

# You are close be-side me

## Chin-Jie Melodie Liu

Since the start of the pandemic, my immigration status has restricted me, like many others, to attend and observe familial events from a distance, alone. My virtual presence and participation have become customary, with relatives asking less frequently about when I can visit.

The state of my absence became the most apparent in February 2022, with the death of my grandfather. Attending the funeral in person was not an option; with the then mandatory 21-day quarantine in Taiwan followed by the border restrictions upon returning to Australia.

My sister, Annette, who had been in Taiwan for the past two years due to the Australian border closure, attended the memorial service. She was the only grandchild present. At the funeral, she facilitated the Zoom live-streaming set up for family members abroad like me.

Unlike the Zoom wedding I previously attended, the live video was patchy and disconnected on several occasions with network issues or when in-person guests accidentally knocked the phone stand over. Online, condolences were not exchanged with muted microphones and black screens. However, together we were all mourning in the same space, experiencing the sentimental service.

Annette regularly sent updates and photographs of details that the livestream could not broadcast in the family group chat. Looking through her images, I realised that I had really only been “present” for a portion of the funeral and excluded from other ceremonial proceedings intended for immediate family members.

This series of prints, from screenshots I took during the Zoom service, aimed to explore the photographic and reproducible quality of memorialisation. Paired with photographs Annette took on her iPhone during the funeral, acting as “footnotes” to my images and providing additional context to the scenes I did not witness.

The series title, *You are close be-side me*, is from Psalms 23—The Lord is my Shepherd one of the songs sung at the funeral.

—Chin-Jie Melodie Liu

# Logging Grief

*You are close be-side me* is a series of large-scale screen prints presenting the documentation of a grandfathers funeral by two sisters—Annette, who attended the proceedings in person in Taiwan, and Melodie, who joined via Zoom from Australia. This collaborative work encapsulates a shared experience of witnessing and documenting grief simultaneously through two different perspectives, access, and means. Together, they reflect on the ways digital access facilitates grief, influencing our process of mourning in the modern world.

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24 February 2022. On the ground in Taipei, I facilitated the funeral livestream for family members overseas. Given setup limitations, I shared the iPhone photos I was taking in an online family chat, capturing details and scenes that could not be broadcast, like a footnote. Unable to attend due to pandemic travel restrictions at the time, Melodie participated virtually in Canberra, messaging me pointers when the livestream lagged, or when the view was lopsided. This intermediate space served as an additional place for silent mourning, characterized by muted microphones and disabled videos.

Over Zoom, Melodie also instinctively documented the funeral through screenshots, creating a record of her presence for the service, and distilling the extended family's last gathering with our grandfather. The pairing of these images with mine offers a glimpse into our attempt to actively commemorate, solidify, and remember this moment of rare togetherness.

Reproducing the images through screen printing—a photographic, iterative, gradual process—allowed for the ceremony, or rather, Melodie's particular experience as a distant viewer, to be relived closely and vividly with the layering of separate CMYK colour screens. The different sizes of our images, her screenshots larger and my iPhone images smaller, reflect the proportional scale of the technology on which we documented.

Upon revisiting our photos and recollecting their contexts, I am reminded of Susan Sontag's eloquent description of photographs as "an invitation to sentimentality," for the way they "turn the past into an object of tender regard." *You are close be-side me* exists in this space of fondness, for remembrance, solace, and to move beyond grief.

The series is dedicated to our family.

—Annette An-Jen Liu

## About

### Chin-Jie Melodie Liu

Chin-Jie Melodie Liu is an emerging Taiwanese artist based in Canberra whose interdisciplinary practice is informed by history, identity, and her Taiwanese heritage.

Liu completed a Bachelor of Visual Arts with First Class Honours in 2020 at the Australian National University (ANU), followed by a Master of Museum and Heritage Studies in 2021. Through the ANU School of Art & Design exchange program, Liu studied at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris in France. Through the ANU School of Art & Design Emerging Arts Support Scheme (EASS), she received five awards for her Honours thesis and was the recipient of the 2019 Westende Travel Grant.

### Annette An-Jen Liu

Annette An-Jen Liu is a Taiwanese writer and curator based in New York City, with a focus on contemporary image-making as performance and collaboration. In 2022, she curated the photography collection exhibition 茺: How lush the world is, how full of things that don't belong to me— at Yang Arts in Taipei. Liu also organized the online exhibition What I know to be true, and other encounters for PhotoAccess in 2021. She has contributed research to the Wolfgang Tillmans: to look without fear exhibition at MoMA, New York, and worked as an Assistant Curator for the touring exhibition Drawn by Stones presented by 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art in Sydney. Liu holds a Master of Art Curating from the University of Sydney and a Bachelor of Visual Arts with First Class Honours in Photography from the Australian National University. Her writing can be found in publications such as ArtAsiaPacific, Art Monthly Australia, Ocula Magazine, MOLD Magazine, Magnum Photos, 攝影之聲 Voices of Photography, and others.

## Image list

4	Chin-Jie Melodie Liu, For You are close be-side me, 2023, CMYK screenprint on Stonehenge paper, 56 x 76 cm	1/1	NFS
5	Chin-Jie Melodie Liu, I have everything that I need, 2023, CMYK screenprint on Stonehenge paper, 56 x 76 cm	1/1	NFS
6	Chin-Jie Melodie Liu, I'll not fear, 2023, CMYK screenprint on Stonehenge paper, 56 x 76 cm	1/1	NFS
7	Chin-Jie Melodie Liu, rest in the pasture green, 2023, CMYK screenprint on Stonehenge paper, 56 x 76 cm	1/1	NFS
8	Chin-Jie Melodie Liu, lead me by the qui-et stream, 2023, CMYK screenprint on Stonehenge paper, 56 x 76 cm	1/1	NFS
9	Chin-Jie Melodie Liu, You have spread a feast for me, 2023, CMYK screenprint on Stonehenge paper, 56 x 76 cm	1/1	NFS
10	Chin-Jie Melodie Liu, He lets me rest, 2023, CMYK screenprint on Stonehenge paper, 56 x 76 cm	1/1	NFS
11	Chin-Jie Melodie Liu, all my days shall be filled with your goodness and mer-cies, 2023, CMYK screenprint on Stonehenge paper, 56 x 76 cm	1/1	NFS
12	Chin-Jie Melodie Liu, com-fort me, 2023, CMYK screenprint on Stonehenge paper, 56 x 76 cm	1/1	NFS