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INTERVIEWS

CHRISTINE SUN KIM

November 25, 2015 • Christine Sun Kim talks about her exhibition in London



Christine Sun Kim, *Face Opera II*, 2015. Rehearsal view, November 25, 2015.

Artist Christine Sun Kim has deployed a range of media, from drawings to electronic devices, to explore sound as a medium, particularly from her perspective as a deaf artist. Her upcoming exhibition at Carroll / Fletcher in London will reprise a work currently on view at “Greater New York” in MoMA PS1, and will also include new pieces, which she discusses below. The show, which runs from November 27, 2015 to January 30, 2016, will also feature a performance, Face Opera: Thumbs Up, on Thursday, November 26, at 7:30 PM.

OVER TIME, I’ve found myself starting to understand the lingo of sound and music more and more, especially in terms of quantitative forms like decibel and hertz. I’m beginning to find music much more personal, mainly because of the musicians I’ve befriended in the past two years. My upcoming show will feature *Game of Skill 1.0*, 2015, which is actually an a predecessor of *Game of Skill 2.0*, which New York museumgoers can experience at MoMA PS1 right now.. I like how super analog *1.0* is, especially with its visible external speakers, as opposed to built-in ones. However, both versions offer the same or similar listening experience. Each piece was built by my technician Levy Lorenzo. I hope the *Game of Skill 1.0* installation will encourage participants to listen like gamers, or human turntable needles. In it, you hold up a device that connects to a strip of Velcro with magnets above you, and then you physically walk around in order to listen to audio, which is controlled by the device and its responses to your movement The audio comes out in a way that’s affected by the way you move, walk, or hold the device. It takes practice to perfect; it might be laborious but it’s meant to make your listening feel unfamiliar and like you’re learning a skill. This partially came from my observation of how hearing people passively and mindlessly listen, which I think is something they often take for granted.

Face Opera, 2013/2015, is another piece I've already done twice with a group of deaf friends in New York. This upcoming performance will involve a group of deaf Brits, which I'm incredibly excited about. Two of them are my good friends and I know British Sign Language (entirely different from American Sign Language) enough to carry conversations. Those participants have helped me develop the score and will sing with their faces alone, rather than hands. In BSL, there is a strong use of thumbs to express everyday concepts like "good night" (thumb up, night), "my dinner is great" (dinner, thumb up), or "all right" (two thumbs up), hence the latest iteration's title, *Face Opera: Thumbs Up*.

In terms of new work, I'll be exhibiting a series of drawings that is mostly about my relationship with ASL interpreters, as well as *Close Readings*, a project that has a lot to do with how necessary it is to work with other voices in order to have one. This piece came from my experience of reading rather than watching a movie called *Kumiko, the Treasure Hunter* (2014). Their captioner went overboard and captioned almost every single sound in it, in a way that made the captions seem imposing, specific, and abstract. I realized from this that sound can be incredibly multidimensional and how difficult it is to put them into a few words. It also made me understand that for many years I've been placing so much trust in captioners to decide which sounds are important. For example, if Rihanna's "BBHMM" comes up in a scene, a captioner could easily describe it as a "song in background" instead of specifying which song, musician, instruments, or even lyrics. My perception of movies largely depends on those captioners, just like my perceptions of spoken conversations depend on my sign language interpreters. I invited four deaf friends to add their own sound cues to five movie scenes I selected that resonate with the theme of voice; they were asked to provide captions that were either literal, conceptual, or imagined.

Ultimately I think my main interest driving this show is the notion of going overboard: overreading movie captions, overlistening while playing games, overthinking about all the different voices I've worked with. Maybe it's more about borrowing voices, and about how people perhaps overvalue voice as a sound rather than voice as a visual.

— *As told to Dawn Chan*

Chan, Dawn. "Interviews: Christine Sun Kim"
Artforum, November 25, 2015.

<https://www.artforum.com/interviews/christine-sun-kim-talks-about-her-exhibition-in-london-56374>