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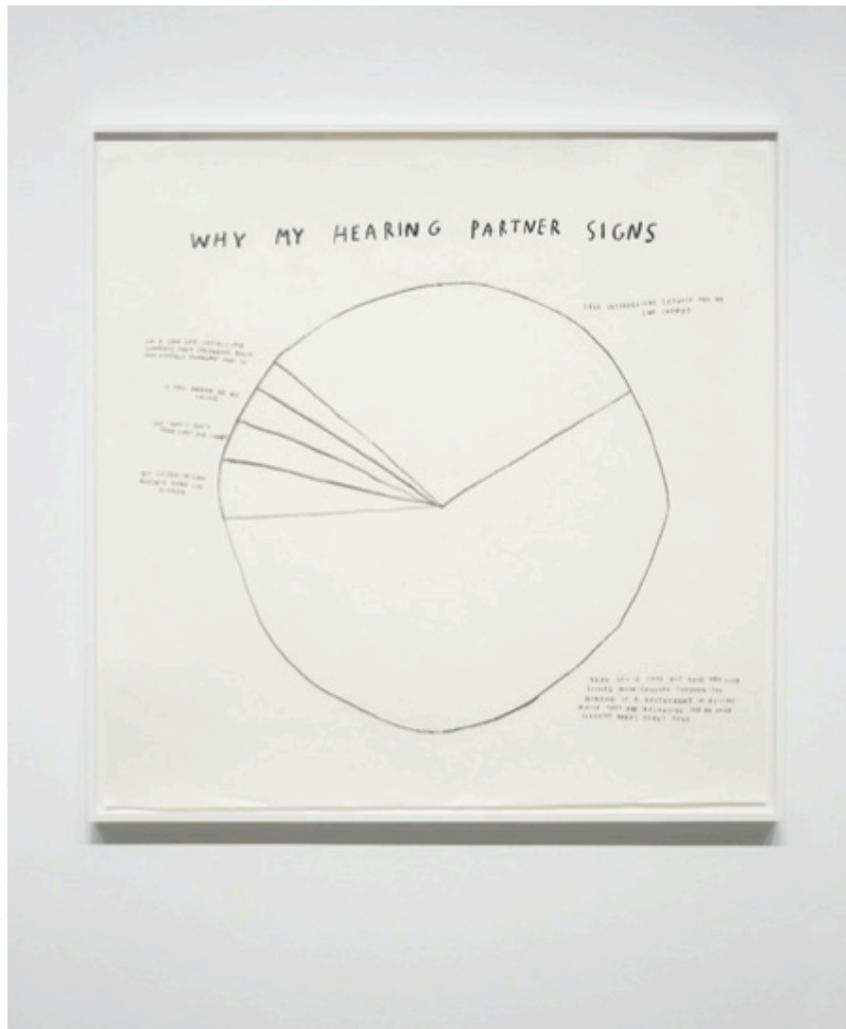
Art Mamas: Christine Sun Kim on Incorporating Motherhood into Her Practice

By Katy Donoghue
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The recent solo show “Trauma, LOL” at Francois Ghebaly gallery in Los Angeles featured new work by Christine Sun Kim. The Berlin-based artist employs infographics, musical annotation, graphs, Venn diagrams, and other visual communication systems to address her own experience as a Deaf woman.

The title piece featured a drawing of the words “Trauma, Upon, Trauma...” in an endless loop, with the words, “Important,” “Cool,” and “Stay Positive,” in the center. In other works, she used time and impact as the X and Y axis to create graphs that map out “trauma as a baby” and “trauma with thick skin.”



Christine Sun Kim, "Why My Hearing Partner Signs," 2019, charcoal and oil pastel on paper, 49.25 x 49.25 inches (125 x 125 cm), photo by Peter Harris Studio, courtesy of the artist, François Ghebaly, Los Angeles and MIT List Art Center.

The artist's love of language is apparent, playing with the linguistic structure of ASL, English grammar, and slang. Two drawings, *America the Beautiful* and *The Star-Spangled Banner* (Third Verse), referenced Kim's signing of the national anthem at the 2020 Super Bowl last February.

Kim, whose mural "" opened at the Kemper Art Museum in St. Louis this week, is also a mother to her almost-four-year-old daughter. For the latest in our Art Mamas series, Whitewall spoke with the artist about the challenges of being a mother in fine arts, drawing with her child, and how 2020 reshaped her understanding of trauma.

WHITEWALL: When did you become a mother?

CHRISTINE SUN KIM: Almost four years ago.



Christine Sun Kim, "One Week of Lullabies for Roux," 2018, sound, edition of 3, 1AP, seven tracks, various runtimes,

WW: Were you able to take any leave?

CSK: I was but we decided that my partner would take the lion's share of the leave (thank you Germany!) since I was more flexible in my work situation than he was. We managed to travel together often, so I could keep up with breastfeeding.

WW: How was your transition back?

CSK: It wasn't so bad because there wasn't a big gap between the end of the parental leave period and the start of daycare.

WW: What has surprised you most so far about motherhood?

CSK: It has caused me to reflect a lot about how I was brought up and how my daughter's experience will be so, so vastly different from mine. It's scary sometimes and I haven't yet found a way to fully come to terms with these feelings.

WW: People I didn't expect reached out to me with words of comfort. Who did you find yourself connecting with?

CSK: Talking to other Deaf parents, CODAs (Children of Deaf Adults), and Asian American mothers has been very helpful for me. These communities are very special to me.

WW: How do you interact with your community of mothers?

CSK: Mostly online I have to admit. My closest mom friends do not live in Berlin.



Christine Sun Kim, "Suggested Amount of Allowing Friends to Sing Songs to a Baby," 2018, charcoal on paper, 49.25 x 49.25 inches (125 x 125 cm), photo by Paul Salvesson, courtesy of the artist, François Ghebaly, Los Angeles and White Space Beijing.

WW: Did becoming a mother, change how you viewed your role as an artist? Your relationship with your practice?

CSK: Real talk, being a mother in fine arts is still hard as hell and I applaud everyone who is doing it. There are so many awful stories out there of female artists being discouraged from having children because of a supposedly damaging effect on their practices. For me personally, since I can't really divorce any part of my life from my Deaf experience, it came naturally to incorporate motherhood into my practice, especially as the mother of a hearing child, and I am so happy that I did.

WW: Has motherhood changed your creative interests?

CSK: Since becoming a mother I have taken a huge interest in educational programs in American Sign Language and started an Instagram account, with a friend. It brings together ASL regional signs with signs from other sign languages to expand our household vocabulary.

WW: How do you share/experience art with your child?

CSK: My studio is in my apartment so my child is in there all the time. We draw together and whenever I have the chance to show my

pieces in Berlin, I make sure that she gets to see them.

WW: What is something a mother has shared with you that's really resonated?

CSK: How children change their needs every few months and nothing is permanent. There are some phases where they connect more with one parent than the other.

WW: What is the biggest misconception about motherhood?

CSK: In my case, it's mostly about how I couldn't relate to my mom-my friends until I became one.



Christine Sun Kim, Artists Band Together Bandana, courtesy of the artist, François Ghebaly, Los Angeles, and Artists Band Together.

WW: What was the starting point for your current show at Francois Ghebaly, "Trauma, LOL"?

CSK: 2020 was pretty shitty. It really made me reconsider what trauma is, what constitutes it. I thought so much about the community health of Deaf people—physically, mentally, and emotionally.

WW: Can you tell us about the story behind the title work, "Trauma, LOL?"

CSK: "Trauma, LOL" is mostly my response to how heavily layered

my trauma is as a Deaf person. I mean, it's not clear like a broken bone but it slowly builds up as someone who is forced to navigate and negotiate all my life. When I look at my trauma objectively, I go "Oh wow. LOL."

WW: Can you tell us about what it was like to make this work this year in particular?

CSK: It was emotionally tough, but I felt so much urgency to make work. Many of my projects this year, like the bandana I designed for Artists Band Together, or a Get Out the Vote billboard with For Freedoms, revolved around the election in November.



Christine Sun Kim, "Suggested Amount of Allowing Grandmother to Play Korean Opera on Phone for a Baby," 2018, charcoal on paper, 11.75 x 16.5 inches, photo by Kell Yang Sammataro, courtesy of the artist and François Ghebaly, Los Angeles.

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