

Preserving Deaf Art and Culture in Museums

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“The museums of the future in this democratic land should be adapted to the needs of the mechanic, the factory operator, the day laborer, the salesman, and the clerk, as much as to those of the professional man and the man of leisure... In short, the public museum is, first of all, for the benefit of the public.”

George Brown Goode, 1889

Why is art meaningful?

- The power of expressing importance within the artwork
- Cultivated through an exchange of ideas
- Visuality

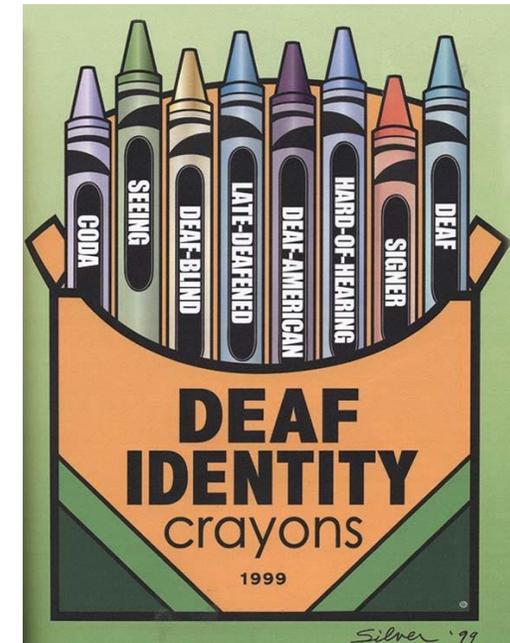
“There’s no way of looking at a work of art by itself: it’s not self-evident—it needs a history, it needs a lot of talking about; it’s part of a whole man’s life.”
Willem de Kooning

Understanding Deaf Art

- Using formal art elements to convey the artist's *deaf* experience
 - Metaphors
 - Perspectives
 - Relationships with surroundings (environment, people, objects)
- Deaf View Image Art (De'VIA)
 - Defining systematic oppression

Identifying Deaf Artists

- Use of common mediums in whatever form, media, subject matter
- Analyzes political, social, economic contexts
- Commission/Patron



Deaf Identity Crayons by Ann Silver

Deaf Artists and De'VIA

- Color contrasts
- Centralized focus with additional emphasis on a certain subject
 - Facial expressions
 - Objects
- Exaggerated iconography/symbolism
 - Widening of eyes and hands



Family Dog by Susan Dupor // Mechanical Ear by Chuck Baird

Deaf Culture and History

- American Sign Language (ASL) is mostly derived from French Sign Language (LSF) and is one of the most widely used sign language in the world
 - Estimated 200,000 – 300,000 signers in US and Canada
 - Not an universal language
 - ~300 years old language
- First deaf school in Hartford, 1814
- Books on fingerspelled handshapes published as early as 1620
- Gallaudet University is the only university that has programs and services that were designed to accommodate specific type of students: the deaf and hard of hearing
(Humphries and Padden, 1988)

Deaf Culture and History

- Ethnocentric culture = not defined by a native land but by native signs on a global scale

- Visuospatial language

- “The Babylonian Laws”

Earliest known written mention
of deafness

(Groce 1985)

Table 1 Properties of ethnic groups: Distinct

Collective name	Customs
Feeling of community	Social structure
Norms for behavior	Language
Values	Art forms
Knowledge	History
Kinship	

(Lane 2005)

Deaf Art within Museums

- Limited resources to preserve deaf artworks
 - Dyers Art Center
 - Museum of Deaf History, Arts, and Culture
- Universities and deaf schools shouldn't be held accountable
- Lacking choice preference

Collections of Deaf Art

- Preservation stewardship
- Possession of Collections
 - Legal, social, and ethical obligations
- Standard assessment
 - Exhibition methods for collections used by the institution
 - Policies, practices, and procedures re: development of collections

Role, Education, Accessibility, and Diversity

- Museums are an educational institution for all classes of society
- Museums are a public service to all citizens
- All U.S. residents provide funding support for museums through subsidy of federal or state tax-exempt status, local bond levies, etc. (Merritt 2008)
 - Are all museums accessible?
 - Do all museums provide educational programming for disabled communities?
 - Would museums hire people with personal cultural knowledge for a specifically-related position on a regular basis?

Museums and the Public

- Curators create a common language and the educator translates
 - Develops common ground (homogenize)
- Cultures and ranking system

Multicultural Inclusive Museums

- Social inclusion
 - Consulting with diverse groups
 - Content of exhibitions
- Lessens the misrepresentation of minorities
 - Education is accurate facts
- No confusion between social fairness and sensitivity vs. knowledge

Questions to Address

- What gives the curator the authority?
- How do we ensure Deaf Art collections are in proper care?
- Is there a system for marginalized collections?



Educating the public creates
cultural opportunities and moral
sensitivity