

# DEAF CINEMA MANIFESTO

**Version 1 - Venice, Italy 2026 - Itinerant Deaf Cinema Festival, Third Edition**

Throughout this manifesto, "Deaf" refers to a cultural and social identity — a community bound by shared language, experience, and history.

For far too long, there has been a whisper in the ear of cinema... a voice from a hearing writer that circumvented the doors of the industry with privilege and reached the ear before we ever had the chance, defined us before we could speak, and shaped our stories into something that greatly favors the hearing mind over what a Deaf perspective truly is.

This manifesto removes that poisonous earworm for good.

Deaf Cinema is the revelation of the Deaf (experience). Cinema that sees the world through a Deaf lens, built from the inside out, rooted in sign language and visual rhythm, and defined by the community it comes from.

That revelation has been appropriated, stolen and starved. Our stories bastardized by hearing hands. The Deaf story rewritten as inspiration porn, salvation arcs, and the tragedy of silence — stories that frame deafness as a problem to be solved rather than a life to be lived. These are not Deaf stories. These are hearing stories about deafness — and the industry has funded them generously while Deaf filmmakers have gone without.

And where hearing hands were absent, so was everything else — funding, infrastructure, a place in the wider industry for Deaf Cinema to become what it should be.

The cost is greater than artistic. When the hearing voice defines deafness, it shapes how the world understands us. We, as filmmakers, know the power of cinema and this is how they understand us. Bad representation or propaganda is not a minor cultural inconvenience. It is infrastructure for discrimination.

Since the earliest formations of human thought, two forces have competed for dominance — audio-centrism and visual-centrism. For centuries, the audio prevailed.

Language, meaning, and communication were understood primarily through sound, shaping philosophy, culture, and eventually, education.

From this hierarchy a systematic oppression was consolidated. The prevailing linguistic assumption that spoken language supersedes sign language gave rise to the oralism method – and with it, the deliberate deprivation of the visual language from those whose dominant perception of the world was visual.

The **oppression** was not only linguistic. It reached into every space where Deaf people might have built something of their own, including cinema.

George Veditz understood what was at stake. In 1913, he picked up a camera and recorded *The Preservation of Sign Language* – and in doing so, declared film a Deaf birthright. Spoken languages have writing. Sign languages have film.

That birthright has been contested ever since.

This manifesto exists to end the contest. It establishes what Deaf Cinema is and who makes it.

☞ **Deaf Cinema is made by Deaf people.** The director or writer (including co-directors and co-writers) must be Deaf – and Deaf characters must be portrayed by Deaf actors.

☞ **Deaf Cinema carries a Deaf gaze.** Not only in who made it, but in how it sees – framing, editing, and rhythm shaped by a Deaf way of experiencing the world.

☞ **Sign language is the leading language in Deaf Cinema.** Unless it is the deliberate choice of the Deaf filmmaker to represent it differently.

☞ **Deaf Cinema embodies Deafhood .** This includes Deaf identity, Deaf culture, Deaf history, Sign language literature, Sign language linguistics, Deaf academic and intellectual tradition.

Deaf Cinema belongs to every Deaf person in the world. And those of us who make it carry a responsibility to the ones who come after – to mentor, to share, and to pass on what we fought to build.

This is the Deaf Cinema Movement.

Signed,

Roberto Diella

~~Roberto Diella~~

Charlie Ainsworth

~~Roberto Diella~~ ~~Charlie Ainsworth~~ ☺

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