

Mandarin Sandwich

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Growing up as a Chinese Australian, I often reflect on my journey in transitioning between two such diverse cultures, and how it transformed my personality and ideologies. I decided to create a multi-faced portrait of my younger self on my first night in Australia as this night holds a vivid place in my memory: the warm, hazy kitchen lights, watching my parents hurry in and out of the house while I excitedly assemble a mandarin sandwich with my sister. I was fascinated by how I manifested the adrenaline of being in a new country through this mandarin sandwich: the offbeat idea, the odd taste, the spontaneity of it all seemed fitting for that moment. Hence, I have decided to centralise this object as a symbol for entering a new environment, full of foreign yet exciting opportunities.

The development of the composition began with the idea of the three versions of me in different motions, representing before, during and after embracing Australia and how this was a truly transitional process. The individual expressions of uncertainty, acceptance and eventual joy purposefully reflect my emotional journey towards becoming an Australian. This is accompanied by my choice of a triangular composition to reflect a harmonisation of these stages as all elements were integral in building my mature outlook.

Aiming to encapsulate the feverishly vibrant, youthful energy of this experience, I investigated motion depicted in the contemporary setting. Taiwanese artist Will Yu became a major influence, as I admired the vibrant, figurative strokes to emphasise kineticism in a confronting manner. Employing Yu's fast, direct yet economical stroke style, I was able to achieve a balance between realism and abstraction to produce an energetic image that makes the memory so real to me, despite it being quite distant and fragmented.

My studies of portraiture, especially in manipulating tone and texture, was directed by the expressionist portraits of Lucian Freud, as I admired how he exposes the psychological complexity of the subject through bold yet purposeful strokes. I focused on his raw, characteristic style, separating facial tones and abstract brush strokes to create this. In this process, I experimented with a broad spectrum of skin tones, often working with certain tones and shades beyond those I am familiar with to signify slight emotional nuances and to introduce more complexity to my expressions. I also experimented with drawing back from brush application, often working holistically as Freud did rather than fixating on certain areas, which I have found to be a highly effective approach.

My work intends to celebrate the energy that is kindled from entering a new stage in your life, a truly indescribable, monumental feeling. I wish to express how grateful I am to have found my place here in Australia. Perhaps if I had not taken a bite of that mandarin sandwich, I may have remained as the girl with the simple bowl-cut hair, devoid of the creative, adventurous impulses that made me who I am.