

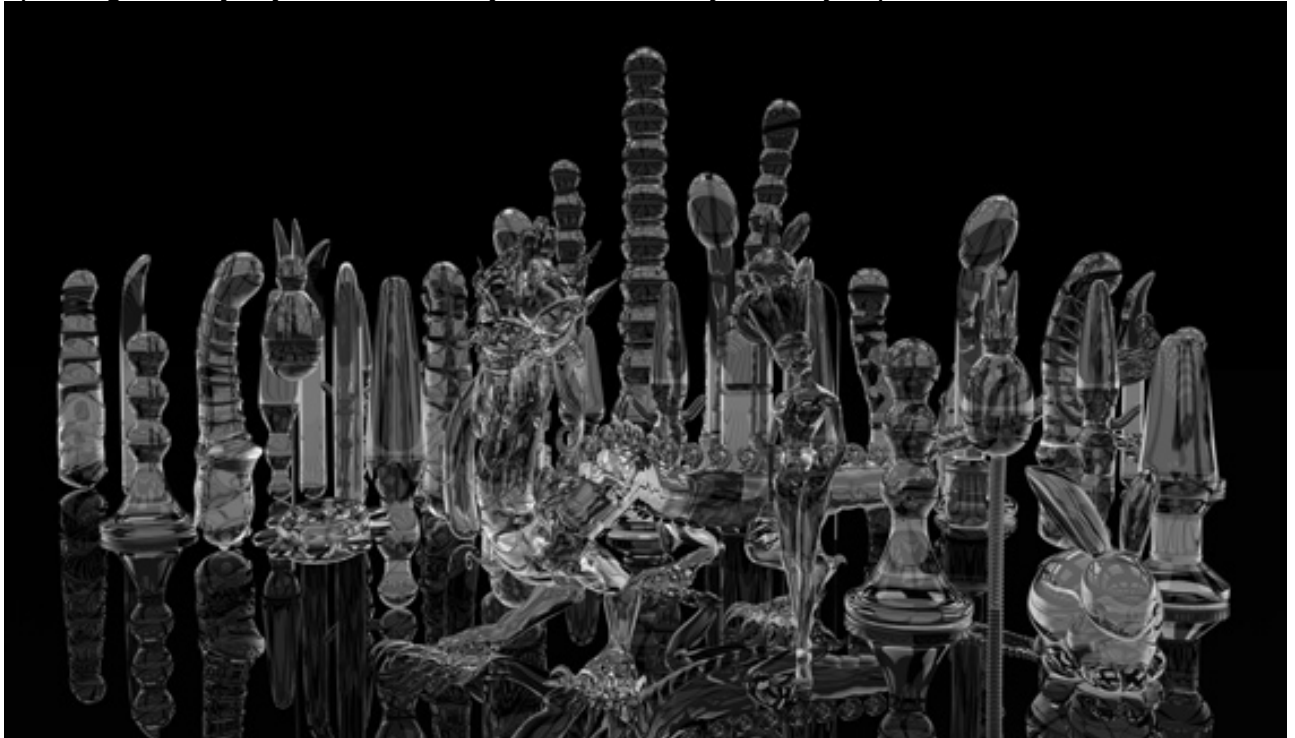
Hye Rim Lee

Crystal City, Spun 2007

3D animation projection installation with surround sound

3D animation, 3 mins 15 sec

Crystal City is a 3D animation series involving a character named TOKI and her mythical creature Dragon YONG. The pair journeys through different imaginative cities, beginning inside TOKI's fantasy and dream where Dragon YONG makes his debut. This sensational atmosphere is depicted as a cityscape of giant, spinning fantasy toys created in my first series, *Crystal City, Spun*.



Hye Rim Lee: video still, *Crystal City, Spun* (2007)

The dream journey of TOKI and Dragon YONG will continue to evolve through research into contemporary popular culture, comics and animation, computer games and cyber culture.

My project deals with the issues of creating a new mythology related to contemporary popular culture, especially cyber culture and video gaming. All the props and cityscapes reference fantasy/fetish toys. These spin and whirl, gradually speeding up and changing colours. Dragon YONG appears in sleep then awake in a sensational atmosphere created in cityscape of spinning giant dildo towers.

TOKI is a highly stylised and curvaceous warrior-vixen who draws upon the Japanese tradition of Manga, Korean animamix and Western ideals of sexuality

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and beauty. She exists in a fantasyland ripe with testosterone-driven energy. Dragon YONG will wander with TOKI, the cyber girl, in a never-ending, ever-moving wonderland—a cityscape made of adult fantasy toys that is both futuristic and fantastic.

Dragon YONG is a kind of beast that inhabits Korean mythology and is a symbol of Asian identity and culture. Dragon YONG “inherits” TOKI’s eyes, referencing a traditional feature of the Korean Dragon as it becomes a vehicle for TOKI’s fantasy exploration and a recipient of her desires and dreams. In this manner, the artist is transferring TOKI’s role to Dragon YONG for the purpose of engendering a new era of mythmaking.

Crystal City is a fantasyland where dream and reality mix. Just like *Alice in Wonderland*, it is humorous, fun and playful. Crystal City evokes nostalgia for childhood, but its mix of reality and toy-world-like fantasy also suggests, or reveals, the darker side of fantasy, the worlds of obsession and addiction.

Although my work is rooted in the challenges facing the Asian diaspora community that has settled in New Zealand, the work speaks to the manipulation and perception of female sexual identity worldwide. Furthermore, I challenge the conventions of the traditionally male-dominated worlds of game structure and 3D animation, specifically with regard to virtualised images of women. *Dragon Myth* is a project in which cyber culture and contemporary mythmaking intersect.

The Dragon in Eastern and Western Mythology

For centuries, the dragon has been a symbol of power and mystery. Depicted in countless legends, both Eastern and Western, the dragon has provoked man to fear and worship it. In medieval Europe, it was a bloodthirsty, fire-breathing figure. Its malevolence and ferociousness struck terror in all.

However, in Asia it is the contrary. The mighty dragon is a mythical beast long celebrated for its benevolence, intelligence and good will. The dragon has been a common symbol of identity for East Asian cultures. Koreans, in particular, have lived for centuries with their own distinct set of beliefs, but they are also bound by this common Asian symbol. In Korea, dragons are called *yong*, and there are three main types:

Yong is the most powerful and protects the sky.

Yo is hornless and lives in the ocean.

Kyo dwells in the mountains on earth.

The Korean dragon has the head of a camel, horns of a deer, eyes of a rabbit, ears of an ox, neck of a snake, belly of a frog, scales of a carp, claws of a hawk and the feet of a tiger.

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Like the Chinese, Koreans also believe that the Asian dragon originated in their homeland, where it was born with 81 scales lining its back and 4 claws on each foot. According to legend, a *yong* travelling to the West or South would grow an extra claw—thus, Chinese dragons have five claws. As it travels to the East or North, it loses a claw, thus dragons from Japan would have three claws.

Regardless of the region of origin, Asian dragons are usually depicted in the colours blue, black, white, red or the ever-popular yellow. Often, they are shown bearing a pearl in their mouth, under their chin or in their claws. This pearl symbolises the power that enables the dragon to ascend to heaven. A beloved figure, dragons are not only a symbol of identity but also the essence of Asia.

Hye Rim Lee

Hye Rim Lee is a New York and Auckland based Korean artist. Lee has been working in a field that is of central importance to the future development of moving images. Exploring game structures and working with a new technology of 3D animation are her ongoing interest and passion in her art practice. Her work questions new technology's role in image making and representation. Her work is consistent with recent international developments in contemporary art, re-looking at aspects of popular culture in relation to notions of femininity and with many artists in general looking at the way fictional animated identities are propagated within contemporary culture. Her work has developed and grown with critical exploration and conceptually evolving through representation of TOKI character in her ongoing *TOKI/Cyborg Project* since 2002. Her work is ambitious, expansive and conceptually and technically honed: each new project surpassing the previous genesis of TOKI. Lee has positioned her work at the interface between West and Asia by exploring the areas of computer gaming, cyber culture, contemporary myth and animamix. In so doing she has demonstrated the progressive role an art form can play in the engagement with high technology and popular culture. . Lee has been gaining considerable attention for works in the series of *TOKI/Cyborg Project* and has been included in major exhibitions in New Zealand and also in Asia, Europe and New York.