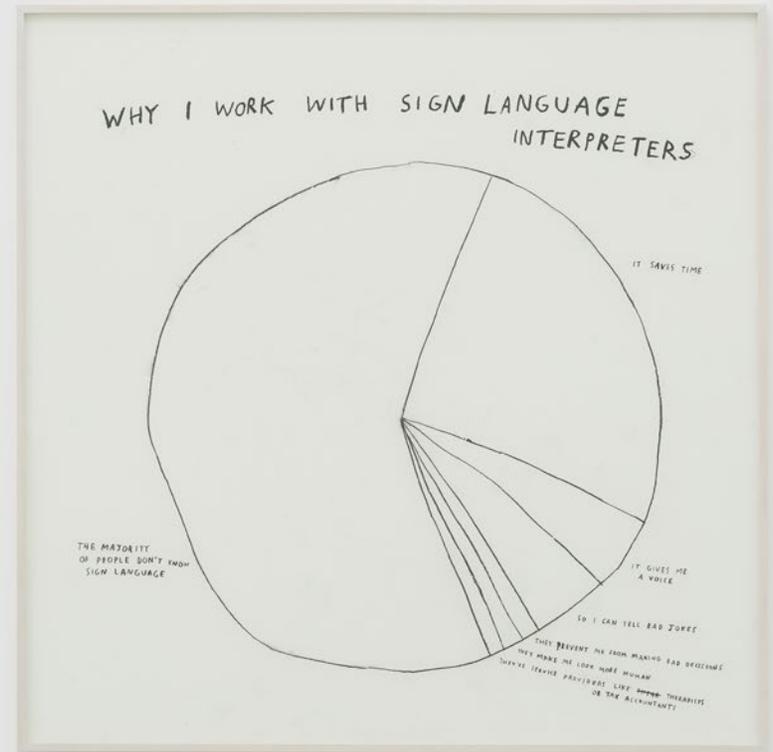
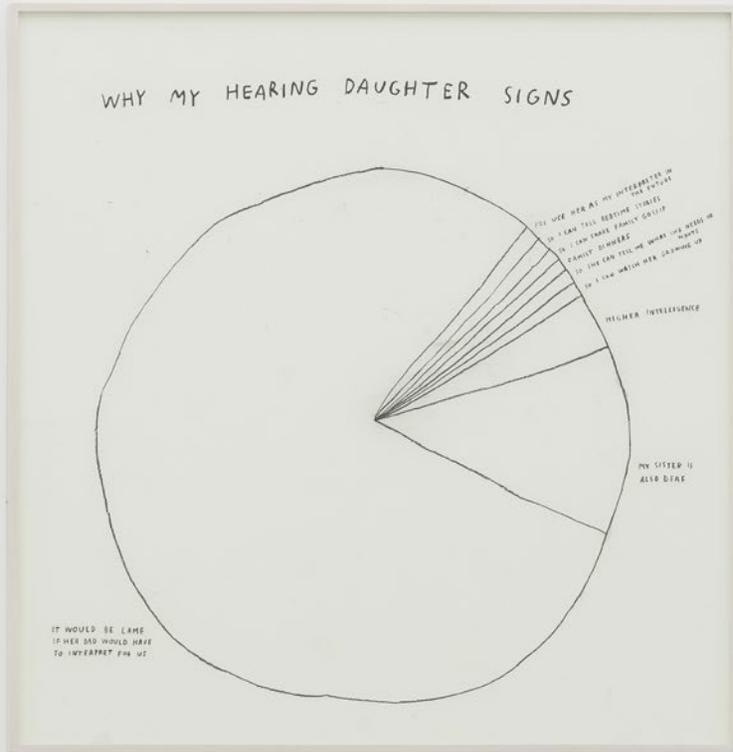


Christine Sun Kim: Off the Charts

February 7 – April 12, 2020



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Reference Gallery February 7–April 12, 2020

Spanning sound, performance, drawing, installation, and video, Christine Sun Kim's work considers the sonic as a multi-sensory phenomenon, one whose properties are auditory, visual, and spatial, as well as socially determined. Kim, whose first language is American Sign Language (ASL), conceives of sound as both a series of conceptual relationships and a form of social currency. Much of her work is invested in uncovering the politics of voice, listening, and language.

Drawing has become a key mode through which she parses these dynamics. Kim's economic, deadpan compositions are usually executed in black charcoal. Three of her works on paper premiering in the List Center exhibition riff on standard pictorial depictions of the American Manual Alphabet. Representing the characters of the Latin alphabet, this group of signs are employed in ASL to spell out, or fingerspell, English-language proper nouns. Each drawing shifts the frontal perspective in which the handshapes corresponding to letters A through Z are received in conversation. Instead of orienting them towards the viewer, Kim illustrates the signs from above, behind, and at a sidelong angle, representing, as their titles somewhat playfully suggest, the respective points of view of "a bird," "the speller," and "a lurker." Taking inspiration from W.E.B. Du Bois's infographics in *Data Portraits: Visualizing Black America*, a group of nine drawings break down the factors involved in a number of personal decisions ("Why I Do Not Read Lips," "When I Pretend to Be Hearing") by relative importance in pie chart form. Simultaneously funny and profound, they also pivot on the absurdity of capturing complex choices and their cultural, social, and historical underpinnings in diagrammatic shorthand.

For the audio installation *One Week of Lullabies for Roux* (2018), Kim commissioned a group of friends to create alternative lullabies for her daughter, Roux. Adhering to a score that instructed the composers to omit lyrics and speech and focus on low frequencies, these compositions serve to vary what Kim has termed the "sound diet" for her child, raised trilingually in ASL, German Sign Language (DGS), and German, and to place equal weight on all three in a culture that tends to ascribe lesser relevance to signed communication. Here, and throughout her work, Kim troubles conceptions of sound as being inextricably tethered to hearing and the implicit authority of spoken over signed language.

INTERIOR: *One Week of Lullabies for Roux*, 2018
Installation view, Art Basel 2018, Basel, Switzerland
Courtesy the artist; François Ghebaly, Los Angeles; and White Space Beijing, Beijing

FRONT: *Why I Work with Sign Language Interpreters*, 2018
Courtesy the artist and White Space Beijing, Beijing
Photo: White Space Beijing and Yang Hao

BACK: *Why My Hearing Daughter Signs*, 2018
Courtesy the artist and private collection
Photo: White Space Beijing and Yang Hao

Score for *One Week of Lullabies for Roux*, 2018

From my understanding, a lullaby is either a soothing or educational song meant to lull a baby to sleep. I've always thought a lullaby was full of fun rhymes, onomatopoeic words, nature sounds, and/or simple repetitions. When I bought a video monitor for my baby Roux, I saw that it had several popular lullabies I can choose from in order to help my child to fall asleep.

The idea of playing songs for my child that I am not familiar with gave me a feeling of unease, so I factored them out of the sound diet. Since I intend to be mindful of what my baby grows up listening to, I have invited my parent friends to make lullabies for Roux based on a conceptual score I've developed. It is worth noting that some of these

friends very recently became parents; given this, they have produced their respective lullabies to the best of their abilities within the baby circumstances.

The score instructions I provided to parents read as follows:

- Length can be as short or as long as you like.
- No lyrics, no speech.
- A greater emphasis should be placed on low frequencies.
- Will be played on repeat at normal or low volume.
- Will be used to encourage my baby to sleep between 19:00 and 20:00.
- Write a short description of your lullaby.

—Christine Sun Kim

LULLABY DESCRIPTIONS

1 **Juan Cisneros, *Untitled***

09:54 and 11:11 min.

--2 lullabies composed with repetition of a melody, slightly evolving patterns of sine waves and fm modulation for additional texture and vibration.--

These were an interesting exercise in composition association for me. My personal association with lullabies is rooted in higher register frequencies and low harmonic timbres (xylophone comes to mind); so to effectively compose the melodies I desired, these were written & then transposed 2-3 octaves down, and using bell & tine types of sounds.

2 **Melissa Dubbin & Aaron S. Davidson, *A Lullaby for Roux***

03:22 min.

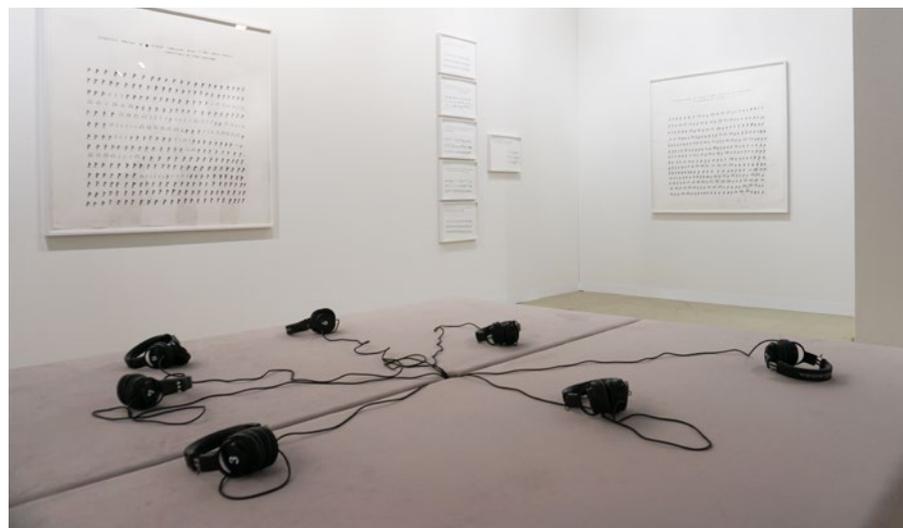
Making music and recording sounds has always been a part of our practice.

During our project *Volumes for Sound*, we had a weekly rehearsal and recording session with our trio Three Planes of Silver (Aaron S. Davidson, Melissa Dubbin and Shawn Onsgard) as we were preparing for performances in 2012-2013. While we are on hiatus from weekly evening rehearsals, we have continued to process and edit the hours of material recorded during that time and sometimes we release a few tracks. This track always felt like an interlude for the listener, a lullaby to bridge a transition. This version of the track has been made especially for Roux.

3 **David Horvitz, *When the Ocean Sounds***

01:36 min.

I am making sounds of the ocean with my voice. Specifically, I am making sounds of the Pacific Ocean, as it sounds on the shore of the Palos Verdes Peninsula. I use my mouth, my tongue, my throat. I try to make



the sound move up and down my throat, to bounce around the inside of my mouth, all over my mouth, all around it, parts I never use in normal everyday speech. I try to find new sounds. I imagine rocks, waves, bubbles, sand. I imagine waves at my feet and off in the distance, water crashing on water, water crashing on sand. I imagine the sea coming out of my mouth in vibrations, a sea to fall asleep with and to. A place for dreams to happen.

"When they went ashore the animals that took up a land life carried with them a part of the sea in their bodies, a heritage which they passed on to their children and which even today links each land animal with its origin in the ancient sea. Fish, amphibian, and reptile, warm-blooded bird and mammal—each of us carries in our veins a salty stream in which the elements sodium, potassium, and calcium are combined in almost the same proportions as in sea water. This is our inheritance from the day, untold millions of years ago, when a remote ancestor, having progressed from the one-celled to the many-celled stage, first developed a circulatory system in

which the fluid was merely the water of the sea. In the same way, our lime-hardened skeletons are a heritage from the calcium-rich ocean of Cambrian time. Even the protoplasm that streams within each cell of our bodies has the chemical structure impressed upon all living matter when the first simple creatures were brought forth in the ancient sea. And as life itself began in the sea, so each of us begins his individual life in a miniature ocean within his mother's womb, and the stages of his embryonic development repeats the steps by which his race evolved, from gill-breathing inhabitants of a water world to creatures able to live on land."

—Rachel Carson, *The Sea Around Us*, 1950

4 **Carmelle Safdie, *O Superbaby***

10:02 min.

When I was pregnant last year my partner and I spent a lot of time listening to Laurie Anderson's album *Big Science*. When our baby, Gene, was born he seemed very focused on the music whenever I played the album, and particularly mesmerized during the intro to the song "O Superman:"

Whether this is because he recognized the melodies from his time in utero, the breath-like beat of “O Superman” reminded him of the circulatory and respiratory rhythms he heard from inside my belly, or he just has really good taste in music, I do not know. Either way, he clearly liked it. I looped the first few beats of the song into a ten-minute hypnotizing track to play him as he falls into sleep.

5 **Sonja Simonyi, Nico Van Tomme, and Niels Van Tomme, *Good Vibrations***

00:29 min.

This recording by Niels consists of sounds Sonja made while our son Nico was sleeping on her.

6 **Lotti Sollevi, *Untitled***

07:50 min.

This lullaby is created with low tones based on random poetry of soft syllables, which

vibrate my chest. They are mixed with bass and the beat of my heart. I wanted to use elements that soothe my son Ari when I hold him to my chest in the evening. It also contains long tones played on our old piano and the sounds heard through our opened window sometime between 7pm and 8pm. Can I recreate the closeness and the feeling of the vibrations of these elements in a recording? Maybe some of it. Hopefully this will have a similar effect on Roux as on Ari.

7 **Alex Waxman, *Roux’s Casino***

05:02 min.

This ambient soundscape is built on a heartbeat of sorts made from a slowed down casio drum sound. In the midrange is a bit of fuzzy sawing breath. Little melodic squiggles in the upper register impersonate the nonsensical waves (thoughts) that precede sleep. A ringing string is the bed of sleep.

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

One Week of Lullabies for Roux, 2018

Seven-channel audio installation
dimensions variable

Alphabet from a Bird’s Point of View, 2019

Charcoal and oil pastel on paper
49.6 × 49.6 in. (125 × 125 cm)

Alphabet from a Lurker’s Point of View, 2019

Charcoal and oil pastel on paper
49.6 × 49.6 in. (125 × 125 cm)

Alphabet from the Speller’s Point of View, 2019

Charcoal and oil pastel on paper
49.6 × 49.6 in. (125 × 125 cm)

Shit Hearing People Say to Me, 2019

Charcoal and oil pastel on paper
49.6 × 49.6 in. (125 × 125 cm)

When I Pretend to Be Hearing, 2019

Charcoal and oil pastel on paper
49.6 × 49.6 in. (125 × 125 cm)

Why I Do Not Read Lips, 2019

Charcoal and oil pastel on paper
49.6 × 49.6 in. (125 × 125 cm)

Why I Play the Deaf Card, 2019

Charcoal and oil pastel on paper
49.6 × 49.6 in. (125 × 125 cm)

Why I Stopped Taking Speech Therapy, 2019

Charcoal and oil pastel on paper
49.6 × 49.6 in. (125 × 125 cm)

Why I Watch with Closed Captions, 2019

Charcoal and oil pastel on paper
49.6 × 49.6 in. (125 × 125 cm)

Why My Hearing Partner Signs, 2019

Charcoal and oil pastel on paper
49.6 × 49.6 in. (125 × 125 cm)

Why My Hearing Parents Sign, 2019

Charcoal and oil pastel on paper
49.6 × 49.6 in. (125 × 125 cm)

Why Your Hearing Parents Did Not Learn Sign Language, 2019

Charcoal and oil pastel on paper
49.6 × 49.6 in. (125 × 125 cm)

All works courtesy the artist; François Ghebaly, Los Angeles; and White Space Beijing, Beijing

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Christine Sun Kim (b. 1980, United States) lives and works in Berlin.

Christine Sun Kim: Off the Charts is organized by Henriette Huldisch, Chief Curator & Director of Curatorial Affairs, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (former Director of Exhibitions & Curator, MIT List Visual Arts Center).

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Opening Reception

Thursday, February 6, 6:30–8:30 PM

Student Gallery Talk

Thursday, February 20, 6:30 PM

Speaker: Noopur Ranganathan

American Sign Language (ASL)

Gallery Tour

Friday, February 28, 12:30 PM

Speaker: Assistant Curator Selby Nimrod

Sketch Session

Wednesday, March 11, 12:30 PM

All programs are free and open to the public. RSVPs are required.

For more information about these events and to RSVP: listart.mit.edu/events-programs.

American Sign Language interpretation is available by request for exhibition tours and public programs. To place a request, please contact us at listinfo@mit.edu.



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SPONSORS

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