



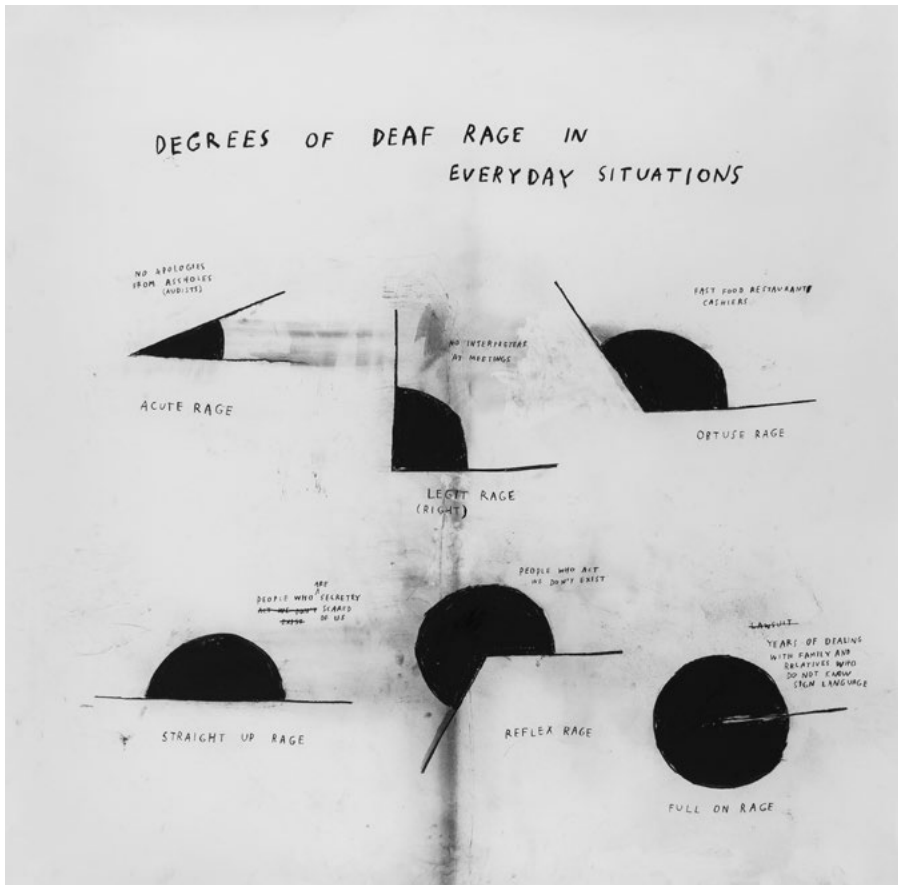
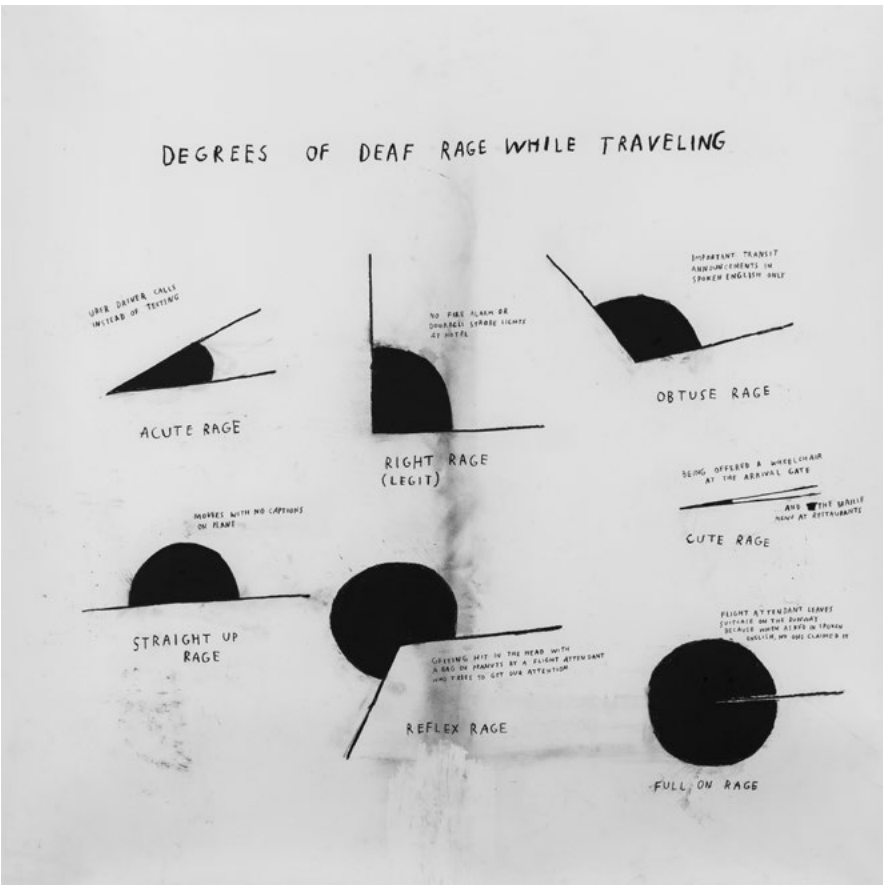
[0.01] Top: Mara Hoffman
 Pants: A Gold E
 Necklace and bracelet: Loren Stewart
 Rings: J.Hannah

[0.02] Suit: Mara Hoffman
 Necklace and bracelet: Laura Lombardi

ON ANGER

PHOTOGRAPHS Christelle de Castro
 WORDS Kimberly R. Drew
 STYLING Jessi Frederick
 MAKEUP and HAIR Lizzie Arneson
 PHOTO ASSISTANCE Duck Feeney

ARTIST CHRISTINE SUN KIM EXPLORES WHAT AN INTENSE EMOTION LOOKS LIKE.



KIMBERLY R. DREW – So, today we’re meant to have a chat about anger, but I know that some of your recent work has been on rage. Do you feel like there’s a difference between anger and rage?

CHRISTINE SUN KIM – Anger feels somewhat cute—when you sign in American Sign Language [ASL], cute could mean in a small amount—but in my case, rage means much more than just anger. Oftentimes it seems to be okay just to be angry, but I always have rage inside me, like anger with so many layers. I think rage gives me much better and clearer reasons that it’s completely justified. It also puts you in a much different state than anger does.

KRD – I had to open another tab to look up how to sign angry. It almost looks like a baby throwing a tantrum. Or like someone with a stomach ache.

CSK – Yes, it’s like ripping your face off.

KRD – Ripping your face off feels like a fair metaphor for how I define the difference between the two emotions. For me, I see anger as immediate and rage as durational. I almost feel like I have to put my rage away in pockets, because no one could hold onto this rage. The anger just creeps out sometimes—then I do my best to work with it.

CSK – When you sign rage in ASL, you can see that your hands become much more dramatic—as if you cannot contain your rage inside you. I like that you find it durational; it’s a cumulative response. Like responding to one specific situation but you’re really meant to respond to all similar situations in your life.

KRD – I was just revisiting my little research tab and it’s just this person signing “anger/rage” with this intense face over and over again.

CSK – I just watched ASL 4 on that page and that woman signed “not happy” as if she’s downplaying one’s

rage. And also, the fingerspelling part—I love that sometimes we fingerspell instead of signing because when you’re beyond rage, you just spell it out to show them that it cannot be spoken.

KRD – Like an unfathomable level of rage?

CSK – Yes, and when you do not want to physically show it on your face. Sometimes we just want to protect our faces. Being expressive can be exhausting.

KRD – Ha! That makes me think of a poem by Paul Laurence Dunbar. In “We Wear the Mask,” he has a line that says:

Why should the world be over-wise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
We wear the mask.

I think there’s almost this secret code that we, as marginalized people, kind of all abide to, where we have to hide what we’re truly feeling at any given time.

CSK – Exactly. If that secret code ceases to exist, there’d be an actual space for our rage. I want people to know that our rage is justified and they need to let us be.

KRD – I love that in your recent series for the Whitney that you were able to illustrate some incidents and hard truths that have drawn out your rage with such eloquence. It’s interesting as a viewer because I’m stuck wondering if I should laugh, offer you a hug, or hand you a match to burn the world down.

CSK – Oh, let’s burn the world down! We need to round up a squad.

KRD – The only issue is, I don’t want to burn the world down. I kind of want the world to just not feel like a garbage fire ... I want it to be fertile for more of us.

I ALMOST FEEL LIKE I HAVE TO PUT
MY RAGE AWAY IN POCKETS,
BECAUSE NO ONE COULD HOLD
ONTO THIS RAGE.

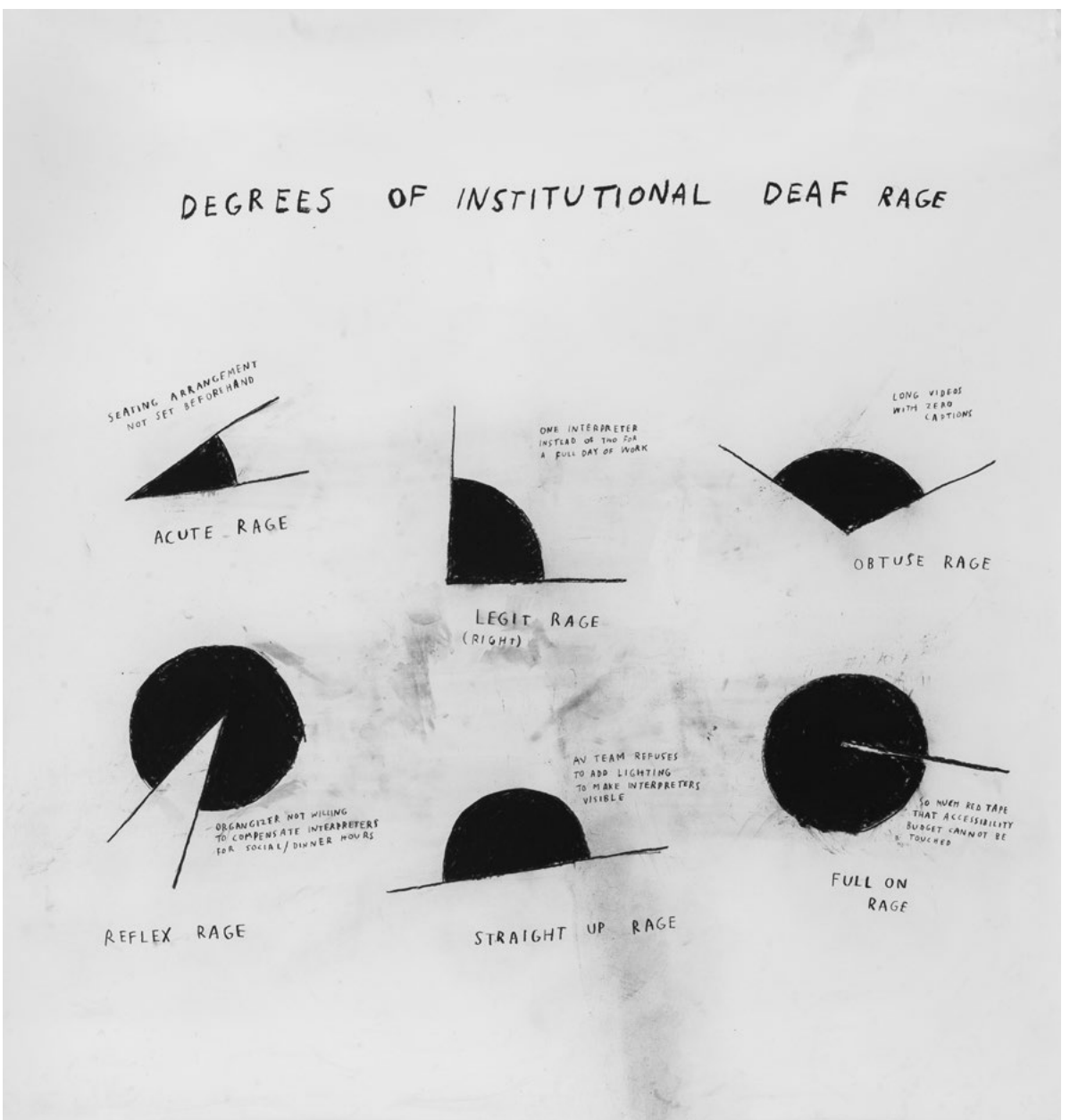
—KIMBERLY R. DREW

Deaf Rage, Christine Sun Kim’s latest series exhibited at the 2019 Whitney Biennial presents hand-drawn visualizations of rage that the artist, who has been deaf since birth, is confronted with in different aspects of her life. In Degrees of Deaf Rage While Traveling, she calls out Uber drivers who call her instead of sending text messages and, in Degrees of My Deaf Rage in The Art World, she calls out the full-on rage she feels when museums do not have any deaf programming. In this conversation, Christine Sun Kim is joined in conversation with the author, activist, and reluctant curator Kimberly R. Drew for a conversation about working through anger and rage. This interview has been edited, condensed and was conducted via Google Docs.



SOMETIMES WE FINGERSPELL
 INSTEAD OF SIGNING
 BECAUSE WHEN YOU'RE
 BEYOND RAGE, YOU JUST
 SPELL IT OUT TO SHOW THEM
 THAT IT CANNOT BE SPOKEN.

—CHRISTINE SUN KIM



CSK – It’s hard for me to be super optimistic during a time like this. When the curators Rujeko Hockley and Jane Panetta invited me to participate in the Biennial, my first thought was my rage drawings, but I hesitated for a bit, mainly because I wasn’t sure if people were ready for my rage. Or if I was even ready. They were first shown in Beijing at White Space gallery but I wanted to give them the right platform, and the Whitney was it. I’m glad I decided to show these.

KRD – I’ve always felt like the Whitney Biennial is a unique chance for an art museum to hold up a mirror to the United States and reflect where we are as a nation. I think that’s why there’s controversy every two years when it comes around. The truth is that the United States and so many other countries in the world are in dark times.

I love thinking about how the rage drawings operate on so many levels. Utilizing geometric shapes and language almost implies that your rage is always operating on a spectrum, or within a kinetic frequency. But then, there’s a darkness to them that is real and valid—and even using charcoal, such a “messy” medium. You can’t get proximate to the truths you’re recording without getting your hands a little dirty. And maybe that’s what we need right now.

CSK – I was actually trying to remove charcoal powder but the paper was too big to just shake it off. Then my studio got messier and messier, so I decided to just leave those traces alone without erasing so much. I think that’s pretty much the state of the world.

My deaf experience is actually American-specific because of the laws we have here. Each country has their own disability laws, some fully or partially enforced ... or not at all. I just had a deaf visitor from Australia and she decided to come here instead of Croatia because some conference there told her they weren’t going to pay for interpreters. I think that case would be entirely different in America. But on many levels, the deaf experience is universal. There’s a shared

experience of not having access to the most fundamental things in life such as education and employment. Sometimes it seeps into our family, like not being able to have a conversation with your own parents—I’m very lucky because my parents sign.

KRD – There’s something about luck as a concept that makes me feel rage. I have been in a phase of embracing how optimistic I am, but I think that my optimism is just like a counter anchor for how much rage I hold on a daily basis. I just know I can’t hold this rage forever. I know it might be my demise. But I know I don’t want to live in a world where some of us have to be lucky to survive and thrive.

CSK – I’ve always thought luck was such a stupid way to justify or explain one’s success, not through one’s actions or work. But in the last few years, there were some things that showed up at the right time and in the right place and it left me wondering what luck actually does.

KRD – I just think about how I’ve almost never, ever been in an instance where a cis, white man is talking about his luck as a justification for anything he’s been granted by the universe. I guess in some small way, I feel “lucky” that I have a spectrum of rage. I feel “lucky” that my rage keeps me moving, keeps me humble, and keeps me honest with myself.

SOMETIMES WE JUST WANT TO
 PROTECT OUR FACES. BEING
 EXPRESSIVE CAN BE EXHAUSTING.
 —CHRISTINE SUN KIM

YOU CAN’T GET PROXIMATE TO
 THE TRUTHS YOU’RE RECORDING
 WITHOUT GETTING
 YOUR HANDS A LITTLE DIRTY.
 —KIMBERLY R. DREW