

About the series '*Family Dreaming*'

by artist *benkai*



This series of ink drawings, unnamed at the time, was first started in 2005 when I was only 18 years old. It was created early on in my time at art school, left for many years and pulled out only rarely to look at – then eventually revisited with a stronger pull nearly twenty years later, in 2023 and 2024. I've asked myself since: *what was it that prompted me to revisit these drawings after so long?* It's hard to say, yet on reflection I feel at least part of it was a sense of slowly losing clearer memories and connection to my own childhood, adolescence, and early 20s that followed... the "dreaming years" as I sometimes consider them.

In that wide timespan a great many things happened in my life – too varied to classify under any single banner or simple assessment. While challenging, these were also immensely fulfilling years that shaped me into who I am now in so many ways. I'm grateful for all these years gave me.

Still, it's strange to look back on drawings that my long-forgotten former self did so long ago, and try to recall the original motives and inspirations that may have been behind them. Some of it I do recall fairly clearly; for others, the original meaning may have changed. Yet to me this perhaps speaks to the power of these drawings, in that they can still hold meaning for me – even if different meaning – over twenty years later. However distant in time, these drawings communicate clear feelings and perspectives that open up whole worlds of *memory*, *growth* and *emotion* that I feel is still relevant to me today. I am glad these visual reflections haven't been lost or forgotten.

At 18, I had just moved to Nova Scotia about a year before, on a dream to attend fine art school there at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD) University (a dream I fulfilled over the course of the next five years). This journey across-Canada, away from my home in Ontario several provinces away for the very first time, was a period of immense challenges, exploration, learning, life reflection, discovery and growth. No doubt I was processing many things at that time – perhaps in some sense, *all* the things I was then aware of and that had come before. Art became an emotional, spiritual and intellectual processing space like none other – allowing me to better sort out my thoughts and feelings, and feel more directly attuned with myself, and not alone.

Such sincere explorations and reflections are I believe reflected in these drawings. Together, they explore reflections on my life, adolescence, and what it means to grow – both to grow independently and also in relation to other people, like friends and family. While my understanding of 'family' at the time was likely more narrow, referring mostly to my own biological family, this understanding was already beginning to broaden to include other people as well: friends, peers, mentors, loved ones. 'Family' then can be a bucket that encompasses *all* people, *all* beings to whom we care for and share some relationship. From this broader lens, this series '*Family Dreaming*' explores the dynamic, changing complexities of family and social life and relationship in all its forms; the relational waters and shared/independent dreams and aspirations that each of us must navigate through life. In my view, 'family dreaming' is likely applicable to most social creatures in varied ways, and certainly applies to us humans.

Years later, I decided to scan, digitally clean and in some cases alter and reconfigure these drawings to draw out their hidden powers and deeper meanings. All of these were initially drawn very directly and simply with an ink brush, using archival black India ink on fine art paper. This technique of hand-drawing with ink is being lost, it seems, to a new digital age, where we are made to believe everything can be done just as well by computer. Yet this will never really be true, and there is still something uniquely attractive about the quality of the hand drawn that I feel cannot be replicated in other ways.

Cleaned and adapted, I'm excited to now share these creations with a new public audience, including you! For me, this is a first as few people have ever seen these drawings before. I hope you enjoy them, and that they give you pause to think, and to explore their deeper meanings for you.

One more note on the title: I titled the series '*Family Dreaming*', because I believe this reflects at least part of what they are: the intermingled dreams and aspirations of different people who make up a 'family', however this is understood, with such dreams *colliding, expanding, reducing, merging, reforming, collapsing* and *expanding again* with time and effort, finding their expression in relation to each other. To me this title also evokes the dreaming that we should want to make *possible* as broader societies and cultures – not to forget our dreams or dismiss them as the mere "fancies" of childhood or young adulthood, but to recognize the *deep value* of carefully tended to dreams still today, for all of us, to help guide us collectively forward. Recognizing this, this series suggests a need to *continue to look to, provide space for, and honour our dreams* – especially the good ones, that can motivate and uplift so many; opening up whole new worlds of possibilities.

At the risk of saying too much I'll stop here, as I must leave enough space for your *own* personal thoughts and interpretations. Good art is, in my view, about much more than the artist, and should have meaning to all those who engage with it. Aside from my own meanings, drawn from my personal life and motivations, what is equally important is: *what do these drawings mean to you?*

More than anything, I hope you enjoy the series and find your own personal meanings within them. I strongly believe that our art creations gain far more meaning and depth when also appreciated, interpreted and shared by others. And that we all have inner dreams worth exploring,

connecting with others', and sharing. A world where all good dreams are supported is, I feel, surely a good world worth dreaming of.

Thank you for considering my drawings – if you'd like to reach out, I'd be most glad to hear your own thoughts, meanings and interpretations. And I hope if you do choose a drawing, it can evoke and inspire new meanings for you :)

Sincerely,

benkai

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