

advocate for signed language and the rights of Deaf people. NAD helped conduct the first census of the Deaf population of the United States. It publishes numerous books, a quarterly monograph, *The Deaf American*, and a newspaper, *The Broadcaster*; it supports a legal defense fund, sponsors an annual youth leadership camp, and backs a Junior NAD for its school-age members. Its biennial conventions include the Miss Deaf America contest, exhibits and theatrical performances, banquets, and business meetings in which resolutions on all facets of Deaf life are voted, shaping NAD's agenda for action. As is the case with athletic events, NAD conventions also have an important social function: they reunite schoolmates and friends who have been scattered around the country.

Many Americans know that there is a national Miss America contest and that a contestant with a hearing impairment won that award in 1995. Fewer people realize that the DEAF-WORLD has its own Miss Deaf America pageant. Evaluations of young Deaf women for the title combine the consensual selection of the storyteller with more formal competitions. The successful candidate often begins as a self-identified performer at a Deaf school, as did the last Miss Deaf America, Maureen Yates. Known as a bright young woman with Deaf pride (she is part of the seventh generation of Deaf people in her family), Ms. Yates was first recruited for the Miss Deaf Maryland pageant. There she presented a narrative skit on a theme in Deaf culture (a child who cannot call for help because her teachers have muted her unseemly voice) and impressed the judges with her knowledge of Deaf culture and of current events, her reflection on important issues confronting the Deaf community, and her beauty. Having won the state pageant, she competed successfully against winners from all the other states in the national pageant,¹⁷ and has become a model to Deaf youth as she travels among the residential schools and is presented at other programs. She is sought after to lecture at Deaf meetings, she participates in ceremonial events, and she often describes her celebrity role in the pages of *The NAD Broadcaster*.

THE ARTS

The institutions of the DEAF-WORLD, some of which we have just surveyed, are a central part of its culture. The arts also play a critical role

in bonding the members of any culture, and the members of the DEAF-WORLD are no exception. In fact, in at least two respects, the arts have a privileged relation to Deaf culture. Deaf people are, as we have seen repeatedly, best thought of as visual people, so it should be no surprise that there has always been a substantial number of Deaf artists, many with worldwide renown. Then, too, ASL is an unwritten language, so literature such as storytelling and humor carry much cultural information that, in cultures with written languages, would be passed down through the generations in books. At Deaf clubs there has traditionally been a variety of cultural activities, including performances, storytelling, skits, and comedies. The flourishing study of signed languages in the last few decades and the associated enhanced empowerment of Deaf people, have fostered a particularly prolific period in the Deaf arts, one might even say a renaissance.

The visual arts

At the outset of modern Deaf history in the mid-eighteenth century, Deaf artists played an important role in creating awareness of the abbé de l'Épée's pioneering efforts and those of his successor, the abbé Sicard. Thus, for example, one of Epée's Deaf pupils was a painter, another a sculptor; each presented a Deaf person's vision of "the father of the Deaf." And ever since then, Deaf artists have continued to present Deaf culture to Deaf and hearing people.¹⁸ Whatever their subject matter, Deaf artists breathe pride into the DEAF-WORLD and serve as role models for young Deaf children. However, it is when the DEAF-WORLD sees itself and its culture reflected in the works of its artists that Deaf art is most effectively a bonding force in Deaf society, so we will focus on Deaf art defined in this way, as a form of cultural expression.

As part of the renascent foment of Deaf culture in the U.S. in the 1970s, an organization called *Spectrum: Focus on Deaf Artists* was started by some hearing artists in Austin, Texas, in 1975. Deaf painter Betty G. Miller left Gallaudet's art department to join them. Two years later, Spectrum was officially launched and twenty-two Deaf artists—dancers, painters and actors from around the country—assembled to collaborate. A Spectrum Visual Arts Institute was established under Miller's direction,

which published a newsletter and convened summer conferences on Deaf arts. The American Deaf Dance Company was formed, as was the Spectrum Deaf Theater, directed by performing artist Charlie McKinney, then president of Spectrum. Miller and Deaf painter Chuck Baird organized a major collection of slides of the works of various Deaf painters and sculptors in the U.S.¹⁹

Miller presented a major exhibit of her work at Gallaudet University in 1972; it may have been the first exhibition in the U.S. devoted to art expressing themes from the DEAF-WORLD. Since much of the work was highly critical of hearing oppression, the exhibit was controversial among both hearing and Deaf audiences. It also introduced many future Deaf leaders to Deaf art for the first time.

A contemporary of Miller's is the acclaimed Deaf painter Morris Broderson, whose work is represented in several major museums across America. Many of his paintings are on religious themes and others reflect his travels in Japan. He is cited here, in relation to art on Deaf themes, because of the series of works *The Sound of Flowers*, and the inclusion of the manual alphabet in several of his works, reminding us that images reflect both sight and sound.²⁰

Growing interest in Deaf art led in 1985 to creation of the professional organization, Deaf Artists of America, in Rochester, New York. Prior to closing its gallery in 1992, DAA organized more than twenty exhibits featuring works by scores of Deaf artists. The organization sponsors conferences, publishes an artists directory and a newsletter and serves as a clearinghouse concerning Deaf art.²¹ In 1989, a group of nine American Deaf artists met prior to the Deaf Way International Conference on Deaf Culture, and developed a manifesto in which they dubbed an art form De'VIA (Deaf View/Image Art), meaning one which "uses formal art elements with the intention of expressing innate cultural or physical Deaf experience."²² The manifesto explains that De'VIA often includes a focus on the hands and face.

In 1993, a major exhibit of Deaf art was presented in Haverhill, Massachusetts, and comparable exhibits accompanied the third and fourth Deaf Studies conferences. Viewers had an unusual opportunity to examine the works of a range of Deaf artists, who varied in their ages, their preferred media, their themes and their visions. There were lithographs, oils,

watercolors, acrylics, pen-and-ink drawings, neon sculptures, and animated films. Aspects of the lives of people in the DEAF-WORLD were captured in many stages of the life cycle: the struggle of growing up Deaf with hearing parents; the suppression of signed language; the imposition of oralism; cochlear implant surgery.* These themes were explored at both individual and cultural levels. For example, Susan Dupor's *Family Dog* attracted particular attention: a somewhat imbecilic-looking child, the family pet, lounges on the living room carpet and stares out of the canvas at the viewer; behind her, a barrier (the edge of a coffee table) separates her from the legs of several adults, seated side by side on a couch. Their heads are spinning, their hands "silently" wedged into their armpits. At the cultural level, Deaf Canadian artist Mary Thornley's *Milan Italy, 1880* (after Goya's *Third of May, 1803*) portrays ASL being shot by a firing squad, a reference to the infamous Congress of Milan.

Betty G. Miller's *Untitled, 1994* portrays with mixed media the battle between the medical and cultural understandings of Deaf people. Several contemporary Deaf artists have acknowledged their debt to Miller's work, which can rage against cultural oppression in one canvas, and in the next celebrate the beauty of ASL. Two of those inspired by her work are Harry Williams and Ann Silver. Williams' paintings frequently express his joy in Deaf culture, often using symbols from hearing culture. Thus in his Musical Notes Series, colored flowering dots stand in for musical notes. "Art is our music!" several of his works proclaim. In other words, culture and thought, like language, are not rooted in any one modality. In one canvas, a large decayed ear rests alongside a keyhole. Through the keyhole we see colors, showing that light has entered the mind through the prism of the eyes; a full-fledged mind is at work behind locked ears.

In the painting on the cover of this book, Williams celebrates the discovery of language, a peculiarly Deaf experience, since for most children language comes first and conscious discovery comes later. Williams' discovery of language came when he grasped that the fingerspelled word B-A-L-L matched the picture of a ball; then the door of enlightenment

* A cochlear implant is an electronic device, part of which is surgically implanted in the inner ear. The device converts sounds to electrical signals that stimulate the auditory nerve. See chapter 14.

opened for him. Before, his mind was a desert. After, his vision was transformed by the primary colors (red, blue, and yellow), which were to change his life. The flower in full bloom is Williams' rendering of the moment of discovery: I-UNDERSTAND.²³

Ann Silver's witty and arresting poster art capitalizes on the evocative powers of road signs and other familiar objects to send messages about Deaf culture and Deaf studies. Poster art is also the vehicle chosen by Elizabeth Morris for her moving protests against childhood cochlear implants. She uses Deaf publicity to counter that of the implant manufacturer. (See Fig. 14-2.)

Chuck Baird's work is sampled and discussed in a recent book commissioned and published by DawnSignPress.²⁴ Baird attended the Kansas School for the Deaf, Gallaudet College, and the Rochester Institute of Technology, where he earned a degree in studio painting. In many of his paintings, Baird plays with the relation between signifying and signified, between language and reality. Hearing artists before him have written on their canvases; Braque glued lettering in his collages; Magritte presented a pipe side-by-side with the statement that it was not a pipe. However, the form that language takes in Baird's paintings is more evocative, because the ASL signs that he often incorporates into the very objects to which they refer, come from a visual language. Not all of Baird's paintings are on Deaf themes, yet they all seem to contain a Deaf vision, in their vivid hues and engagement with form and light. In recent years, Baird has completed major murals on Deaf themes at Gallaudet University and the Learning Center in Framingham, Massachusetts.

One contemporary sculptor whose work reflects DEAF-WORLD culture is Lee Ivey, a Gallaudet University graduate whose 1992 *Deaf Power* is a celebration of the Gallaudet Revolution. Her *School Memories* of the same year presents a pupil locked in a small room: Did he sign when it was prohibited, or did he fail to use his voice?

Possibly the first architect in the U.S. whose work reflects Deaf culture was Olof Hanson (1862-1933), the NAD president whom we quoted earlier on the alienation of Deaf people in hearing society. In the course of a very successful career, Hanson designed scores of residences, store buildings and hotels, schools and churches, many of them adorned by numerous turrets, towers and chimneys, arched doorways and windows. Hanson was

born in Sweden but moved to Minnesota when he was thirteen, attended the state residential school for the Deaf, then Gallaudet College, which awarded him his degree in 1886. He earned a master's degree there three years later, then spent a year studying the architectural sights of Europe and taking classes at the famed Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris.

On return, he married Agatha Tiegel, the first Deaf woman to earn a B.A. degree from Gallaudet. Hanson took a position as an architect in Philadelphia and designed most of the buildings on the campus of the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf, the first of many buildings he conceived expressly for Deaf people, including the North Dakota and Mississippi Schools for the Deaf, and buildings on the grounds of the Washington School, the Minnesota School, and Gallaudet College. In his designs, Hanson incorporated large double-hung windows on all floors to allow adequate natural light for signed communication. Windows were not placed behind the speaker's platform, however, as that would have obscured the ASL speaker's face and made it difficult to see the facial grammar. Interior windows allowed Deaf people to communicate between adjoining rooms. Lighting controls were placed near the podium, so the speaker could attract audience attention by making the lights flicker, and seating was arranged for maximum visibility. In 1915, Hanson designed the first civic and social clubhouse for Deaf people in the U.S., the Charles Thompson Memorial Hall in St. Paul, Minnesota. Over the years, the club has hosted numerous weddings, banquets, and conventions, as well as presenting silent films and then captioned films. Today this Deaf club includes game rooms, a dining room, a two-hundred seat assembly hall, a bar, and a Deaf-culture salon.²⁵

Art historians have yet to focus their trained eyes on Deaf art in the U.S. and abroad, to deliver an analysis of its themes and methods, to inventory the many artists, and to present their works in book form. Deaf artists have yet to be recognized in the larger art world, despite their growing and enthusiastic following in the DEAF-WORLD, and despite the wide attention to the art of other groups such as African-Americans and Native Americans. Perhaps with the growing recognition of the distinct culture of the DEAF-WORLD, this minority's art will finally receive the attention it deserves.²⁶