

空白空间 WHITE SPACE

Christine Sun Kim & Thomas Mader | *Lighter Than Air*
05.23-07.13, 2024

White Space presents *Lighter Than Air*, an exhibition by Christine Sun Kim and Thomas Mader, on view from May 23 to July 13. The duo's debut at the gallery brings together their latest installations, videos, and drawings.

Kim and Mader's collaborative practice has long been centered around themes such as signed and spoken languages, Deaf history, games and word play. Approaching the complexities of communication with specificity and nuance, their work often parodies and questions social stereotypes and prejudices with a sense of humor.

The titular phrase "lighter than air" refers to aircraft such as balloons and airships and the low density gasses that elevate these aircrafts. In this exhibition, Kim and Mader materialize this concept and the intangible "air" into palpable forms, applying them to the many modes of inhalation and exhalation inherent in signed as well as spoken languages. Playfully likening the subtle bodily movements to the actions of inflating and deflating, Kim and Mader explore ways of getting attention, the layered meaning of the "nose exhale" in memes and pop culture, body temperature, and the role of Alexander Graham Bell in Deaf culture and education.

ATTENTION is a kinetic installation that references two ways of directing attention in American Sign Language (ASL). By waving a hand downwards and bringing it into another signer's field of vision, a person can signal they want the attention of another. Additionally, by pointing a finger at another person or thing, a signer can direct attention to that topic. Based on these signs, *ATTENTION* consists of two giant inflatable arms intermittently pointing at a worn-down stone. Alternating between inflation and deflation, the choreography of the arms and hands continuously attracts viewers' attention. The kinetic dance makes the semantics of American Sign Language spatially and physically palpable, while alluding to the erosion of our real-life attention spans.

In the other works on view, the artists turn their focus to the respiratory organs—the mouth and nose. As with their previous projects, Kim and Mader connect complex and broader themes related to signed and spoken languages through the use of seemingly simple games and observations of the body. Language and grammar are central elements in the playful *HooHaa* and *Heatmap*, in which the artists make smart use of the observation that the sound "Hoo" produces a cold gust of air from the mouth, while the sound "Haa" produces a warm gust of air. They connect this observation to the complexity of body functions, changes in ambient temperature, and speech therapy. The nose is another organ that maintains our respiratory system. It typically isn't a body part that is immediately associated with American Sign Language, but it does play a crucial role in the language's grammar. In their drawing *Running Gag* and sculptural piece *Circle Lurks*, Kim and Mader borrow meme culture and internet aesthetics to directly address the detrimental effects of Alexander Graham Bell's influence at the Second International Congress on Education of the Deaf (1880) in Milan, which led to the suppression of signed languages internationally for many decades, as well as his eugenicist perspective on sign language and Deaf culture.

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About Christine Sun Kim & Thomas Mader

Since 2013, Christine Sun Kim and Thomas Mader have collaborated on a shared practice addressing the complexities of communication in a variety of formats. Their projects include recording an overnight shipment from Berlin to New York (*Recording Contract*, 2013), compiling 24 hours of invited contributors' studio time (*Busy Day*, 2014), using the arm game, a combination of body and face, in order to describe a series of awkward social situations (*Classified Digits*, 2016), and animating signs that show the power of decision-making (*Palm Reader*, 2020).

Selected group exhibitions include: Instituto Tomie Ohtake, São Paulo; Galerie Crone, Vienna; Ian Potter Museum, Melbourne; Times Art Center, Berlin; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Nuit Blanche, Toronto; and Neuer Berliner Kunstverein. Their solo exhibitions include Buffalo AKG Art Museum in Buffalo, New York; Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Siegen; and Kunstraum, Munich.

Christine Sun Kim was born in California, USA, in 1980 and lives in Berlin. She uses the medium of sound in performance and drawing to investigate her relationship with spoken languages and the aural environment.

Thomas Mader was born in the South of Germany in 1984 and lives in Berlin. He is a research based artist who works with themes related to national identity, storytelling and communication.