

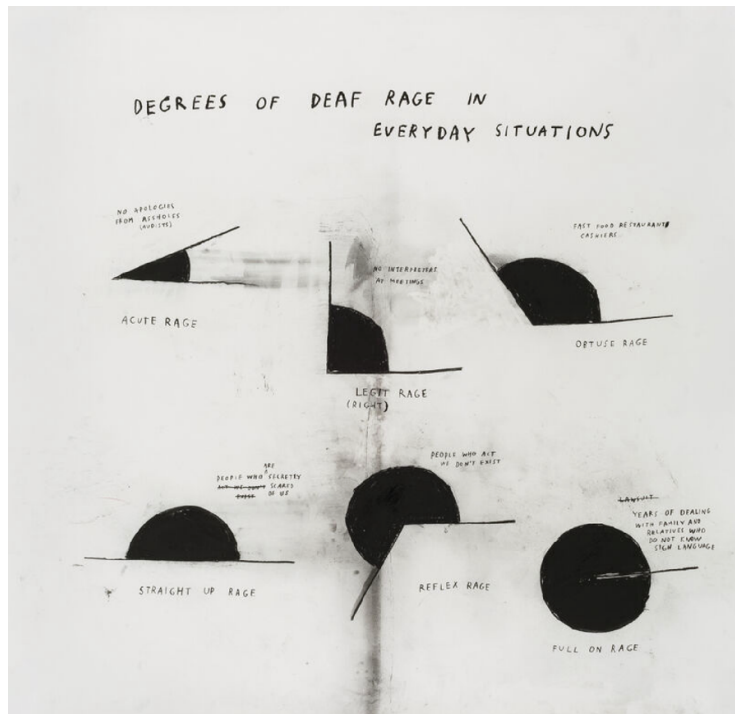
CULTURED

IN BRIEF THE CRITICS' TABLE ART

Feminist Nudes, Evil Flowers, and Musical Notation: Three Critics on What to See in New York this March

A.V. Marraccini writes on Christine Sun Kim's Whitney triumph, Wendy Vogel picks Sylvia Sleigh's male odalisques, and John Vincler loves a goth-antiquarian group show.

March 5, 2025



Christine Sun Kim, *Degrees of Deaf Rage in Everyday Situations*, 2018. Image courtesy of Y.D.C., François Ghebaly, and White Space.

Christine Sun Kim

Whitney Museum of American Art | 99 Gansevoort Street

On view through July 6, 2025

Christine Sun Kim's mid-career retrospective "All Day All Night" at the Whitney isn't one of those exhibitions that reactionaries can use to claim identity's role as some dour bogeyman in the art world. Thanks to Kim's witty, piercing, and sometimes laugh-out-loud funny pieces across video, ceramics, and drawing (which span the early 2010s to the present), such a reductionist reading would be impossible. For Kim, a native user of American Sign Language, Deaf identity is an open door, and musical notation is a universalizing motif. The works, installed throughout the museum and on the entire eighth floor, include black, blue, and red charcoal-and-pastel drawings—ranging in scale from roughly poster-size to A6 paper—that are like better, smarter David Shrigleys, or akin to Cy Twombly's work in their use of rhythmic mark-making. *How To Measure Quietness*, 2014, quantifies, in descending order, quiet things—"the silent treatment" is a *ppppppp* cold ultra-*pianissimo*. Ouch. A shrug? Only *pp*.

A remarkable aspect of Kim's oeuvre is how ASL, written English, musical notation, and gestural mark-making are fused into a coherent, unified language. The arcs in the exhibition's title works *All. Day* and *All. Night*, both 2012, trace the sweeping ASL signs for those durational phrases, in the first drawing, the number 126,144,000 floats above the symbol for a rest bar, denoting a silence of approximately 32 years (her age at the time). Kim forces us to consider both time and the absence of sound in terms of movement and musical rests.

Time is also invoked in terms of an eminently relatable, anxious futurity. *Future Base*, 2016, is another standout piece—a grid of 20 framed "futures." Some are amusing ("the Biles" is a series of appropriately gymnastic loops), while others are dark, looming, and jagged. A caffeinated future is *fff*, triple forte, leaping out of a smudged espresso cup. Similarly, in *Degrees of My Deaf Rage in the Art World*, 2018, the artist uses smudges, redactions, and corrected misspellings to inscribe a fury recognizable to anyone who has faced systemic injustice. Taken together, the works are the scream I didn't know I needed; they are also the self-reflexive chuckle, and the clever drawing back. Go now—it's a triumph. —A.V. Marraccini



Sylvia Sleigh, *Double Image: Paul Rosano*, 1974. Photography by Steven Probert. Image courtesy of the Estate of Sylvia Sleigh and Ortuzar.

Sylvia Sleigh

Ortuzar | 5 White Street

Through April 5, 2025

Sylvia Sleigh (1916–2010) called herself “in some ways, very traditional.” It was a droll remark from the Welsh-born artist who settled in New York in 1961, as she is known for her women’s lib-era paintings of male nudes. It’s true that she borrowed compositional strategies from earlier centuries, reworking historical paintings with groovy figures from her social circle. But she used art history—and tradition—to make space for feminist imagery that sexist detractors would deem too marginal or risqué. “Every Leaf is Precious” at Ortuzar, her first New York solo exhibition in 15 years, focuses less on her art-historical remakes than on her signature portraits, which are full of tan lines, fuzzy body hair, and backdrops of riotous pattern and color. Sleigh’s style melded Realism with sumptuous detail, elaborating the individuality of her sitters’ bodies and their environments.

Her lounging, sensitive men especially reflect the changing mores of her time. And, as much as they telegraph '70s feminism, they foreshadow 21st-century figurative practices that recast gender norms (think Louis Fratino's scenes of queer domesticity). Sleight's frequent model Paul Rosano—a slim, hirsute man with a crown of curls—is the primary embodiment of a new, post-sexual revolution masculinity. In paintings from the mid-to-late '70s, he appears luxuriating in the buff like an odalisque; sporting denim short-shorts in the artist's garden; and in a double nude portrait that shows his front and back, posed with his hand resting seductively on his upper thigh. This last work drew ire from a judge when exhibited at the Bronx County Courthouse in 1975. "I don't see why male genitals are more sacred than female," Sleight responded.

She didn't shy away from showing it all, but, occasionally, she winked at what could be hidden in plain sight. In the earliest canvas on view, *At the Café*, 1950, the exhibition's ostensibly most sexually innocuous vignette, Sleight depicts herself with her partner Lawrence Alloway, dressed in restaurant finery. The decorum depicted here is a ruse, however: She painted the scene in their love nest while they were in the midst of an affair. (The couple would marry in 1954.) Anticipating her bolder statements of the decades to come, the work—a sly portrait of her male paramour—shows her already turning the tables on an age-old artistic tradition. —*Wendy Vogel*



Chris Oh, *Bound*, 2025. Image courtesy of the artist and Silke Lindner.

“Fleurs du mal”

Silke Lindner | 350 Broadway

On view through March 15, 2025

Decadence, eroticism, death—in borrowing the title from Charles Baudelaire’s book of poems, translated into English as *The Flowers of Evil*, the current exhibition at Silke Lindner imports a seductive air of goth antiquarianism. The French symbolist poet’s book dates from 1857, but the references in the works on view extend back much further, especially in the stand-out works in this strong group show—a trio of conceptual paintings, all 2025, by the Portland, Oregon-born artist Chris Oh.

For *Bound*, Oh painted a near facsimile of the weeping face of the Virgin Mary from early Netherlandish painter Rogier van der Weyden's *Descent from the Cross*, c. 1435. Oh's image is recognizable from the antique altarpiece yet estranged from it: The saint's tear-drenched face, painted in acrylic on the faux-leather binding of a late 20th-century American edition of the show's titular book, is broken up by the cover's underlying gilt vegetal pattern. Across the room, in *Flood*, the iridescent inside of an abalone shell contains the likeness of another distraught Mary, this one copied from a late-medieval painting by Albrecht Bouts. Oh's third work, *Glory*, is the strangest and most transfixing. In it, a small sculptural assemblage, housed in a bell jar, features a brass flower-shaped candlestick, above which a rainbow locust, mounted atop a thin brass rod, hovers. Look closely. Painted on the insect's body you'll see another portrait of the Virgin—this one sourced from a work by Gerard David, c. 1509—and, in the candle-holder cup, the rod pierces a life-size painting of a human eye, as if in a nod to the infamous eye-cutting scene in Luis Buñuel's film, *Un Chien Andalou*, 1929.

Oh's extraordinary works almost steal the show, but his use of abalone is mirrored by Tommy Xie's oil painting, *Blood Pearl*, 2025, which shows an open oyster, its treasure sitting atop a fleshy mantle that appears to have a vascular system coursing with blood. The spooky *Ways of Seeing 015*, 2025, a pigment dye transfer-on-canvas diptych by Sang Woo Kim, depicts an open-winged bat beside a statuary head resting on its side, a juxtaposition too cool to be macabre. And I loved the deeply textured abstract paintings by Barbara Wesolowska, which use shellac and gold leaf to effect worn metallic patinas, as well as those by Morten Knudsen, with their waxen surfaces that at once suggest flowers and poxes. As Baudelaire wrote, "Melancholy is the illustrious companion of beauty; "In "Fleurs du mal," you will find a particular—and uncommon—beauty that sets itself apart from the typical gallery fare. —*John Vincler*