

17-10-2000

Ben Gu

Family is the most important thing in the world to most people. It has different definitions to different members of the family. To me, at this stage of my life, it means the start of my life and a shelter I can go to when I encounter difficulties in life. The meaning of family is also different around the world. In western cultures, family is more of a group of individuals and each of the family members are more independent. However, in Chinese culture, where I come from, family is always a whole and it is the biggest part of people's lives. Family members are more involved in each other's lives than in the west and therefore Chinese people have stronger senses of connections with family in many ways.

Being in a new country and being exposed to western culture has made me see family differently from my parents in terms of perspective of many things. Influenced by both cultures, I still see family as a whole but I respect the individuality of family members more than most Chinese people do. This piece is about the reunion of the family despite the differences due to generation and cultural experiences.

Zhang Xiaogang is a contemporary Chinese artist who stylises portraits of Chinese families from old photos and singles out individuals by enhancing their colour. This inspired me to use one of my photos from the past and simplify the shapes and tones. I also used some elements of the Australian contemporary artist Jasper Knight's style of flat areas of colour and dripping paint to represent the portraits of my family while I used much stronger saturation and less detail. The original photo was turned into highly saturated colour blocks in Photoshop as a reference and then painted onto canvas with acrylic paint.

The background consists of different blocks of warm colour with dragged paint on top to create a moving and layered texture. The background symbolises the harmony and the lovingness of the family. A few details in the painting reflect Jasper Knight's style, such as the negative space within the family, the use of text and the dripping effects. The Chinese characters "家庭" means family, "2016" is when I moved here, "subclass 500" is my visa type, "17-10-2000" is my date of birth and "China penalises big families" implies the one child policy that used to exist in China.

All the texts are extremely personal, for example, one child policy is part of the reason that I am the only child. By combining these different texts, it lets the viewer read into my work and question whether those can shape the outcomes of a person, in my case me. Not all Chinese have the opportunity to experience living in a different culture and although this can provide immense benefits, the greatest challenge will be the distance from family, the core of Chinese life. By not having intense realism in the family depicted, it allows me to create the concept of them being far away but still part of my life.

#