

## Imaginations

I first became aware of JooYoung's work when she contacted me, explaining [that] the art school encouraged her to choose any artists she'd like to spend a few months studying under. While I was flattered, I explained [I didn't] feel I had much to offer any artists, being [that I am] self-taught, and a pretty reclusive person by nature. She graciously understood, yet over time, we stayed in touch by email, and she kept sending me examples of her latest work, and I was often in awe, impressed [with how] her work has exploded and wonderfully morphed over the years.

I feel her paintings connected us to her 'Cosmic Womb' universe, a magical place that reminds me of a cross between *Pee-wee's Playhouse* and [the] Funkadelic soundtrack. A quirky blend of traditional paintings, comics, animation, installations, clay, sculpture, you name it. Her attention to every genre of creation seems all funneled through the lens of adolescence and self discovery. Is it any wonder she happened across some issues of old *Maxx* comics when she [was] younger? She is always looking to combine rhythmic space and vivid colors in ways that never fail to impress me.

And while I still feel academically unqualified to teach anyone artistically, it slowly dawned on me that what JooYoung had sought from my work when she first wrote to me, she has already organically achieved, independent of me. Because of HER. Her talents. Her vision. Somehow she's forged her own path, already absorbed all she needed from her own inner story. Her fascination with the childlike womb of imagination has become a language in and unto itself.

-Sam Kieth, author of *The Maxx* comic series



Together Again, 2019, acrylic paint and paper layered on canvas, 60 x 48 in. image courtesy of the artist, photo credit Tom DuBrock

## JOOYOUNG CHOI biography

Born in 1982 in Seoul, South Korea, adopted in 1983 in Concord, New Hampshire, reunited with birth family in 2007 in Ansan, South Korea  
Resides in Houston, Texas

### SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- 2019 *Big Time Dreaming in the Age of Uncertainty*, Art Museum of Southeast Texas, Beaumont, TX
- 2018 *Perennial Favorites, Big Time Believer and the Garden of Courage and Love*, Harvester Arts, Wichita, KS
- 2017 *Somnioplexic Resonance*, solo installation in conjunction with *A Better Yesterday*, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, Houston, TX
- 2016 *Paracosmic Alchemy*, Anya Tish Gallery, Houston, TX  
*Have Faith for You Have Always Been Loved*, solo installation in conjunction with *Round 45: Local Impact*, Project Row Houses, Houston, TX
- 2015 *A Strange Paradise*, Front Gallery, Houston, TX  
*C.S. Watson and the Cosmic Womb*, Brazos Gallery, Richland College, Dallas, TX  
*(Choi Show)*, International Korean Adoptee Art and Film Festival, Seoul, South Korea
- 2011 *Speaking the Unspoken, East Meets West*, Cambridge, MA
- 2010 *Parker Hill Library Exhibition*, Roxbury, MA
- 2009 *For Ae Ran Won, Ko-Root*, Seoul, South Korea
- 2008 *Vive L'Amour*, Jamaica Plain, MA  
*Artadoptee*, Somerville Library, Somerville, MA

### GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2018 *A Time Before We Were Born: Visions of Arcadia in Contemporary Painting*, Sylvia Wald & Po Kim Art Gallery, New York, NY  
*From Pangs to Pangolins*, Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles, CA
- 2017 *Picture Show of the Mind: A Tribute to the Teachings of Lee Baxter Davis*, Meadows Museum of Art, Shreveport, LA
- 2016 *Reverberations*, Stella Elkins Gallery, Tyler University, Philadelphia, PA  
*Double Digits*, Lawndale's Artist Studio Program, Lawndale Art Center, Houston, TX
- 2015 *ABCD*, Lawndale Artist Studio Program Exhibition, Lawndale Art Center, Houston, TX  
*The House on Mango Street*, National Museum of Mexican Art, Chicago, IL  
*Parliament of Owls*, DiverseWorks, Houston, TX
- 2014 *Eco Myths*, LAST Project Space, West Hollywood, CA  
*Urban Art: Expressions of an Environment*, FCA Council Gallery, Fayetteville, NC  
*Raw Paw: Keeping Dreamtime*, Museum of Human Achievement, Austin, TX  
*The Big Show*, Lawndale Art Center, Houston, TX
- 2013 *Third Coast National*, K Space Contemporary, Corpus Christi, TX  
*The Big Show*, Lawndale Art Center, Houston, TX
- 2012 *AIB MFA in Visual Arts Graduate Exhibition*, Boston, MA
- 2011 *BORN INTO IDENTITY: The Asian Pacific American Adoptees Experience*, Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience, Seattle, WA  
*TJX Asian/Pacific Islander American Heritage Month*, TJX Head Quarters, Framingham, MA

- 2010 *TJX Asian/Pacific Islander American Heritage Month*, Framingham, MA
- 2008 *Calvin Burnett Exhibit*, Massachusetts College of Art and Design, Boston, MA
- 2006 *Speaking Truth to Power*, Edna Stebbins Art Gallery, Cambridge, MA  
*International Women's Day Celebration*, La Rivolta at CCB, Boston, MA
- 2004 Bunker Hill Community College, Boston, MA

### SELECTED AWARDS & GRANTS

- 2019 National Endowment for the Arts, Challenge America Grant Recipient  
The Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs and Houston Art Alliance Support for Artist and Creative Individuals Grant, Houston, TX  
The Idea Fund Stimulus Grant, endowed by the Andy Warhol Foundation, Houston, TX
- 2015 Artadia Award, Artadia Fund for Art and Dialogue, New York City, NY  
The Idea Fund Grant, endowed by the Andy Warhol Foundation, Houston, TX
- 2009 UUFPP Stanfield Artist Award, Boston, MA
- 2008 UUFPP Stanfield Artist Award, Boston, MA
- 2007 UUFPP Stanfield Artist Award, Boston, MA  
Inter-Adoptee Scholarship  
Somerville Arts Council LCC Cultural Heritage Grant, Somerville, MA

### PUBLICATIONS

- 2017 *A Better Yesterday*. "The Value of Imaginary Friends: Lessons from JooYoung Choi", edited by Betsy Stepina Zinn
- 2016 *New American Paintings*, West Edition, No. 126
- 2015 *Exu*, Volume 1, Published by Robert Boyd
- 2014 *The Adoption Constellation*. "Fearing the Adult Adoptee", by Jae Ran Kim (Art Work Featured)
- 2013 *Gardening Secrets of the Dead* by Lee Herrick (Cover)
- 2012 *Kartika Review* Fall Issue (Cover)
- 2010 *Outsiders Within*, Korean Translation (Cover)
- 2010 *Waxen Wings*. (Cover)
- 2009 *Asian American Poetry and Writing - "New Truths"* (Cover)



Journey Vision 5000 Part I & II - Sweet Cretaceous Edition BR, 2018, Flat screen, plywood, digital video art files, acrylic paint, 24 x 24 x 7 in. Collection of Orly Adelson and Rick Rosen, photo credit Tom DuBrock

Cover: *Tourmaline the Celestial Architect*, 2018, acrylic paint and paper layered on canvas, 60 x 48 in. image courtesy of the artist, photo credit Tom DuBrock

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To find out more about how National Endowment for the Arts grants impact individuals and communities, visit [www.arts.gov](http://www.arts.gov).



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# JOOYOUNG CHOI

Big Time Dreaming in the Age of Uncertainty

March 16 - June 2, 2019

As an astro-futurist, multidisciplinary artist who works with paracosms, the foundation of my art-making process is a highly structured imaginary realm called the Cosmic Womb. Through this magical world, I use the genre of sci-fi/fantasy to explore the conditions and characteristics of the Other, and critique the act of Othering. Using a variety of media such as video art, painting, puppetry, music, soft sculpture, and installation, I create art that reflects the Cosmic Womb myths and ideas behind it.

The name Cosmic Womb was inspired by a book titled "The Primal Wound." In it, author Nancy Verrier discusses how the separation of the adopted child from her birth mother is a form of trauma. As a Korean adoptee who grew up in a family where it wasn't safe to openly use words like trauma, loss or grief when referring to my adoption, I found Verrier's ideas to be a relief. It was a relief to know that the pain, loss, and sadness I felt was not a bad thing, and moreover didn't make me a bad person. Over time I realized that if I was to acknowledge that I had a primal wound, I would also require a cosmic womb, a place of healing, where I could express my feelings freely, and provide my younger self the childhood she always dreamed of experiencing.



*Like a Bolt Out of the Blue, Faith Steps In and Sees You Through (installation view), 2019, wooden armature, fabric and hardware, paint, vinyl dots, dimensions variable image courtesy of the artist, photo credit Tom DuBrock*

they were able to revive the magical bed and create for her a pair of shoes that can travel on a superhighway of dreams. Together they rescue and reunite displaced children and their parents.

With the help of Queen Kiok, benevolent ruler of the Cosmic Womb, myself, Earth artist JooYoung Choi, and a team of incredible volunteers including Shelby O'Dell and Alyssa Shotwell, we were able to redesign my installation here at the Art Museum of Southeast Texas into a reunion center complete with a teleportation portal that has allowed Pom Pom Thunder to make nightly trips via the superhighway of dreams and rescue and reunite more families. Already, Pom Pom Thunder has transported families such as Emma Poundcake Girl and her father Poundcake Man, Amplexus and Spacia and their adopted son Momo the scaleless Pangolin, Lewis and Martin the Snow Brothers, and many others to AMSET.

From what I hear they are enjoying Beaumont. Finally free from Lady Madness's reign of terror and trauma, they are beginning the process of reconnecting with their loved ones and finally getting a chance to do some Big Time Dreaming together as a family.



*Like a Bolt Out of the Blue, Faith Steps In and Sees You Through (detail) image courtesy of the artist, photo credit Tom DuBrock*

*About Big Time Dreaming in the Age of Uncertainty*

When I began designing this show, I challenged myself with the task of using visual art to reflect the joy, relief and unconditional love I experienced when reuniting with my birth father. It was as if I began at the finish line, for I could already see the happy finale of this chapter in the Cosmic Womb saga. I envisioned a massive celebration featuring imaginary friends old and new, dancing and cheering for the almost impossible reunion of a long lost daughter and a determined single dad.

Just as one would plan a road trip, I knew my destination from the start. Over the course of two years, I developed a narrative about a terrible dictatress named Lady Madness. She is a horrible person. Her skin is green with

envy, she smokes 3 packs of Virginia Slims 100s a day, eats pandas, throws beloved school teachers in black holes for fun, and she drinks "box whine" made from the sweat and tears of innocent Snowpeople.

The narrative focuses on Lady Madness's terrible War for Power that results in the attempted enslavement of an entire race of beings called Black Stars, whom Madness uses as human batteries to power her castle and box whine factory. The War for Power causes the fracturing of Black Star families and the families of their allies; it also begins a wave of child trafficking on an intergalactic scale.



*Like a Bolt Out of the Blue, Faith Steps In and Sees You Through (detail) image courtesy of the artist, photo credit Tom DuBrock*



*Like a Bolt Out of the Blue, Faith Steps In and Sees You Through (detail) image courtesy of the artist, photo credit Tom DuBrock*

From this narrative, a new character began to form, a new type of hero I hadn't yet seen. For months I worked with an incredible team of volunteers to create a Black Star named Resilient Heart; she's a single mom from outer space who wants nothing more than to be with her two missing daughters. She has sacrificed everything and would gladly travel across the universe and back again if it allowed her even a moment with her girls.

Her two children, Everlasting Spirit and Brilliant Mind, had been kidnapped by Lady Madness' Legion of Horribleness. They were sold to NEVAHALT, a corporation that exchanges children for cash and favors. Before being bought, the two children were stored in a holding tank, where they found the remains of a magical sentient bed named Pom Pom Thunder. Using Everlasting Spirit's healing powers and Brilliant Mind's engineering skills,

Although this story and the world I have built are imaginary, the feelings I share through it are real. Big Time Dreaming isn't just for children or artists, it is a gift we are all born with. The power to use our imagination to heal, and resolve the primal wounds and unspoken traumas of our pasts, is open to us all. It is a way of thinking and doing that invites gratitude and reflection. It is a process that recognizes the power of creative expression and steadies the heart during times of great uncertainty. The quest to find wholeness in one's life is a journey of big time dreaming.



*Like a Bolt Out of the Blue, Faith Steps In and Sees You Through (detail) image courtesy of the artist, photo credit Tom DuBrock*

Gratitude to all the big time dreamers, thank you to: Mariah, Lynn, Caitlin, George, and the team at AMSET, Sarah Beth Wilson, the donors, the NEA, the volunteers from Houston, Beaumont, and Wichita, Sam Kieth, my birth family, the Twitty family, my supportive American family members, George Morton, Karol Howard, and my loving husband, Trenton Doyle Hancock. Without all your love, support and help this project wouldn't have been possible.

-JooYoung Choi, March 2019