FRUIT MACHINE 2

TRY YOUR LUCK WITH XAVIER CHA

TEXT NATASHA STAGG

XAVIER CHA'S NEW WORK EXPLORES A PSYCHOLOGICAL RELATIONSHIP THE BODY HAS WITH RANDOMIZED TECHNOLOGIES, CONTINUING A THOUGHT SHE CHOREOGRAPHED LAST YEAR WITH A SLOT MACHINE-INSPIRED APP/PERFORMANCE IN PHILEDELPHIA. *FRUIT MACHINE 2* RAISES THE STAKES BY FOCUSING ON COMMUNICATIVE ACTIONS MADE BY BLIND AND DEAF PARTICIPANTS AND ASL INTERPRETERS

CLICK HERE AND MOVE FORWARD WITH THE SPACE BAR TO PREVIEW THE APP

What exactly does the *Fruit Machine* app do for the performance?
XAVIER CHA The app randomly selects the actors to fuel an elegant machine-like functionality in the performance. In *Fruit Machine 1*, performed at the ICA Philadelphia in 2012, the app was quite literally based on slot machines, which are called Fruit Machines in the UK.

How is *2* different from *1*?
XC The first *Fruit Machine* formalizes and empties narrative from otherwise hyperbolic theatrical expression. The app spins every minute to randomly determine which of four pre-set roles each actor would play. The actors had to instantaneously switch from extremes of expression within seconds of each spin of the Fruit Machine. The chance element negates the over-the-top theatricality of the performances and abstracts the gestures into randomly set roles. The frequent and regular spins of the app create a psychotic scene within the parameters of a very logical and orderly structure. Acting is isolated as a formal element, rather than used to manufacture a specific narrative or emotional response.

In the new performance, *Fruit Machine 2*, the app looks less like a slot machine, and more like a video game-like lotto system. There are now five fruits: Lime represents the blind jazz singer Frank Senior, berry, actress Hari Nef, banana, blind actress and writer M Leona Godin, cherries and peaches represent a deaf actor and ASL interpreter pair—J.W. Guido, artistic director of New York Deaf Theatre, paired with actor and ASL interpreter Jon Wolfe Nelson, and deaf actress Alexandria Wailes, paired with performance artist and ASL interpreter Felice Shays. In *FM 2*, one of two alternating emcees or hosts, KING DAVID and ASL actor Douglas Ridloff begin each round of this abstracted game show by dramatically delivering a very descriptive text in either spoken English or ASL. The app randomly selects an actor to receive the text and then transmit it to the next "contestant" until it has traveled through seven very different sensory registers. The focus is on exploding language through layered perspectives and vast subjectivities, a mechanized synesthesia.

How did you come up with these?
XC I knew I wanted an immediate and logical way to randomize the performance of extreme roles by actors. The slot machine made the most sense for the first *Fruit Machine*. For *Fruit Machine 2*, I wanted it to be a like a major software upgrade, a more complex operating system. Samuel Cormier did an incredible job with the programming, graphics and animations, Aaron David Ross [Gatekeeper] designed the sound element, and Eckhaus Latta designed the costumes.

What makes The New Museum the best place for this new piece?
XC Lauren Cornell has been incredible through out the process of commissioning this new work. In October, she hosted the online element of *Disembodied Selfie*, a performance for the Lyon Biennale, as part of the New Museum's *First Look: New Art Online* program. My performances are generally non-linear, anti-narrative pieces you can often enter or leave fluidly without missing too much content. This is the first time I've created a performance for more of a traditional theater setting, so I'm curious to see how it feels for the work to have a committed audience from beginning to end (I hope!).

Fruit Machine 2 will be at the New Museum, NYC at 7pm on Friday, December 20th (tickets available here) and at 3pm on Saturday, December 21st (tickets available here)

Read an earlier interview with Xavier Cha here

EXTRA CREDITS

GRAPHIC BY SAMUEL CORMIER COURTESY OF THE ARTIST