

2025

Red in my memory

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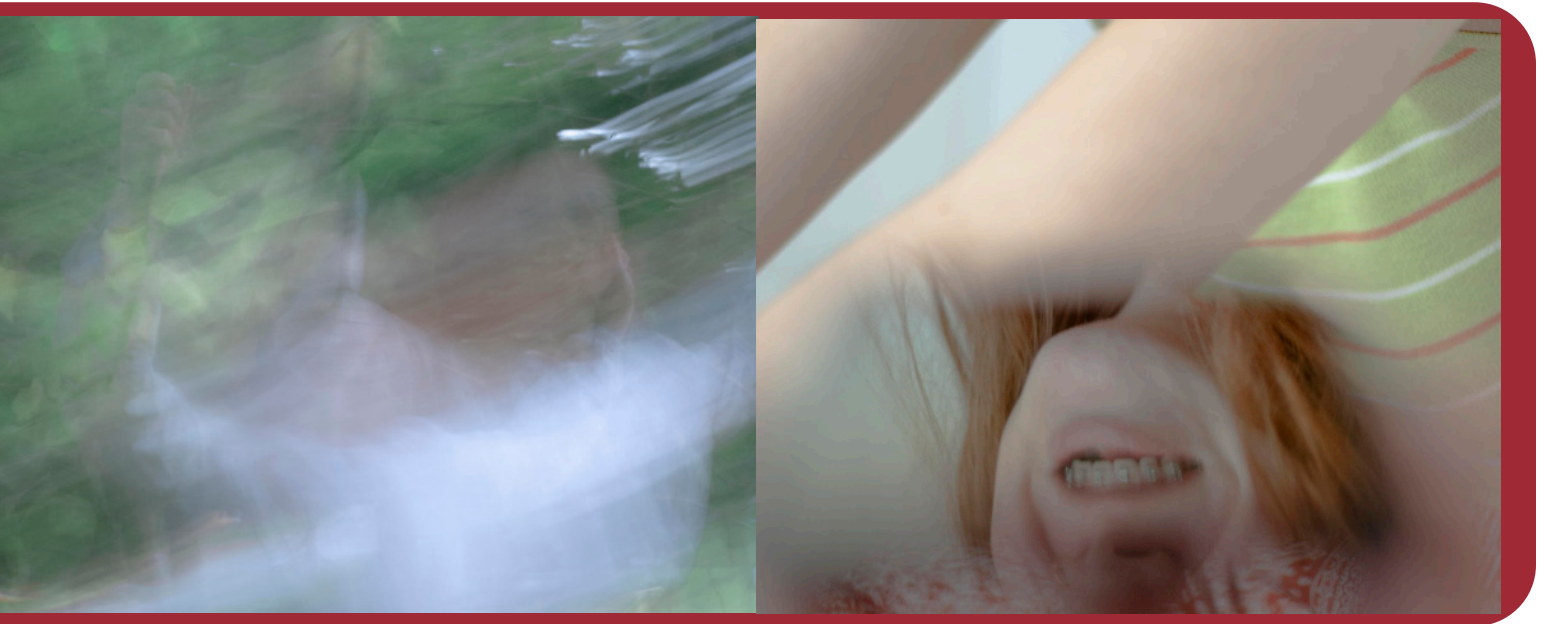
Nancy Wang

Each year, as the first new moon of the Chinese lunar calendar marks the beginning of the Chinese New Year, the visual language of celebration takes over, with red emerging as the dominant hue in decorations, art, and symbols. Preparations for the New Year begin, with ubiquitous 福 (fú) taped onto windows and doors, symbolizing more than just a wish for happiness—believed to invite fortune. Rolls of couplets (对联) are placed on the doors, while peach blossoms and bamboo adorn the windows. Each year, as the streets of Chinatown come alive with the beats of lion dances and firecrackers, I'm showered with confetti and given 红包 (hóngbāo) (red envelopes) filled with money. Every action holds special meaning, symbolizing the giving or receiving of luck for the new year. In the drawer of my desk, I keep a collection of red envelopes from each year, as though hoarding luck itself. Often adorned with gold details and its year's designated zodiac animal, these envelopes carry more than just monetary value—they symbolize the passing of blessings and the continuity of fortune across generations. The act of giving and receiving red envelopes, in art, represents familial bonds and the transmission of good fortune within the community.

In traditional Chinese painting, red has long symbolized prosperity, protection, and good fortune, with a rich artistic and cultural history dating back to the Tang and Song dynasties. According to ancient folklore, the color red and loud noises, such as firecrackers and fireworks, were believed to ward off demons. As spring arrives and the cold persists, cherry blossoms (plum flowers) are among the first to bloom. In Chinese art, these early blossoms symbolize resilience and enduring hope, embodying the concept of renewal. Rendered in delicate brushwork, often with ink wash or watercolor, the flowers appear in varying shades of red or pink, evoking themes of rebirth and new beginnings. The brushstroke technique, with its fluidity and spontaneity, contrasts fragility with strength, symbolizing resilience in the face of adversity. Chinese New Year art often depicts commu-

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nities and small towns, where children dressed in red embody the joy and vitality of the season. Red firecrackers and decorations, carefully integrated into these works, symbolize protection and abundance with their deep roots in cultural traditions. Examining Chinese New Year art reveals that these colors and symbols are far more than decorative; they are steeped in centuries of tradition. The evolution of artistic techniques—from the delicate brushwork of the Tang and Song dynasties to the intricate woodblock prints of the Ming and Qing dynasties—shows how these symbols have been continually reinterpreted and preserved across mediums. Through calligraphy, ink washing, woodblock printing, and even modern digital art, artists have upheld the essence of renewal, hope, and prosperity.

As I turn 20, I realize that the red in my life holds memories of every New Year I've experienced. These memories capture the vibrant spirit of the season—family, friends,



celebrations, laughter, happiness, and hope for the year ahead. In Chinese culture, as well as many cultures across Asia, red symbolizes luck and prosperity, making it a constant thread woven throughout my childhood. As millions around the world celebrate the Lunar New Year, I understand that the red in my life is not unique to me alone. The same red decorates homes and windows everywhere, creating a shared tapestry of joy, luck, and renewal. This red binds us all together in celebration, symbolizing community and family. It carries not only personal memories but also the weight of centuries of artistic tradition and cultural significance. In this way, the essence of the Lunar New Year is found not just in its traditions, but in the shared joy of a fresh start, the hope for a brighter future, and the collective spirit that unites families and communities. The red in my life, like the red around me, speaks to the power of togetherness and the enduring love that shapes our memories.