

The Chosen Book Tour: June 2016
by Ginny Wheeler

The Art of Silence

David Malter to Reuven: **It is hard work to fill one's life with meaning.**



James Castle exhibition

Silence can mean the absence of sound. Let's brainstorm the other meanings for "silence" before we see the other objects.

- Lived in silence but expressed himself through art: tactile, familiar, charming, instinctive.
- For nearly 70 years, Castle made art from the stuff of everyday life. In ink, he combined soot and saliva. To obtain color, he extracted dyes with water from pulped mail. For his canvases, he used advertisements, envelopes, newspapers, milk cartons, packaging materials and whatever else his family and neighbors would save for him. He'd often incorporate sticks, apricot pits, broken fountain-pen nibs and string into his multimedia works.
- His works echo the modern artists of his era. (i.e. Cezanne incorporated figures into the overall design as in the figures in the attic.)
- His subject matter: images of family members, fantastical calendars, pop cultural references, memories from his time at the School for the Deaf and Blind, and flashes of life on the farm.
- Born profoundly deaf, he spent his entire life with his parents and other family members on a succession of farmsteads in southwest Idaho. The geographic remoteness of his rural home and studio was amplified by a social isolation, as he never learned to read, write, speak, sign, or lip-read. Yet he discovered an abiding need and acumen for personal expression, born of his instinctive visual perception and anchored in his everyday experience.
- Dream houses - his family called them. He finally got his own home. Deconstructed interiors so that the various parts became people. He called them Friends.
- He lived an ordinary life, shared his works with visitors, watched tv (Red Skelton was his favorite, especially his mimes), created art work daily. Bundled them up into bundles, tied them, and stored them. Many bundles were abandoned when his family moved.
- Largest collection is at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in DC.

Silence: absence of sound, quit talking, wordlessness, avoiding talking about something, respect as in a moment of silence, cause silence as in the end of the movie silenced the audience, hush someone, muffle like in a silencer, prevent someone from expressing their views, a weapon, kill, silence is golden, meditation, not answering, soothing as in silence his fears, a silent partner, silence your critics, Silent Night.

Silence in our story was broken when the news of the Holocaust reached America. Potok actually uses the word “silence” to describe “not knowing.” Silence - the absence of knowing. When faced with Zionism, Danny’s and Reuven’s fathers choose different paths.

Lipchitz’ interpretation: **If you desire to continue freely in your creative work, it will be necessary for you to enter the struggle and conquer the forces of darkness that are about to invade the world.**



Prometheus Strangling the Vulture II, Jacques Lipchitz, 1944/1953

Consider the choices Prometheus made. In what ways are they similar to the choices made by various characters in the novel?

- Democracy triumphs over fascism. The sculpture, however, speaks to the struggles all of us have. Both Potok and Lipchitz would say that it is best to take matters into your own hands rather than to wait for someone else to help/rescue you.
- As a Hasid, Danny can't choose a wife; as a Tzaddik, he can't choose his profession.
- Exudes strength, movement. Greenish cast. Very Baroque.
- Foreshortening shows how this sculpture is cubism.
- Inspired by the Greek myth in which Prometheus stole fire from the gods as a gift for mankind. The god Zeus was so angry he punished Prometheus by binding him to a cliff for eternity, where every day a vulture devoured his liver, but it grew back each day. However, in this sculpture, Lipchitz portrays Prometheus triumphing over the vulture, strangling the bird with one hand and holding his claws in the other. For the artist, this was a symbol of human progress and determination and of democracy triumphing over fascism.
- The original version was created for the World Fair in Paris in 1937. The Walker Art Center's sculpture is based on the 1944 creation for Rio de Janeiro.
- Lipchitz: Born to philanthropist in Lithuania; proclaimed “redeemed” or “chosen” by his father in a public ceremony when only 1 month old; Jewish studies encouraged by father but art nurtured by mother; Paris in 1909 at age 20 to become an artist; Stopped practicing Jewish law; Experienced Nazi atrocities and escaped to America in 1941; Returned to Paris for exhibition in 1946 but wife left him to stay in France; Married a Hasidic Jew in America; 1958 stomach cancer changed his life; He confessed to a Rabbi who asked him to do two things: don phylacteries and pray each morning; He said this put him in touch with his own people and gave new life in his art work.
- A Rabbi to Mrs. Lipchitz after he died: Let me add that this creation has great meaning. The eternity of the soul is a staple in the Jewish faith. Nevertheless, the eternity is expressed through the good deeds and the contributions the individual made during his lifetime on earth. This is emphasized when an individual is blessed from Above with exceptional talents. Your husband was blessed with such talents, that merited him great fame worldwide. He also had great influence in the worlds of spirit and ideas and he served as an example in these areas.
- Epigraph 1: "When a trout rising to a fly gets hooked on a line and finds himself unable to swim about freely, he begins with a fight which results in struggles and splashes ... In the same way the human being struggles with his environment and with the hooks that catch him. ... It is hard for a free fish to understand what is happening to a hooked one." –Karl A. Menninger (American psychologist)

A moment of silence is a quiet reflection, a prayer, a time of contemplation.

Danny: You can listen to silence, Reuven. I've begun to realize that you can listen to silence and learn from it. It has a quality and a dimension all its own. It talks to me sometimes. I feel myself alive in it. It talks. And I can hear it. . . . You have to want to listen to it, and then you can hear it. It has a strange, beautiful texture. It doesn't always talk. Sometimes - sometimes it cries, and you can hear the pain of the world in it. It hurts to listen to it then. But you have to.



Dinh Q Le, Untitled (Two figures)

What do you discover as you contemplate this object?

What do you think the artist wants us to take away from this piece?

- Woven together an image of a Khmer temple at Angkor and two passport-style photos of the victims of Khmer Rouge which Le witnessed. The Vietnamese documented their atrocities with photos of each victim before execution.
- Notice that the artist chose a corner, close-up view of a pillar covered in images of gods facing forward to weave into the two photos of the victims. What does this perspective add to the piece?
- Born in Hà Tiên, a Vietnamese town near the Cambodian border in 1968, Dinh Q. Lê immigrated with his family to the U.S. at the age of ten to escape the Khmer Rouge.
- Inspired by traditional Vietnamese grass mat weaving.
- Based on thorough research and interviews, Lê throws light on people's memory as it is told through actual personal experiences.
- Angkor Wat is decorated with depictions of deities from both the Buddhist and Hindu religions as the original Hindu temple was transformed into a Buddhist temple in the 12C.
- The temple is a powerful symbol of Cambodia, and is a source of great national pride.
- During the Kmer Rouge reign from 1975-79, 2 million people were killed or died.



Silence can be communication. Silence helps us make connections without words.

Reuven about the forced silence between him and Danny: **We had begun to communicate with our eyes, with nods of our heads, with gestures of our hands.**



Vigilants, Dave and Steve Ryan and Mika Negishi Laidlaw, 2016

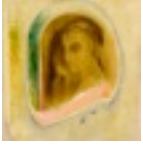
As you stop at each station, ask What does this communicate about our interconnectedness?

Paraphrasing an analysis of *The Chosen*: Out of a cultural confrontation between a minority immigrant culture and the larger umbrella American culture a Potokian 'Zwischenmensch' ('between-person') is born, one who rejects neither his original culture nor the contemporary culture surrounding him. Potok believes that one can live in the adoptive, secular culture without giving up one's roots, ethnic or religious traditions.

- syzygy—a pair of connected but opposing forces
- Rabbi Saunders sends Danny off into the world to study psychology and to become a Tzaddik of the world. The novel ends showing us that you can still be a practicing Jew and be a part of the larger society at the same time.
- This exhibition explores the possibilities of syzygy—a straight line configuration of three celestial bodies—through the connection between ceramics and interactive video projection.
- Syzygy, according to Carl Jung, is the union of opposites like anima & animus or Yin & Yang
- Silence teaches Danny and Reuven that you can communicate without actually speaking
- At the end of the story, the two friends are aligned with the universe, with Judaism. They are connected again, in communication with their fathers, on their way into their respective futures.
- Potok, a Hasidic Jew who grew up balancing culture and religion much as Danny and Reuven learn to do, writes about that tension between faith and culture; between the individual spirituality and the community's; between religion and science.
- Danny experiences silence; Reuven experiences blindness. Their stories are interwoven throughout the book - even at the end when Reuven watches his friend walk into the future. The touch by shaking hands, Reuven hears the tapping of his shoes as he walks away and sees him bent forward .
- Reuven's experience with blindness made him see his home anew: I stood in that room for a long time, watching the sunlight and listening to the sounds on the street outside. I stood there, tasting the room and the sunlight and the sound, and thinking of the long hospital ward... Somehow everything had changed. I had spent five days in a hospital and the world around seemed sharpened now and pulsing with life.
- Dave-media artist; Mika-ceramic artist; Steve-neuroscientist
- The choices we make have consequences. (This idea works with the touch station.)
- The last passage uses sensory impressions: hungry, tapping, watched him.
- Rabbi Saunders and David Malter differed in their ideas about what it means to be a Jew, but they had a deep respect for each other.

Silence can be meditation, prayers, inward reflection.

Rabbi Saunders: **A man is born into this world with only a tiny spark of goodness in him. The spark is God, it is the soul; the rest is ugliness and evil, a shell. . . Anything can be a shell, Reuven. Anything. Indifference, laziness, brutality, and genius. Yes, even a great mind can be a shell and choke the spark.**



Silence, Odilon Redon, 1911, French

Silence - what does it look like? How did Rodin make visible something that is invisible?

- Won art award in school at age 10.
- Served in Franco-Prussian War, moved to Paris after, part of the cult of Delacroix
- Symbolist; Wanted to make visible what was invisible
- Represented the ghosts of his mind
- “I have often...painted before an object down to the smallest accidents of its visual appearance; but the day left me sad and with an unsatiated thirst. The next day I let the other source run, that of imagination, through the recollection of the forms and I was then reassured and appeased.
- Explored his internal feelings and psyche. Created a series of paintings dedicated to Poe to express what private torment looked like.
- Luminous color evokes dreaminess.
- Consider: Man or woman? Hands in prayer? Color on the outside, neutrals for the figure.

Silence can mean death, genocide --- what does that feel like?

Reuven: [War] was as senseless, as empty of meaning, as Billy's blindness. I lay there and thought of Roosevelt being dead and Billy being blind, and finally I turned over and lay with my face on the pillow and felt myself crying. I cried a long time.



Arshile Gorky, 1946

Like his other work in 1946, this painting references his memories of the Armenian genocide. But look at it if it were hung upside down. How does it change? (At one time it was hung the other way.)

His work of 1946 expressed both joy and pain. Can you see both in this work?

- WWII invades the novel from the very beginning with the baseball game and all the metaphors of war not to mention that Danny admits he wanted to kill Reuven. This immediately introduces the idea of cultural or religious differences as a reason for battle or war. They listen to the war on the radio, but not until the war ends do they realize the war reporting was silent as it pertained to the Holocaust.
- The Hasidic view is to take on the suffering of others and deal with it through silence, prayer and study of God, all while continuing to wait for the coming of the Messiah. Other Orthodox Jews, like David Malter, believed in action
- The year he painted this was his most prolific with 192 drawings and the year he produced his best work. This is probably one of the 192 sketches. Earlier that year his art barn burned down and he suffered from rectal cancer. His work expressed both joy and pain.
- Survived Armenian genocide. As the Ottoman Empire crumbled, Armenians were the Turkish scapegoats for the depression. 1m killed; 1m exiled.
- Mother introduced him to art. They went on a forced death march; she died in his arms from starvation at 14 which inspired him to create something so people won't do the same thing to their people. He used techniques such as drippings and splattering paint to indicate that world is not a perfect place and that there are unknown things that we human haven't discovered yet, especially since he saw many of his family die during the genocide he was in.
- In America he created a new name Arshile (Russian for Achilles) and Gorky meaning bitter one.
- Married and moved in Connecticut countryside that reminded him of the Armenian countryside. Became known as "an artist of the earth" as his work was inspired by nature. Surrealism meets abstract expressionism.
- His work was known for not only expressing earth but his haunting memories of the war.
- Later he discovered his wife having an affair with one of his painter friends, she left him taking the kids. Then he was in a car accident that left him unable to paint. He hung himself.



Silence can be when someone stops talking, when there are pauses---just like a rest in music. So how does that feel?

Reuven: **For the rest of that semester, Danny and I ate in the same lunchroom, attended the same classes, studied in the same school synagogue, and often rode in the same trolley car---and never said a single word to each other. Our eyes met frequently, but our lips exchanged nothing. . . Silence was ugly, it was black, it leered, it was cancerous, it was death. I hated it, and I hated Reb Saunders for forcing it upon me and his son.**



The Studio, Larry Rivers, 1956

How do these silences or separations in the painting make you feel about what you see? How does Rivers unify this piece?

How did you react to the forced silences in the book? (i.e. Danny is forbidden to see Reuven, Reuven ignores Reb Saunders' invitations, David doesn't reveal everything he understands and knows about Danny to his son, they don't learn about the Holocaust until after the war.)

- Characters often do not reply. There are long pauses for reflection. This echoes the way Danny is being brought up to listen to the silences and to search within himself for understanding. Potok forces us readers to fill in the voids with our own thoughts.
- Rabbi Saunders discusses the freedoms in America with Reuven just before setting his own son free to study psychology and become a tzaddik of the world.
- Abstract expressionists painted how they felt about their subject. This is also partly gestural (Pollock) and Pop (Warhol.)
- A Renaissance man: painter, sculptor, musician, poet, tv personality, actor, filmmaker.
- Saxophone player - jazz. Studied at Julliard and played in NY bands in the 40s.
- Appeared at the art expert on *64,000 Challenge*, which later was found to be rigged
- Inspired by Gustave Courbet's *The Painter's Studio*, the figures in the painting are representations of the influences in his life: the poet Frank O'Hara, his two sons, Birdie-his mother-in-law who posed for him, and in the center a reference to the social and political issues of the time.
- Born Yitzroch Loiza Grossberg to Jewish immigrants from Ukraine. Introduced as Larry Rivers and the Mudcats in a NY pub and kept the name.
- Married and had several relationships including O'Hara. Raised his son and adopted son.
- The people are all disconnected, but obviously connected to him.
- Larry Rivers created an homage to Delacroix with Lady Liberty scene.

Silence is a teacher.

Paraphrasing Reuven after listening to Rabbi Saunders and Danny go at it with the Talmud: ***I didn't understand a thing they were talking about.***

Rabbi Saunders to Reuven at the end of the book: **I did not want him to grow up a mind without a soul.**



Yad, (YAHD) Torah Pointer, 1870

- Silence. The word of God. Light. All of these images used in the book derive from the creation story in Genesis 1:1-3.
- Silence preceded divine speech in the creation of the world. God's first words: Let there be light. The imagery of eyes is also prevalent in the story. The idea being that once you understand, you see the light. These three images are woven into the story (Silence, the Word of God and Light) and have a spiritual component as they come from the Torah.
- **In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. 3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.**
- Silence, as a Jewish spiritual practice, is both a meditative technique and the discipline of reticence.
- In the book, there were often "warm silences" between the characters.
- Rabbi Saunders sends his son off to be a tzaddik of the world - a Potokan Zwischenmensch.
- Potok was a Zwischenmensch - a between person. A Hassidic Jew who became a writer but still practiced the Jewish religion, he becomes a between-person between himself and us the readers, between reality and imagination.
- In that way, the Yad becomes the connection between the word of God and the reader.
- Rabbi Saunders wanted his son to understand pain and suffering. He wanted Danny's mind and soul to be connected.
- Yad (YAHD) means hand. It is used to follow along when someone is reading from the Torah.
- Knowledge and inspiration to Hebrew people came from the hand of God or hand of Moses.
- The way Danny was being raised was just the opposite of the warm communication between Reuven and his father.

Silence can be warm, calm, soothing, protective.

Rabbi Saunders: **My father himself never talked to me, except when we studied together. He taught me with silence. He taught me to look into myself, to find my own strength, to walk around inside myself in company with my soul. . . . One learns of the pain of others by suffering one's own pain, ... And it is important to know of pain, he said. It destroys our self-pride, our arrogance, our indifference toward others. It makes us aware of how frail and tiny we are and of how much we must depend upon the Master of the Universe.**



Sleepers, Georges Jeanclos, 1979

How did you react to the end of the story? Did your views of Reb Saunders change when he reveals why he used silence with his son Danny?

- Ceramic sculptor recalls an individual and collective past. Imagery of life and death.
- His exploration of the human condition was rooted in his experience as a Jewish boy during World War II, hiding in the forests around Vichy, in Nazi-occupied France, to escape the Gestapo.
- Layers suggest blankets and pages from a book: textiles and text both provide protection but the use of a fragile medium like clay suggests the frailty of life.
- Eyes closed suggests thought rather than action (Zionism: ideology of Saunders to action with Malter)
- Hebrew letters are inscribed in several places on the thin covers that act as both a shelter and a shroud.
- Inspired by the death of his father. Hebrew letters on the forehead are lines from the Kaddish, a prayer recited after a relative's death.
- Flattening of the sheets of clay was an accident and then became his signature style.

Conclusion: Play Paul Simon singing Sound of Silence at Ground Zero and give copies of the lyrics to the guests to read while listening to the song.

Epigraph 2: **"True happiness/Consists not in the multitude of friends,/But in the worth and choice." –Ben Jonson**

- Written in 1963 by Paul Simon and recorded by Simon and Garfunkel in 1964. It resonated with people worldwide, not just with Americans who recalled the assassination of JFK.
- Garfunkel once summed up the song's meaning as "the inability of people to communicate with each other, not particularly internationally but especially emotionally, so what you see around you are people unable to love each other."



"The Sound Of Silence"

Hello darkness, my old friend
I've come to talk with you again
Because a vision softly creeping
Left its seeds while I was sleeping
And the vision that was planted in my brain
Still remains
Within the sound of silence

In restless dreams I walked alone
Narrow streets of cobblestone
'Neath the halo of a streetlamp
I turned my collar to the cold and damp
When my eyes were stabbed by the flash of a neon light
That split the night
And touched the sound of silence

And in the naked light I saw
Ten thousand people, maybe more
People talking without speaking
People hearing without listening
People writing songs that voices never share
No one dare
Disturb the sound of silence

"Fools" said I, "You do not know
Silence like a cancer grow
Hear my words that I might teach you
Take my arms that I might reach you"
But my words like silent raindrops fell
And echoed in the wells of silence

And the people bowed and prayed
To the neon god they made
And the sign flashed out its warning
In the words that it was forming
And the sign said "The words of the prophets
Are written on subway walls
And tenement halls
And whispered in the sounds of silence"