

Richmond Art Gallery
SCHOOL ART PROGRAM
TEACHERS' GUIDE



Hua Jin, *My Big Family*, 2012, Photograph

April 20 – June 10, 2012

My Big Family

Hua Jin



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ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

My Big Family is an exhibition of the work of Vancouver artist **Hua Jin**, and consists of a series of photographs and videos the artist took of her extended family members and their homes back in her native China.

"My Big Family is a long-term and ongoing project that I started in the summer of 2010. More than just a portrait of my own big family, the project's purpose is to examine the gradual disappearance of the traditional large families in contemporary Chinese society since the inception of the One-Child Policy in 1978. During six months traveling in China, I visited over forty members of my extended family and documented their lives via the media of photography, video, and text."(Hua Jin)



Hua Jin, *My Big Family*, 2012, Photograph

Jin is very interested in the ways in which the change from large families to small families is affecting ordinary people's lives, and Chinese society as a whole. This issue is very personal to her since the loss of her own parents in 2001 and 2005. Since Jin is among the first generation of children born under China's population control policies, her immediate family now only consists of herself, her twin sister, brother-in-law, and young niece. After moving to Vancouver to study photography in 2007, Jin felt the isolation of being a new immigrant in a strange country, and increasingly her thoughts turned to the importance of the bonds of family, and she sought to reconnect with her extended family.

The photographs do not look like the typical family portraits we are used to seeing or even taking ourselves. Instead, each photo captures a person in the midst of the activities of daily life, acting almost like **documentary photographs**, capturing a moment in time. They also document evidence of the dramatic changes that are already occurring in China, as ordinary families are exposed to western influences and material goods.



Hua Jin, *My Big Family*, 2012, Photograph

In this photo, her Aunt Nian sweeps the yard surrounded by the family quilts, which are aired out during the day, and used on the Kang (a traditional long sleeping platform made of bricks) at night. In the background, a huge satellite dish points skyward, bringing the rest of the world to their doorstep.

"I am attracted by the idea of how the photographs of the present will detect the outlines of the future. The irreversibility of this high-speed society triggered me to construct a memory and an archive not only for Chinese families but also for all the families that live in this contemporary society." (Hua Jin)

Some images show only a room, or a group of objects, called a **still life**. The remote control in this image serves to help us place this tranquil scene of a refreshing summer snack in the context of the China of today, where modern technology has become ubiquitous.





Hua Jin, *My Big Family*, 2012, Photograph

Jin is also concerned with the effect the shift from large families to small families will have on the value system of the younger generation. Her parent's and grandparent's generations were very much concerned with how their actions and decisions affected those around them, and there was a greater emphasis placed on thinking of others first. However, Western culture and the values of individualism are on the rise, and Jin fears that young people will lack the environment to learn about traditional Chinese values. Her young niece stares back at the viewer, one hand gripping a bough from the family's cherry orchard, the other clutching a sheet of colourful stickers. It makes you wonder how this little girl will negotiate the conflicting influences as she moves into an uncertain future.

"The result of the One-Child Policy in China is that the shrinking of family size transforms the attention of kinship into the single child, which puts the ideology of collectivism in a position of danger. Instead, with the booming of the Chinese economy and the surging influence of western culture, the values of individualism are on the rise. The lack of relationship for the single child leads to a lack of reference points and a lack of history." (Hua Jin)

What will the loss of the large family mean to Chinese society? Only time will tell, and Hua Jin will be there with her camera to document the process as it unfolds in her own family.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Hua Jin was born in Hebei, China and lived in Shanghai for more than twenty years before moving to Vancouver in 2001 to study photography at Emily Carr University of Art and Design. Originally trained as an animator and graphic designer, Jin worked as an artistic and creative director for more than 10 years. Jin has shown her works in exhibitions in China, the Netherlands, and Canada since 2005. Her photo-based works are included in many publications and private collections, as well as the public collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Shanghai (MOCA). Jin is the winner of the *SnapStar* photo competition in Canada, and the *TOP 20 Chinese Contemporary Photographers* in China.

COMMUNITY FAMILY PORTRAIT EXHIBITION

The Richmond Art Gallery invited the community to bring in their own family portraits to hang in Gallery 3 as part of our Community Family Portrait Exhibition. The exhibition provides opportunities for the community to have conversations about their own experiences and views on family.

Join us! You are invited to bring in a framed “ready to hang” picture of your family and add to the exhibition. Label the back of the frame and drop it off during gallery hours at the Attendant’s desk. You’ll receive a receipt so that we can identify your photo when you come to pick it up at the end of the exhibition, and you will be entered in a draw to have a new family picture taken by the artist Hua Jin. The deadline for entry is May 12, 2012.



Richmond Art Gallery Family Portrait Exhibition, 2012

Richmond Art Gallery School Art Program - Teachers' Guide

BEFORE YOUR VISIT

China's One-Child Policy

Efforts to control China's **population growth** were first introduced starting as far back as 1955, but it wasn't until the 1970s with the "Late, Long, and Few" voluntary family planning program that population growth was significantly lowered. This program encouraged people to marry later, wait longer to have children, and have fewer numbers of children. In 1979 the **One-Child Policy** was introduced limiting family size to one child only, with a few exceptions for rural families and those in special circumstances. This policy, however, was mandatory, meaning that families don't have a choice, they must go along with it, or suffer consequences such as having to pay heavy fines.

This policy was met with much initial resistance, because traditionally in China, family size was large. One reason for this was that children were needed to work on family farms, so more children meant more help. Another reason was that elderly parents depend on their adult children to take care of them, since there are no government pension programs. Why was the policy undertaken then? There were fears that if population growth was not controlled, eventually there would not be enough food to feed everyone. There was also a belief that it would stimulate economic development, since it would lower unemployment rates, and families could use more resources on things such as education and housing.

Today most people in China do support the policy (76% in a 2008 poll), but there are still questions as to how this policy will change society, and artists such as Hua Jin are very interested in examining this question.

Population Facts:

Population in China in 1952: 582,603,417
Population in China in 1982: 1,008,175,288
Population in China in 2010: 1,339,724,852

Average Children per family: 5-6
Average Children per family: 2-3
Average Children per family: 1-2

Explain the One Child policy to your class, and discuss their views on it. Some questions for discussion:

- Do they know anyone affected by the policy? Any family or friends living in China?
- What are some of the dangers of having too many people (high population growth)?
- Do you think having only one child should be mandatory, or should people get to choose? Do you think people will have small families if they can choose?
- What are some reasons why people like having large families?
- Do people in Canada today have large families? Why or why not?
- What do you like about having a big family, or having siblings? What don't you like?
- What do you like about being an only child? What don't you like?

AFTER YOUR VISIT

Activity: Pre school - Kindergarten

Discuss the idea of family with your students. Some questions for discussion:

- Who are the members of our families?
- Can pets be family members? Can friends?
- Who is part of *your* family?
- Are all families the same, or can families be different?
- In what ways are families different?

Create a **Family Portrait Exhibition**. Each child can bring a picture or do a drawing of their family. Choose a wall to hang their portraits, and allow children to share their family stories.

Activity: Primary

Hua Jin's family **portraits** are very different than the posed family portraits we are used to seeing, and in fact, rarely do her subjects look at the camera or smile. Instead she captures a moment in time which reveals something about the person, and about their life. Her pictures when seen together all tell a story. Discuss with students the difference between this style of picture and a posed picture.

Hua Jin, like many **contemporary** artists today, uses her personal experiences as inspiration for her artwork. Ask children to reflect on their own experiences in their families, as only children, as part of a big family, as an immigrant having family far away, etc. What does being in a small or big family mean to you? What parts of it do you like? What don't you like? Is there a story about something you and your family all shared, such as a trip somewhere special?

Ask students to create a drawing that shows something that they really like about their family, or some experience they have shared with a family member. For example, students could do a drawing showing them sharing their toys with siblings, spending time with a grandparent after school, or visiting family members who live far away. Alternately, students can bring in family pictures to be photocopied and then collaged to make a picture illustrating their family life.

Activity: Intermediate

Many **contemporary** artists, especially photographers, engage in art projects that are **Ongoing**, meaning they continue to add to them over time, and the ideas of the project are developed through a series of works, rather than in a single artwork or photograph. My Big Family consists of photographs and videos Hua Jin took over a period of two years, and she is going to continue working on this project to document the changes to her family and the ways in which Chinese society is changing. Ongoing art projects use time as an element of the artwork, and focus on the process of making art more than the final product. Some examples of other ongoing art projects are :

The 2011 Project

The artist Tofu St. John documented the year in art by making one piece of art a day, what he calls "a map of the year in 365 pieces." Find it here at <http://tofu-2011project.blogspot.ca/>

Learning to Love You More

Artists Miranda July and Harrell Fletcher posted assignments such as "photograph a scar and write about it" on this website and invited people to post their results on the website. Over 8000 people have participated in the site, and the assignments have become exhibitions in galleries, museums, schools and festivals. <http://www.learningtoloveyoumore.com>

Draw Happy

This project was started when Catherine Young asked the question, "What makes people happy?" She decided to ask people to draw what makes them happy, and the results are posted here : <http://drawhappy.org/>

Create an ongoing project for your class to participate in. There are lots of ongoing projects online, and here are some ideas you could try:

- Post a question or a theme on a bulletin board for a few weeks. Allow students to add drawings, stories, photos, clippings, or post-it notes etc. over this time period.
- Document something over time by taking a photo a day, such as the view outside the classroom, or what you have in your lunchbox.
- Spend a week doing a drawing a day of the same subject, but each day do a drawing from the previous day's drawing, not the original subject.
- Participate in a Mail Art postcard exchange with students of another school /province, or country.

GLOSSARY

Contemporary Art	Artwork that is produced in this current time, generally considered to be artworks made from 1970 to the present. Contemporary art is a very broad term, including artworks made in almost any medium and incorporating many different themes and ideas.
Documentary	A work such as a film or video presenting political, social, or historical subject matter in a factual and informative manner.
Domesticity	Domestic activities; relating to home life or the family.
One - Child Policy	The policy adopted by the Chinese government that limited family size to a single child in order to control population growth.
Population	The total number of people living in a specific area, such as a city, a country, district, or region. The World Population is the total number of people living in the world today.
Population Growth	The increase in the population over a set period of time, usually measured either by year or decade.
Portrait	A work of art that represents a specific person, a group of people, or an animal. Portraits usually show what a person looks like as well as revealing something about the subject's personality. Portraits can be made of any 2-D or 3-D art medium.
Still Life	A picture that consists of an arrangement of inanimate objects. This genre of artwork flourished among the 17 th Century Dutch painters, and typically consists of arrangements of everyday objects, such as flowers, fruits, vegetables, tableware, and pottery vessels.
Video Art	An art form that emerged in the 1960s, when artists began to explore the possibilities of video as an art medium. Video art differs from film or videos seen on television, as there does not necessarily need to be a narrative or definitive beginning, middle and end. Often video artists experiment with sound, video imagery, and how the work is viewed (i.e. projected or on different screens). Some notable artists working in video are: Nam Jun Paik, Paul Wong, Sara Diamond, Kate Craig, Vera Frenkel, Bill Viola, Gillian Wearing, Fiona Tan, Douglas Gordon, Matthew Barney, Gilbert and George.

RESOURCES

Websites

Hua Jin's Website:

<http://phoebejin.com/>

One Child Policy:

<http://www.good.is/post/transparency-what-s-up-with-china-s-one-child-policy1/>

Using Digital Cameras in the classroom, and Photo Lesson Plans:

<http://www.wacona.com/digicam/digicam.html>

<http://terpconnect.umd.edu/~toh/image/DigitalCameraUses.htm>

http://www.hardin.k12.ky.us/res_techn/TEC/digitalcamera/primary.htm

Books: Photography

Bidner, Jenni. *The Kid's Guide to Digital Photography*. Lark Books, 2004.

Ebert, Michael & Abend, Sandra. *Photography for Kids!*. Rockynook, 2011.

Friedman, Debra. *Picture This: Fun Photography and Crafts*. Kids Can Press, 2003.

Add a video book

Books: China & Families

Allan, Tony. *The Rise of Modern China*. Heinemann-Raintree, 2002.

Best, Cari & Blackall, Sophie. *What's so bad about being an only child?*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007.

Boyd, Brian, Fry, Ying Ying, & Fry, Terry. *Kids Like Me in China*. Yeong & Yeong Book Company, 2001.

Florence, Debbi Michiko & Caputo, Jim. *China (Kaleidoscope Kids)*. Williamson Books , 2008.

Leavitt, Caroline. *The Kids' Family Tree Book*. Sterling publishing, 2005.

Sebag-Montefiore, Hugh. *China*. DK Children, 2007

UPCOMING EVENTS & PROGRAMS

Artist Talk with Hua Jin

Saturday June 2

1:00 –2:00 pm, Free

Join exhibiting artist Hua Jin in the Art Gallery for a tour and discussion of her exhibition *My Big Family*. Refreshments provided. All ages.

Doors Open and Heritage Fair

Friday, May 4 – Sunday, May 6, 2012

This is the day that Cultural and Heritage organizations all over Richmond open their doors to the public. On Saturday and Sunday the Richmond Art Gallery hosts free Tours in Mandarin and English from 11am-3pm.

Imaginary Enclave

Saturday, May 5 from 6-9pm

Imaginary Enclave, a free public evening event for participants to view exhibitions and performances in the Cultural Centre. The Gallery will host a performance from local musicians Orchid Ensemble, who play a mix of traditional Chinese and Western music.

Sunday Art Group – Let's Make Stuff!

Sundays: May 13, June 10

1:00 – 4:00 pm , Free for Gallery Members or \$5 Drop-in

Let's Make Stuff! offers a relaxed, social approach to learning and improving on one's artistic technique or to kick start that project you've been procrastinating on. We meet the 2nd Sunday of every month. Adults only. Please RSVP to ktycholis@richmond.ca

Art for Lunch

Thursday May 17, 12–1pm

Great food, great art and great conversation! Join us for tours of the current exhibition with the Art Gallery Curator, followed by a lunch in the Gallery. These social lunches are a great lunch-hour escape to chat about art and meet other people. Pre-registration required, \$10 per person includes tour and tasty lunch. Vegetarian and meat options available.

Register online at www.richmond.ca/register or by phone 604-276-4300

Family Sunday

May 27, June 24, July 22, Aug 26

1:00 – 4:00 pm , Free

Families are invited to participate in various exhibition-related art projects and activities on the fourth Sunday of each month. It's free, thanks to the RBC Foundation.

Children's Summer Art Courses – Focus on Drawing

Explore drawing with a wide variety of materials and subjects. These week-long morning classes are a great introduction to the world of drawing, and all the many ways you can express yourself on paper! Learn the basics of form, shading, colour, line, and texture from the Art Gallery's professional art educator.

Ages 6 to 8

July 9 – 13, 2012 9:00am–12:00pm \$85/5 sessions Course #239610

Ages 8 to10

July 16 – 20, 2012 9:00am–12:00pm \$85/5 sessions Course #239610

Ages 9 to12

July 23 – 27 9:00am–12:00pm \$85/5 sessions Course #239612

Register online at www.richmond.ca/register or by phone 604-276-4300