



## JooYoung Choi

Inman Gallery, Houston, Texas

Review by Donna Tennant



JooYoung Choi's paintings with cut paper (and one soft sculpture) show an affinity for comic books, toys, fairytales, and galactic superheroes. Dense imagery and explosive color make for an exceptionally loaded show with a huge array of characters.

### **Continuing through September 1, 2023**

JooYoung Choi is a builder of worlds. Her recent work conveys dynamic narratives from inside her fictional universe and the Cosmic Womb, a world she has created. It is a small planet replete with the benevolent Queen Kiok, a supporting council called Tuplets, and myriad creatures both good and villainous. A quasi-autobiographical earthling named C.S. Watson plays a recurring role in this elaborate mix. Born in South Korea, Choi emigrated to

Concord, New Hampshire by way of adoption. She draws extensively on her life experiences for this body of work, thus investing it with emotional themes.

The exhibition includes generously sized wall pieces, smaller machine-like constructions, and a sculptural installation of large soft creatures in confrontation with a heroine figure. Choi's affinity with the spirit and sensibility of comic books, toys, galactic superheroes, and fairy-tale traditions are evident throughout. Painting on canvas augmented with copious cut-paper images and shapes, she produces explosively colorful, complex storylines. Other elements and materials are applied in some works, but paint and paper are constant and dominant.

In "Tourmaline the Celestial Architect," the central character, a female figure rendered in black with white dots on the back of a turtle-like creature, floats above a crowded, chaotic, Bosch-like hellscape. Creatures devour one another in a mélange of gray despair. By contrast, a row of upraised hands seems to raise Tourmaline toward a much more benign galaxy populated with alluring planets. The central theme of overcoming tenacious obstacles is presented head-on in the title piece, "Discovering Truth Will Make Me Free: The Liberation of Poundcake Man." The figures seem to be breaking out of the canvas in a frenzy — color explodes in all directions. Text at top and bottom references a path to liberation. In "Resilient Heart," the newest and perhaps most elegant piece, a black female figure with multiple arms stands in front of a large orb of flowers created from intricate paper cutouts. The black background, as in other paintings, suggests an imagined cosmos.

Dominating an adjacent gallery is "Freedom from Madness," a large installation of soft sculptural creatures. The same spotted female figure from the paintings is prevailing over several toothy monsters. Hanging nearby is "So This is What Makes Life Divine," perhaps Choi's most direct reference to comic books. The layout is structured like a comic-book cover, bursting with colorful images, headlines, and text teasers.

Choi's toolbox is loaded. With nearly 200 characters in the Cosmic Womb alone, she has an ample array of actors with which to develop her sagas. The motto of the Cosmic Womb is "Have faith, for you have always been loved." Inspired by television's Mr. Rogers and the richness of her own imagination, Choi's art remains faithful to her canon of themes: love, loss, healing, redemption, joy, self-esteem, and hope.

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