

A working sculptor

my news and studio journal

Through Dangers Untold

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JooYoung Choi: *Adventures of the Quantum Soup Surfer* at [Mead Art Museum](#), Amherst College, through July 5

Happening upon JooYoung Choi's universe on a gray, drizzling day was a welcome entrance to a world where joy, transformation, self-knowledge, and pie are all very important. In Choi's new installation at the Mead Art Museum, we learn that an all-powerful entity, the Quantum Soup Surfer, is continually in the process of rehabilitating the universe, one instance of love at a time. Choi creates a cast of characters, both recognizably human and cartoonishly surreal, who protect and inhabit a virtual landscape called the Cosmic Womb, the Nexus of Love. Her media are wide-ranging: soft sculpture and embroidery, collage, painting, drawing, animation, and music.



As befits any epic journey, Choi's resplendent installation includes a workstation—a "Buddy Station"—where visitors can choose a stuffie Companion with whom to tour the exhibit. Born in 1982 in South Korea, Choi was adopted as an infant into a New England family and now lives in Texas. She employs her original name, JeeYung, as a split-off protagonist who finally becomes reunited with her present self through the interventions of many humorous, serious, and psychologically powerful imaginary characters. The artist's intergalactic and complex narrative is outlined in a booklet available at the Buddy Station table, which is fortunate, since Choi's dynamic inner-and-outer space spectacle needs interpretation, and the colorful English-Korean book is entertaining all by itself.

Choi's full-length animation *Spectra Force Vive* is a mashup of dancing, pies, puppets, silliness, and yes—I'll use the "E" word—Empowerment. Choi cites both Fred Rogers and Tupac Shakur as influences; songs (composed by the artist herself, who studied at both Berkeley College of Music and Mass. College of Art) abound. In an MTV-esque format, puppets dance with costumed humans to evolve an interpolated existence of imaginary and pointedly real worlds—a kind of cosmic Sesame Street which can only exist onscreen. (Choi also credits Jim Henson as an influence.) *Have Faith for You Have Always Been Loved, Narraplexic Arrangement No. 2* shows the moment, a numinous Annunciation, when the protagonist receives her professional imaginary friend, an entity named Nina Blue. Myriad other helpers arrive to assist, and eventually Blue herself morphs into the superhero known as the Quantum Soup Surfer (or Quantum Soup) in the painting *She Was A Blue Bird Dreaming of a Rainbow She Could Follow*.

A large tableaux of stuffies, life size, and over-life-size soft sculptures, is titled *Resilient Heart and the Tree of Miracles; Children Need Love Like Flowers Need Rain*, featuring Quantum Soup's encounter with an interstellar scientist named Resilient Heart. The installation's colorful, felted and sewn animals and humanoids are comforting, both toylike and towering, as a parent is always bigger in the eyes of a child. "Through Dangers Untold and Hardships Unnumbered, I Have Fought My Way Here to Reclaim the Truth You Have Stolen / I Am Jeeyung, I Am the Child Whose Will Endures Forever / You Have No Power Over Me" are phrases imprinted on the large canvas, *A Vision of Technicolor Justice*. *A Vision of Technicolor Justice* portrays the moment when Soup regains her birth name, JeeYung, and defeats the green monster responsible for stealing it.

The overarching message? *Have Faith, For You Have Always Been Loved*.



