

Picturing the “Global Family”: CYJO’s *Mixed Blood*
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(English translation from original French text)

Scholarly works on the family in a globalized context may be multiplying, but pieces of literature or works of art dealing with the same theme remain rare.

In 2014, the pioneering work of an American artist working with the subject gained attention from art critics and contemporary art amateurs.

The photographic project *Mixed Blood*, created by art photographer CYJO, dating back to 2010, illustrates in a gripping way the considerations mentioned above on the role of the contemporary individual in both the familial and global dimensions.

An American photographer of Korean ancestry, CYJO, who was raised in the United States, has always explored the themes of cross-cultural experiences, not denying that her own experience led her to question the notions of identity and otherness.

In *Mixed Blood*, CYJO captures nineteen multicultural or multi-ethnic families in New York and Beijing. In each of these family portraits, the artist reinvents this traditional type of representation that ran through the history of art. CYJO pictures families posing in their households.

The pictures are characterized by a representation of the social and economic situation of each family: more or less sophisticated house furniture, more or less aesthetic interiors... For some, the interiors are simple and sturdy, probably denoting a crossing of cultures experienced in the context of a hard-working way of life to which immigrants are often subjected. For others on the contrary, the housing is decorated with contemporary pieces of art, which hints to an upper-class family globalization.

All these families show an invariant element through their very variety. All families pictured are multiethnic, underlining the artist’s will to represent the possibility of developing a bond through love and family affection that goes beyond ethnic, religious or language barriers.

This representation must have been aided of course by the urban context in which the work is set. Few cities in the world are as yet as interwoven with diverse community connections that irrigate the whole social fabric than those of New York and Beijing.

If the social stratum of each family can easily be deduced from observing their interiors, one may also point to a certain level of uniformity in the way of life that crosses social boundaries. In almost every picture, we can imagine a television and a computer. In almost every picture, we can see the classical imagery of the household “communitarian” life, represented here by living rooms with sofas as the central place of collective conviviality.

But the most interesting point here is doubtlessly the attitude adopted by the families in their pose. Facing the photographer's camera, they all stand up toward the spectator, but the artist cautiously individualized each of the family members, with the only exception of babies who need to be held in their parent's arms, usually the mother.

This pose is very revealing. The distance between family members is short, but always present. This may have been a way for the artist to express the view that beyond the loving union of couples impersonated by their children, globalization is also characterized by a strong sense of individualism. The social structures are absent from the picture, as they are in this new globalized world, and the family is the last form of interpersonal union that remains. The individuals are standing at a distance, and contrary to the usual family portrait, which often includes close physical contacts between family members, they are here free from such "mandatory squeezing".

One can moreover see a form of inevitable social molding and hierarchy reappearing in the position of family members on the image: left to right, father-mother-child(ren).

In the end, more than an idealistic vision of a multicultural world that would have set aside any form of ethnic barrier, CYJO reveals many contradictions inherent to the process of globalization. Multiculturalism is confronted with individualism, personal independence is confronted with the perpetuation of a traditional social order, and the possibilities of cultural circulations are confronted with persisting social stratification.

A highly evocative and topical work, *Mixed Blood* is, as yet, a unique piece of art both in terms of aestheticism, and socio-political clear-sightedness.