Profile

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The resulting paintings have a quiet, intense minimalism, often featuring architectural structures with multiple windows, cast in contrasting light and shadows. The silence they evoke is as disquieting as a Surrealist dream. The more you look, the more you wonder what the structures could mean. What do those tiny windows hide? Who is commanding the light?

Niall McCormack's work reflects upon his childhood experiences as a Deaf man attending a Catholic convent school in Dublin. His is a classic example of Deaf visual art with a subtle message: the experience of developing a cultural deaf identity under the eyes of oralist nuns. Those structures could well be Niall himself, shutting his true self away from the light.

Ironically, others have also seen the light: recently The Royal Hibernian Academy in Ireland selected Exposed to The Light (below) for their annual exhibition.

Both House of Exposure, 2002, and Exposed to The Light, 2000, are (c) Niall McCormack.
Exposure, or ‘getting out there’ in the public eye, is very much a deaf issue, especially if you’re a deaf visual artist. It’s easier for deaf filmmakers, as their work chimes with current mainstream trends - see page 4.

That’s not to say deaf visual artists haven’t succeeded within the mainstream: Niall McCormack (page 8) and Joseph Grigely (page 7) are two shining examples. Then there’s our own Miles Thomas, making his return with his true cultural identity intact (page 6).

It’s all about perseverance: never losing belief in your art.

Melissa Mostyn
Comment

In the last 17 years, there have only been five major deaf art group exhibitions in Britain. Of these I have exhibited in three, two of which my works sold out: Deaf Expressions (1995), Deaf Eyes (2001) and Lake of Art (2003).

Sadly deaf arts resources are thin, funds always low. Few deaf visual artists are able to access training in marketing/PR and intellectual property/copyright, which places them at risk of being either exploited or under-exposed.

That has not been my experience with Salon. Since 2005, when I first got involved, my practice has flourished again with confidence. The invitation to present an overview of my career to date at Modern Art Oxford in 2006 – complete with a selection of work on display - was the stuff of dreams, leading to not one, but two workshops as part of the gallery’s own main programme.

Modern Art Oxford have since asked me to join their team of regular freelance artists – something which has restored my faith in the opportunities that good deaf arts management can bring. I am not the only one. Following Salon’s art retreat, Colin Redwood has also been in touch with Stour Valley Arts of his own accord about a proposed training programme.

Miles Thomas, Artist Facilitator, Salon

Below: Participants at the last Miles Thomas-led mainstream workshop at Modern Art Oxford, Small Worlds.

Salon has just set up its own Facebook group for those wanting to keep up-to-date with developments online. The group is free to join and includes a selection of film trailers, photos and posted items. Members are welcome to log in and reply to discussion topics or post relevant comments on its ‘Wall’.

For those unfamiliar with the concept, Facebook is a social networking tool useful for hooking up with old schoolfriends, work colleagues, strategic contacts and so on. Users create their own profiles with whatever information they choose to publicise: favourite films, music, books, interests, photo albums, contact details, etc. You can post messages or funny videos on your friends’ walls, use your profile as a ‘business card’ with customised privacy settings or set up a discussion group with a shared interest. The sixth most-trafficked site in the United States, with over 60 million users Facebook also enables more enterprising types to advertise services or goods quickly.

If you’d like to join Salon’s Facebook group, contact us now at info@salonart.org.uk and we’ll email you an invitation. Note that you need to have a Facebook profile before joining the group.

Deaf artist Sunny Chana is offering a digital printing service to those wanting to get computer images printed onto fabric or ready-made canvas. He can print any specified quantities to size on specially-prepared silk, cotton, linen, viscose and certain canvas fabrics with steam-fix, light- and wash-fast dyes.

All printed canvas will be steam and delivered in bubble-wrap and cardboard, ready to hang on your wall. For prices and other details, contact Sunny on xsunnychana@hotmail.com

Below: Deaf Cultural Centre.
Ask a young deaf person to pick between media and visual art and chances are he will choose the former every time. Yet artists like Damien Hirst enjoy media status. Melissa Mostyn reports.

Like many other arts bodies competing for the public eye, Salon has had to explore new ways of marketing itself effectively. Visual art will always be our core activity, but in an age where almost everything has gone digital, we also value the pivotal role film plays in boosting our media profile.

Film is a deaf-friendly medium. Since VeeTV, the Channel 4 magazine show for young deaf people, first exploded onto our TV screens in 2000 for six brief glorious years, we’ve seen certain young bright things try out film-making on their initiative. A few even meet with success.

Despite a growing confidence in their creative talents – recent evidence of which emerged at Deaffest 2007 – a trend is yet to fully emerge where deaf film-makers use their medium as a ‘canvas’ a la Sam Taylor-Wood or Derek Jarman. Similarly precious few high-production-value documentaries exist of deaf visual art activities; it’s hard enough finding deaf arts practitioners with the skills to present them anyway.

Inevitably, deaf visual artists will be viewed by a media-savvy Deaf Community as out-of-touch. Uptake on deaf visual art group activities also tends to be slow. In contrast, deaf TV drama auditions are over-subscribed, with enterprising deaf film-makers showing up regularly on MySpace and at festivals. Meanwhile, a £50 million diamond skull gets Damien Hirst into the news.

Some may dispute Hirst’s artistic integrity. Nevertheless, he illustrates perfectly how competitive mainstream visual art is today, with many contemporary artists gaining skills in ‘media manipulation’. The South Bank Show has been on TV for decades. Key investors will only fund art with guaranteed media impact. If you Google images for ‘deaf visual art’, and then ‘Young British Artists’, you will see a marked difference in picture content and quality between the two searches.

Mainstream visual art has always moved with the times. Impressionism was a response to the invention of photography, while the Futurists capitalised on the 1920s obsession with cars. Why shouldn’t deaf visual art go digital?

Get used to it – we are now living in a media-saturated era, where bold, photogenic visuals take precedence over everything else. We now have a thriving deaf filmmaking community in our midst. Let’s take our artistic cue - and start collaborating with them.

Salon in King’s Wood is out now on DVD.

Facing page: poster advertising Salon in King’s Wood.
Perspective

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**News**

*Arts & Business South East* is keen to commission a South-East based artist or designer £800 to create their Awards, which will be presented at the Arts & Business (A&B) South East Awards ceremony in June 2008.

Artists are being invited to send three images showing examples of their work, a short CV, and a 200-word statement describing the pieces they would produce. Each piece should embody the ethos of A&B and its leading role in bringing together arts & business communities, with the credit 'Arts & Business South East Awards 2008' prominently visible, and be free standing with the potential of display in a cabinet within business premises.

2008 will be the fourth year of the Awards. Previous awards have been made from ceramics, glass and copper. A&B is particularly interested in designs which differ from the above in terms of the medium used. The deadline for submissions is 3rd March 2008.

For more information, email emma.jacquest@aandb.org.uk.

**Competition:** during the Make Your Own Salon project last October, we got Mary Hare students to invent 'theories' that described the drawings they made without revealing their subject-matter. These 'theories' were distributed with entry forms on the day of the exhibition which we invited visitors to fill in and return.

We're pleased to announce that the entrant with the most correct answers was Gavin Short of Newbury. His prize is a free subscription to *The Lounge*. Congratulations Gavin!

Themh Cultural Centre is currently planning the Midlands' first ever Deaf Arts Festival on 7th-12th April 2008. Called Creative Hands, the festival aims to be a showcase of visual art, dance and music, with workshops by deaf arts practitioners and local organisations and an 'Accessing the Arts' event which looks into deaf access to the arts.

The Birmingham-based Deaf Cultural Centre, opened by Princess Anne in October 2007, has its own Deaf Arts Network, made up of 30 deaf artists from across Europe. For more information about the Network, the festival or the Deaf Cultural Centre, contact Lisa Davies on lisa.davies@bid.org.uk

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**In The Frame**

*White Noise* by Joseph Grigely, 2000. Courtesy of Cohan and Leslie, New York. In pasting up years of collected notes exchanged between himself and hearing non-signers, Joseph Grigely has made a successful career out of an aspect of Deaf Culture little acknowledged by the mainstream. White Noise, made up of some 2,500 notes stuck at random to a concave wall, skilfully brings alive the pieces of 'conversation' that clutter our minds; the more we remember, the more they become a mass of pointless chatter. 'Everyone knows what a conversation should sound like,' goes the artist's slogan, 'but what does a conversation look like?' And then he jumbles them all up.
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