

Eddy Frankel, 'Christine Sun Kim: Rustle Tustle', *Time Out*,
January 2016



Christine Sun Kim: Rustle Tustle



Californian artist Christine Sun Kim was born deaf. She experiences the world differently to the hearing majority. She uses her art to explore being deaf in a hearing world, but also to reclaim the power taken away from her by her difference.

The walls of the gallery are covered in large, white, simple pastel drawings filled with the language of musical notation – staves, notes and letters to indicate volume: f for loud, as in 'forte' and p for quiet, as in 'piano'. She uses these symbols of sound as a sort of diary of her silent life. In one piece, two lines of a staff rise upwards, capped off with f's to indicate loudness. Beneath, Kim writes 'unattainable future'. In another, she describes levels of quiet as 'anxiety', 'shrug' and 'sleep'; loudness is 'to argue in limited ASL' (American Sign Language) or a 'high pressure shower head'. These aren't great drawings, but they're wonderfully personal descriptions of the thing that most affects her life: sound.

In the back room, four silent video screens show movie clips with captions added by four of Kim's deaf friends. It's deaf-language for hearing people.

The best piece here involves strips of Velcro stretched across the main room. Viewers navigate the strips using a homemade radio receiver with a long antenna. Brush past the strips with the receiver and bits of speech blurt out of the speaker. There's sense to be made of the words, but you have to figure out how to navigate the strips so it's not just garbled nonsense – all with your arms held aloft. It's uncomfortable, difficult and hard to piece together: a neat interactive metaphor for the struggle for communication that must be involved in deaf life.

But this show works because it's not just about deafness. The art communicates feelings of isolation and alienation that are more universal. This is about Kim kicking back against her constraints. It's immediately relatable.

Annoyingly, the show is ruined slightly by the loudness of the works in Carroll/Fletcher's adjoining gallery rooms. Maybe having your concentration affected by sound leakage adds something conceptual to Kim's work, but really it just sort of messes up the viewing experience.