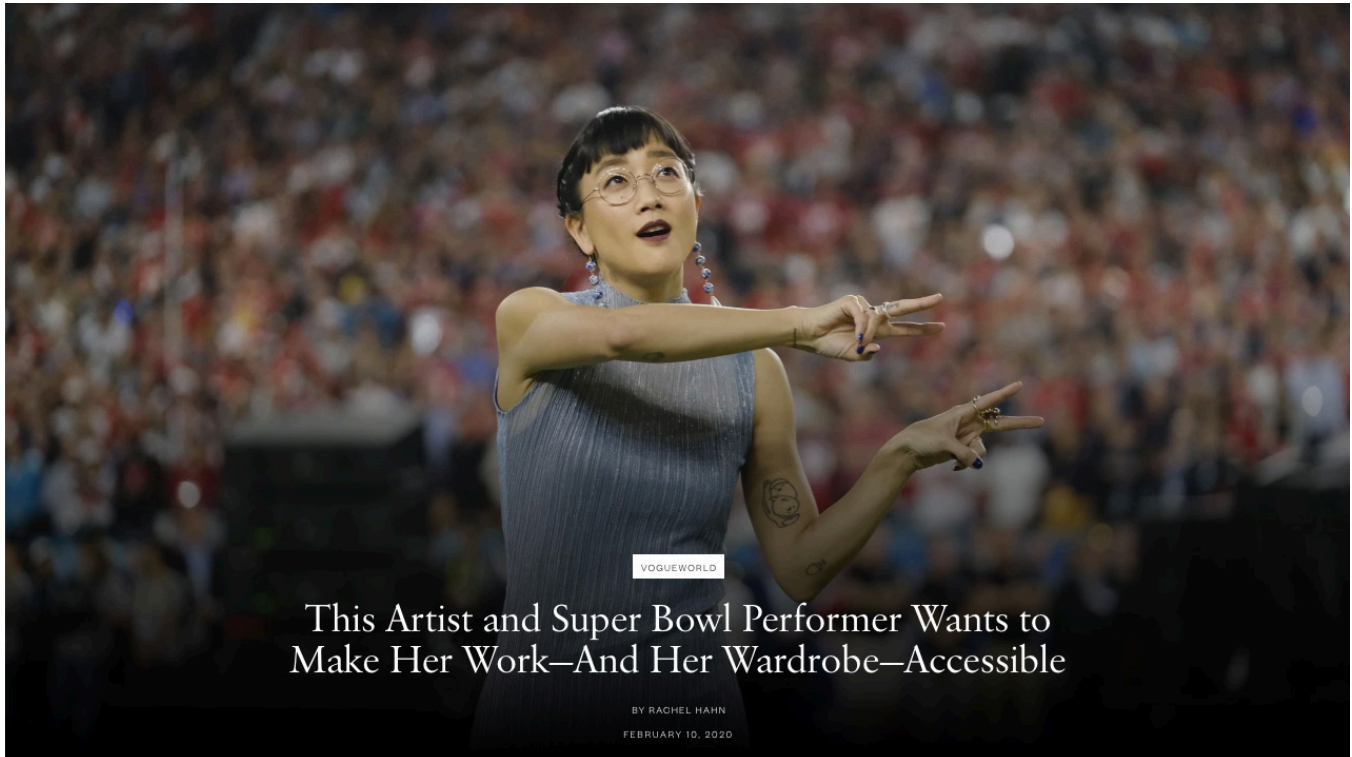


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## This Artist and Super Bowl Performer Wants to Make Her Work—And Her Wardrobe—Accessible

BY RACHEL HAHN  
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If you didn't catch California-born, Berlin-based artist Christine Sun Kim's work at the Whitney Biennial last year, and if you didn't make it to the Museum of Modern Art's first major exhibition of sound in 2013, then you likely first encountered her last weekend during the slight window of time when she was onscreen during the Super Bowl. The National Association of the Deaf (NAD) invited Kim to sign both "America the Beautiful" and the national anthem in tandem with singers Yolanda Adams and Demi Lovato, respectively. "I was a little stunned at first because I never considered myself a performer for signed songs," Kim says over email following the performance. "I took some time translating those songs into American Sign Language (ASL), enlisted help from my deaf friends for feedback, memorized every sign, and learned how to stay on track with Lovato and Adams with an interpreter's cues." With 102 million viewers watching the big game, Kim understandably chose her outfit with care. Even if you only caught Kim's appearance on television or the bonus feed on Fox Sports, where her performance was interrupted by video capture of the players on the sidelines, you were likely struck by the gauzy, pleated periwinkle Opening Ceremony dress that she wore out on the 40-yard line (or maybe you even caught a glimpse of the spiral ring that swirled up Kim's finger, a design by her friend Lia Lowenthal of LL, LLC). Kim arguably beat out Jennifer Lopez and Shakira for the best fashion moment of the night.



Kim outside of Hard Rock Stadium in Miami Gardens, Florida, in a Maryam Nassir Zadeh top, handmade shorts by Don Ryei Aretino, and Vagabond boots  
PHOTO: COURTESY OF CHRISTINE SUN KIM / @CHRISUNKIM

The day after the Super Bowl, Kim published an op-ed for the *New York Times* that expressed disappointment at the fact that she was only visible on the television broadcast for just a few seconds, but she tempers this with appreciation for raising awareness for issues that affect the deaf community on such a major platform. These include “limited mental health services, lack of employment opportunities, inadequate support for ASL, and so on,” Kim says. “I want people to start thinking about what deafness means, and maybe that will reduce the stigma and society will be more inclusive of people with disabilities.”

With her drawings and sound art, Kim has already begun fostering this type of dialogue. At the Whitney Biennial last year, Kim exhibited charcoal drawings from her *Degrees of Deaf Rage* series, which is composed of hand-drawn charts and graphs that quantify her reactions to various scenarios that underline the dissonance between hearing individuals and deaf culture. (Kim often capitalizes the term to emphasize deafness as a cultural group, as opposed to the physical associations.) At the Museum of Modern Art, as part of *Soundings*—the museum’s first major exhibition dedicated to sound art—Kim renders onto paper notation systems that she uses, whether it be ASL, musical notation, or body language. She also collaborated with her husband, conceptual artist Thomas Mader, on a sonic work in which she recorded the unconscious sound that she makes while concentrating and Mader simultaneously described it in a short text. (He refers to it as “concentration suffocation.”)



Kim in a Versace Medusa choker at the opening of her MIT List Visual Arts Center exhibition PHOTO: COURTESY OF CHRISTINE SUN KIM / @CHRISUNKIM

Now, Kim is continuing her *Deaf Rage* series with an exhibition at the MIT List Visual Arts Center, where she's decided to use pie charts as her main format along with three new drawings that depict the English alphabet in ASL from three different perspectives: that of a speller, a bird, and a lurker. To the opening of the MIT show earlier this week, Kim wore a pair of baggy blue pants, a layered tank top with a black long-sleeve shirt underneath, and a chunky gold necklace—the very first Versace Medusa choker that she recently purchased. The choker offers insight into some of Kim's style influences more broadly. "Growing up, I remember watching my mom and paternal grandma getting ready for Sunday church—putting on makeup, wearing sharp outfits, and sporting a Louis Vuitton purse," she says. She draws some parallels between her artistic intentions and her approach to self-presentation: "I think my style consists of both simplicity and a bit of flashiness. I think in a way I want to make myself approachable, and that reflects in my work—making it understandable to non-deaf viewers."



Kim (in Totême) and Mader at their wedding PHOTO: COURTESY OF CHRISTINE SUN KIM / @CHRISUNKIM



Kim in a sheer Opening Ceremony suit PHOTO: COURTESY OF CHRISTINE SUN KIM / @CHRISUNKIM

This mentality clearly extends to some of her favorite outfits—there’s her Totême wedding dress (a cream-colored, tiered, ruffled gown that puffs out a bit at the hem) and the standout, semi-sheer green dress with a built-in pouch filled with teddy bears and other stuffed animals by New York-based brand CFGNY that she wore to a Whitney Biennial party. It’s a playful garment that she chose both for its comfort (in both an emotional and physical sense—in her Instagram caption, Kim cheekily says that “these bears helped me control my rage all night”) and for the brand’s ethos. Designers Tin Nguyen and Daniel Chew recast fabrics sourced abroad in more obtuse ways. (As Nyugen told *Vogue*, “We’re using unconventional materials in weird ways that do come from Vietnam but don’t read as Asian.”) Kim says she admires CFGNY’s conception of Asian aesthetics—Nguyen and Chew also describe CFGNY as “vaguely Asian” in reference to the loose stereotypes that adhere across distinct Asian backgrounds.

It’s that teddy bear dress, actually, that sparked her desire to wear Opening Ceremony to the Super Bowl. “After I accepted the invitation [from the NAD], I thought about the dress by CFGNY I wore at the Whitney Biennial party last May and figured I’d continue wearing outfits by different Asian American designers.” And while Kim actually met one half of the Opening Ceremony design duo, Humberto Leon, at a bar in New York 17 years ago, it wasn’t until their mutual friend Kimberly Drew reintroduced them that this recent partnership was set in motion. “I needed something that would allow me to sign very big, and he found me that perfect outfit!” Kim says. “I wanted to represent all my identities while standing in the field: child of immigrant parents, Deaf, Asian American, woman, mother, artist, and many more. We need to allow intersectionality to exist or bloom everywhere, even on the biggest platform in America.”



Kim in a teddy-bear-stuffed OFGNY dress that she wore to a Whitney Biennial party last year PHOTO: COURTESY OF CHRISTINE SUN KIM / @CHRISUNKIM

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<https://www.vogue.com/vogueworld/article/christine-sun-kim-super-bowl-performance-artist-sign-language>