

CHEN YANYIN  
“Mother” Series

## Brief Overview

The series, "Mother" is centered on several moments and montages in my mother's life. Through a group of typical Shanghaineses who were close to her, the work conveys the mental and ideological condition of the generations from 1936 to 1999. The figures represent the popular working class in Shanghai from these years.

Sculptures, oil paintings and installations were all transferred from real photographs, so they will be displayed on the wall next to the artworks. The series of works will be arranged in chronological fashion regardless of the medium. The exhibition space will be taken into consideration during the installation.

There are seven parts of the work "Mother". Including 6 paintings, 12 photographs and 5 sets of sculptures.

**I.**

1936 - Childhood

**II.**

1949 - The Young Pioneers of Communist China

**III.**

1956 - Farewell to First Love

1963 - Mother in 1963

1998 - Elderly Mother

**IV.**

1959 - My Aunt and My Cousins

1963 - The Birth of Two Boys

**V.**

1966 - Commemorial Photo on the Bund

1966 - Commemorate Photo in Shanghai With Li Hong,  
Cao Weiguo, Zhang Jianjun, Wang Guodong, Xie Chunhui,  
Wu Weikang, Jiang Haitao and Jin Xiangmin

**VI.**

1985 - Office

**VII.**

1978 - Mother and Sister

1982 - Loneliness



I. 1936 - Childhood Oil on canvas, 180 x 150cm, 2012



Family photo  
35x45 cm

It is a group portrait taken at 1936 with my mother, my maternal grandparents and my uncle. My grandfather wanted to commemorate my uncle's 1st birthday and went to a photo studio. My mother was still a little girl standing next to my grandma.



**II. 1949 - The Young Pioneers of Communist China** Sculpture, life sizes,  
figure x 15 pcs, base x 6pcs overall: 200 x 150 x 200cm 2010



Family photo  
35x45 cm

On Oct.1, 1949, Mao Zedong declared the founding of the People's Republic of China and the ruling of a new government. He claimed that the government would serve its people. It would function according to plans overseeing every five years to strengthen socialism and to reach the final goal of communism. Education would be free and mandatory for every single child from all family backgrounds. There would be six years of elementary school and four years in middle school. Modeling after the Soviet Union and its training of the next generation, China set up the Communist Youth Group to praise its exemplary students and future successors. The members of the Communist Youth Group are from families of proletariat and revolutionaries. The proletariat was the exploited social groups before 1949, including laborers and peasants. They would be called "the people," the owners of the country. (Until today, the communist government still calls itself the People's Government.) My mother could not join in the Communist Youth Group because she came from a family of the bourgeoisie. She was loved by her family but abandoned by the society. Every time she mentions this she seems sad. I guess that she worked hard and proved herself as a distinguished candidate. She asked me to be studious and self-motivated, to be a good student and a useful member of the society.

The society at that time was filled with hope and aspirations. People loved the new China and the Communist Party. As long as the people follow the Party, their lives will be better and happier. At the moment, almost everyone handed their destiny to the Party. They all shared one conviction: people would achieve the ultimate goal of "Communism." As a result, many people trusted the Party more than their own parents. Even though the image promoted by the Party at that time was "potatoes with braised beef," people still held onto it as their lifetime goal.



Family photo  
40x30 cm

My mother ended her first romantic relationship in 1956. It was against their will to separate as a result of the social transformations. He was born into a good family and had stellar grades. He was sent to the Academy of Military Affairs as one of the top candidates that were watched after by the country. He had to leave Shanghai. Even though the guy's mother was illiterate, she could imagine the future of her child because of the transformative trends at the moment. She knew that people like her son would run the country one day. She thought that marrying someone from a subpar family would cause negative effects on her son's future. The caste system had been the convention for thousands of years. Furthermore, the newly appointed Communist Party required that the right successors had good behaviors and no stigma in their political life. She waited for the right moment to get rid of her son's "stumbling block." My mother was asked by her lover to help seek studies for his brother. But the guy's mother needed the brother to get a job to make ends meet at home. Consequently, she used my mother's decision as an excuse to break off the young lovers. Mother realized that it would be impossible to ask grandfather for money. He used to be a Red Capitalist. His private capitals were made public by the Communist Party. Mother gave up the opportunity of higher education in order to help the brother. By entering into the factory she would be able to offer him financial assistance. She was sensitive about her public image and she endured the pain without saying a word. I believe that similar cases had occurred to many more in her times. The waves of pursuit of freedom didn't start to affect China until the New Cultural Movement. On the other hand, conventional etiquettes and moral perspectives were deeply rooted in the society. My mother and her lover belonged to a pained generation. In the same year, my mother was introduced to and got married with my father through a friend. Her ex-lover heard about the engagement and immediately asked his superiors to leave Harbing for Shanghai. He gave up his plans to intervene and conceded, under the great pressure from his mother. The lovers swore to be brother and sister for life. They thought about each other for the rest of their lives.

**III. 1956 - Farewell to First Love** Sculpture, life sizes, 110 x 90cm Base: 75(h) x 120 x 60cm 2007

\* The base can either be prepared by the artist or the organizers according to the actual installation.



**III. Mother in 1963** Sculpture, life sizes, 80 x 100 x 45cm Base: 75(h) x 120 x 60cm 2008  
\* The base can either be prepared by the artist or the organizers according to the actual installation.



**III.1998 - Elderly Mother** Sculpture, life sizes, 90 x 70 x 45cm Base: 60 x 60 x 60cm 2008

\* The base can either be prepared by the artist or the organizers according to the actual installation.

My father passed away in 1989. Because my mother wasn't mentally pressured by father anymore, plus I helped set her up with her first love, Zhang, she spent several enjoyable years on her own. She dressed herself nicely and went on trips with her colleagues. Zhang visited her frequently. Some people persevere through whatever mental traumas and life crises. She's one of those who stayed happy ultimately and kept her kind and outgoing nature. My mother is a beautiful woman like this.





**Mother from 1985 to 1998** Installation view at Shanghai Art Museum



**IV. 1959 - My Aunt and My Cousins** Oil on canvas, 180 x 150cm, 2012



Family photo  
35x45 cm

My aunt has a certain Western type of beauty. She was married to my uncle at 16 (who later became a nationally renowned painter) and shared a strong bond with my father. The two families were very close. However, the sisterly care from my aunt later caused my father to have the wrong impression on my mother, resulting in an end to the aunt and mom's relationship. My cousins were instrumental to my childhood.



**IV. 1963 - The Birth of Two Boys** Oil on canvas, 180 x 150cm, 2012



Family photo  
35x45 cm

People's Republic of China suffered from a nationwide natural disaster from 1960 to 1963. People were without food. Millions of peasants starved to death. My mom gave birth to my sister in 1960. Due to malnutrition, my sister wasn't healthy and lacked the proper care and attention from my father. Near the end of the disaster in 1963, my mom gave birth to my brother. The family became lively again because of the arrival of a son. My father was particularly attentive and loving to my mother. They were very close. Mother experienced several years of love out of her marriage.

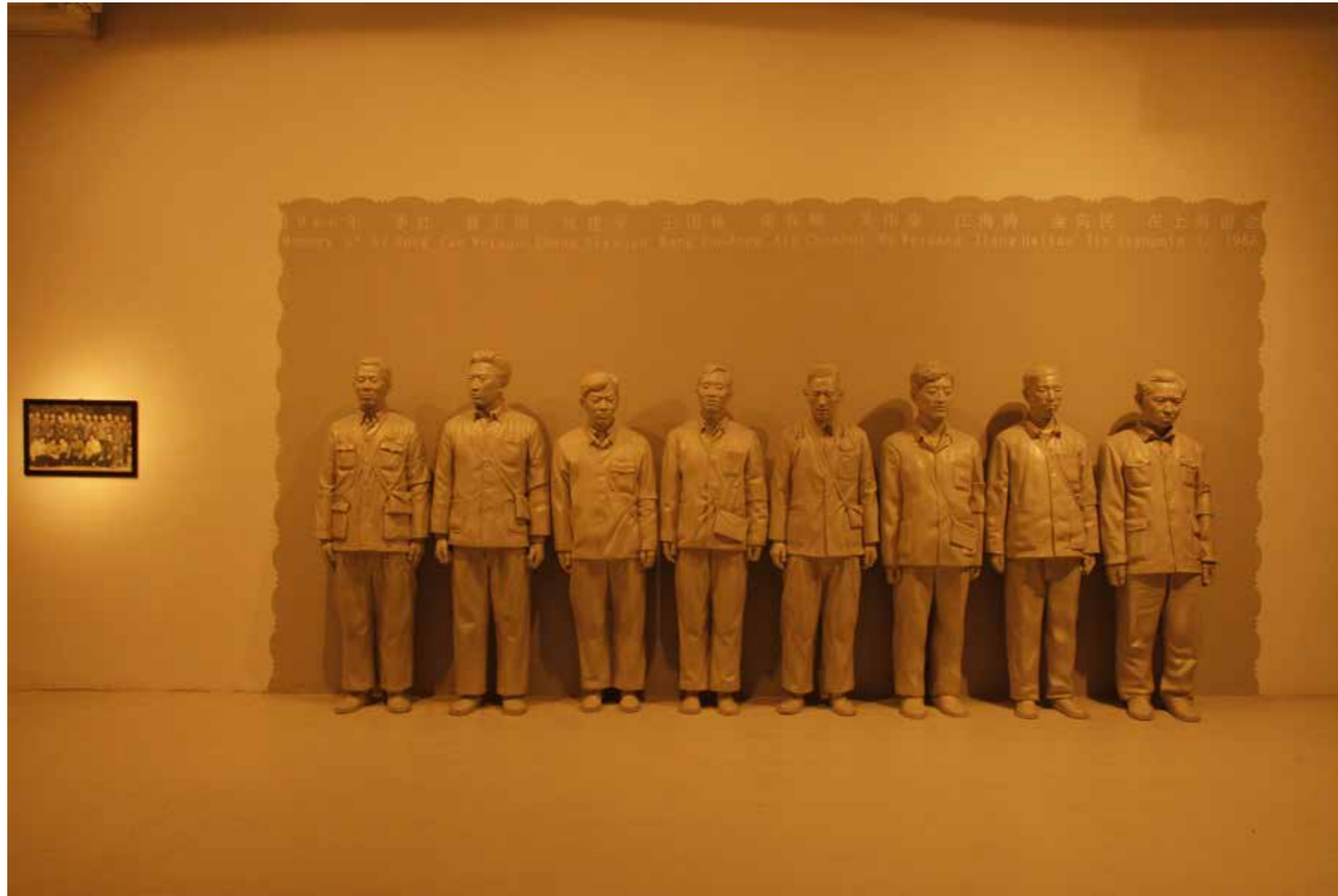


**V. 1966 - Commemorial Photo on the Bund** Oil on canvas, 180 x 150cm, 2012



Family photo  
35x45 cm

The Cultural Revolution initially started when students went on strike. It was followed by a chain of nationwide revolutions that fought with the capitalists, the landowners and the right wing. Immediately afterwards, the working class went on strike to join in the historically unprecedented revolution of the proletariat. They were divided into two factions - the fraction to save the king and the rebels. The people that were supposedly safe during the revolution today would become anti-revolutionaries tomorrow. Yesterday's revolutionaries would be tomorrow's prisoners. The two factions created a reign of terror where people were fighting amongst themselves. The piece "Rebels" were a typical snapshot of the working class during the Cultural Revolution. My mom inevitably got involved in it. Like the majority of the people, she was filled with faith and passion towards the Party and dove into the waves of the Revolution. She was also confused about the direction the revolution was going. Since she had already made a decision on the fraction, she experienced a movement that she did not dare looking back.



Family photo  
35x45 cm

**V. 1966 - Commemorate Photo in Shanghai With Li Hong, Cao Weiguo, Zhang Jianjun, Wang Guodong, Xie Chunhui, Wu Weikang, Jiang Haitao and Jin Xiangmin**  
Each: 180 x 50 x 35cm Overall: 500 x 250 x 60cm Background (Paper, can be rolled up): 600 x 250 x 60cm 2012



V. 1966 - Commemorate Photo in Shanghai With Li Hong, Cao Weiguo, Zhang Jianjun, Wang Guodong, Xie Chunhui, Wu Weikang, Jiang Haitao and Jin Xiangmin



Family photo, 35x45 cm

**VI. 1985 - Office** A restored work environment with duplicates of readymades  
Installation | Sculptures x 25pcs

\* Still in the process of manufacturing

My mother was in charge of managing and archiving technical documents.



**VII. 1978 - Mother and Sister** Oil on canvas, 180 x 150cm, 2012



Family photo  
35x45 cm

In 1968 during the Cultural Revolution, my father left Shanghai to work in the greater mainland. He had one month's vacation in Shanghai for the Lunar New Year. Mother lived with brother, sister and me. I left home to go to Shanghai Arts and Crafts School in 1977. Mother was left with my brother and sister.



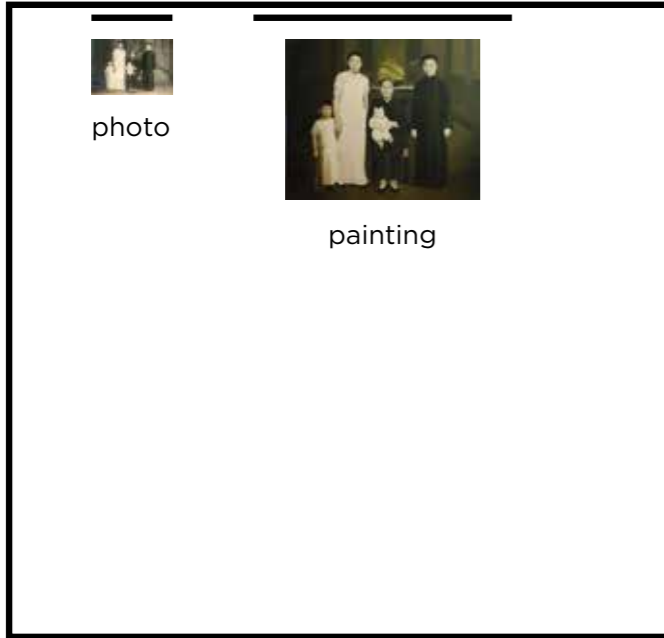


**VII. 1982 - Loneliness** Oil on canvas, 180 x 150cm, 2012

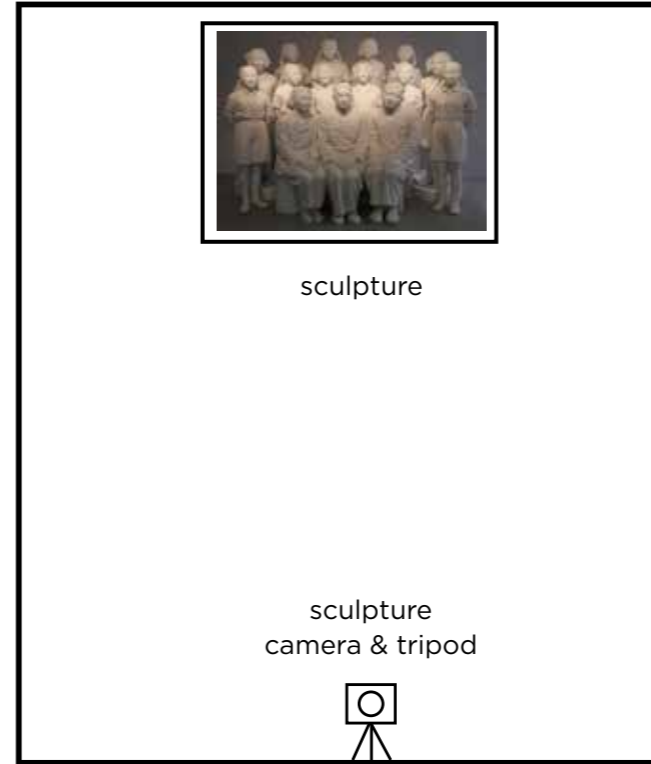


Family photo  
35x45 cm

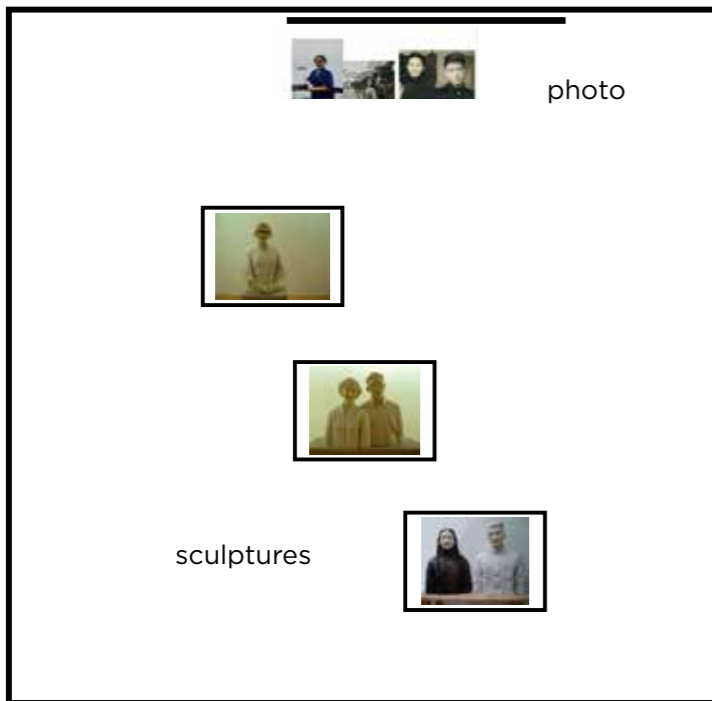
Father retired early to come back to Shanghai in 1979 upon our request. Because of years of separation, plus my aunt's instigation between my parents, my father and mother were on the brink of a breakdown. Mother's muted melancholia concerned me. By that time I had graduated from the Shanghai Arts and Crafts School and started to work at my mother's company to design gold coins. In order to console her, I took her to stroll in the park and photographed her. She complied with my suggestions for the photograph to satisfy me, but she was still sad and lonely on the inside.



**Space I.**  
 approximate size : 500x500 cm  
 1936 - Childhood



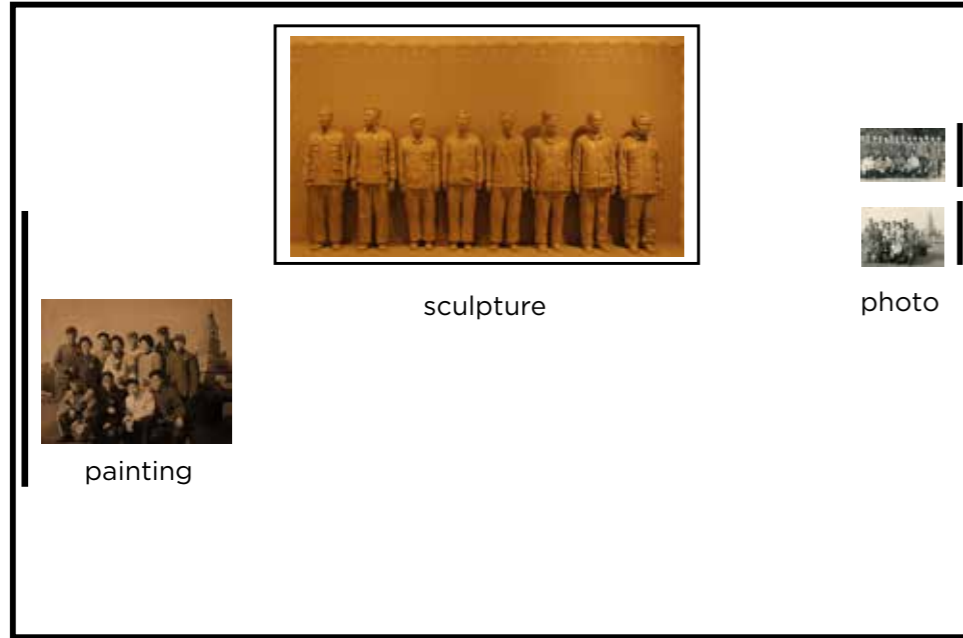
**Space II.**  
 approximate size : 500x800 cm  
 Dark space with lights in the middle.  
 1949 - The Young Pioneers of Communist China



**Space III.**  
 approximate size : 600x600 cm  
 1956 - Farewell to First Love  
 1963 - Mother in 1963  
 1998 - Elderly Mother



**Space IV.**  
 approximate size : 600x500 cm  
 1959 - My Aunt and My Cousins  
 1963 - The Birth of Two Boys



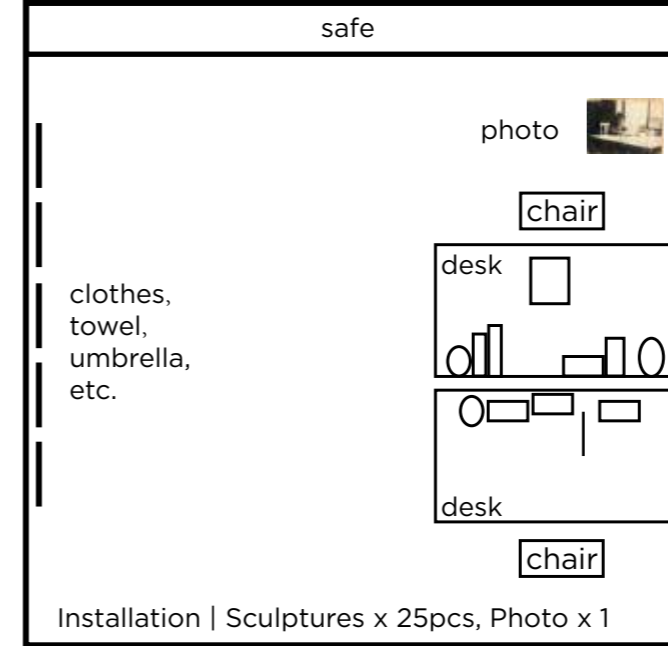
**Space V.**  
approximate size : 900x600 cm

1966 - Commemorial Photo on the Bund  
1966 - Commemorate Photo in Shanghai With Li Hong, Cao Weiguo, Zhang Jianjun, Wang Guodong, Xie Chunhui, Wu Weikang, Jiang Haitao and Jin Xiangmin



**Space VII.**  
approximate size : 800x500 cm

1978 - Mother and Sister  
1982 - Loneliness



**Space VI.**  
approximate size : 400x400 cm  
1985 - Office Installation. An environment made up of objects duplicated from found objects and readymades.  
\* Still in the process of manufacturing

There are seven parts of the work "Mother". Including 6 paintings, 12 photographs and 5 sets of sculptures.

**\* The dimensions of each space are to be decided and altered according to the actual installation.**

2013  
Chen Yanyin