



ARTIST STATEMENT

Sami Tsang Navigates the Great In-Between

For her first solo gallery exhibition, Chinese-Canadian artist Sami Tsang shows a body of work that investigates the complexities of mythology, cultural inheritance, and personal liberation through the lens of her Chinese and Western cultures.

BY JENNA ADRIAN-DIAZ

May 30, 2025



'I'm the Reflection of You.' Courtesy of Claire Oliver Gallery

Name: Sami Tsang

Age: 27

Where you're based: Toronto, Canada

Instagram: [@samitsangart](https://www.instagram.com/samitsangart)

Title of work: I'm the Reflection of You

Where to see it: "Our Family Portrait," Claire Oliver Gallery, New York City.

Three words to describe this work:

Reflection, tension, and tenderness

What was on your mind at the time:

When I was making this work I was thinking a lot about how the people closest to us shape who we become. The work reflects on the ways we inherit physically and emotionally from our families, especially through the lens of being a daughter and navigating generational expectations. I was also thinking about a Cantonese proverb I heard often growing up: 嫁雞隨嫁, 狗隨狗 — "If you marry a chicken, follow the chicken; if you marry a dog, follow the dog." It's often used to suggest that once you commit to someone, you follow them unconditionally, for better or worse. For me, it raises questions about inheritance, how we are expected to unquestioningly fall into certain roles and the pressure to follow paths shaped by tradition, even when they don't serve us.

An interesting feature that's not immediately noticeable:

The body of the figure acts like a landscape, with small figurines perched and climbing across it, almost like a wild child running freely and innocently through a mountain range. Growing up in Hong Kong, hiking was one of our main family activities. We'd go into the mountains once a month, and I still remember how overwhelming and peaceful that terrain felt. I also think about landscape in traditional Chinese painting, not just as background, but as emotional and spiritual space. That idea shaped how I built this work. The surface of the figure is more than skin. It's a site of memory, imagination, and liberation.

How the work reflects your practice as a whole:

My work often lives in the in-between, where tenderness meets tension. I use humor, ornamentation, and clay's physicality to tell stories visually that are complex and have many perspectives at once. My work explores themes of family dynamics, cultural duality, and memory through figuration, exaggeration, symbolism and humor with influences as ranging as classical Chinese iconography and comics. This work is part of a larger and ongoing conversation I'm navigating between reverence and resistance. Another theme that runs through my work is breaking cycles, barriers and charting your own course. This often runs counter to the concept of filial piety, which is so important in Chinese families. It's something I grapple with a lot and by virtue of making the work, I think it's something I'm doing.

One song that captures the work's essence:

"What Was I Made For" by Billie Eilish