

*Tang exhibit examines deafness, perception of sound*

# Visual & visceral

By William Jaeger

The large, monochromatic works in Christine Sun Kim's "Oh Me Oh My" at the Tang have three main layers. The first are oversized graphical representations of facts surrounding the artist's life as a deaf person. This seems the core of the show, but it ends up not being the best of it. What matters more is the second layer, the actuality of being deaf — or Deaf,

which the artist prefers because it suggests the full and separate culture it is. The third layer, in a surprise, is sound, both suggested and literally in the gallery, without irony.

The graphs get you quickly. "Why Most of My Hearing Friends Do Not Sign" answers its own question with a simple, large pie chart. Over half the circle is marked, "they assume I am 100% okay with this."

Smaller segments offer other excuses, like "learning a visual language is hard," with "hard"

in quotes.

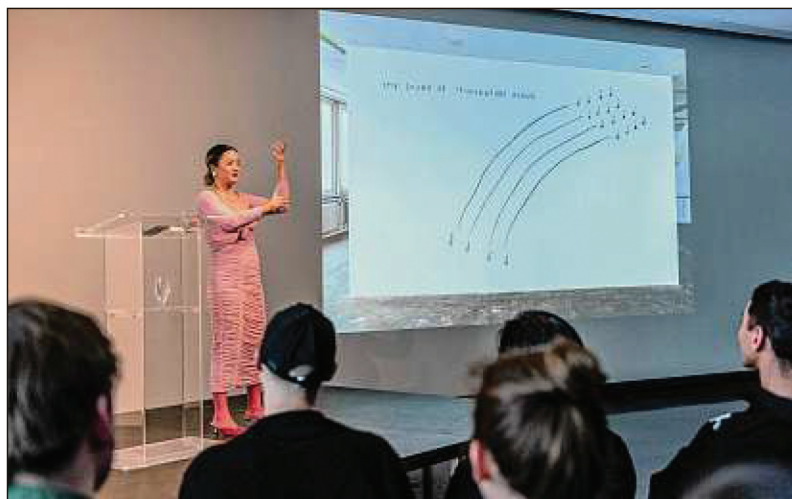
The fact these are drawn artworks, charcoal and oil pastel on paper, makes them personal and oddly friendly, so they seem to avoid becoming mere statistics. But here, with many on view, the formal impact wanes, leading inevitably to the point behind all of it.

And that point really is the crux of the artist's work. This is the part that made me worry that I was insensitive to people

Please see **TANG 5** ▶



William Jaeger / For the Times Union



Above, an installation view of Christine Sun Kim's "Oh Me Oh My" exhibit at the Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College.

At left, Christine Sun Kim gives an artist talk in March at Skidmore's Tang Museum.



# Much to see, learn at ‘Oh Me Oh My’ Tang exhibit

## TANG

▼ CONTINUED FROM 1

who are deaf, or who communicate with ASL. (I don't know any deaf people and so have never learned ASL. That's my excuse.) The works ask questions that are not about the artist, after all, but about the viewer. Even an especially inward question in one pie hart, "Why I Stopped Taking Speech Therapy," begs the viewer to wonder what they would do, and what role they (we, I) have in forcing the deaf to need speech therapy at all.

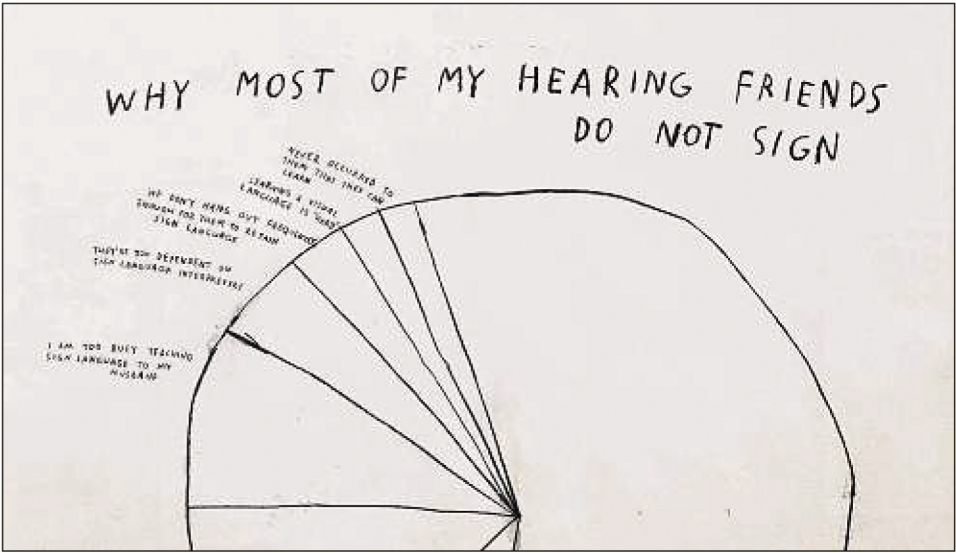
As you might see, the show can lead to intense, heartfelt dialectics. I imagined a tidy book with these same questions and visual answers, small and compact, and I realized I'd have exactly the same responses. Not that I mind grappling with all this in a beautiful gallery, but it does make you wonder if the art part of it, the visuals, are enough? And why, after all, is everything so big? And so black and white. Kim was apparently inspired by the great W.E.B. Du Bois's infographic charts from 1900, and his lively use of color might have been welcome here.

The third layer relating to music and aural experience is quite complex, after a bit of looking and listening. There are headphones for viewers/listeners to use to take in seven different lullabies created by experimental sound and music composers marking the birth of the artist's daughter, Roux, who can hear. These were stipulated by the artist to be without words, and to emphasize lower frequencies, which can be more easily felt, physically. Many will find the sounds a bit intellectual, especially when forced to sit on bench with them. For me these sonic effects were a tonic, but would have been more forceful made ambient, filling the gallery.

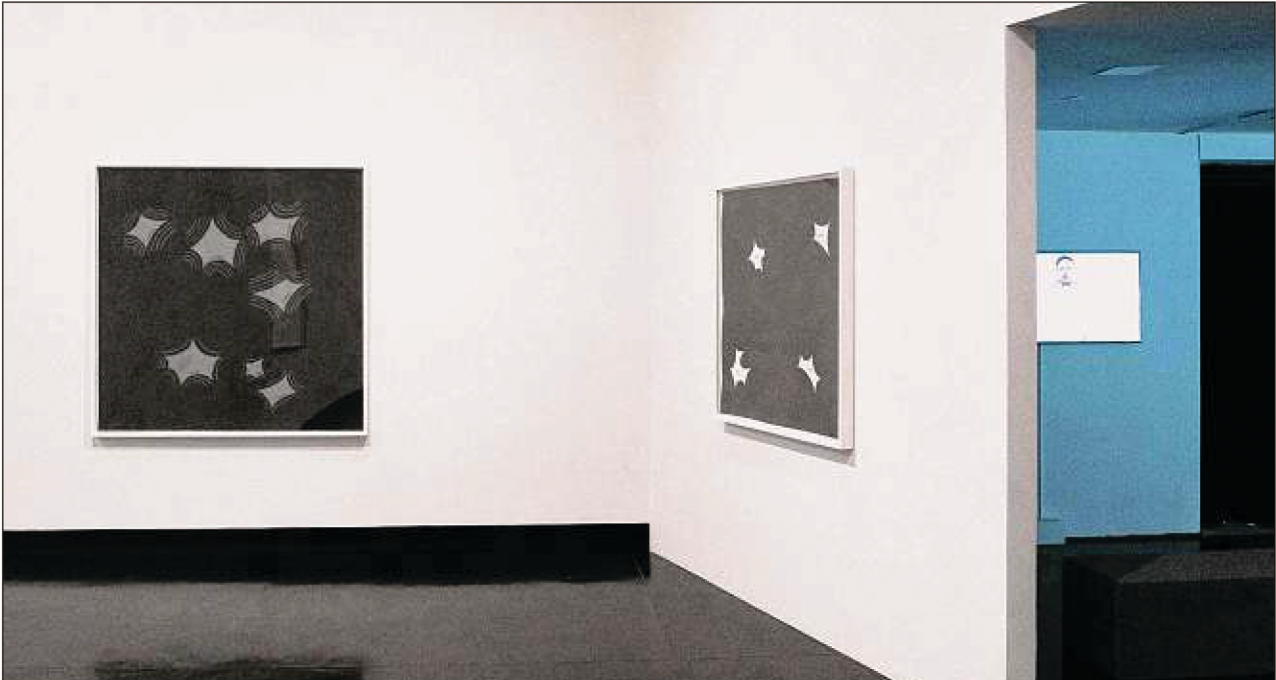


Christine Sun Kim and Thomas Mader's "Classified Digits" video in the "Oh Me Oh My" exhibit at the Tang Teaching Museum in Saratoga Springs.

Photos by William Jaeger / For the Times Union



"Why Most of My Hearing Friends Do Not Sign" is an infographic display, making clear how Christine Sun Kim's deafness and ability to communicate affects her friends, or doesn't.



“The third layer relating to music and aural experience is quite complex. There are headphones for viewers/listeners to use to take in seven different lullabies. These were stipulated by the artist to be without words, and to emphasize lower frequencies, which can be more easily felt, physically.”

It was here in my visit that I felt the yearning the artist must have for sound to be part of her world in a visceral way, and to knead this into the fullness of experience having a child. And not just for Roux. The implications of sound, beyond language, are everywhere. Though they seem inaccessible at first for the deaf, they are integrated into daily life. This is where poetic magic is at play, and Kim gives us a graphical sense of motion and sound—music—with how the lines rise and fall, and with notations on how to feel the lines.

This visualizing of sound, in terms of language, becomes literal in some videos on monitors in a beautifully geometric, glassy museum space. For “Classified Digits,” made in collaboration with her husband, hands come from behind one figure, signing to the viewer, with text overlays, in a kind of playful confusion.

“Oh Me Oh My” is an interesting show, for sure. The curators call Kim's gallery pieces “data visualizations” and this is a revealing, almost belittling phrase, getting to their limitations as visual art, but also to their depths as social statements. And as social questions.

### If you go

#### “Christine Sun Kim: Oh Me Oh My”

- **Where:** The Tang Museum, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs
- **When:** Through July 16
- **Hours:** Thursdays 12 to 9 p.m., Fridays to Sundays 12 to 5 p.m.
- **Admission:** Free
- **Info:** [tang.skidmore.edu/exhibitions](http://tang.skidmore.edu/exhibitions) or 518-580-8080