



'Off the Charts': Artist Christine Sun Kim on Her New Work, and Signing at the Super Bowl

Following her performance at Super Bowl LIV, SVA alumnus Christine Sun Kim is looking ahead to a new exhibition in Berlin.



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by Emma Drew



Artist and SVA alumnus Christine Sun Kim performs the national anthem at Super Bowl LIV.

CREDIT: A J MAST / THE NEW YORK TIMES

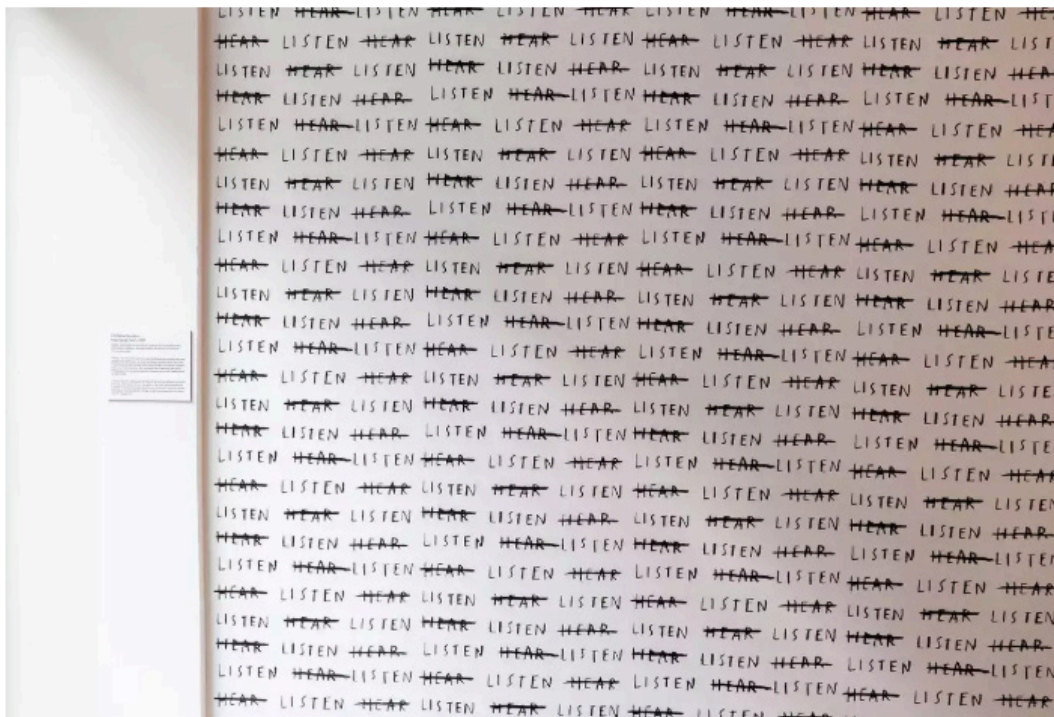
Last month, sound artist Christine Sun Kim (MFA 2006 Fine Arts) performed for her largest audience yet—the nearly 100 million worldwide viewers of the National Football League’s Super Bowl LIV. A prolific creator, whose work was shown in last year’s Whitney Biennial and has been featured in *The New York Times* and *Artforum*, the SVA alumnus has achieved many successes, but this was something else entirely: Kim, who was born deaf, signed the national anthem and “America the Beautiful” in American Sign Language as part of the pre-game ceremony in Miami, in concert with singers Demi Lovato and Yolanda Adams, respectively.

“It was my first time signing a song!” Kim says, a surprising admission given her fluid and expressive performance, and the fact that different musical devices and formats—from musical notation to full-blown operas—are often used as conceptual and aesthetic frameworks in her work. “It was actually not my intention to expand my practice that way, but it worked out well. Let’s see where that takes me.”

The California-born, Berlin-based artist has built her practice around sound, its visual representation, and how it is valued by society. Through texts, charts, drawings, paintings, performance and video, she makes work describing her relationship to sound, language and other people. “It’s all about visibility and taking advantage of platforms,” she says—of the Super Bowl opportunity in particular, but the attitude applies to her studio practice as well.

Kim was selected for the Super Bowl performance via a partnership between the NFL and National Association of the Deaf (NAD), who every year search for a person who best represents the deaf community to perform at the big game. “A bit stunned” that she was invited to audition, Kim took a stab at translating the songs’ lyrics into American Sign Language—which uses a grammar and syntax entirely different than that of English—carefully honing her understanding of the songs before envisioning them in ASL, and soliciting feedback from her deaf friends. In a *New York Times* op-ed published the day after the game, Kim explained her reasons for performing, and registered her frustration with her contribution’s limited visibility: Fox Sports, which broadcast the game, didn’t air her full performance either on television or online.

“I had hoped to provide a public service for deaf viewers, and believed that my appearance might raise awareness of the systemic barriers and the stigmas attached to our deafness—and move some people to action,” she wrote. “I hope that despite the failure of Fox to make the performance accessible to all, it did do that.”



Christine Sun Kim, *listen hear listen* (installation view), 2017, wallpaper. From "For the Record," 2018, ifa Gallery, Berlin.
CREDIT: VICTORIA TOMASCHKO

Kim's latest solo show, "Off the Charts," is currently on view at the MIT List Visual Arts Center in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The exhibition includes an audio installation, for which Kim invited artists to make lullabies for her own daughter based on score instructions she provided, like omitting speech and lyrics and focusing on lower frequencies—as well as several new charts and drawings. Most are about the choices Kim makes for herself and her family as a deaf person—why she does not read lips; why her hearing partner signs—rendered as pie charts. Her decision-making factors are represented as a mix of the poignant, practical and cheeky. (One reason she watches TV with closed captions? It's "good for rap battles.") The charts are serious and funny, informative and absurd, personal and political.

"Addressing the fight for basic rights can be exhausting and sometimes you want to take a break from it," she concedes. "But those personal insights offer a real gateway for people that are not familiar with the issues."

The humor helps, too, as do the familiar formats, from pie charts to opera, which Kim hopes are ready for wider audiences to understand. "That, in turn, makes my deaf ideas much more accessible to people who aren't familiar with my culture and language."

Right now Kim has another large stage on which to work. As part of a collaboration with *Weltkunst* magazine she's showing two huge murals depicting a day's journey into night and back again at the Deutsche Oper Berlin opera company. She says the works are likely her biggest ever.

“Christine Sun Kim: Off the Charts” is on view at the MIT List Visual Arts Center through April 12. “Another Day Rising into Being” opens in Berlin on March 11. For more information, visit christinesunkim.com.



CREDIT: NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF THE DEAF

Christine Sun Kim Performs the National Anthem / Super Bowl LIV

Artist and SVA alumnus Christine Sun Kim performs the national anthem at Super Bowl LIV in Miami on February 2, 2020. #AmericanSignLanguage #ASL #SuperBowlLIV #WithCaptions

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