

# Datsun Tran Q&A



Datsun, *Then and Now* is such a beautiful and emotional book. Did you write it with a particular readership in mind?

***Then and Now was conceived as a poem first with the intention of honouring my family's story, as well as for all people who have been displaced. When I made it into an illustrated book, I wanted to encourage empathy amongst the broader population and show that refugees are just humans who have been forced to make difficult decisions to survive.***

Your art looks really different to most of the art we see in picture books. Can you tell us how you made those pictures?

***Working out how to make the art to best tell the story was the hardest part in the creation of Then and Now. I spent about 4 months experimenting with different layers of different inks to see what would blend and what would resist. I settled on using mulberry paper (which is what I use in my daily art practice), alcohol ink, pigmented ink and gouache. Once I knew how it all worked together, it was a process of covering the mulberry paper in alcohol ink and using pure alcohol to 'wipe away' to reveal highlights. I then selected certain things on some pages to paint in full colour gouache to direct the viewer's eye and expand on the storytelling.***



Your book is illustrated in two main colours: brown and blue. Can you tell us why you made this choice?

*This was a collaborative decision with you! [Tess at Slingshot]. We wanted to colour code the 'then' and the 'now' to further differentiate the past from the present. I chose these two colours specifically as I was already familiar with them in my day to day art practice. I feel the sepia tones I used for the 'then' is already a familiar tool used in visual language that most people would associate with times past. And as for the blue, I chose that because it's a strong contrast to the sepia. It's a blue that is bright but would also work in all of the compositions I had thought of for the book.*

It can be hard to make a living as an artist, but you've managed to do that for twenty years. That's really impressive! Do you have any tips for young people who are interested in an art career?

*My one biggest tip to anyone interested in an art career is to follow your curiosity. Don't fall into the trap of sticking to one medium or style; whatever you do that you're genuinely interested in, will be your style. It will naturally come out over time.*





The second-last illustration in *Then and Now* shows a little boat on a rough ocean, representing the boat that your parents and siblings took to arrive here from Vietnam. The Kenyan poet and teacher Warsan Shire once said this about refugee boats: 'No one puts their children in a boat unless the water is safer than the land.' I imagine your parents must have made this difficult decision because their lives in Vietnam were even more dangerous than that journey. Is there anything in particular that you would like everyone to know about refugee families?

***It's hard to say one thing that applies to all refugee families as everyone's stories and experiences are different. I would say that refugee families that survive are probably made up of some of the toughest and most adaptable people. But some also carry immense hurt and trauma, these are people who have had to rebuild their lives from scratch, so empathy is the least they deserve.***

Before journeying to this country from Vietnam, your parents travelled from China, also as refugees. Can you share with us how cultural connections were honoured and celebrated during your childhood on Wurundjeri land?

***My childhood was filled with all the traditional Chinese festivals, like the Lunar New Year, Ghost Month and the Mid-Autumn Festival, and a lot of the images in Then and Now are actually based on these traditional festivals. But the main way my family kept the connections to their homeland alive was with food, and while my family are culturally Chinese, the food had a massive Vietnamese influence. I remember how my mum used to cook up a massive amount of spring rolls every once in a while, and we shared them with our neighbours, This would always be a big hit with them as some of them had never even had a traditional spring roll before.***

