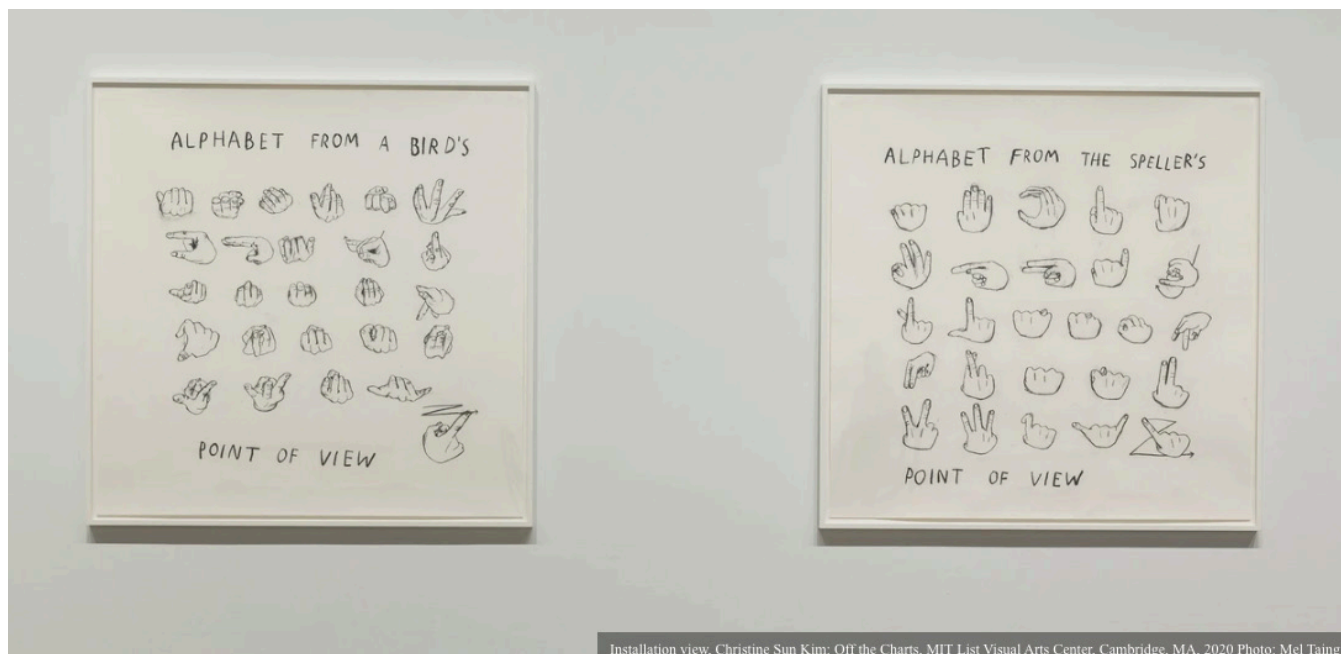


GARAGE

VICE



After Making a Splash at the Superbowl, Christine Sun Kim Is Just Getting Started

We talked to the artist about the Superbowl, “sound diets”, and how to bring more awareness to deaf culture.

2020 is off to a remarkable start, as GARAGE readers were finally given a reason to care at all about what is supposedly the most watched television event in the US: the Superbowl. And that reason was that artist Christine Sun Kim was set to perform “America the Beautiful” and “The Star-Span-gled Banner” in American Sign Language. Spirited and expressive, Kim’s performance was stunning. This, we’ve come to expect from her, as the artist has been causing a stir following her work on view at the 2019 Whitney Biennial, and had work at MoMA’s 2013 exhibit “Soundings.”

The Superbowl performance also aimed to utilize the prolific attention the event draws to bring more awareness to deaf culture. Though, the day after the game, she wrote an op-ed for The New York Times, writing that the media’s coverage of the event was “a huge disappointment — a missed opportunity in the struggle for media inclusiveness on a large scale. Kim added, “Though thrilled and excited to be on the field serving the deaf community, I was angry and exasperated.” This feeling of exasperation isn’t unfamiliar to Kim, who was also a part of the group of artists who requested to withdraw their work from the Whitney Biennial last year in protest of the museum’s vice chair Warren B. Kandors, whose company

Safariland supplies teargas used against asylum seekers around the world (he has since resigned).

Kim continues to use her art to fight back against systems of oppression, and her new exhibit, “Christine Sun Kim: Off the Charts” opened this past Friday at the MIT List Center. The show features new diagram works, similarly brazen and poignant to those included in the Whitney Biennial, as well as sound pieces in the form of “alternative lullabies,” composed in accordance with the “sound diet” Kim has created for her daughter, Roux. We caught up with the artist the day before the opening to learn more.



CHRISTINE SUN KIM PHOTO: MEL TAING

I'm very curious about the alternative lullabies composed for your daughter. Can you tell me about who you invited to create them?

When I bought a video baby monitor, I saw that it had several popular lullabies and I didn't like the idea of playing something to my baby that I'm not familiar with. So I decided to write a score with specific parameters such as: no lyrics and greater emphasis on low frequencies. I invited seven parent artists to make lullabies according to my score. I also asked them to write a description about their lullabies so that I will know exactly what I'm playing to my baby. Here are a couple of examples: David Horvitz made sounds of the ocean with his voice, Lotti Sollevi used low tones based on soft syllables, and Alex Waxman slowed down casino drum sounds. MIT's List Visual Arts Center and I designed the installation together and it's a representation of a weekly pillbox.

Your work, from my perspective, is pretty confrontational. Over the span of a year, you've been involved with two popular events, the Super Bowl and the 2019 Whitney Biennial — nicknamed the "Teargas Biennial" — that became politically charged. Does having your work on these political frontlines feel natural to you?

My responses to both events were so difficult but that's what platforms are for. Taking a political stance is always so complicated and it's my aim to do it with grace while sticking to my principles.



I'm curious to learn more about what a "sound diet" entails. Can you tell me more?

After I gave birth to my daughter, I was overly anxious about how she might end up favoring speaking over signing because that's how things are. I came up with "sound diet" and acted like I was a doctor prescribing all different amounts of listening: "suggested amount of sound toys for a baby to play with," "suggested amount of watching netflix with volume up when a baby is in close proximity," and "suggested amount of music in background while interneting in the morning." I used musical symbols as notes to indicate the amount of quietness or loudness during certain times in a day like morning and evening. Of course, this isn't something

we abide by but it's good to be mindful of our sonic spaces and how much sound she consumes everyday.

How do you think the world might be different if we all grew up with more awareness of signed and spoken communication?

Then we would totally have stronger disability laws, more access to a higher quality of life, better education, and above all, actually get respect for our language and culture.

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