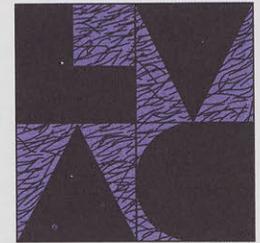


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N E W S R E L E A S E

**MIT List Visual Arts Center Presents  
JOSEPH GRIGELY: ORDINARY CONVERSATIONS**



**Cambridge, MA, September 1996** – Joseph Grigely will be artist-in-residence for three weeks this fall, September 12-20, October 2-5, and dates in November, to create an installation entitled *Ordinary Conversations* in the List Visual Arts Center's Bakalar Gallery. The project will remain on view through December 29.

Grigely has been totally deaf since the age of nine, a condition that has led him to explore the nature of human communication and interaction through his art, particularly the everyday exchanges that many people take for granted.

*Ordinary Conversations* will be constructed around the use of Grigely's own everyday mode of communication with the hearing: writing messages on slips of paper. The artist has communicated this way (in addition to using ASL, TDD, fax, and lately, e-mail) for some 30 years due to his inability to lip-read people consistently due to the idiosyncratic speech patterns of some speakers. *Ordinary Conversations* invites visitors to share written exchanges with Grigely in this manner in a neutral and informal "study" setting that the artist will create within the Bakalar Gallery, an intimate gallery space that lends itself to installation or experimental work.

The slips and notes that will result from the exchanges in turn become representations of the conversations that have taken place. In this regard, Grigely considers the scraps of conversation as a form of still life drawing. The cumulative notes generated will be arrayed and posted on the walls of the gallery for visitors to examine (and add to) alongside papers connected to previous conversations to which Grigely has added his own typewritten commentary contextualizing the exchanges. Ultimately, Grigely's project is not about the condition of deafness or of hearing, but explores the manner in which we make ourselves known to others amid individual differences, and the creative act which is every person's life.

A catalogue will accompany the show and be available at the List Visual Arts Center.

An opening reception for *Ordinary Conversations* at which Joseph Grigely will be present will take place on Friday, October 4 from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.

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MIT List Visual Arts Center  
GRIGELY/2

Joseph Grigely was born in 1956 in Springfield, Mass. and deafened in 1967. He attended school at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, New England College and Oxford University, England. Currently, he is a professor in the department of art history at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Grigely had his first one-person show in 1994 and has since exhibited his projects at the AC Project Room, New York, and FRAC-Limosin, Limoges, France. He recently published *Textuality: Art, Theory, and Textual Criticism* (University of Michigan Press, 1995).

*The List Visual Arts Center's Artist-in-Residence program is an invitation to artists to create new work that takes advantage of the special technological, intellectual, and support resources at MIT. In turn, the artist opens the creative process to gallery visitors, who may share in the development, research and execution of the project and take the opportunity to converse with the artist directly.*

### **How to Get to the List Visual Arts Center**

The List Visual Arts Center is located in the Wiesner Building, 20 Ames St., Cambridge on the MIT campus in close proximity to Kendall Square and Memorial Drive.

From the red line Kendall Square T stop, follow Main Street west to Ames Street, turn left, walk the distance of one block to the cross walk and the List Center will be on your left. Signage is on the building. Parking is available at the Marriott Hotel on Main Street near the T stop and in campus lots after business hours and on the weekends.

### **Gallery Hours**

Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday	12 - 6 p.m.
Friday	12 - 8 p.m.
Saturday, Sunday	12 - 6 p.m.
Closed Monday	

*Please note the change in gallery hours. The gallery will now be open on Friday evenings (instead of Wednesday evening).*

### **Information**

617-253-4680 or visit us on the web: <http://web.mit.edu/lvac/www/>

**All events at the List Visual Arts Center are free and open to the public.**

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The List Visual Arts Center's artist-in-residence program invites artists to turn our galleries into active hybrids of studio, laboratory, library or staging area. For periods of time ranging from a week to several months, artists are invited to make new work, and to push their research and creativity in new directions. Taking advantage of the special technological, intellectual and support resources of MIT, artists return the favor by sharing their process of research, development and execution with the gallery visitors who are invited to engage with the artists, and return for further observation and conversation.

Artist Joseph Grigely has been invited by the List Visual Arts Center to be artist-in-residence for three weeks in the fall of 1996. An exhibition of his work (some which will have been created during the residency) will be exhibited through December. Grigely's Conversations with the Hearing is an ongoing project that examines the communication exchanges that occur between the deaf and the hearing. The Conversations themselves consist primarily of pieces of paper that were written upon by hearing people in the course of a conversation with the artist. Partly because of Grigely's total deafness, and partly because of the uniqueness of individual speech habits, the artist found himself in the position of not always being able to lip-read people. In these situations, Grigely simply reconfigures the act of face-to-face communication by asking people to write down what they are saying. The artists' interlocutors vary considerably and include friends, colleagues, and complete strangers; topics range from a conversation in a bar with a friend, gossip with a neighbor, or questions asked by people in the street -- in essence, the range of communications which make up everyday life.

In this sense, the Conversations are essentially a representational or figurative art. They might be described as linguistic portraits or still-lives, inasmuch as the portrait of the conversation is 'drawn' in words and idiosyncratic visual features: paper, handwritings, spacings, spellings, and

so on. Yet, the portrait is one mediated by the exchange taking place, an exchange that is a necessary condition for all portraiture. And, like still-life paintings, the Conversations record ordinariness *in terms of* ordinariness; yet because of the speakability of the inscriptions, they are unusual as written texts. They are written images of things that usually do not get written down -- slips, secrets, whispers, spontaneous insights -- thereby preserving, in a way that is both compelling and unsettling, the mutability of speech.

Physically, Conversations incorporates the aforementioned notes into "still-life arrangements," to which Grigely adds a typed card contextualizing a situation and offering insights into the mechanics of its exchange. Recently he has grouped these arrangements within installations which replicate sites of verbal exchange -- i.e., a party, library table, living room -- fleshed out with coffee cups, ashtrays, and other evidence of human interaction. Conversations functions on many levels: the arrangements of differently colored and shaped pieces of paper form pleasing configurations, while Grigely's accompanying texts are beautifully written, full of warmth, humor and insight.

Grigely's Conversations transcend issues specific to deafness, highlighting instead the ways in which we all communicate. Ultimately the work is not simply about being deaf or about being hearing, but about being different in a world of difference. Grigely explores both the ways in which language 'humanizes' us as social beings and -- the ways in which language *dehumanizes* us as well. The Conversations purpose as art, or as social document, is to frame certain truths about what it means to be human -- the means by which we create our own existence, and how the life of every person is, by necessity, a creative act.

For his MIT residency, Grigely plans to create a four-walled 'study' within the List Center's Bakalar Gallery. Grigely will be in residence within this "study" during the first three weeks of the exhibition; sorting and processing collected bits of the Conversations, and engaging with gallery visitors. These exchanges may in turn become part of the ongoing Conversations project, turning them -- like any conversation -- into a generative process. Upon the study's outer walls, new additions to Conversations will be mounted alongside a selection of preexisting work. If Grigely considers his work to be representational, then his MIT installation will represent, in part, a selection of those attending his exhibition.