



cruelty and indifference of capitalism. The artist splits her time between Copenhagen, Denmark and Beijing, China, so the story also bridges two cultures she knows well.

To most fully appreciate the artist's exquisite reworking of the story requires a summary. We encounter the match girl as she walks alone and shoeless on a frigid New Year's Eve. Hungry and cold, she smells the celebratory dinners wafting from kitchens. She has lost her oversized slippers borrowed from her mother and wanders shoeless. She carries an apron with matches and does not want to return home until she sells some because otherwise her father will beat her. Eventually, overcome by exhaustion, she huddles down in an alley and decides to light her matches to keep warm.

As each match flares, she imagines being lifted from her awful situation. First, she dreams of a warm kitchen with a fancy brass stove. With the strike of her second match, she sees a sumptuous dining table with a large roasted goose. Before her eyes, the goose walks away with a carving knife stuck in its back. Then, she sees her dead grandmother – who we learn was the only person who loved her. In an act of desperation, the girl burns the rest of her matches to propel herself into the stars and join her grandmother in Heaven. The following morning, her body is found in the alley with rosy cheeks, having succumbed to the night's bitter cold.

Using the original text as a foundation layer, the video builds an intricate structure of images and sounds that effectively transform the experience of the story. First, the story's words appear in rows that scroll up the screen and are paired with rows of images generated by those same words plugged into a search engine. "Penny" pulls up a pile of copper pennies, "mite" pops up with the arachnid, while "downcast" shows a sad-eyed puppy. Occasionally, the machine's logic produces hiccups. The phrase "to go home" has a candle, a small child walking on a road, and a house perched on a wall about to fall. Behind these ascending text and image bars, there are changing video backgrounds. Two reappear frequently: a view of outer space with stars and galaxies in motion and a lone person in a parka viewed from above whose footsteps crunch while walking across a snowy field. A soundtrack adds another layer of sensation. There are city sounds, dripping water, and towards the end, as the girl dies, a mournful woodwind instrument.



*At top and above: Liu Shiyuan, For the photos I didn't take, For the stories I didn't read (stills), 2020, 4K video, single channel, color, stereo sound. Duration: 16 min, 39 sec (composer Kristian Mondrup Nielsen), Edition of 5, 2 AP, Courtesy the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York / Los Angeles*

Like the odd search results mentioned above, these backgrounds sometimes function as non-sequiturs, even if they do not feel that way. In fact, it takes reflection and effort to see the absurdity. For instance, when the roasted goose waddles off the table with a knife in its back, the background image is a fancy scabbard dripping with blood freshly withdrawn from a wound. The music at that point is menacing, keyed to the knife and not the light-hearted whimsy of an escaping goose. Or, when the match girl's grannie comes back to life looking "so tall and beautiful," in the background emerge immaculately groomed 21st century women with sunglasses and tasteful make-up. Working class Danish grannies surely did not look like these smiling well-to-do women who might be on vacation.

These are not mistakes, and the artist's decision to include them strengthens the piece. They are the raw products of search engines, whose artificial intelligence does not follow narrative development or catch the nuances of natural language. Their untroubling presence in the video points to something deeper about how the brain takes in parallel channels of information from the screens we constantly stare at. The orderly rectangular format of the monitor belies the disorder. Multiple programs run, video channels stream, a Zoom call drones while notifications ding. Even in the era of

<https://www.lumartzine.com/articles/liu-shiyuan>

Google's smoothed search results, the cacophony increases as one scrolls down. In other words, Liu Shiyuan's rendering of Andersen's story mirrors the screen and also reveals how much we miss as we surf, procrastinate and live online. As neuroscientists keep discovering, the brain processes in parallel tracks that often fail to intersect, while everyday consciousness deludes us into thinking we are an executive calling the shots, aware of everything.

Search engines or not, the video is moving. Whether it is the recurring burning candles contrasted with ice, snow or frost, or the view from above of a person walking on a snow-covered field, these images resonate with emotion and foretell the girl's sad death from hypothermia alone on a cold street. In the finale, when the final blaze of matches sends the girl heavenward to join her beloved grannie, the background shifts from a group of fish displayed on ice as if for sale, to snow, to light colored skin, a dry desert surface, and then to outer space with stars and galaxies in motion. The film ends with the lone person in a parka walking on snow. That the artist never took the pictures or read the story, or why fish incongruously appear on ice in the last video sequence as the girl dies does not matter. The compelling narrative of this sad, brief story carries the viewer along.