

## THE ARTS

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Yoon Cho redefines the suburbs with 'Nothing Lasts Forever' at Women & Their Work. 'The Kittlesons,' top two, and 'The Chos,' are part of that reimagining.

## Cho puts her life on display in her art

By Jeanne Claire van Ryzin  
AMERICAN STATESMAN ARTS CRITIC

For Yoon Cho, all the world really is a stage.

On the job, in social situations, even in private at home, we're always constructing our identities, trying to control how others perceive us, she says.

"We perform whether we think we are or not," the 35-year-old artist said recently as she stopped by the galleries of Women & Their Work, where her current

solo show, "Nothing Lasts Forever," is on view through May 10. Digital photographs interspersed with four digital video projects fill the space, a sampling of just some of the work the Korean-born Cho produced in the past several years.

Cho thinks a lot about how we let our physical and social environment shape our identities. She is herself the subject — the performer, really — in much of her work. In her "Texas Self Portrait" series she overlays larger-than-life-size color photographs of herself with different schematics or diagrams, such as the street plan of the Southwest Austin subdivision where she lives, each individual lot carefully outlined. Then there's her "Nuclear Family" series that features seemingly candid shots of Cho and her husband going about the tasks typical of their suburban lifestyle — hanging curtains in the kitchen, jogging down the wide, new street, washing their SUV, gardening — only there's an imaginary baby, silhouetted as a bright yellow cut-out, digitally inserted into the scene.

Cho moved to Austin four years ago with her physician husband after spending most her life in big cities in the United States and Korea. The quiet sameness of suburbia shocked her — or did it appeal to her? She still lives there, after all. And her ambiguity about her new surroundings is front and center in all her artwork.

"The first thing the neighbors asked about was our kids," Cho says. Actually, it was the first thing her own family asked soon after Cho and her husband were married. So she created Christmas cards in 2004 featuring a portrait of herself and her husband dressed in their holiday finest, a silhouetted baby superimposed

Yoon Cho

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between them ("My mother actually thought it was funny," Cho says.). Next, she began staging more images for what gradually became the "Nuclear Family" series. As an extension of that project, her six-minute "Backyard Project" video shows Cho and her husband building a gazebo, the yellow silhouetted baby, now depicted as a toddler, romping with its toys (its gender is not identifiable).

Are Cho and her husband trying to conform — if even by digital magic — to the norms of their new surroundings or are they razzing the suburban status quo? Both. The tension between conformity and nonconformity is pointed and tongue-in-cheek.

Cho's search for her new profile in a new social surrounding began immediately after she moved to United States at age 17 after a childhood in Seoul. It continued as she worked through degree programs at two noted art schools — Rhode Island

School of Design and Parsons The New School for Design — set out on a career as an artist and graphic designer in New York and took a college teaching gig in Korea. Daughter, woman, artist, Korean, new United States citizen, wife, Texas resident — every new layer of identity is fodder for Cho's creative juices.

At the Austin Museum of Art, where some of Cho's video works are included in the current exhibit "New Art in Austin: 20 to Watch," "Haircut" is three minutes of side-by-side footage showing Cho and her husband each having their hair cut in a shopping mall salon as saccharine Christmas music and mall announcements play in the background. While her husband gets a basic trim, Cho's long black hair is more dramatically cut so that it matches her husband's. How much does — or should — a woman assimilate when she gets married?

"Identity always changes for everyone, constantly — it's always evolving," she says.

That's right, nothing lasts forever.

### 'Yoon Cho: Nothing Lasts Forever'

- When: 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mondays-Fridays, noon to 5 p.m. Saturdays through May 10
- Where: Women & Their Work, 1710 Lavaca St.
- Cost: Free
- Information: 477-1064, [www.womenandtheirwork.org](http://www.womenandtheirwork.org)

### 'New Art from Austin'

- Cho's work is also included in "New Art from Austin," on view through May 11 at the Austin Museum of Art, 823 Congress Ave. 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays (until 8 p.m. Thursdays), noon to 5 p.m. Sundays. \$1-\$5. Go to [www.amoa.org](http://www.amoa.org) for more information.

### On Austin360.com

- For excerpts from Yoon Cho's video artworks and a slide show of her photographs, go to [www.austin360.com/arts](http://www.austin360.com/arts).

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