

Paste
Local:Chicago

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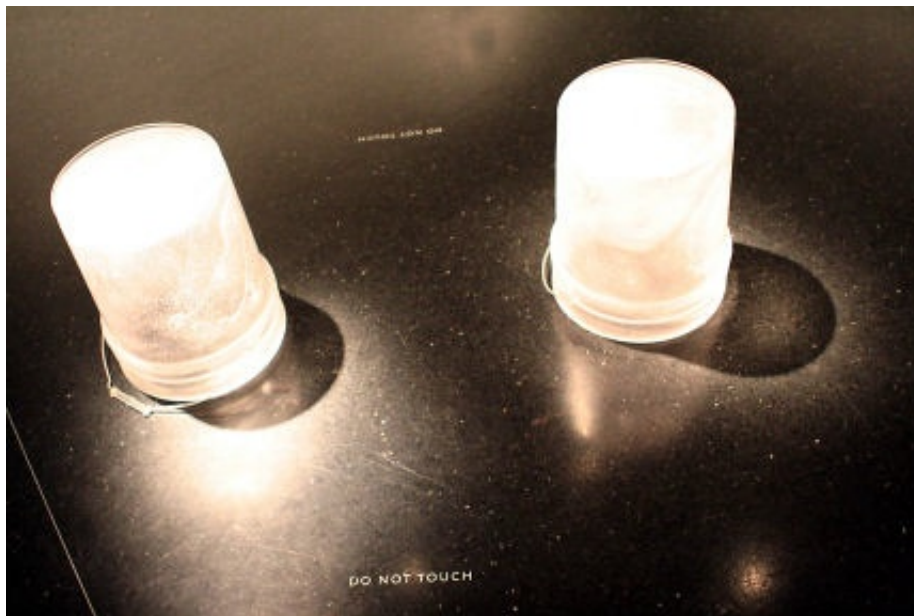
By Selena Fragassi, photos by Rory O'Connor

Art Review & Interview: Joseph Grigely's *St. Cecilia* @ Museum of Contemporary Art through 2/22/09



"When words can't be heard, language is translated to what is visual," Joseph Grigely told Paste: Local about the opening of his new exhibition, *St. Cecilia*, now through February 22 at the **Museum of Contemporary Art**. Named after the patron saint of music, the fourth floor exhibit comprises work that parlays the acclaimed deaf artist's memories of sound into video and sound installations, sculptures, and paper works focusing on the idiosyncrasies of communication.

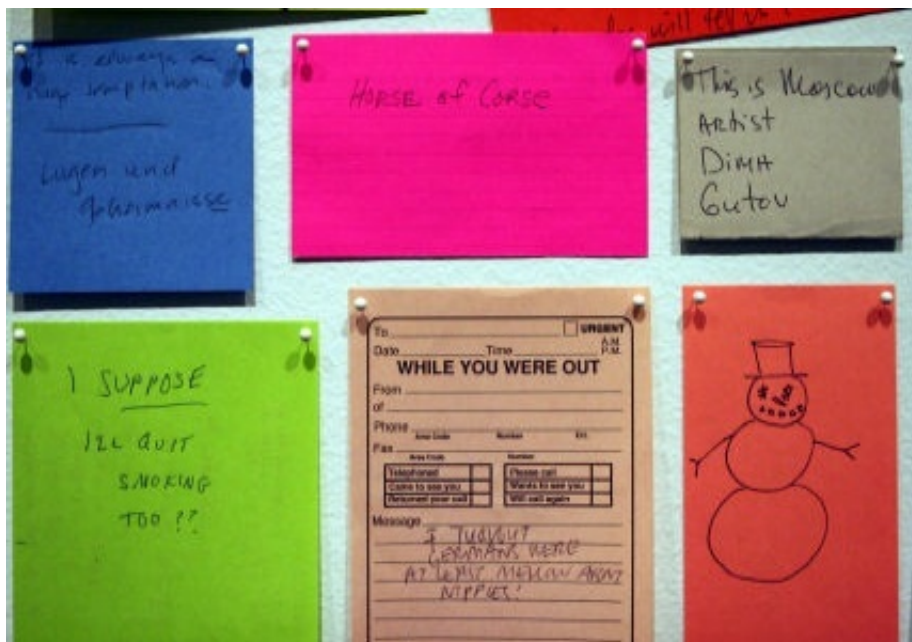
It was music that first took Grigely's attention as a young clarinetist in his school orchestra. But in 1967, after a fever and a cursed game of King On The Mountain caused him to lose his hearing at the age of 10, Grigely turned to literature and language, receiving his Ph.D in English literature from Oxford and following it with published essays and books. In the last 15 years Grigely turned to visual art as a form of expression, supported by a teaching position at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.



Air de Paris

"Literature is only the starting point of what words can do. In the world of literature and academia, there is almost an obligation to convince people of your point of view-- and often multiple, contradictory points of view," explained Grigely. "By the nature of visual art, I'm not obligated to convince anyone of anything." *St. Cecilia*, then, subjectively explores the inner love triangle of music, literature and language, and the ways that humans use these forms of communication to build their own relationships. In the sculpture "That's What We Live For," Grigely was inspired by a catalogued *Chicago Tribune* article of two men ice fishing on Lake Michigan and uses the floor space of the MCA to display two overturned buckets that appear frozen in time.

In "Blueberry Surprise," an oversized framed manuscript pieces together sentence fragments for a complex puzzle of plots and subplots, which resembles MadLibs. "It was an effort to transcribe and edit 10 years of confrontations and conversations, for constructive narration" Grigely said during a lecture at the opening. "We have all these conversations but we don't know where we store them," he added. In a similar exploration, "What Did I Say?" features post-its and colored paper with different phrases and words that are arranged based on relationships to each other.



The cornerstone of the exhibit is the St. Cecilia video installation. The screen, divided in two segments, features replications of a choir singing familiar tunes. While one half is the actual song, the other features the choir singing lyrics made up by Grigely, which look the same when lip-read. What is most striking is the particular songs chosen, many obvious remnants from Grigely's childhood. "The silence of the external world gave me the freedom to play and replay various performances I had heard over the years," read the placard with Grigely's words, beside the installation. "When you become deaf suddenly, you don't have a choice about what you are privileged to remember."

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