

# TANK

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## Mommy

The artist Maggie Lee's feature-length documentary describes her experience of her mother's death with unflinching candour. By Guy Mackinnon-Little



Maggie Lee, *Mommy* (film still), 2015

In our social-media era, oversharing is ordinary. Even so, Maggie Lee's *Mommy* (2015) manages to make an extreme sport of self-documentation. This commemorative video piece, which was screened at the Whitney Museum upon its release, follows the multi-media artist as she returns to suburban New Jersey to renovate and resell her childhood home after the sudden death of her mother. Ahead of Lee's new solo show at Arcadia Missa, the South London gallery organised a screening of the film.

*Mommy* is a frantic collage of self-recorded videos paired with old photos, home-videos and diary entries from Lee's childhood and adolescence. Things quickly get weird. In one scene, we see her spitting on boxes of her father's stuff spilled out over the lawn. In another, her childhood toys are arranged around the dinner table as she serves them dessert (a sticky blue sweet, pre-chewed by Lee). The rawness of these moments stems from the fact that Lee had no intention to release these videos before the film's producer Asher Penn encouraged her to compile them into a feature. Above all, the work articulates a desire to render tangible the intensity of Lee's experience. As she explains, "I wanted to feel everything, sleep in every single room of the house before we had to sell it, and record everything. It was about storytelling and about preserving life and memories."

Assembled together, these autobiographical videos take on a fantastical character. *Mommy* unfolds over 18 chapters to form an hour-long feature. This provides a loose coherence to the film's frantic energy, but also lends a framework for multiple times and moods to present themselves at once. In "Maggie", Lee overlays videos of herself as a baby with humorous Comic Sans captions to a blaring dubstep soundtrack. "In My Bedroom" begins with an on-screen poem tilted "on B31in' A t33na93r iN T3h 5u8UR82" and ends with a karaoke cover of Weezer's emo guitar anthem "Say it Ain't So".

In these scenes, the distance between past and present collapses. Lee speaks through her baby self, but also acts out her adolescence, inducing an unnerving and amorphous psychic state in the viewer. It's funny but also frightening to watch Lee restage her personal history. Flung between emotional extremities, we are left with a sense of disorientated urgency that mimics the messy ambivalence of both love and grief. ●

*Mommy* is available to stream and purchase from [Beta Pictures](#)

Maggie Lee's new solo exhibition *Music Videos* opens at [Arcadia Missa](#) on 8 September 2018