



Elizabeth Fortescue for the Telegraph Australia: 16 October 2014

In the 1960s and '70s, when Gabby Malpas was a little girl, no one talked about adoption.

Fast-forward to 2014 and the troubling issue has risen to the surface in the most natural of ways — in the skilled and intricately-created artworks made by Malpas in her Sydney home.

But don't expect this artist's work to be obvious or overt. With her preference for allusion and symbolism, Malpas has made paintings that can be read purely as decorative objects.

If there is one exception, it is the densely-worked still life painting in which Malpas has incorporated a photograph of herself as a baby with her adoptive mother Bonnie.

This painting's title, *When Did You Find Out You Were Adopted? (You're Shittin' Me — Right?)*, references Malpas' disbelief when family friends would "side" up to her at gatherings and ask that.

How could anyone imagine she hadn't noticed her Chinese looks in the midst of a caucasian family, she thought.

In another painting, titled *'Family Mart'*, Malpas paints all eight children in her adoptive family as if they were maneki neko cats, the good luck toys that wave their paws in countless Asian restaurants.

Family Mart shows eight of the ten children as white cats. The two darker ones are Malpas and her older sister, who was also adopted but is not related to her by blood.

Malpas was born in 1966 in Auckland to a young, unmarried Chinese woman. "The Catholic Society phoned up Mum and Dad and said: 'Oh, you have a big family. We have a Chinese baby here; you have to take her'," Malpas says.

The Malpas family was "crucifix-above-every-bed Catholic", Malpas says. Even though she has found and loves her birth mother, the Malpas family made her what she is today, she says.

When Malpas met her birth mother, the artist learned what her mother had endured when forced to give up her baby. It was worse than what Malpas herself had suffered in discrimination for being a Chinese child in "white bread New Zealand". "It just closed up 40 odd years of hurt and angst," she says. Gabby Malpas, *Where Are You From?*, Platform 72, Central Park, 28 Broadway, Chippendale; until October 26, platformstore.com.au