

CC2

ASL Poetry and Performance in translation

Student journals, week 5: Christine Sun Kim and Rene Pellerin

Names Removed

Dartmouth College

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This week, our ASL course took an exciting turn as we were introduced to two Deaf artists. Christine Kim is a visual artist, whereas Rene Pellerin is a cross between a comedian and a storyteller of Deaf-blindness. Their experiences as Deaf members in society heavily influence the artists' works.

Kim explained that, as a young child, she "had no access to a full language". She was semi-alingual and relied on a conglomeration of Korean, broken English, and hand gesturing. The organic language that she and her sister formed left them isolated as children. The artist found a sense of stability through art. Kim later learned to sign exact English. In high school, Kim met other Deaf students who progressively introduced her to American Sign Language (ASL). Unfortunately, barriers withstood outside of her close-knit community. Ironically, Kim had the most difficult time with interpreters, professionals who are often highly regarded in the Deaf community. The interpreters' inability to communicate with Kim made it hard for the student to understand concepts. So she immersed herself into art, in which the limitations of a medium sparked creativity and fostered expression.

Rene Pellerin's academic experience somewhat mirrored that of Kim's. Pellerin was born in Quebec and relocated to Vermont as a young child. In a class picture, Pellerin later noticed that he was the student not looking into the camera. The comedian believed that the camera man's lack of knowledge on how to accommodate Deaf students mirrored the apathy of society. The Deaf world need not be accommodated in the eyes of a Hearing pedestrian. This widely held belief remained with Pellerin until his college years, when he began to lose his sight. As a student, he remembered visiting Gallaudet University for the first time. He was astounded to discover that there was an office for Deaf-blind students, in the same way offices exist for ethnic students, athletes, and student government committees. Finally, Pellerin was accommodated for.

At the Rochester Institute of Technology, Kim majored in visual studies and began to experiment in painting. Kim's experiences with Deafhood emerged in her Andy Warhol-esque and manga-influenced, humorous pieces. Word bubbles extend from her subjects' rectums; mountains of grotesque interpreters overlook red balloons; Mongolian spots aid alopecia victims. Following graduation, Kim temporarily relocated to Berlin where she joined in the Youth Art Movement. She felt alive, accepted, and on the cusp of a cutting-edge event. Unbeknownst to the painter, art would never influence her as much as a dream did. A nightmare, in which she prepared for suicide, forced Kim into self-introspection. She dumped her boyfriend and later enrolled in a graduate program. She began to play with sound on her level of understanding. The novel idea, I believe, is one of the few encounters between music and Deafness with no external influence. I love how she recorded her art through a video format instead of refusing to acknowledge its complexity through paper alone. The artist set paintbrushes on top of speakers and dipped nails in ink. The sound effects and vibrations were awesome, to say the least. I would love to see exactly how far Kim's vision will take her.

Pellerin's calling, although progressive, did not occur until later in life. He worked to expand disability services for Vermonters who are deaf. Although Pellerin loved his career and the traveling that ensued, he still felt isolated. For one, he had a part-time interpreter. Imagine the frustration that arises from seeking to understand others, but rarely being understood by your peers...ugggh. Following his retirement, the self-proclaimed Mr. Mom decided to do what he did best: put on a show through the second-oldest profession: storytelling. He shared snapshots of his life with us through ASL. His first stories focused on Gallaudet University, a community to which he truly belonged. It was there that Pellerin met his wife. He told us a story of taking the train to Gallaudet prior to his first semester. After a long night of drinking booze, he drifted into a deep sleep. The train assistant came to collect the passengers' pillows and desperately tried to wake Rene up by yelling. Rene's brother gestured, explaining that they were both Deaf and could not hear. The assistant left, then came back and yelled again. And again! Finally, Rene's brother tapped him on the shoulder. Rene instantly woke up and handed the pillow to the assistant. I imagine that the experience resonated with Rene because it best summarized his communication (or lack thereof) with the hearing world. The communication between both entities has historically been based upon ignorance. The anecdote touched me deeply. In the past, I have always worked to change myself and others, rather than accepting

that some things are the way they are just because. Rene told a multiple-part story about the difficult task of exiting the airport and retrieving baggage as a Deaf person. In the story, he relies on the visually-impaired elderly woman and a stylish, sophisticated man who is asked to escort Rene to the bathroom. Rene notices a man talking on the phone while using the urinal. Wanting to feel 'cool' and in touch with society as well, Rene pulls out his iPhone and dials up his wife through Facetime. His story demonstrated that with changing technology, the barrier between the hearing and the Deaf constricts. My experiences and opportunities in life resembles those of a Deaf person now so more than ever before.

Rene called for a society in which everyone--despite their disability status--becomes proficient in ASL. For now, Rene hopes for an even more grandiose initiative: tolerance.

It was interesting to see how Christine's visit juxtaposed René's in many ways. What I appreciated about both of these artists was that they really jumped in and focused on their art, Christine showing pictures and videos and René telling stories. While that was beneficial, because we got to interact with them on that level, I felt that it also created a certain distance between them and the class that didn't exist with our previous guests. Perhaps this is because we now have a better understanding of general Deaf culture and are ready to focus on their art specifically, or maybe it is just because they only had two hours each and they really wanted to share as much information about their art form as they could.

Now, what I meant by our guests "juxtaposing" each other is a commentary on their individual Deaf experiences. While much of Christine's artwork dealt with Deaf themes, I got the sense that she does not want to be considered a "Deaf artist". That is, she wants to interact with the world and to be considered the same as any other artist. In contrast, while René is now a professional storyteller, much of his life has been advocating for Deaf rights on a political level. He stated that the goal of his stories is two-fold, to entertain, but also to educate the audience about his experiences. I believe that he achieves this balance brilliantly. However, one of the messages that he emphasizes is that of inclusion for Deaf people and his stories therefore carry a very strong moral and political message.

This was a message that resonated with me on a very personal level. I found that René and I have a lot in common (it must be that Vermont spirit!) and his successes and

stories were an incredible inspiration. I could identify with much of what he was saying about challenges, frustration, and especially drive. That is to say that René reignited a drive for personal growth and societal justice that lives within me. It is so easy to forget about people whose challenges are different than our own, and to accept the societal status quo when it is convenient for us, even if it does not fulfill the needs of others. And I don't mean that René brought feelings of pity, because he did not; I think that his stories of his efforts to *confront* the challenges that society has fed him and his ability to overcome them are what inspire me to do the same.

As for Christine, I had a harder time connecting with her on a personal level, but I have a great appreciation for her work, especially her more recent exploration of sound. I loved the trial of a deaf choir; I found that fascinating, and am excited to see where she will take it. I also found much of her video work really innovative and interesting. It made me reconsider what sound is, which is one of the goals I believe. By definition it is a vibration that we perceive with our ears, but maybe perceiving the vibrations with our eyes is equally as valid?

Finally, while it wasn't the original plan, I think that having the interpreting students was a tremendous learning experience. I thought they did a commendable job interpreting; the most significant difference I noticed between the young interpreters and the ones who interpreted for René was in assertiveness. The more experienced interpreters knew that they were there to do the job to the best of their ability, and they were very assertive about being in the right position and having all the ultimate working conditions. The new interpreters were much more hesitant to displace students so that they could be in the right position and also to ask for the shades to be open enough for

them to see Christine. Perhaps this was just a function of personality, but it is definitely something that struck me. Along those same lines, I'm also curious about René's support group compared to Janet's. Are such drastic differences in support networks just due to chance? Are they functions of the states in which they live or some other factor? These are just some of the questions and ideas that have crossed my mind over the last week. I feel so incredibly privileged to have had the opportunity to interact with such knowledgeable, creative, fascinating people and they are shaping my worldview in many different ways!

May 10, 2011
ASL Poetry

Journal Reflections- Christine Kim & Rene Pellerin

Our guests for this week, Christine Kim and Rene Pellerin, both presented interesting perspectives because of their roles as artists. While both were open with sharing about their experiences as deaf individuals, it was evident that they desired to keep the visits focused on their art. For Christine that meant a presentation of some of her earlier works and more recent work in which she experiments with sounds. For Rene, he easily filled the entire class with his comical narratives. While being deaf is an integral part of each of their lives, Rene and Christine's dedication to displaying their arts dominated our classroom conversations. Although both poked fun at their difficulties with the non-deaf, this overshadowing of the "deaf issue" by their creative talents supports the contention that being deaf in no way takes away from an individual's ability to live a fully integrated life despite such challenges. Having acknowledged what I saw as a constant deference for art over discussing the "deaf issue", I will now discuss particulars from Christine and Rene's art.

I thought Christine's earlier art tended to view non-deaf people in a stereotypical way. Her insistence that we were all talking loads of s*** caught me off guard. This ascription of non-deaf people is one-dimensional and seems to not fully explore the intimacies of language and communication. For instance, what can we infer if someone chooses to discuss superficial topics with a stranger versus their best friend? In the former, we might infer polite conversation but in the latter we might conclude some type of avoidance in the two's communication. Even when non-deaf people seem to be

babbling, more is beneath the surface. This is why I did not quite understand Christine's art until she mentioned "communication breakdowns". From her perspective, what I read into the above-mentioned conversations may have been impossible when communicating with her family and friends if a well-trained translator was not around to accurately interpret her conversations. These kinds of communication breakdowns seem unfathomable to non-deaf people so I would guess that Christine's teachers and friends did not understand her experience. Her solution to the communication limitations she experienced was to express her frustration through art. When I first viewed her pieces I did not realize that the frustration I experienced with the pieces seeming one dimensional was exactly what the artist intended, the pieces mirrored some of her earliest life experiences in which she did not always participate fully in the conversations happening around her.

Christine's earlier blue works contrast with the always-upbeat tone of Rene's comedic stories.

I found Rene's stories about Gallaudet very insightful. They helped me to understand what life is like on a deaf university campus while making me laugh at Rene's self-deprecating humor about the problems he experienced on registration day because of his deaf-blindness. Several times, Rene discussed his amazement at all the signing around him when he first arrived. Even more so, he expressed his joy and relief at meeting a deaf-blind administrator at the university. After hearing Rene's reaction to Gallaudet, I felt kind of shortchanged by Dartmouth (I'm joking—kind of). What I mean to say is that I've never thought of Dartmouth as a place that opens up possibilities in the same manner that Rene seemed to view Gallaudet. While one reason for our different views of

Dartmouth and Gallaudet might be that Gallaudet offered Rene opportunities that would have been impossible to find at other colleges, versus Dartmouth being a pretty standard place in terms of what it offers non-deaf students, there still might be another difference. I'm thinking a part of our different views is perspective and maybe being deaf and blind afforded Rene a sense of appreciation for opportunities that students at Dartmouth routinely overlook in their world. One might think I'm reaching but it's worth some reflection. Irrespective of what one thinks on this manner, I'm sure everyone who watched Rene's performance can agree that his overall tone was very upbeat and appreciative of the life and experiences he has had thus far.

This week's guests were much different than past guests. First, Christine:

I think the best way to describe Christine's work is that it is unlike anything else I've ever seen. From her earlier works with visual arts, she clearly was the rebel child. Some of her work was quite gruesome. I liked her metaphor with the eels. After looking up the eels on Wikipedia, they don't look like they have particularly large eyes, but that artistic license is warranted. But everything else she mentioned about them matches up quite well, how they hide from outsiders and how they group together.

As for Christine's work with sound, I thought that she didn't work with enough interesting sounds, mainly bumps on a microphone or feedback. I'm sure that she works with these sounds because she can feel them better, but I think seeing some visual result of a concerto would be cool. Her use with the spinning pinwheels using the sound of air, and not the motion of air was pretty cool. It kind of made me question how well she understands sound, and if she thought the sound was always moving those pinwheels, even when you blow on them. That thought made me wonder how mysterious sound is to deaf people, but from our guests, it doesn't seem particularly mysterious to them, since they have some limited hearing, especially in the low ranges.

Rene was interesting. He is clearly not a poet, but a story-teller. He seemed like a grandfather-figure who tells stories. Often, the interpreter seemed to be interpreting gestures, or repeated actions, that worked visually, but not orally. For example, you might watch a guy stumble through 20 train cars, but you wouldn't mention each one if you talked about it. I think Rene's ASL added a lot to the story past the actual language.

From his performance and others we have seen, I'm beginning to think that oral presentations could be enhanced by the use of ASL, to show exactly what you are saying. It adds another descriptive element. I've been told to show what I want to say, not just say it, multiple times in writing classes. I think this would be great.

Christine's visit was very different from the visits we've had from guests so far. And it gave me a better picture of what Deaf culture is like today on two accounts. First, we were able to see a young Deaf Asian-American speak to the class, which not only gave us a glimpse of the young community but also the ethnically diverse community in the Deaf world. And we were also able to see young interpreters, around our age, interpreting for Christine, showing us the budding career side of interpreting for students studying ASL through college.

Christine was incredibly different from the other speakers and was very enthusiastic about her work. It was amazing looking at her artwork and hearing her life story. I was especially impressed with the way Christine seemed to have such a strong sense of self and pride in her work. I couldn't imagine how hard it would be to learn ASL when one's parents don't even know how to speak English. Besides having to define her identity as a Korean-American, Christine also had to define herself as a Deaf individual, which must have been very frustrating in her youth.

I was also really interested in her artwork because my best friend is very interested in manga artwork. Seeing her deaf experience expressed in her artwork was so interesting for me personally. So far, in looking at poetry, we have rarely considered deaf artists and how their experience is felt through their artwork. Seeing Christine's artwork, especially expressed in a medium I was familiar with was amazing. I was especially impressed with the eels display that she created. But most of all, I felt I could relate to her as an artist when she talked about creative compression, how one generally becomes more creative when he or she has access to fewer resources. I recall hearing the same idea applied to comedians, who find that small spaces and limited topics push them to create funnier jokes and more comedic situations.

But the thing that was the most inspiring and beautiful for me to watch was the work Christine did with visualizing sound. That was truly astounding. To see the small nails and the lines of ink move on the page due to only sound through speakers/vibrating drum heads was incredible. I also was really struck by the beauty and simplicity of the project when done with the pinwheels on the speaker heads. I knew when I had heard about Christine's work that visualizing sound was something that I thought could not be possible. But after seeing her videos, it was. It also made me think about rhythm in a new light. When watching Christine dance with her friend without any sound, I was amazed at the rhythmic movement they had. It made me think that all things had rhythm, and that it takes a trained artist, like Christine, to see rhythm implicitly in things other than explicitly in music.

I also found Christine's integration of her Korean background into her culture in her "blue bottom" work a very interesting take on age. I also liked the creative metaphor used in her work with her boyfriend, in which she would film films over and over again until the quality is significantly reduced. It was a unique take on perception, and possibly the confusion many Deaf children may have in seeing the world and understanding it when they are growing up without a language, or vice versa, what a limited knowledge non-Deaf people have of Deaf culture.

Another fascinating thing for me to see was the Bed-shaker. It was one of those things I never even considered being a problem for Deaf people until it was brought to my attention. Non-Deaf alarm clocks rely entirely on sound, with hearing being the sense we can provoke to wake ourselves up in the morning. The idea of a motion alarm was

new to me and another glimpse into the various alternate technologies Deaf people use every day.

I am also interested to see how Christine's Deaf choir progresses. It is a unique concept that I think could catch on to be a very popular form of Deaf entertainment. The idea crossed my mind when watching DPAN works in class, but to see it actually happening was very cool.

Christine also seemed to be very well integrated with the non-Deaf community. I remember thinking, when looking at one of her art pieces, how terribly difficult it must have been to constantly have to write notes to her friends in order to communicate and how frustrating that must have been. But the amazing thing was that Christine did not seem frustrated at all; she seemed very confident and happy and proud of her Deaf culture. And to see that in someone *our own age* was very different from the speakers we had seen before and incredibly telling of that continued pride in Deaf culture in this generation. I loved how Christine said she had "no shame"; it is one of those things you have to see to believe, and Christine certainly has no shame about herself. And I think that makes her artwork and professional endeavors even more impressive, expressive, and personal; by not being afraid of one's past or future, Christine is able to touch on various issues in her art and also push the limits of what it means to be Deaf and to interact with sound.

As an added note, Christine's sign also seemed more energetic and faster than the sign we have seen before from other speakers. It made me think back to what Pat Graybill said, how even sign is changing to become faster and shorter, with the advent of new technologies like cell phones and video phones.

Rene Pellerin was a sharp contrast to Christine Kim's visit. Rene has lived a full life with Retinitis pigmentosa and Usher's syndrome. He has worked in various fields of study. He has worked in environments for non-Deaf as well as Deaf people. He has lived working tirelessly to promote the Deaf political stance through his work in providing facilities in his own state. And now as a performer, he stood before us with a great many stories to tell. And through his stories we truly got to vicariously experience what it means to be Deaf. Rene is also incredibly funny. I loved his cooking class. I also enjoyed the story of his wedding. All of the stories were very personal and specific and brilliantly told. And at most times, Rene was so expressive and seemed so comfortable that you forgot he was blind and deaf. It also made you think about how ridiculous non-Deaf people like myself can seem to Deaf people. I was shocked and amused when Rene related to us how he was called over the PA system at an airport. I also never considered the possible confusions with Rene's name being a girl's name, which was related to us during his dorm room assignment story. I also found the interpreter/"interpretee" relationship interesting in his story where a person addressed his interpreter rather than hire. I never considered that a Deaf individual may want to hire an interpreter for all business affairs for an extended period of time; it made me think how a long-term interpreter is probably so integral to a Deaf family/person, and also how CODAs must have a lot of responsibility on their shoulders in interpreting for their parents at a young age.

I recall specifically how many people were there with Rene as interpreters and assistants in his performance. It reminded me of what Janet said about deaf-blind persons

being willing to trust and take help from others. I was so impressed by Rene's story, and how he did not even attend Galludet initially. I was surprised also to learn that Rene did not know he had poor vision until he was tested. I remember finding Rene to be very brave when he tried to navigate his way home without his cane at night. The amount of trust he had to have had in himself and in those around him must have been so much for him to even attempt to make it home that night. But the thing that made Rene such a great performer was his ability to frame his stories and make them humorous so that even a non-Deaf person could relate to the situations. A non-Deaf person could understand his difficulties and share in his joy.

Probably the most "real" relatable part of Rene's performance was his mentioning the "power of the cane." I remember thinking that many Deaf people and even non-Deaf, disabled people must also find their cane useful navigating through crowds or trying to make it out of a crowded situation quickly. I also found Rene's description of the hotel at Galludet eye-opening; his description of the incredible hospitality towards Deaf people at that hotel made me realize how difficult even the most menial tasks must be for a Deaf person to live in a "hearing" world.

I also realized the amount of tolerance a Deaf person must have for others. Rene mentioned several times in his stories that one had to pick and choose one's battles. And that must be so true for so many Deaf people. For most non-Deaf people who don't know the extent to which they should offer help to a Deaf person or to what extent they appear ignorant of a Deaf person's culture, the burden almost always must come on the Deaf person to either begrudgingly accept the help or be more understanding of a non-Deaf person's ignorance. I think this comes with the intrinsic maturity that Deaf people have that comes with a shared experience and culture in dealing with non-Deaf people every day.

Overall, this week was a great adventure into the varied spectrum of the Deaf community. I think that with the image that the Deaf community has portrayed in the past, as one of a unified, solid, almost uniform community, we don't consider how varied Deaf individuals can be, and even so, how their experiences can still be the same. And this week, I felt more than the rest, I really found this concept to be made into a reality.

Christine Kim/Rene Pellerin

Christine Kim

Christine's visit was a very unique one in that it gave me insight into alternate modes of expression for Deaf individuals. As a dabbling artist and an appreciator of art myself, it was a great experience seeing her work and how her emotions were reflected in her art work as opposed to in poetry. Throughout the class, we've all seen creative expression via handshapes and gestures in ASL, but we had yet to see an actual creation placed and set permanently on paper. Her journey in her artwork especially stood out to me – how her pieces from when she was younger reflected more frustration and how it evolved and matured over time. For example, the one piece where there was a face with an open mouth filled with feces was very visually demanding of the viewer and stood out to me, as it was magnificently drawn to incorporate serious emotions.

Her evolution to working with sound, even though she can't hear, was a novel idea to me. The previous guests had all mentioned that they could "hear" via reverberations in the ground or felt beats of sound in their bodies, but Christine took it a step further by creating a visual experience from sound. That was something I found very unique and admirable, as that effectively was her method of "hearing" sound. I think her creativity with moving around the obstacle of not being able to hear is amazing, since she didn't view it as a limitation, but more so as an alternative mode of expression.

One last point I'd like to make from Christine's visit is the job of the interpreter. Christine had referenced several times in her intro and explanations to us that she had difficulty with languages in school and had quite a few communication breakdowns with interpreters. Her and Rene's visit showed me how integral it is to have an interpreter you can connect with on a personal and emotional level. There were some communication issues between Christine and the interpreters, as they would switch off or pause sometimes to clarify. Comparing this to Dennis and Rene's interpreter – there was a bit of a discrepancy. I can only imagine how frustrating it is to not have someone understand what you're trying to express or express it incorrectly or take several tries to get the message across – this also happens normally with nondeaf people. That's also why during Rene's visit, I was really impressed with how much he and his interpreter clicked and how smoothly the translation went...which I'll delve into more below. Overall, I truly enjoyed Christine's visit. I know that art work is special and meaningful to an artist, as they devote a lot of time, effort, and emotion into creating their pieces, and I appreciate that she gave us the opportunity to view her work.

Rene Pellerin

Rene's performance was extremely enjoyable, as he had such a wonderful aura about him. His ability to tell stories and make fun of himself at the same time was very enlightening and I appreciate that it helps the audience feel more relaxed and comfortable.

What stood out to me from his performance was the ease at which his stories were translated/interpreted. When he told us about his journey to find a good interpreter, I never realized how difficult that must be and how much effort one must go to in order to find a good match - especially since the supply of good interpreters is most likely low while demand is high. I'm sure his stories wouldn't have had the same effect for the nondeaf community/the class if he hadn't found his particular interpreter, as his stories were told with much fluidity and not many pauses or clarifications.

With that said, I really enjoyed his stories - how they were built from little things that happened in his life and how he was able to put a spin on them to make it funny and enjoyable to the audience. My favorite would probably be the story of how he met his wife at Gallaudet and was mistaken for a female. His stories always ended with a little twist at the end and I was able to learn and take something away from each one he told. Rene is a great story teller and I really enjoyed his creations.

Christine Kim's artwork and presentation was rather shocking and gave me new ideas about sound and art. Although I've taken my fair share of science courses I've never really thought of sound as vibrations or a medium in which to create art. It was really interesting how she was able to take sound and turn it into a physical manifestation transcending the 'hearing' portion of sound. It was also intriguing to see how well adjusted she was to the hearing community and how it didn't really phase her to have to navigate through the hearing world. Some of her artwork was quite explicit and I liked her unbridled attitude towards making the kind of art that she felt best portrayed her ideas. She's simply brilliant.

Rene Pellerin's stories really got me thinking about the versatility and breadth of ASL. As he expertly weaved through his stories I found myself comparing it to written stories. I began taking note of his use of repetition and exaggeration and I found myself very much in love with the way that ASL can add a level of exaggeration or emphasis that can't be reached in spoken English. There are things that I felt Rene Pellerin was able to express that a hearing person would not have been able to express as well or as humorously. The way that he jerked the train around and showed how he was walking back to his seat were moments where I was simply in awe of the power of ASL. His stories were so finely crafted and were just such great snapshots of his life. I was very impressed and look forward to hearing more ASL storytelling

Polansky

Course 002: Lectures by Rene Pellerin and Christine Kim

10 May 2011

The lectures presented in class this past week focused more on the literary and performance aspects of d/Deaf culture. Each of the two presenters, Christine Kim and Rene Pellerin, had distinct experiences growing up d/Deaf, and these experiences in fact constituted the essence of their works. It was remarkable to note that neither performer felt ashamed in carrying out their lives as d/Deaf or Deaf-blind, in Rene's case. It is true that all past performers had this same sense of pride, but what was exceptional in the performances of both Rene and Christine was their embodiment of their experiences. I not only enjoyed their lectures but actually felt that at times I took their place and became the speaker.

Christine Kim's performance was absolutely amazing and also strange in the sense that I had never ever imagined that a d/Deaf person would be able to convert sound into a visual experience. She explained the fact that her parents are Korean and since they did not speak English well, she was primarily a-lingual throughout her childhood. The fact that she had an older d/Deaf sister seemed to play a critical role in her development as a child ,but even they only communicated through SEE-signing exact English. I have never heard of this mode of signing, but based on her explanation, it is easy to distinguish between the grammar of ASL and the grammar of SEE; which simply reflects the grammar of the English language. What was more striking to find out was the fact that Christine remained a-lingual and did not master ASL until the age of 25. How can one remain in a sense without any means of communication for so long? I can only envision the sense of frustration and isolation she must have felt, especially knowing that she

could not even take advantage of her only language, ASL, from an early age.

This sense of struggle and resistance was explicitly and creatively portrayed in her visual art. Christine's point that her visual art creativity sprang from lack of materials can be interpreted in a different way; this lack of materials to use parallels her lack of a language as a child and the work that she produced is a reflection of her experience, development, and identity as the woman she is today. The piece that interested me most and seemed rather bizarre in connection to her d/Deaf experience was the eel piece. Christine was able to link the image and personality of the garden eel with the d/Deaf experience in a rather innovative way. It was baffling to understand that just like garden eels who hide behind stones and clump together in groups, so do members of the d/Deaf community who also forms groups are often hard to reach by the non-Deaf because of the breakdown in communication. I believe that if Christine had not expressed herself so vividly in her visual art and released all her emotional burdens, she would never have been able to have the courage to explore a domain, sound, that is simply unfamiliar and at times unattainable to the d/Deaf. Everything that Christine does or has been engaged in, from her visual art to her sound projects, speaks of her.

Rene Pellerin's storytelling experience was also fascinating in its ability to transform past experiences into the present, and in its ability to make me feel as a hearing person d/Deaf during the performance itself. It's worthy to note that Rene's success, however short, as a d/Deaf-blind storyteller springs from his ability to not only speak of his experiences, but actually enliven them especially through humor. We've listened and watched the performances of many guests so far who luridly articulated the challenges of growing up d/Deaf, but Rene was the first guest, at least for

me, who made me feel that growing up d/Deaf does not always have to leave a dark spot in your heart. Perhaps it was the humor but I just felt that he did not in any way retain the bitter memories of the past; those memories turned into different, illuminating moments of the past through his stories and humorous performance. His performances of the stories allow me to personify myself into Rene and at times actually become him, the subject, rather than simply an observer.

Each of these two lectures revealed something new about the d/Deaf culture, and most importantly they taught me something about myself. Yes, it is true that both guests demonstrated the themes of resistance and struggle in one way or another, but what was different was their ATTITUDE. Their sense of humor and complacency with who they are and the lives they've lived taught me that no matter what happens in life, as long as you have the right attitude, you will always overcome anything. They taught me that even during moments when the world seems to close in on you, never should one abandon their dreams and aspirations. These two guests not only exposed much about the d/Deaf and d/Deaf-blind culture, but also about the human race.

Last weeks presenters all had one thing in common, passion. Their inspirational genius for their art really demonstrated such joy that it was infectious in the classroom.

Christine Kim's work reflected her personal emotions during different periods of her life and her coping with her deafness. The piece that I enjoyed the most was the picture of the worms as she captured their natural personalities and compared it to that of the deaf society. Thus I found it very exciting and intuitive of someone so young. I also found the commentary of the deaf community also relevant to other groups within Dartmouth College.

In reference to the Rene Pellerin, his performance was the true epitome of a joyful experience. His passions and drive was communicated through each facial expression and sign. He captured my attention also through his personal perspective on each story as it reflective aspect of his life. He did tell us that he took personal liberties on some details out he creatively edited his stories to capture the audience. And boy did he!

Overall, both artists who came were truly captivating as their heart for life was expressed through their work.

May 10, 2011

COCO 002

Christine and Rene Journal

Last week we had the amazing opportunity to see two very different Deaf artists, Christine Kim and Rene Pellerin. I thought it was a very interesting experience and a bit different from the Deaf poets we have been learning about. When Christine told us she was a Deaf artist who worked with sound, I was honestly a little confused about how she did that. Once she showed us some of her newer work and the process by which she makes art out of sound I understood a little bit better what sound means to her and how she interacts with sound in her life. I thought hearing about her journal from purely a visual artist to an artist who works with sound was very interesting, and seemed to reflect her struggle with her identity, both as an artist but also as a Deaf person who interacts greatly with the non-deaf world. Perhaps my favorite piece that she showed us was her beginning work on the Deaf chorus. I thought it was such an interesting spin on a concept that does not really seem to be accessible to members of the Deaf community. I also really liked her visual artwork that subtly made fun of the non-Deaf world (especially the one that read "I'm deaf – ½ price"). You could really get a sense of the frustration Christine felt as she interacted with non-deaf people who most of the time seemed to think their conversations weren't important enough to be translated for her. To grow up in a society where you were constantly left out of conversations, no matter how trivial, must have been extremely difficult and lonely.

Rene Pellerin is a very different artist than Christine, yet they both touched upon some of the same ideas, many dealing with the struggles of being Deaf in such a non-deaf dominated culture. Rene's storytelling abilities just blew me away. I was a little worried at the beginning that the interpretation would somehow diminish the effect of his storytelling, but this did not happen at all. I think a lot of credit goes to the amazing interpreter. However, what struck me was that Rene told these stories not just with his words, but also with his whole body. There were times where I thought I might not even need the interpreter (of course in reality I am sure I did) just because Rene was so expressive. His stories were incredibly funny (I found myself chuckling to myself almost the whole class period) but also reflected the real challenges Rene has faced in his life, dealing with his disease and also with just interacting with other non-deaf people on a daily basis. I think it is wonderful that he is trying to use his storytelling to educate people about Usher's and I think the way in which he is transmitting his message, with humor and grace, will hopefully make a profound impact.

I really enjoyed both of our speakers this week. I thought that they complemented each other very nicely by showing us another side to Deaf culture, nonpoetry Deaf art. Christine intrigued me very much. I really loved her drawings, their simplicity and message really drove home different points, such as her feelings in speech therapy, and her feelings of exclusion from aspects of the hearing world. What I thought was most interesting, however, was her work with sound. I had never thought that a Deaf person would be in a music program, but I suppose that goes back to Chapter 6 of Deaf in America, and how they say that hearing people don't realize just how much Deaf people interact with sound. I thought that her work with transforming sound into a visual experience was very neat. It was interesting to think of sound as something that moves and creates. It really introduced me to a different aspect of sound.

Rene was really quite amazing. His story telling was fluid, beautiful to watch, poignant and hilarious. I think what he is doing is really important. Anyone can get up and tell someone the so called "story of their life" but it takes a real artist to get people to experience what his life is like, and to do it in a relatable way, through comedy. All too often, when people just start talking, we all just tune out. We say, "well that's his life, not mine. It's so far removed from me that I really don't need to care all that much." But by making use of laugh and showing us not only the experiences that make his life unique, and the unique challenges associated with Usher's syndrome, but mostly by showing us how alike people are. We can all relate to wanting to fit in, to staying close to family, to laughing at misunderstandings and to trying to make connections with others despite barriers. I hope he keeps doing this for a very long time, I think he is contributing so much to the understanding of Usher's syndrome because, oh dear I'm about to be corny again, laughter is probably the best bridge builder that I can think of.

Christine Kim

Christine Kim is an absolutely amazing artist and I was awestruck by her relationship with art, with sound and with sound as art. I had never really considered the possibility of visually experiencing sound before. In her series with the drum heads the finished products are visually impressive and stimulating, yet her process of creation makes them all the more fascinating. My favorite piece was the video of the whirligigs on the subwoofer. The (recorded) wind literally caused them to spin. It was ironic, unexpected, and extraordinarily thought provoking.

Some of the visual art she showed the class was rather explicit and she tended to skip over these images without discussing them. These images struck me as the most interesting and I definitely would have liked to see more of them. Explicit art is sometimes created for shock value, but more often than not it contains a very strong or extreme emotion or conveys an intimate story. I think the images she skipped might have been more telling of her as an artist, but I can understand why she might have felt the need to censor herself.

Rene Pellerin

Rene Pellerin's stories were an excellent way to convey some of the difficulties of everyday living as a deaf-blind person to a non-deaf and non-blind audience. His stories were carefully and articulately told with great comedic timing and the perfect amount of repetition. Even without translation many segments of his stories were easy to understand.

Although the stories were meant to be humorous, and granted parts of them genuinely

were, much of the humor was dark. Gallows humor tends to be used in the cultural storytelling of the most oppressed and minoritized groups. Often with gallows humor the content comes off as amusing, but in reality discusses a truthful situation that is actually depressing, horrific or otherwise appalling. The fact that Rene has so much difficulty battling ignorance (and stupidity) at the airport is not amusing. Being able to laugh about the situation is a cultural tool that allows those in unbearable situations to cope, and it is an extraordinarily useful tool for surviving these situations. However, it is important to recognize the underlying systemic issues that give rise to the living and retelling of these stories. I hope that the class will be able to look past the light-hearted nature of the stories and take the time to critically reflect on some of the truly horrific situations Rene covertly described.

ASL Poetry, Literature and Performance in Translation
Professor Polansky
Week 6: Christine Kim/Rene Pellerin

Last week we met two more of our wonderful guest speakers, Christine Kim and Rene Pellerin. I really enjoyed attending both lectures and learning about their respective experiences.

It was very refreshing to meet Christine, the first really young and “hip” Deaf individual to visit our class. (Not that Patrick Graybill isn’t young or hip or anything...) Anyway, I mention this because figures like Janet Marcous and Patrick Graybill are a tad older than the rest of us, and certainly a great deal wiser and more experienced. Although both were amazing and insightful guest speakers, a generation gap did exist that separated our points of view. Thus, it was interesting to hear from someone who is not necessarily as grounded or established from decades of knowledge and practice. Like us, Christine is still exploring her identity- not just within the Deaf community or the art world, but also in society as a whole. As a result, it was sort of easier to relate to her and her feelings of anger and frustration while she was growing up. Her paintings from her earlier years clearly exhibit her struggle to be accepted in a mostly non-Deaf world, as with the exclamation on one piece that reads, “Hearing people suck!” In that way, her art demonstrates her phase of resistance, even resentment- emotions that we had not deeply explored previously in class.

I was also intrigued to learn more about the cutting edge of contemporary Deaf culture, which Christine is involved in, what with her experimental visual and sound performances. Previously, I hadn’t understood how she might play with sound to create art, but it made sense when I saw that she used sounds and vibrations as physical and visual experiences. I admit that some of her more avant-garde videos were over my head, as my understanding of and experience with art is rather basic, but I still appreciated the creativity and boldness of her innovations.

On Thursday, Rene Pellerin came in to tell us several of his stories, with the vast majority based on his experiences as a Deaf man living with Usher’s Syndrome. By then, we knew that our skilled interpreters would not allow the language barrier to hamper his ability to communicate effectively or our ability to understand him, but I was still pleasantly surprised by how riveting his stories were. I remember not wanting to tear my eyes away from him to jot down comments in my notebook because I didn’t want to miss any important signs, gestures, or movements that he made. His performance made me truly realize the significance of facial expressions and body language in ASL. I noticed that while he used the traditional signing space, he would frequently also imitate certain actions or motions with his entire body, in a way that straddled the divide

between storytelling and performance. Regardless, I would argue that this behavior enhanced his performance, because it often transformed the funny into the hysterical.

Rene was definitely a very compelling storyteller, whose charisma and confidence shone through consistently. While his stories were peppered with humor, his ultimate purpose was sincere. At the end of class, he stated that he hoped to educate the public about Usher's syndrome through his stories and promote inclusion for the Deaf, meaning that all people should learn ASL in order to accommodate Deaf individuals. His message was earnest and did make me, personally, want to attain a better understanding of American Sign Language. However, it is undeniable that our society is quite a ways from that lofty goal.

Our guest speakers never fail to impress and inspire us all. I'd like to close by just thanking both Christine Kim and Rene Pellerin for visiting and enlightening our class, and I look forward to hearing from our final three guest lecturers.

I truly enjoyed the tone of this past week in class; it was interesting to see how two different individuals have been able to express themselves creatively within the Deaf community. I feel that with many of our discussions and viewings centered on ASL poetry, we have narrowed our focus to a single way in which the Deaf experience intersects with the arts. However, Christine and Rene clearly demonstrated for the class the many ways in which the arts can factor in the individual and collective Deaf experience.

In an effort to bring sound into the visual realm of understanding (one that Christine, as an artist, has mastered entirely) Christine Kim has made public her initial encounters with sound. I think the novelty of sound within the context of Christine's life is what makes her work so compelling. Through her multimedia approach to the translation of sound into art, Christine allows a viewer experience what sound *does* to a canvas; in this way, both Christine and the viewer realize the power of sound in a similar way. I wonder if Christine anticipated this effect when she took on such a task of relating sound to aesthetics. After her discussion about how much has been lost in the translation in her own life's experience, it seems that Christine might be drawn to an art in which both the viewer and the artist can observe the creation simultaneously; in this way, nothing is lost in translation and the experience is largely shared.

The issue of translation seemed to be one that was an issue in Rene's experience as well. I think his expressive and engaging stories made it easy to understand his point of view as a Deaf-Blind individual in a fast-paced world. While Rene had a number of early professional opportunities to engage with the Deaf and disabled experience, it seemed that he continued to struggle to find his "voice" until later in his life. However, at the present, Rene seems to approach the ignorance of those around him with humor and a very forgiving attitude. I like how he hilariously contrasted the structure and idiosyncrasies of his own life with the unpredictability of the words and actions of those around him. Much like Patrick Greybill, Rene Pellerin demonstrated for me how one's personality and charisma can be largely maintained, even in translation. His "voice" is extremely resonant, and I think his take on the Deaf experience was a very refreshing one.

I enjoyed Christine Kim's lecture a great deal, Probably because of the material she was presenting. It intrigued me that It was not only about sign and being deaf, but about her journey of sign and deafness expressed through art; first paintings and then through sound. I found that extremely intriguing. I absolutely loved her art, my favorite had to be the painting she drew of a man "talking out of his a**" and like I said in class, that type of feeling, I feel, applies to both hearing and non hearing. I love how she really expressed herself through her paintings, and the explanations behind her art were also thought provoking, to me at least. I wish I was artistic and creative and was able to channel my expressions, thoughts feelings, etc through visual art and just art in general. Her sound pieces were REALLY abstract, interesting but, to me, kind of out there, the last piece she showed about herself and her deaf friend at their show, where they were experimenting with both sound and dance was pretty out there for me, and I couldn't really grasp it too much, but Im sure it means a lot to her. Her experience with sound, or rather how she experiences sound brings about a curiosity in me, How does a deaf person "hear" sound, I first started questioning this when Janet Marcous came and she spoke about how she loves to dance and how she can hear, or rather feel the beat and thats how she experiences music.....what does it sound like? In one of our readings it spoke about how deaf students would make so much noise and figure out how sound worked by being "obnoxiously loud" or making sounds to see what happens, the stories of Deaf peoples embarrassing stories of eating to loud, or wondering what it sounded like when they go to the bathroom, "bathroom noises," laughing a certain way, farting in public, things like that, I never thought twice about how those sounds "work," hearing people don't think twice about it because well, we don't have to, but for a deaf person, they have to think about it, I never thought about that and it became obvious as I read it but, I just never thought about it like that. So I definitely loved Christine's lecture and how she experiences sound.

Rene's lecture was also entertaining, he told a lot of stories, funny stories, and what really caught my eye was the way he "spoke." The whole time I thought that I was in a performance, he was very animated, he signed slightly different from what I've seen thus far, almost like a performance signing. It was quite entertaining and I caught myself not being able to divert my attention if I wanted to. I wonder if he signs like that because he is deaf/blind or if thats just how he naturally signs. I will say that I was able to understand his signing more so than all the other guests, and its probably because he pretty much uses his whole body to sign, so if I don't catch the hand shape, something else that he does hints toward what hes trying to say, I found it really easy and more comfortable for me to decipher what he was saying which was great since I have no background on sign language. I wonder if anyone else got that same vibe...

This week we had the wonderful opportunity to hear from Christine Kim and Rene Pellerin. Christine is a young artist who works in a variety of mediums including sound, which makes her quite unique when you consider the fact that she is Deaf.

I enjoyed hearing Christine discuss her experiences growing up – something that has of course been a theme among our guests thus far. It is interesting to hear Christine's frustration with interpreters. Perhaps unlike some of our older guests, it sounds like Christine grew up with interpreters in school and as very much a part of her Deaf experience. It saddens me to hear how she feels that she was left out of many conversations. When I think about what I speak about on a daily basis, I would estimate that I would deem less than 1% is sufficiently "profound" to be worthy of putting forth the effort to write it down or have interpretation. Thus, after hearing from Christine, I cannot even imagine the frustration she must have felt when left out of 99% of all conversations. Most of the time we converse just for the sake of talking and for entertainment, and not necessarily to speak or proclaim deliberately, and being Deaf prevented her from accessing this sort of dialogue that is important to us even if we don't deem it "meaningful." Rene echoed Christine's frustration when he discussed his wish to be able to converse with everyone without interpretation, which would require everyone to sign ASL.

Given her hardships in conversing with peers, it made me happy to see that Christine is so passionate about expressing herself via her art. As someone who is not naturally inclined toward art, whether it's producing or appreciating it, (trust me, I've tried!) I won't spend this time giving my opinions on her work but I can say that I enjoyed hearing about her process. I am especially intrigued by her exploration of sound "on the level of her own understanding." It sort of blows my mind to try to fathom her experience with sound given that she has a modified neural representation given her lack of perceptual experience. Truly creating without any outside influence! It is strange to think about...

Switching gears, Rene Pellerin's stories were fantastic! He is a gifted storyteller and I loved seeing how much he enjoys what he does while simultaneously entertaining his audience. His stories seem to me to be a great way of increasing awareness about Deaf Culture because they can be enjoyable while simultaneously thought provoking.

Its been a great week and I look forward to meeting our next guests!