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27 See for example, Eric Hobsbawm, Terence Ranger eds., The Invention of Tradition (Cambridge University Press, 1983).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

De’VIA: Art Talk—
A History of Deaf Art

CHUCK BAIRD

Chuck Baird has been a painter since his teen years and was the official curator of Deaf Way II in Washington, D.C., in 2003.

In the summer of 1989, a month before Deaf Way held at Gallaudet University, Seven other Deaf artists and I gathered to discuss the future of deaf art. We defined it as Deaf Visual Image Art, or De’VIA, and developed a manifesto. For the Deaf Studies Today conference, I prepared a 45-minute, three-part presentation on the past, present and future of De’VIA. However, as soon as I entered the room, I realized I had to adjust my presentation quickly, since the participants weren’t what I had envisioned. There were approximately 40 attendees, with the majority being young hearing students from the college where the conference was being held. De’VIA was a foreign concept to most of the participants. I have chosen to provide both versions for the reader. My presentations are a bit different from typical seminars or workshops; they are more of a narrative of what I have witnessed firsthand as a De’VIA artist. —Chuck Baird

Rather than give an in-depth look at our art movement, I will give a basic description of Deaf View Image Art (De’VIA) and its brief history.

My presentation at the Deaf Studies Today conference included a tour of some artwork on exhibit there. Since gathering permission from artists to show variations of De’VIA would be a difficult task, I did not have the luxury of using a slide show or PowerPoint presentation to showcase artwork. Instead, I used a flipchart to illustrate some of my points. At the end of the presentation, we moved to another room where there was some artwork hanging for an exhibition. There we explored the exhibitions and held a question-and-answer session.

It seems prudent that I give a bit of history regarding the exhibition that the students and I explored. In October 2003, when I first learned of the [Deaf Studies Today] conference, there was no mention of plans for an art show like the 1999 conference in Oakland, California. The art show
My first exposure to De'VIA came through Dr. Betty G. Miller. This was during the early 1970s, long before we gathered to create the name and manifesto of De'VIA. I was a transfer student at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf at Rochester Institute of Technology (NTID/RIT) at the time, but I often traveled to Washington, D.C. to visit my friends at Gallaudet University or to visit my late sister Liz, who was sharing a townhouse with Betty near Capitol Hill. It was at this townhouse that I first saw Betty's paintings with my naked eyes.

I was blown away by the awesome power of her artwork, such as ASL Prohibited and A.G. Bell School. It was the first time I ever saw De'VIA. Today! It was the first time I ever saw De'VIA. I returned to Rochester and created a couple of paintings for my studio course, including Mechanical Ear and Why Me? (available for viewing in Chuck Baird: 35 Plates, published by DawnSignPress). But I stopped painting like this because it wasn't really from my heart, and I didn't want to copy Betty's style when it didn't reflect my own feelings. She did influence me, though, and planted the seed of De'VIA in me.

This was in 1973, and I didn't paint Deaf-related artwork again for the next 19 years. I was worried about the quality of the forms in my works more than the contents. Meanwhile, I continued my studies at NTID/RIT aiming for a professional job in the mainstream to make my vocational rehabilitation counselor happy with the money she spent on my education. This was, unfortunately, the general mentality about young deaf artists' futures: that they needed "real" jobs to be successful. Making a living as an artist isn't always easy, and even more so for a Deaf person; this is what the old school of thinking was in these days.

I was not surprised to learn recently that my former classmates such as Harry Williams, Ann Silver, John Smith, and others who majored in art at Gallaudet, wanted to express the Deaf theme in their class art projects. It was, after all, the 1970s—an era of awakening for the Deaf community. But they, instead, had to focus on elements of art and design or they wouldn't pass their courses. Yet Betty shocked students and faculty alike in 1971 when she used the Deaf theme in her now-famous faculty show at Gallaudet University's Washburn Art Building. This exhibit truly was the shot that was heard (seen) around the world. She faced a lot of opposition, including deaf faculty who said her work was too raw and exposed her feelings too much; however, the Washington Post gave her a full-page review full of praise. Even the anger in her paintings was pure art.

The question, then, became: Who showed the Deaf Experience as visual art first? The students? The faculty? The beginning may be found as far back as deaf photographers like Theophilus H. d'Estrella (1851–1929), Frances Allen (1854–1941) and Mary Allen (1858–1942), Maggie L. Sayer (1920–2000). As Deborah Sonnenstrahl has written, photography was initially considered a part of science or technology, but later it became considered a form of fine art, showing souls like a painting. Were these deaf photographers De'VIA artists?

Dennis Watson, a CODA, drew illustrations for a 1964 sign language book, Talk With Your Hands. His style was playful and his humor showed through. Some believe that the influence of growing up with deaf parents was apparent in his drawings. However, opponents insist that before the age of computer art, illustration was not in the same category as fine art.
Regardless of who was the first De'VIA artist, Betty holds the claim to being the first Deaf artist to expose the country to the genre. She had a strong and clear vision of what she was doing. Her exhibit was a bold step, just like Paul Cézanne was ahead of his time. Cézanne, the father of modern art, was perceived by European high society as crazy.

The 1970s were a time of cultural change, especially with the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, and the discovery by William Stokoe that ASL was a true language. These changes—certainly influenced many deaf people like myself to become Deaf. We were becoming free from pure oralism, finally being accepted and feeling a sense of liberation, yet we deaf artists were not ready to express our experiences as Deaf people. But Betty was. We were impressed by her cutting edge artwork, and slowly began to follow her example—not necessarily through rage, but through our own various approaches.

I see a parallel between those days and the days after 9/11. I recently read an interesting article in the New York Times about artists living in New York City in the wake of 9/11. While the media ran 24-hour coverage of the terrorist attacks and the horrific deaths, the artists in the city responded slowly. They had to digest the events before attempting to express themselves in artistic form.

The writer of the article surveyed the artists about who responded first to the tragedies. The first were the musicians who quickly made albums or did benefits, such as Bruce Springsteen's The Rising. Next were poets, playwrights, choreographers, symphonists, and so on. The very last group to respond was the group of visual artists (with the exception of photographers, who were part of the media). The visual artists simply weren't ready, and needed to absorb different things before revealing their innermost feelings to the world.

This made me realize that in the Deaf community, visual arts, too, were the last to emerge. The 1960s and 1970s sparked social changes for Deaf people and performing artists, such as Good Vibrations, Hughes Memorial Deaf Theatre Group, National Theatre of the Deaf, Fairmount Theatre of the Deaf, Rock Gospel, and so on. But we Deaf visual artists were probably the last ones to respond to the social changes around us. We simply weren't ready. We slowly absorbed while watching the scenes of the Deaf community celebrating our Deaf culture and language being accepted and becoming stronger. As I mentioned earlier, Betty was ahead of our time, and that is a testimony to her courage as a frontrunner.

These days are what Paul Johnston, another deaf artist, and I recently agreed to call pre-De'VIA days.

Eventually, a few organizations advocating and spreading awareness about Deaf artists were formed, such as Spectrum, Focus on Deaf Artists (FODA) in Austin, TX (1976–1980), and Deaf Artists of America in Rochester (1985–1999).

In 1975, the 7th World Congress for the Deaf was held in Washington, D.C., and two hearing women from Austin, Texas asked my fellow artists and I what we desired or dreamed of. We answered: an art colony of our own. And this is how Spectrum was conceived.

The following summer, these women invited us to spend a week near Austin. In addition to harmonizing and sharing, we discussed our aspirations and goals for the expansion into a national organization. We wanted the organization to operate as a clearinghouse, archives, and so on. After signing the proposed constitution, Spectrum was born.

It was the first time ever that an art organization was available for Deaf people and run by Deaf people. Soon after, a highlight of the year was when the next summer conference was held, with almost 40 artists in attendance. Afterwards, about half stayed on to work for Spectrum, living in the area.

Let me skip over the history of Spectrum and focus on who was involved as Deaf/De'VIA artists. Betty had resigned from Gallaudet and started a masters program, along with Liz Baird and Carolyn Ball. The rest of us were working for the organization in various capacities. We had a weekly seminar on Wednesdays, discussing the uniqueness of Deaf visual artists. "De'VIA" was not yet coined at that time, but Betty was persistent in trying to pull us into something like De'VIA. Except for my sister Liz and few others, many of us failed to see why it was necessary for us to analyze ourselves as deaf artists and putting that into our art. We were simply not ready to show our bare souls. We were in denial. We were very slow to capture the concept and again, Betty was way ahead of us.

Spectrum expanded quickly, especially since we had an oil rancher donating on an annual basis almost half of our budget. Eventually, due to unforeseen circumstances, our benefactor had to discontinue her support. This created a crisis for us. With increasing demands and inadequate funds, many of us became unhappily strapped for money. Some of us had to leave in order to survive financially. I was one of the very last artists remaining in town.

Later, as I was recruiting Texas Visual Artists for an exhibition at the Texas Capitol rotunda during Deaf Awareness Day, I met Tony Landon McGregor, who later became one of the stronger De'VIA leaders. We had our paintings hung in the rotunda. My painting was Mechanical Ear that I brought from my college days. I look back today and think how strange I painted it without having any intentions of it becoming De'VIA.
That was the first time I didn’t feel shame in exhibiting the painting. It’s also interesting that this painting was created with pathologists in mind, long before cochlear implants became widespread.

When Spectrum formally closed its doors in 1980, I left Austin and headed for the National Theatre for the Deaf, where I was for the next 10 years. I did paint in acrylics during my spare time, but I wish I had done much more than that. Although I painted sceneries for the NTMD almost every year that had nothing to do with De’VIA, I only painted maybe three to five pieces a year for myself.

In 1985, I met Harry Williams, an extraordinary artist, again in Berkeley, California, when we exhibited our works at Celebration, sponsored by D.E.A.F. Media. I never have forgotten how I fell in love with his masterful art—very romantic and surrealistic. We were alone in the room with our works hanging. We spent hours discussing everything about art and our identities as Deaf persons. He was so brilliant and articulate. I was spellbound.

Let me tell you something important about Harry. He graduated from Gallaudet filled with Deborah Sonnenstahl’s art history teachings, especially fascinated with Baroque and surrealism and inspired by Betty’s exhibit. He returned to his home in southern California, spending much time alone to develop a singular vision in painting. None of us knew what he was doing during that time. He brought his new works to Washington, D.C., delighting us all. His works were more poetic and celebratory, glorifying ASL and the blessings of the visual world.

We learned from him that De’VIA didn’t have to be all about anger. He should be recognized as a pure De’VIA artist, one of the earliest next to Betty. He has influenced me, especially in my choice of approaches to my art. His death at the age of 42 from AIDS was sad for us all, and in one of my paintings, Left and Right, the calla lilies in it are my way of paying homage to him.

Allow me to return to 1985. Five years after Spectrum became inactive, Tom Willard, a late-deafened photographer, journalist and a NTID/RIT graduate, formed Deaf Artists of America (DAA) that focused on visual art only. The organization moved from New Jersey to Rochester into a rented space, apart from NTID. The Deaf community there gave DAA its full support. Deaf artists’ works were curated and exhibited, with a careful balance between locals and out-of-towners, genders, Deaf and hard of hearing, and so on. We were thrilled with DAA’s services, but we were still hungry for more Deaf Visual Artists out there unheralded. DAA lasted longer than Spectrum did, having learned from Spectrum’s mistakes, though financial difficulties persisted.

In 1988, a well-attended art conference was held at NTID. There were full days of various seminars and lectures, and artwork was on display. The conference was fun, but at the roundtable discussion for Deaf artists, there were a lot of conflicting ideas and opinions about the future of DAA. Afterwards, many of us left feeling divided and headed nowhere. At this point, De’VIA still had not been devised. After one of the most memorable years in my life performing in King of Hearts for the National Theatre of the Deaf, I was summoned by Jane Norman, part of the first Deaf Way committee, and Paul Johnston, to paint a 10 x 30 foot mural at Gallaudet related to Deaf Way. When I went there to begin the huge project over Memorial Day weekend before the Deaf Way, I was suddenly pulled into a room where many deaf artists were present. I told them I didn’t know what was going on, but they smiled and said, “You will see.” We spent three days and nights debating, drawing, critiquing, laughing, videotaping, writing, and painting before we finally came up with Deaf View Image Art, or De’VIA. We created a manifesto and signed it:

(1) De’VIA represents Deaf artists and perceptions based on their Deaf experiences. It uses formal art elements with the intention of expressing innate cultural or physical Deaf experience. These experiences may include Deaf metaphors, Deaf perspectives, and Deaf insight in relationship with the environment (both the natural world and Deaf cultural environment), spiritual and everyday life.

(2) De’VIA can be identified by formal elements such as Deaf artists’ possible tendency to use contrasting colors and values, intense colors, contrasting textures. It may also most often include a centralized focus, with exaggeration or emphasis on facial features, especially eyes, mouths, ears, and hands. Currently, Deaf artists tend to work in human scale with these exaggerations, and not exaggerate the space around these elements.

(3) There is a difference between Deaf artists and De’VIA. Deaf artists are those who use art in any form, media, or subject matter, and who are held to the same artistic standards as other artists. De’VIA is created when the artist intends to express their Deaf experience through visual art. Deafened or hearing artists may also create De’VIA, if the intention is to create work that is born of their Deaf experience (a possible example would be a hearing child of Deaf parents). It is clearly possible for Deaf artists not to work in the area of De’VIA.

(4) While applied and decorative arts may also use the qualities of De’VIA (high contrast, centralized focus, exaggeration of specific features), this manifesto is specifically written to cover the traditional fields of visual fine arts (painting, sculpture, drawing, photography, printmaking) as well as alternative media when used as fine arts such as fiber arts, ceramics, neon, and collage.
Drs. Betty G. Miller and Paul Johnston lead our session. Dr. Deborah M. Sonnenstrahl, Guy Wonder, Alex Wilhite, Sandi Inches, Lai-Yok Ho, Nancy Creighton, and I also participated.

When we came to the point where we discussed the third paragraph, about the difference between deaf artists and De'VIA, I said, “Hey, I know some artists who happen to be deaf here and there, especially those at DAA. Can’t they be De’VIA?” I guess I was still naïve, and I often misunderstood people—I was exhausted from the long days of discussion. I saw that Betty was looking at me, Paul was saying “Come on!”, and Deborah was being patient with me. I ended up signing the manifesto without completely agreeing with it. In reality, I had thought it was a huge mistake. I had no idea that I would be as solid De’VIA as I am today. Funny, when I reread the manifesto as I write this, I now support every word of the manifesto. One hundred percent.

After the gathering, I returned to the mural. It took me three long months to complete the mural. Perhaps that was my first De’VIA work, but I feel it was all from me. I saw the mural again after 12 years, and even if I feel I could have done it differently, I know it has had an impact on some people. That comforts me.

Let me fast forward to the time where I feel it important to see De’VIA as an art movement that changed our lives as visual artists. De’VIA has long remained the same, almost never changing. After Deaf Way and good feelings from the conference, we (Deaf artists) got responses from different places asking, “What is De’VIA? What’s wrong with Deaf Art?”; “It sounds like a French word for nitwit or nut!”; and so on. One argument was that no one nor art critics would know what the heck De’VIA was. Rob Roth, a good friend of mine from the Bay Area and a visual artist in printmaking, gave a presentation at one of the early Deaf Studies Conferences sponsored by Gallaudet. He said that it was essential for our artworks of Deaf experience to reach out larger audiences, that we are part of the mainstream through art critics or reporters. He suggested that De’VIA would confuse the people we needed to reach.

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We, as the creators of De’VIA, remained silent and waited until doubters’ arguments faded out. We knew time would come when our critics would agree. We drew inspiration from the small group of artists that often met in salons in Paris at the turn of the 20th century. They would discuss what their paintings had in common, and others asked who they were trying to impress. With time, the artists created the label, “French Impressionism.” The public reaction was “What is it?” Now it is one of the world’s most beloved terms. I am a witness to the fact that the name of De’VIA is widespread, in almost every Deaf school and many mainstreamed programs. It has always been a topic in at the past few Deaf Studies conferences. The name has been used in Europe, Russia, Japan, and other countries. Paul Johnston is even now teaching De’VIA as part of the Deaf Studies curriculum at Gallaudet University. He will also lead the art department’s De’VIA Studio as a major or elective course for the first time this semester.

Let me take you through quickly the important highlights of De’VIA exhibitions. There have been several one-person shows, but the group art shows are always thick with art and experience as we De’VIA artists gather and share new eloquent experiences among us. Every time we meet, there is always an addition of emerging De’VIA artists, which is truly an exciting thing. (These with asterisks have a list of participating artists at the end of this paper.)

1989, DEAF WAY ART EXHIBIT; WASHINGTON, D.C.

The exhibit at Deaf Way was held in the field house at Gallaudet University. We were very fresh from the first and historical De’VIA meeting. We met several more visual artists but the days flew by too quickly, and we never had a full day to ourselves.

1993, DEAF STUDIES CONFERENCE; CHICAGO

A few of us De’VIA artists brought our works there. My works were hung on display. Ann Silver and Betty Miller were also there, and we had a seminar on De’VIA. But the seminar became more like a debate between two artists with the third leaving feeling deadlocked.

1993, A PERSPECTIVE OF DEAF CULTURE THROUGH ART; ESSEX, MASSACHUSETTS*

Brenda Schertz, who majored in Art History and Museum Studies at the Massachusetts College of Art, took her first opportunity of setting a major exhibition of many De’VIA artists at Northern Essex Community College. The exhibit was a very impressive and well-publicized event, and Brenda also gave exhibit tours as a docent. Not only were Deaf people delighted at receiving rich and in-depth information about art and Deaf culture, but hearing people also learned about human values in the Deaf community.
Again, Brenda, as curator, pulled off another successful exhibit. With pride, she made this well-organized exhibition special for the conference (a list of participating artists is below). Brenda trained several docents for the conference participants and local Deaf people and friends. The main attraction of the show was works of then-emerging artist Susan Dupor of Wisconsin who used both painting and freehand animation.

Susan's work was very powerful and evoking, especially her painting, *Family Dog* (available for viewing in Deborah Sonnestrahi's book). The interesting thing about her work was that she was similar to Betty in that she was raw and blunt in her art. Her works quickly became popular and were exhibited at many locations. Many years later, when I was part of the visual art committee for Deaf Way II in 2002, we invited 12 people to give ratings on works submitted as color slides. One wrote on his evaluation about the works of a young female from Mexico, Ixchel Solis Garcia, as “Duporseque.” I considered that a major honor! Dupor's works have changed through time; she has passed her anger phase in her art, just like Betty did many years ago. However, her subject matter remains the same with the views of a feminist, ecologist, maybe psychologist, and of course, De'VIA. She currently works at the Wisconsin School for the Deaf as an art teacher, yet amazingly she finds time to paint.

The avid art-lover behind the success of the Oakland art exhibition was Dr. Susan Rutherford. Brenda was the curator with her amazing energy, and brought bright and bold works of De'VIA from 22 visual artists. The artworks were hung in a site two blocks from the conference site in a contemporary place with plenty of appropriate lighting. The opening reception was a phenomenal success, with a packed room of people in awe shoulder to shoulder. It was one of the best exhibitions ever.

One week prior to the third Deafestival in Louisville, Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (KCDHH) executive director Bobbie Beth Scoggins, and her two right-hands, Virginia Moore and Rowan Holloway (all who strongly believe in arts through visual mediums as an imperative foundation of Deaf Culture), found time and space in the country away from the hustle and bustle of daily life for us, the deaf artists, to meet and grow with each other.

It was a mind-blowing and spirit-lifting experience. The group consisted of five national artists and five local artists, and we learned about each other. We had in common our being Deaf and our passion for De'VIA. We created new works there and brought them in for display at the Deafestival at the Kentucky Art Center.

This exhibit was a gigantic step forward for De'VIA, and the credit goes to Brenda Schertz once again for her energy and hard work. The provost of a Boston college invited to a linguistic seminar at Northeastern University responded to Dupor's *Family Dog*. She said that the artwork should have a national tour. At Harlan Lane's prompting, Brenda wrote a grant, and received funding from the Knight Foundation for a Deaf Art tour consisting of 16 De'VIA artists that lasted a year and half. That was the first national touring of De'VIA.

After the selection of artists for the tour, they observed and wrote down into four categories: political expression, communication barrier, cultural affirmation, and visual sound. Read more at www.deafart.org and www.artdeaf.com.

After the first three festivals hosted by KCDHH, a focus on Deaf visual artists was added since the festival organizers felt that we deserved audiences as much as performing artists or groups. We had our own space separate from the general exhibitions, known as the Deaf Visual Artists Studio. There, festival attendees could enjoy watching us as we worked on our crafts or paintings, and purchase our works from there. Brenda Schertz was there, and set up a small group show of artwork there.
next to the nooks and had a group discussion among visual artists. Half of us wondered about what De'VIA really meant. Some had mixed reactions about De'VIA, wondering if those who were not Deaf could still be considered part of De'VIA—for instance, those who were not raised using ASL and continued using spoken English, or those who weren’t necessarily culturally Deaf. Tony Landon McGregor brought up a brilliant solution. He said that we could do whatever differently from others, and still consider our art part of De'VIA, by putting our art in a subcategory: Southwest De'VIA, Native American De'VIA, Feminist De'VIA, Black De'VIA, CODA De'VIA, Late Deafened De'VIA, and so on.

At the same meeting, Brenda also surveyed us and found that we wanted to network and keep in touch with each other. She created a group mailing list, DeafArtTalk, and for the next eight months, about 50 people joined and contributed wonderful comments and questions.

2001, Seeing Through Deaf Eyes; New York City*

We who were selected to show our works there were overwhelmingly impressed by how they set up the show in two galleries next to each other on Prince Street and Blue Mountain in the heart of the Chelsea District, a hotbed for the galleries, and we were treated like royalty. The show was partly curated by Lesley Kushner, a deaf art teacher at Lexington School and Center for the Deaf. There was a benefit one evening where almost every one of the artists showed up. We were stunned and honored by the red carpet treatment we got. There was a mix of different mediums and yet a strong representation of the genre of De'VIA. This was the first time that De'VIA and Deaf artists were treated like real artists.

2002, Deaf Women Art Show; New York City*

Lesley brought several female artists into the gallery for a group show focusing on the unique experience of being Deaf women. I wish I had seen the show, because when I learned about it, I was thrilled to see these artists getting this much-deserved privilege. Since I wasn’t at the show, I should not write about it.

2002, Deaf Way II Art Exhibition; Washington, D.C.*

Deaf Way II was unlike the exhibitions for the first Deaf Way, not better but quite different. In fact, they’re incomparable. I worked on contract with the committee for the Visual Art Exhibition for sixteen months prior to the festival. It was a huge task and rewarding experience for me—I learned so many things while living on campus and painting commissioned art for Gallaudet as well.

I viewed slides of over 500 entries from around the world, which was a unique experience. It was interesting to see the mix of artworks—some incorporated the Deaf experience into their art; others didn’t. Since Gallaudet was considered a setting for all Deaf and hard of hearing students, we had to be neutral in the selection process, and look for the best quality that would appease both Deaf and hearing audiences.

Unlike the first Deaf Way, Gallaudet president I. King Jordan wanted to have cultural art programs that would reach out to the Washington, D.C. metro area as our primary audience. With that in mind, we had to whittle the selections down to 70. 12 invited judges evaluated the works, with the committee remaining neutral. Of 70 selected as featured artists, 22 were Americans, six were from Russia, eight were from the United Kingdom, 10 from China, and one or two from other countries, for a total of 21 countries.

Let me skip ahead to the very week of the international Deaf festival, which had over 10,000 registered attendees. Like many De'VIA artists there, I felt very fortunate to meet all 70 artists, both in honor and modesty, wishing we could have much more than 70. To be able to witness their skills and interact with them throughout three opening receptions and group discussions was such a rich and rare opportunity for us.

As I helped hang or set their works in 10 different venues (four on campus and six off campus), I saw that about 40 out of 70 artists expressed the Deaf experience in their works to varying degrees. That is something to consider. There would have been more but some countries like communist China train deaf artists never to reveal their culture as Deaf people. There was an exception: Hong Ze, a glass engraver. When Brenda Schertz and I saw his detailed painting that had deaf children wearing ancient clothing signing to each other, our eyes became wide. We were delighted to discover that there is no way to prevent deaf artists from expressing their own language or culture.

The group of painters from Russia amazed us with how advanced and disciplined they were. Out of six, all but one was culturally Deaf. I may be bold in claiming that we American Deaf or De'VIA artists would benefit in learning from them. We were amazed to learn that Russian Deaf people have a strong sense of Deaf culture just like here in America. We noticed fish always present in almost every painting by the Russians, and were floored to learn that they look at fish as similar to Deaf people: fish don’t have ears, nor do they bark in the water.
The second meeting of Deaf artists was held at the same location as the first. In attendance were 12 visual artists, two performers, and one poet. For the NAD conference in July 2004, KCDHH will host booths exclusively for Deaf artists, much like the Deaf Visual Artists Studio at Deafestival.

What I really enjoyed at this gathering was to see how warm and happy the artists were to share their arts and techniques with each other nonstop, almost as if there would be no other gathering again. Bobbie Beth Scoggins has said she believes that Deaf Americans in general have overlooked the gem of Deaf Culture. Not only do Deaf performers and actors deserve the spotlight, but also visual artists. We were truly grateful to the people at KCDHH who helped make this happen.

There was a major group show by 14 Deaf/De'VIA artists held at the NDA Gallery in St. Paul in April 2004. The gallery, run by a hearing owner who has a sister that works with deaf people, hosted the showing with the help of Brenda Schertz. I was not there nor was my artwork, so I must again abstain from commenting on the events. The show was part of a month-long celebration of Deaf/De'VIA artwork, including presentations by Deborah Sonnestrahl. Although the gallery presented the show in an impressively designed manner, there were a few art critics.

Mary Thornley, an artist who painted *Milan, Italy, 1880*, read an article which quoted deaf artists. The article (found at http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/features/2004/04/30_lundeen_deafart/) was a preview rather than a review or critique. Thornley wrote in a weekly column, "Well, yawn, how many times have I read this or something like it in my many years as an artist? For the same number of years as I have yearned for a more sophisticated understanding, a treatment that does not address me as other or odd, that does not describe me as silent or my art works as a replacement for hearing, any more than a hearing artist's work is a replacement for deafness." Thornley added, "During Deaf Way II the Featured Artists Committee contacted art critics in the D.C. area and asked them to write up our exhibits. All refused. One said it would be like telling someone in a wheelchair how to walk!" (The Tactile Mind Weekly, Week #59, June 8, 2004).
Last, but not least, for any of you who wish to expand on or learn more specifications about the De'VIA manifesto, I recommend that you study the similar genre of De'VIA in other countries more. We shall not focus on what we have here in America only. Like any scientific method, you will need to compare with others to define your own. You will be amazed at what you find, and will come to learn about and appreciate De'VIA so much more.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would be remiss if I did not mention individuals that I have been working with for years in ongoing discussions of what De'VIA really is.

Dr. Paul Johnston, artist, close colleague, and my old friend, who is now teaching Art and De'VIA at Gallaudet University.

Dr. Betty G. Miller, the Mother of De'VIA and an old friend of my deaf sisters, who has had a long artistic career in Washington, D.C.

Dr. Deborah (Sonnenstrahl) Meranski, who is beloved and remembered for her many years of teaching art history at Gallaudet. She is also the author of the newly published book by DawnSignPress, *Deaf Artists in America: Colonial to Contemporary*. She is currently enjoying retirement in Florida.

Brenda Schertz, curator of many exhibitions, especially the Deaf Art Exhibition on Tour in 2000–2001. She now works as an ASL instructor and lecturer on Deaf Culture at the University of Southern Maine, and continues her love of art.

And those, also, whom I am proud to have met and/or had our works displayed together—I consider them very important active hands in helping De'VIA shape up in America to be what it is today:
The late Harry William of Southern California
The late Frank Allen Paul of San Diego, California
Ann Silver of Seattle, Washington
Tony McGregor of Austin, Texas
Alex Wilhite of Pinehurst, North Carolina
William Spark of Winston-Salem, North Carolina
Susan Dupor of Delavan, Wisconsin
Iris Aranda of Kenosha, Wisconsin (originally from Panama)

Mary Thornley of Alexandria, Virginia
Guy Wonder of San Francisco, California
Ron Trumble of Berkeley, California
Jeff Carroll of Cincinnati, Ohio
Paula Grcevie of Rochester, New York
Rita Straubhaar of Rochester, New York
Morris Broderson of Los Angeles, California
Charles Wildbank of Long Island, New York
Joan Popovich-Kutscher of Orange County, California
Israel Uzi Buzgalo of Boulder, Colorado

There are also so many new emerging De'VIA artists that I truly am excited to meet and see their works spread around. I wish I could name all but once again, please forgive me if I didn't name everyone that has eye-touched and hand-touched my life as an artist. We are like one big family, expressing our Deaf Experience in Visual Art forms. And those have given us a major awakening, the international Deaf Visual Artists, especially the United Kingdom and Russia artists, as I have mentioned above in my presentation. And special thanks goes to Trudy Suggs of T.S. Writing Service for editing this article.

LIST OF CONTRIBUTING ARTISTS

Perspective of Deaf Culture through Art, 1993: James Canning, Randy Dunham, Susan Dupor, Betty G Miller, Eddie Swayze, Mary Thornley, Sandi Inches Vasnick, Chuck Baird


Deaf Artists Retreat in Harrodabury, 1999: Betty G. Miller, Brenda Schertz, Steven Barbas, William Wombles, Jeff Carroll, Betty Taylor, Beulah Hester, Barbie Harris, Chuck Baird

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"Works by Deaf Women" at Ceres Gallery in Soho, New York City: Janet Ahren, Irene Bartok, Claire Bergman, Susan Dupor, Lesley Kushner, Orkid Sassouni, Dana Simon, Robin Taylor, Mary Thornley


Second Deaf Artists Retreat in Harrodsburg, 2003: Betty Taylor, Beulah Hester, Barbie Harris, Juan Hoffman, Roy Ricco, Victor Notaro, Dick Moore, Paul Johnson, Jeff Carroll, Peter Cook, Pinky Aiello, Kevin Kreutzer, Anita Dowd, Alex Wilhite, Chuck Baird


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chuck Baird has been a painter since his teen years and has led a distinguished career, most notably as the official curator of Deaf Way II art exhibitions in the Washington D.C. area in 2003. He has served as artist in residency at over thirty schools, has been involved with the National Theatre for the Deaf for a total of ten years, has participated in dozens of exhibits, and has been commissioned many times. Having recently completed his role in the play, "Nothing Sweet in my Ear," at the Mixed Blood Theatre in Minneapolis, MN, he is settling in Austin, Texas, rolling up his sleeves and getting his hands wet with paint.