

Through the Eyes of Blue Bird

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30 Sept 2025

The eyes are where it begins. They are often said to be the windows to the soul, and in Cheong Kiet Cheng's *Blue Bird* they serve just that purpose. In each work, a gaze appears first, steady and insistent, before the rest of the drawing unfurls around it. These eyes compel as much as they console, pulling the viewer into a world that is tender, strange, and infinitely layered. They are the points of entry, portals through which the drawings take their first breath. To meet them is to feel both seen and drawn in, as if stepping across a threshold into a realm where fragility and strength converge.

From this beginning, Cheong's process moves into rhythm. Guided by the stillness of Zazen meditation, she draws not from outlines but from shadows, letting them lead her hand across the surface. Line after line accumulates, thousands of marks weaving into living constellations, pulsing with both discipline and unpredictability. This is not drafting but unfolding; the page becomes a field where thoughts and breaths take form, where silence translates into ink.

Out of this density emerge figures, animals, and spirits, recognisable yet never fully familiar. They hover in the uncanny valley, part human and part otherworldly, creatures refracted through Cheong's own whacky, idiosyncratic style. Their strangeness unsettles even as it charms, keeping the viewer in a state of wonder, always slightly off balance. They are companions as much as guides, reminding us that transformation often comes cloaked in ambiguity.

Watercolour interrupts and softens this intricacy, seeping into the line work with washes of chance. Colour arrives like weather: sudden, fleeting, luminous. It resists containment, flowing across boundaries and refusing perfection. Where ink builds a world of repetition and control, watercolour opens it to impermanence and release. The interplay between the two mirrors Cheong's own journey, an existence shaped by discipline and fragility, suffering and renewal, meditation and surrender.

That journey is steeped in hardship. Cheong has lived through long seasons of illness, both her own and that of her children. Schizophrenia resurfaced in her most vulnerable periods, after the birth of her daughters, entwining itself with the anxieties and exhaustion of early motherhood. Her daughters too faced illnesses, moments of fragility that stretched her to her limits. Yet Cheong does not recount these as tragedies or fall into the rhetoric of victimhood. She regards them instead as teachers. "If the illness I have is the result of the influence of my past karma," she reflects, "then perhaps this suffering has been my teacher." In this light, every challenge becomes material, every wound a line on the page.

Motherhood becomes a prism through which *Blue Bird* gathers its meaning. Inspired by Maurice Maeterlinck's allegory, in which a brother and his ailing sister search for hope, Cheong reimagines

herself as the guide, leading her children toward light and safety. Her drawings become maps of that journey, both intimate and expansive, where care and responsibility are inscribed not only in narrative but in gesture. The density of her lines echoes the constancy of maternal devotion, while the sudden bursts of colour mirror moments of renewal amidst difficulty. Through these works, we sense both the exhaustion and the tenderness of a life shaped by the demands of care, and the resilience that blossoms from it.

The eyes that anchor her drawings are in part her own, but also those of her daughters, those who look back at her with trust and vulnerability. They are steady, watchful, luminous. To begin each work with the eyes is to affirm presence: “I see you. I am here.” This act of seeing resists despair, affirming connection even in the midst of hardship. From there, the drawing grows outward like a living organism, building a cosmos around the gaze that first opened it.

What makes *Blue Bird* remarkable is the refusal to treat illness and suffering as something to be conquered and cast aside. Instead, Cheong transfigures them into images of endurance and grace. Trauma is metabolised into pattern, into rhythm, into colour that bursts and bleeds with life. Pain becomes a line, fear becomes a shadow, fragility becomes a creature both strange and familiar. This is not a narrative of “woe is me,” but a testimony of how even suffering can refine perception, opening new ways of seeing.

Standing before these works, one feels caught between worlds. The uncanny figures, the hypnotic line work, the sudden washes of watercolour—all hold the viewer in a state of suspension, as if hovering on the edge of dream and waking. Yet beneath the strangeness runs a current of care. Each drawing is a gesture of survival, an act of love, a reminder that resilience is not the absence of suffering but the ability to transform it into something luminous.

Blue Bird is less a conclusion than a meditation. It is not a story with an ending, but a field of states, shifting between vulnerability and endurance, strangeness and intimacy, shadow and light. To stand before these works is to be drawn into their gaze, to feel both the stillness and the movement they contain. And what emerges is not resolution but the simple truth that even suffering can give rise to light.