

# ARTFORUM

## Joseph Grigely

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, CHICAGO

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Deaf since the age of ten, Joseph Grigely has dedicated his fifteen-year artistic practice to researching the various translations and subsequent shifts in meaning that take place when music, language, and informal talk are communicated through visual form. His compressed survey comprises eleven works created since 1999. The show is anchored by his masterly 2007 video installation *St. Cecilia*, an eight-minute production depicting the Baltimore Choral Arts Society singing familiar Christmas carols with unfamiliar lyrics. These baffling verses are the result of Grigely's lip-read translation of the intoning choir. Here Grigely privileges the audience with the sounds and words he sees. Grigely calls this "lipmisreading," a source of frustration and poetry for nonhearing lip readers. And it is within this paradox of translation, from sound into visual sign, vexation into invention, that Grigely situates his art practice.

*We're Bantering Drunkening About What's Important in Life*, 2007, presents Grigely's daily written exchanges with people on numerous small sheets of paper that are organized into formal rectangles of vivid colors and monochromatic fields. Decontextualized, these notes and drawings appear as random sound bites that communicate narrative interest through their handwriting and broken syntax. Similarly, in *Blueberry Surprise*, 2003, forty-five thousand tiny typed words culled from ten years of written conversations are arranged into a massive, impenetrable block of text. As Grigely accumulates and assembles isolated exchanges of communication, he highlights the limitations of written vernacular dialogue. His works on paper illustrate that the fullness of everyday communication depends on a complex choreographed interplay between sound and sight. Yet the most compelling facets of Grigely's poetic misinterpretations are his lamentations for the lack of innovation, playfulness, and creativity in commonplace communication.

— Michelle Grabner



Joseph Grigely, *We're Bantering Drunkening About What's Important in Life*, 2007. Installation view.

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