



Remember Ann Silver, the artist who introduced us to "Deaf Art" in the 1960-70's and whose works are in many private and public collections today?

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Ann Silver

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Gallaudet was not ready for Ann Silver when she enrolled in the 1960-70's but she brought a new perspective. At that time, "Deaf Art" or "Deaf Studies" was not known. But as Silver puts it, "the Gallaudet community provided me with a rich foundation in ASL/Deaf culture, New York City gave me a solid framework in the visual arts."

Silver had a love for art but Gallaudet did not have proper art facilities. "Truthfully, the Gallaudet art department was substandard, and I would've had majored in Deaf Studies had it been offered back then," she admits.

Author Deborah M. Sonnenstrahl, in her book "Deaf Artists in America: Colonial to Contemporary," said that in an attempt to give legitimacy to Deaf Art both as a genre and as an academic-scholarly discipline, Silver advocated for a cause known as the 'Deaf Art Movement'.

What Happened at Gallaudet?

"At Gallaudet, several art majors, student activists, supporters and I banded together to fight for the inclusion of Deaf Art in our classroom and studio work," Silver recalls, "A Deaf ethic served as a primary characteristic of our small collective, and it was an appreciation of the value of ASL/Deaf culture and aesthetic that drove us to seek acceptance of Deaf Art in the overall art system. The art department, however, suppressed our desire to express art the 'Deaf Way.' In fact, our protests were recorded on 8mm film that I made."

Making Her Mark on Society – and the Deaf World

"I have evolved from a sign language book illustrator of the 1970s to a master of Deaf Pop Art today," Silver says. "My work is always about ASL/Deaf culture, representing the visual art wing

of the Deaf Studies spectrum. As a Deaf woman and first-generation American, I experience the same roadblocks of racism and homophobia. As a reflection of my civil rights background, my artwork deals with issues of discrimination based on hearing status. I make art that makes viewers think.

"Though I make poster art for the gallery world, my priority is to create ASL/Deaf cultural themes in public art as part of or separate from architecture and environmental design. I seek to create art that becomes a value-added benefit to any building project in a Deaf setting (i.e. Deaf schools, Deaf community service centers, Deaf residential centers). Though ASL-/Deaf-based artwork in public spaces is a rarity, it would be great to include the work and ideas of Deaf artists into the design and construction to enhance the quality of architectural, sculptural and functional spaces – while making Deaf Art an everyday experience for everyone. The future for public art by Deaf artists lies in the forward-thinking ability of master planners and architects to accept the language, life, culture, and history of Deaf people. Clearly, the inclusion of Deaf Art in the art world and academia, as well as public art, is my lifelong passion."

Upbringing

She was born into a hearing family in Seattle, WA in 1949 and attended public schools. "Born profoundly Deaf, I was blessed with art as a vital tool to communicate with the hearing folk via crayons long before I acquired English and ASL. My K-12 public education was 90% guesswork and 10% art because support services (professional notetaking and interpreters) were nonexistent. I turned to art as a means to escape from the oppressive world of speech, lipreading and auditory training.

"In 1962, at the age of 13, my exposure to Morris Broderson's

watercolor painting was my first taste of what came to be known later as Deaf Art. His fingerspelled artwork inspired me to pursue a goal years later, which was to legitimize Deaf Art.

"...Whenever I am assigned a project, my images, symbols, codes and text call to mind the language, culture, identity and heritage of the Deaf-World. Many of my culturally-specified logos have been published in graphic design reference books. A designer and artist by trade; I am a Deaf Studies researcher by habit."

Has Three Collections of Her Own

In addition to Silver's artwork, particularly mixed-media poster art, being exhibited across the country and abroad and is in many private and public collections, Silver also collects and is known for her three huge collections: 10,000 carved, sculptured, mechanized and molded hands of every size and type; Deaf Art archives - preserving Deaf Art studies for future generations; and celebrity I-Love-You sign photography portraying 300 famous Deaf and hearing ILY signs.

"Other than possessing three major private Deaf collections, I must confess to having too many eclectic collections such as autographs, sushi items and Japanese antiques," Silver adds.

"Deaf Art"

"As an artistic, intellectual, emotional and visual expression, it is a medium that relates to the Deaf Experience," Silver explains, "also labeled as De'VIA, SuperDeaf Art, Deafcentric Art, Deaf-defined Art, Deaf Visual Art, Deaf-based Art and whatnot, Deaf Art features visual elements, mannerisms, codes and imagery that are associated with things Deaf and ASL – as well as national sign languages where applicable. Deaf Art develops along the lines parallel to language, culture, history, politics, education and society – and contains a diversity of not just experiences but

also themes and issues that affect the Deaf-World."

Greatest Impact?

Although Silver graduated with a bachelor's degree in commercial art from Gallaudet in 1972, she says she has never had formal art training since graduation. The self-taught visionary artist exhibited at the "National Touring Exhibit of Deaf Culture Art," "The International Deaf Way," and "Vision through Deaf Eyes" at the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). She also obtained her master's degree in deafness rehabilitation from New York University in 1977.

In 1979, Silver and the Museum of Modern Art were recognized with the New York Governor's Art Award for establishing a 125-museum consortium program for Deaf visitors. She also lived in Japan as a 1986 Japan-U.S. Friendship Commission Fellow which subsequently led to Japanese Deaf Studies there.

In the Present

A limited number of prints are available from her exclusive collection. "As my true following are the Deaf, interpreter and CODA communities," she explains, "I have an exclusive collection of prints ideal for anyone's

personal collection or as a gift for a friend or co-worker. They are hand-assembled, signed, numbered and certified in limited editions. Each framed edition is accompanied by art documentation identifying it as an authentic Silver print. I only produce five original copies of each piece by hand plus five artist's proofs. Due to the exclusive nature of my artwork and the extremely small edition number that makes my work highly sought after, they are likely to become collectibles."

"Though I am best known for limited-edition prints," Silver says, "I am most comfortable with Mail Art which I have been doing for over 30 years with the collaboration of the U.S. Postal Service. Also known as Correspondence Art and 'Velopes going as far back as the early 1900s, my color-penciled/inked envelopes depict either realistic or surreal combinations of sign language, Deaf and or fingerspelling elements."

When asked about her current activities, she said "While juggling freelance projects, I am working on two books: my hand collection and an autobiography that also includes a descriptive catalog of my lifetime art/design work." Does anyone know how to clone Ann Silver?



Ann Silver is the only founding member of the historic Deaf Art movement group (1960s-1970s) to work extensively in graphics. A designer/artist by trade and Deaf Studies researcher by habit, her work combines Pop Art, product advertising, road signs, ASL/Deaf culture, and her own experiences with audism. Silver has been a driving force for over three decades for recognition and inclusion of Deaf Art in the world of art, architecture, public art and academia.