

A woman with dark hair, wearing a white button-down shirt, is shown from the chest up. She has a neutral expression and is looking slightly to her right. A semi-transparent VR headset is overlaid on her face, showing a dark interior with a small window. The background is a blurred crowd of people, all tinted with a strong red color.


MOSTRA INTERNAZIONALE
D'ARTE CINEMATOGRAFICA
LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA 2021
Venice VR Expanded

TEARLESS

A VR FILM BY GINA KIM



소요산

TEARLESS

WHEN GHOSTS SPEAK HISTORY

Tearless is part of a trilogy on camp town comfort women that the South Korean government made available to US soldiers stationed in South Korea. This 3D VR film moves through the haunting spaces of “Monkey House,” a medical prison established in the 1970s to isolate comfort women with STDs. The film depicts a single day based on a real document found on the site.



PROJECT INFORMATION

A VR Film by Gina Kim

A MASS ORNAMENT FILMS AND CYAN FILMS PRODUCTION

IN CO-PRODUCTION WITH VENTA VR

COSTUME YOUNG A LEE

SOUND DESIGN MYUNGHWAN HAN JIYOUNG JEONG

PRODUCTION DESIGNER HEEJUNG LEE

SPECIAL EFFECTS DAEWON YOON

EDITORS GINA KIM MOA SON

VR CINEMATOGRAPHER ALEX LEE

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY HONGYEOL PARK

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER SAM JEON

PRODUCED BY ZOE SUA CHO AND GINA KIM

“TEARLESS” STARRING BORYEONG KIM

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY GINA KIM

2021, 12 minutes

360° Virtual Reality Live-Action (S3D)

Genre: Historical film, experimental documentary

This production was supported by UCLA Transdisciplinary Research Acceleration Grant, UCLA Faculty Research Grant, UCLA TFT Dean's Vision Fund



MASS
ORNAMENT
FILMS

Cyan
Films

VENTAVR



SYNOPSIS

Tearless is a 360 3D immersive VR project on “US comfort women”* that the South Korean government made available to US soldiers in camp towns outside the US military bases. Using immersive media technology, this project focuses on these women’s memories within a detainment center called “Monkey House”—a prison established by the South Korean government and staffed by the US

TREATMENT

Following the Korean War, an average of 25,000 US soldiers per year have resided in the US military bases in South Korea, occupying as much as 17.7 percent 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 one million women thus far.

In the 1970’s, the Korean government led by a military dictator required camp town women to wear number tags and STD test results on their chests at all times, pressured by the US government to lower the STD rate among their soldiers. Random inspections were held on the streets twice a week to haul suspected carriers away along with those without number tags. The women who were suspected to have STD were locked up in a detainment center and indiscriminately treated with harsh doses of penicillin that resulted in severe side effects and occasional deaths. Some women jumped to their deaths. The detention center was given the name “Monkey House” because people could

military in the 1970s to isolate and treat comfort women with STDs.

* NOTE: While the term “comfort women” has been associated with the Japanese imperial army’s use of sexual slavery before and during the World War 2, it is now increasingly understood more generally as instances of government forced prostitution as seen in a recent decision by the Seoul High Court.

hear the imprisoned women screaming to be let out like monkeys trapped in a zoo. Although no longer in operation, the Monkey House building still remains to this date.

Tearless is an immersive media project that interweaves elements of experimental documentary and narrative storytelling, while actively incorporating a new medium and technology to further my efforts for utilizing new technology for social justice. Wearing a VR headset, viewers are virtually transported to the immersive environment of Monkey House. Once entering the site, the viewer will be introduced to the multiple rooms of the building such as bedroom, bathroom, dining hall, and treatment room – all of which is communal and bare like those in the military camps. The staged props that emerge slowly in the footage imply what the women had to go through in each room, based on the testimonies from the women as well as a handwritten panel of the daily schedule that was discovered on the site.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I first visited Monkey House during the production of *Bloodless*. The building has been relatively untouched like a haunted house on a cursed land in between farm fields and hiking trails. The windows are blocked with barbed wires that were now covered in heavy vines and cobwebs. The door-less communal showers and wooden bunker beds lay there as physical remains of the horror that took place. Perhaps the building remains relatively intact because of the palpable fear and shame that are ingrained in the space. The site is not a memory but a real presence of the past itself.

In 2018, the Seoul High Court ruled that the Korean government was responsible in justifying and facilitating acts of prostitution against the comfort women in the process of operating and managing the camp towns. The ruling also implicated the US government in facilitating prostitution and violating the rights of these women, calling for their response and admission of guilt. The

court officially referred to the women as “military comfort women” for the first time, acknowledging that the women were involuntarily and systematically offered up by the government as sex slaves to US soldiers. This is a historical ruling that acknowledged both governments’ unlawful acts and responsibilities for the pain these women suffered.

The nine-decade issue of Korean comfort women for the US military is more important than ever – it is the origin story of the fetishization of and violence against Asian women in the US. These US military comfort women embody the ruins and contradictions of the 20th century, and yet they have received neither reparations nor public recognition. *Tearless* aims to bring forward the experiences of these women while they are still alive. Their voices must be heard, their tears must be felt, and the women who did not survive – the ghosts that haunt the 21st century – deserve a long overdue reckoning.



CREATIVE TEAM

GINA KIM (DIRECTOR/WRITER/PRODUCER)

Gina Kim is a writer and director whose five feature films and works of video art have screened at over 150 prestigious international film festivals and venues such as Cannes, Venice, Berlin, and Sundance, as well as MoMa, Centre Pompidou, and the Smithsonian. Praised by Le Figaro as a “fearless feminist who conceals an extreme sensitivity,” Kim’s *Invisible Light* (2003) was selected as one of the 10 best films of 2003 by Film Comment. *Never Forever* (2007), starring Jung-woo Ha and Vera Farmiga, was the first co-production between the United States and South Korea. Kim’s latest work *Bloodless* (2017) won the Best VR Story Award at the 74th Venice International Film Festival, followed by international acclaim and numerous awards and nominations. Kim’s films have been theatrically released to critical acclaim in Europe, Asia, and the US. Kim is a professor at UCLA.

ZOE SUA CHO (PRODUCER)

Zoe Sua Cho is a Korean-born New Zealand-bred producer based in Los Angeles. In 2015 she co-founded Mass Ornament Films and has since produced numerous transnational films spanning features, documentaries and hybrid projects by emerging international artists. Her 5 producing works

have screened and awarded at festivals around the world, including Cannes Film Festival, Berlinale, Rotterdam, Toronto, Busan and Tribeca. Zoe’s feature producing credits include *They*, directed by Anahita Ghazvinizadeh, Laura Stewart’s *Drifting Towards the Crescent*, and Bora Kim’s debut feature *House of Hummingbird*—winner of over 50 awards including the Grand Prix Award for Best Film at Berlinale’s Generation section, Best International Feature at Tribeca Film Festival, and Best Film Award at the Korean Critics Awards and the Korean Producers Association Awards.

SAM JEON (EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, CEO VENTA VR)

With the best experts in the industry, Venta VR has built a 3D VR company covering a wide scope of tasks from pre-production specialized for VR to post-production requiring 3D effects and elaborate stitching work. Venta VR provides services in various fields such as 3D VR LIVE solution, CMS, and AR production using volumetric technology. Venta VR has collaborated with global companies such as LGU+, Google, Huawei and China Telecom to produce original contents. Currently, Venta VR is producing tangible ‘Ultra High Definition 3D VR’ and ‘Volumetric AR’ contents suitable for 5G.



IMAGES

[Stills, Trailer, Poster](#)

[Making of Film](#)