



The Lounge

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Editorial

Welcome to *The Lounge!*

Communication breakdown is something that impacts upon everyone, for better or for worse. That it remains largely unexplored within contemporary visual art actually presents a strong argument for us to place Deaf Arts centre-stage. Look at *In The Frame* (p. 7) and *Profile* (p. 8). Sadly, certain mainstream arts professionals do not attempt to look beyond the surface, as *Perspective* reveals (p. 4-5). If only these people had seen us in action last year!

Got something to say? Write or email us. We can't promise publication, but if we do, it will be a worthy addition to the quarterly.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Melissa Mostyn



News *Start applying* now for our five-day retreat at Stour Valley Arts on 9th-13th July 2007 (preceded by two training days on 28th-29th June). There are just ten free places for deaf and hard-of-hearing visual artists to make work deep in 1,500 acres of mixed woodland called King's Wood and accommodation will be paid for by Salon.

To win your place, email us on info@salonart.org.uk for a copy of the guidelines and an application form and return it before Monday 7th May 2007. Good luck!

Matthew @ MAO: following in the footsteps of Miles Thomas last year, fine art postgraduate Matthew Jenkins will be leading our next one-day workshop at Modern Art Oxford on Thursday 7th June 2007.

He will be showcasing his work to date and participating artists will be invited to talk about their own experiences.

Entry is free but you need to book as we have only 10 places available.

Visit www.salonart.org.uk for a booking form that you can download. Matthew Jenkins' profile can also be found in the website's 'Meet The Team' section.

Salon is seeking deaf and hard-of-hearing visual artists for an online gallery. We plan to create a brand-new gallery linked to our website that will showcase works for sale by artists who meet our selection criteria. There is 35% commission for every work of art sold – low compared with the usual 50-60% charged by some art galleries. Find out more on info@salonart.org.uk

The development of Salon's new Board continues. Last month we met our prospective Trustees at Tate Modern to discuss how the board could help us improve our fund-raising efforts, which went well. Once elected, Salon Trustees will be expected to attend the inaugural board meeting on 26th April. More details to come soon.

If you come across any words in this issue that you don't understand, do email us and ask. We'll explain as best we can.

Facing page (right): The destruction of the city by nature according to Matthew Jenkins. King's Wood, 2006. Photo Miles Thomas

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Please note that any views and opinions expressed in *The Lounge* belong to the individuals expressing them and are not necessarily shared by Salon. Ideas for contributions in our next issue are welcome, although publication is not guaranteed. Only high resolution .jpg or .tif images (300dpi) will be considered. Deadline for next issue is 6th July 2007.



‘Exhibit together just because they’re deaf? That’s not a very good concept!’ These were the words of an art gallery director during a meeting in Brighton to discuss collaborating on Salon’s first exhibition. Having never worked with deaf people before, the director betrayed ignorance of the cultural perspective that also informed Deaf Arts and gave it such rich potential for diversity. Clearly, her equality principles did not include those of us who desired to work within social, environmental or educational settings that allowed our sense of community, culture and language to thrive.

And it is this that we need to strive for much more within Deaf Arts. Many people are familiar with the social model of disability but I am not sure if this alone is enough to turn one work of art into Disability Arts and another into Deaf Arts. Obviously it is up to curators if they want to exhibit works by deaf and hard-of-hearing visual artists as Deaf Arts regardless of the subject matter; I have done that myself. Unfortunately, it will not teach that gallery director - and others like her - about the values that are unique to deaf and hard-of-hearing people. What can a deaf painter of nature teach that his or her hearing equivalent can’t? That one has just as much skill as the other? How does that advance Deaf Arts as a concept?

When I first began working with Salon, I believed that through bringing deaf and hard-of-hearing visual artists together, we would encourage diversity within deaf and hard-of-hearing visual art practice. Like many others, I saw Deaf Arts as ‘arts made by deaf people,’ naively thinking that the works would automatically reveal aspects of Deaf Culture anyway. Since then I have become aware of deaf or hard-of-hearing visual artists who have more affinity with Disability Arts than Deaf Arts - either due to the circumstances in which they were deafened, or because they don’t believe in Deaf Culture, or both. Nevertheless deaf audiences can still identify with these artists, because of the way their art explores their experiences as deaf people.

I find that such works can often be hit-or-miss affairs. They need to be placed in the deaf cultural context as so the artists can assess their appeal for Deaf BSL users as well as deafened and hard-of-hearing people. It is worth remembering that certain BSL users see the social model as being in conflict with their cultural beliefs due to their perceived negative connotations of the words ‘disability’ or ‘hearing loss.’

This may not find favour with certain disabled or hard-of-hearing artists. But it is a key to understanding why BSL users view themselves as a linguistic minority rather than a disabled group, arguing - rightly - that as an officially recognised language BSL should be treated with the kind of respect reserved for spoken languages. It is this that leads them to believe that people discriminate against them on cultural grounds - rather than disability grounds - and Deaf Equality trainers to include the cultural model in their training.

Salon does not exclude either model in its approach. Instead we encourage the advocates of the social model on one side, and those of the cultural model on the other, to meet and discuss their experiences with an open mind by way of finding common ground. Artists who practise both are also encouraged to demonstrate the advantages that can be gained in doing so. Traffic shouldn’t be one-way.

But neither do we ask artists to practise models of deafness they don’t believe in. Rather, they should use the shared experiences that play an integral role within Salon activities as an opportunity to enrich their art and advance their practice. Only through exploring each other’s deaf experiences as well as their own, and acknowledging the new influences in the works, can Deaf Arts truly educate others about the rich diversity of the deaf and hard-of-hearing population and the cultural and/or social values they uphold – and reveal its full potential as a concept.

Facing image (right): Miles Thomas’ Positive Space, 2002-3. A large-scale sculpture installation work that both explores the concept of the ‘spatial identity’ of Deaf BSL users and places the linguistics of BSL in the context of Leonardo Da Vinci’s The Last Supper.





Comment

“Working with Salon was a very positive experience last year and I’m looking forward to building on this and developing the partnership further.

“I was very impressed by the quality of the work all the artists produced and by their sensitivity and their response to the forest environment. I think the fact they work as deaf artists informs their artistic practice in very interesting ways.”

Lucy Medhurst, Education Officer of Stour Valley Arts (left), on partnering Salon in this summer’s art retreat at King’s Wood

Membership

From April 2007, it will cost £15 a year to become a member of Salon. £15 will get you:

- * 4 quarterly issues of *The Lounge* (this issue free)
- * Salon membership card that gives you entry to invitation-only Salon events
- * Regular e-mail updates and press releases

Sign up or miss out!

Fill in your details below, cut out the form, and post it with a SAE and a cheque for £15 made out to Salon to: Salon, P.O. Box 748, Aylesbury, Bucks HP22 9BH. Thank you!

Name:

Address:

.....

..... Postcode:

Tel/text (delete as appropriate):

Mobile SMS:

Email:



In The Frame

Communication Breakdown by John Morris, 2006. 3D installation made at King's Wood, Kent. This is made up of two curving lines of twigs joined at the centre by a large post showing a 'hand', symbolising the tool for BSL, and a piece of bark resting against it to the right of the dark cone pictured. One line represents the Deaf Community; the other, hearing people. When the wind blows the piece of bark falls, thus causing a 'communication breakdown.' To see this work in action, watch our documentary, *Salon @ Stour Valley Arts*, on CD-Rom.

Profile

Hard-of-hearing retired social worker Heather Veevers is exhibiting 15 of her works at the North Oxford Association Community Centre as part of Deaf Awareness Week. Heather isn't sure she can regard her experiences of deafness as a source of inspiration: "I'd call it more desperation!" Struggling to follow a party conversation one evening, she took to doing a small pen and watercolour sketch of a bamboo curtain - which unexpectedly began her extraordinary artistic practice.

Since then Heather has gone from strength to strength, with sculptures including *What did you say?* (cover image) - a work that could translate into the BSL for "gone over my head" - and *Excluded* (below). That Heather should feel compelled to explore her deaf experiences in this way speaks volumes about the potential of visual art to communicate to others in ways that spoken English cannot. Astonishingly, given how evocative her works are, she does not sign.

See Heather Veevers' works in the Annex of the North Oxford Association Community Centre, Diamond Place, Summertown OX2 7DP on 9th – 10th May 2007 at 10am – 4pm.

