

2004 American Psychiatric Association Annual Meeting  
First Prize for Mixed Media Art

*Editor's Note: The artwork "This Is How I'll Look When We Say Goodbye" is on death and cultural surprise. It won first prize for mixed media installation at the APA Art Exhibit in the Javits Centre in New York in May 2004. It provoked much discussion at the show and was unusual on a few counts - Canadian content for the art show, images of death, Asian content, art that was a result of a collaboration, and art by a Distinguished Fellow of the APA, Dr. Caroline W.H. Choo, UBC Department of Psychiatry Clinical Associate Professor.*

**This is how I'll look when we say goodbye**

The mixed media art installation, "This is how I'll look when we say goodbye", deals with the theme of death and cultural surprise within one's Chinese family.

Three large translucent banners that reference Chinese scrolls honour one woman's majestic approach to her final journey.

The piece is a collaboration between Richmond psychiatrist Dr. Caroline W.H. Choo and award-winning writer Paula Stromberg.

Dr. Choo commented, "As a psychiatrist, much of my work (except in palliative care) is to steer people back from the brink of death. When someone dies despite our efforts, that death can represent a failure."



The second image in this installation, the pink hand of the living holding the cooling hand of the newly-dead, portrays an aspect of death that as professionals, some psychiatrists rarely experience.

The work documents the unexpected death preparations made years earlier by Dr. Choo's uneducated 88-year-old Chinese grandmother who dressed in dull cardigans, padded jackets and polyester trousers throughout her life -- yet surprised those who thought they knew her well by embracing her own death with confidence, nobility and elegance.

**Artist's Statement—By Dr. Caroline W. H. Choo and Paula Stromberg**

*This is how I'll look when we say goodbye*



The day my grandmother Lin Hoo died, we were surprised to find the clothes and portrait she had been mulling about in the hospital actually moved. She also told us ancestors were gathering by her pillow so at first we feared morphine clouded her mind.

From her hospital deathbed, she bid her son and three daughters to give the box placed at the back of her closet to the undertaker. Funeral preparations began.

Lin Hoo, dead at 88, was born in a remote orchid-farming village in China and emigrated to Singapore as a young woman. Although Prime Minister Lee Kwan Yew

encouraged Singaporeans to adopt modern ways, Lin Hoo kept many mysterious customs.

We discovered that when she was 60, she had a large photo portrait taken, framed and stored in a box. We had never seen it before although she lived with us many years in Canada. This is how I'll look when we say goodbye.

Stored in the same large box at the back of her closet was a breathtaking silk robe. She had gone to a tailor to be measured and fitted, then kept the majestic clothes neatly folded in her box, waiting for the big day.

In everyday life, she wore

dull Chinese grandma clothes -- grey cardigans, padded jackets and loose pants -- but she planned to be splendidly dressed when she crossed over. This is how I'll look when we say goodbye.

Lin Hoo amazed us, lying in her white coffin, attired for her grand journey. Her four-length 'sui y' was indigo brocade with a brilliant blue collar. Her daughters tucked slippers on her spotted, plump feet. She held a red zig-zagged purse. Clearly she was ready. This is how I'll look when we say goodbye.

By Dr. Caroline W.H. Choo  
and Paula Stromberg