



MOSTRA INTERNAZIONALE
D'ARTE CINEMATOGRAFICA
LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA 2023
Venice Immersive

COMFORTLESS

A VR FILM BY GINA KIM



“Your silence is a mirror”

LOGLINE

Shot on location, COMFORTLESS is a 360 3D cinematic immersive experience of “American Town,” a brothel established for the U.S. Air Force Base in South Korea, during its heyday in the 1980s.

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INTERNATIONAL CULTURE VILLE

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AMERICAN TOWN OSCAR

아메리칸타운
American Town
환영합니다

PROJECT INFORMATION

CAST & CREDIT

A VR FILM BY GINA KIM

CYAN FILMS PRODUCTION

STARRING BORYEONG KIM

PRODUCED BY GINA KIM

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY GINA KIM

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER ZOE SUA CHO

ASSOCIATE PRODUCER MOA SON

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY JI-HYUN KIM

CO-PRODUCER EUNSUK JO, SEUNGHYEUN LIM, HANJAE KIM

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR HYEONSEUNG KIM

SCRIPT SUPERVISOR MOA SON

EDITOR GINA KIM MOA SON

PRODUCTION DESIGNER JONGJIN KIM

ART ASSISTANTS HOONJONG SONG, MIJEONG LEE

HAIR & MAKEUP DO EUL LEE, HYEONMIN PARK

COSTUME YOUNG A LEE

PRODUCTION ASSISTANTS DAEWON LEE, YOUNG-IN CHO, HANSOL SEO

VR CINEMATOGRAPHER ALEX LEE

VR CAMERA ASSISTANT SANG HWA LEE, WOOSEOK CHEON, HYEONGDEOK JEON

GAFFER SOO YEOL IM

GRIPS CHEL-HWAN KIM

LOCATION SOUND SOL KIM

VFX SUPERVISOR JAE CHAN KA

CGI SUPERVISOR DONG HWAN LEE

SOUND DESIGN MARCO D'AMBROSIO

LEAD COMPOSITE ARTIST GIHYEON KIM

PUBLICITY SUE KIM DA YE KIM

MARKETING CREATIVE SUE

GENRE

EXPERIMENTAL, DOCUMENTARY, HISTORICAL, DRAMA

TECH SPECS

3D 360 VIRTUAL REALITY CINEMA, 16MIN, COLOR, 2023

SPONSORS

KOREAN CREATIVE CONTENT AGENCY, JEONJU INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL, UCLA FACULTY RESEARCH GRANT, UCLA CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF WOMEN



SYNOPSIS

In 1969, a brothel was established exclusively for the U.S. military near the U.S. Air Force Base in Kunsan, South Korea. About 500 residential units were built and "American Town" corporation was established with approval and support from the Korean government. The women recruited from all over the country were called "US military comfort women" by the authorities. American Town grew to be a small self-sustaining city that provided US soldiers with whatever convenience they desired: currency exchange, culinary pleasures, and sex. One thousand American soldiers visited every night.

Shot on the actual site, COMFORTLESS is a 360-3D cinematic immersive experience of American Town during its heyday in the 1980s. The VR film starts in the present time, where the town is empty and silent. When the night falls, however, various sounds from the past begin to fill the space. Viewers traverse this uncanny deserted town, guided by a ghost and the ambient sounds and voices from its past. COMFORTLESS offers an immersive experience of the daily routine of American Town, creating an essential archive of the past.



ABOUT “AMERICAN TOWN”

Following the Korean War, an average of 25,000 US soldiers per year resided in the US military bases in South Korea, occupying as much as one fifth of the nation's habitable land. Concurrently, the Korean and US governments worked together to establish 96 “camp towns” equipped with brothels and clubs around the US bases, which have involved half million women thus far. The dollars these camptown women made was a significant source of national income in post-war Korea. COMFORTLESS is a VR documentary about one of such camptowns in Korea.

American Town is 5 minutes away by car from the Kunsan Air Force Base. Evident from the name, American Town was built specifically for US Soldiers. It was a project led by one of the members of the group that staged a military coup who eventually became the Director of the Korean CIA. He purchased 8.5 acres of land near Kunsan and established “American Town, Inc.” The women recruited from all over the country were called “US military comfort women” by the authorities. American Town grew to be a small self-sustaining city that provided US soldiers with whatever convenience they desired: currency exchange, culinary pleasures, and sex. The town also operated shuttle services to and from the military bases. As soon as soldiers newly arrived in Kunsan Air Force Base, they were exposed to information about the camptowns and prostitution. Up to 1,000 US soldiers would visit in a single night.

COMFORTLESS is the last part of Gina Kim's virtual reality trilogy on US military comfort women in South Korea following BLOODLESS and TEARLESS. Shot

on actual location, BLOODLESS is a VR experimental documentary that traces the last living moments of a real-life sex worker who was brutally murdered by a US soldier at the Dongducheon camptown in South Korea in 1992. TEARLESS, the second part of the trilogy is about a detainment center called “Monkey House”—a medical prison established by the South Korean government and staffed by the US military in the 1970s to isolate and treat camp town women with STDs.

The US military comfort women physically embody the ruins and contradictions of the 20th century, as well as the violence against women and oppression of foreign individuals, and they have yet to receive recognition and reparations. COMFORTLESS aims to bring forward the voices and experiences of these women while they are still alive. In their honor, COMFORTLESS immerses the viewers in the daily routine of American Town, creating an essential archive of the past.

*NOTE 1: While the term “comfort women” has been associated with the Japanese imperial army's use of sexual slavery during World War II, the South Korean government has used the term since 1951 to refer to “women who provide comfort service” to the U.S. military. The term is also used by the Korean Supreme Court in its 2022 ruling on the state compensation lawsuit for the Camptown U.S. military Comfort Women.

*NOTE 2: The official name of the corporation is “American Town, Inc” and, accordingly, the official name of the town is also “American Town.” However, it is also commonly referred to as “A-town” or “America Town” by residents and visitors.



WELCOME TO AMERICA TOWN OSCAR

아메리칸타운
American Town
미국 문화 체험 공간

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

During pre-production for COMFORTLESS, American Town was designated a redevelopment area. The town was barricaded, and the brothels were the first to be demolished. Our project became a race against time to archive this history. Ironically, on the day we wrapped production, the South Korean Supreme Court announced its final verdict on a lawsuit filed by the

women from the US military camp towns. The judgment acknowledged the government's responsibility and awarded compensation, pointedly using the term "US military comfort women." After five decades, these women's voices were finally heard. In their honour, this VR aims to bring forward the voices and experiences of these women while they are still alive.



DIRECTOR'S BIO

Los Angeles-based Gina Kim is one of the few South Korean filmmakers to produce works in Hollywood and her home country. Her award-winning films reimagine cinematic storytelling across different genres and platforms, developing a unique transnational perspective centered on female protagonists. Her five feature-length films and works of video art have screened at more than 200 prestigious international film festivals and venues including Cannes, Berlin, Venice and Sundance, as well as such arts venues as the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C., and the Centre Pompidou in Paris.

Her work has been theatrically released to critical acclaim in Europe, Asia and the United States. According to *Variety*, "Kim's highly sensitive camera turns the film into a chamber-piece hushed eroticism and surprising narrative grip." *Le Figaro* said, "Kim is a fearless feminist who conceals an extreme sensitivity." In 2018, *The Hollywood Reporter* selected Kim as one of "5 South Korean Talents to Watch" noting Kim's pioneering efforts in Asian cinema.

Invisible Light (2003), hailed by the *Los Angeles Times* as a "deeply introspective and accomplished art film," was selected by *Film Comment* as one of the 10 best films of 2003.

Never Forever (2007), starring Jung-woo Ha and Vera Farmiga, was the

first co-production between the United States and South Korea. Kim was subsequently nominated in the Best New Director category at the Motion Picture Association of Korea's Daejong Film Awards (the Korean equivalent of the Academy Awards) and was awarded the Jury prize at the 2007 Deauville American Film Festival.

Kim's latest works include a virtual reality trilogy about the issue of U.S. military camp towns in South Korea. The first of the trilogy, *Bloodless*, (2017) transforms the controversial issue of crimes by U.S. military personnel stationed in South Korea into a personal and emotional experience. *Bloodless* received Best VR awards at Venice International Film Festival, Thessaloniki International Film Festival and Bogotá Short Film Festival. *Filmmaker Magazine* featured *Bloodless* as the Best VR Storytelling of 2017. The second part of the trilogy *Tearless* (2020) premiered at the Venice Film Festival accompanied by metaverse of "Monkey House," a medical prison that detained U.S. comfort women who were suspected to have STDs.

Kim is widely recognized as an innovative instructor who uses media for social justice. She has taught at Harvard University as the first Asian woman at her department and was awarded a Certificate of Teaching Excellence in 2014. In 2018, *Variety* listed Kim as one of the "Top Teachers in Film, TV" noting Kim's "keen understanding of the future of entertainment technology."



IMAGES

[Stills, Trailer, Poster](#)



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