

Rae-Yen Song 宋瑞渊

•~TUA~• 大眼 •~MAK~•

For Rae-Yen Song 宋瑞渊 (b. Edinburgh, 1993; lives and works in Glasgow), the immigrant experience of flux and resilience gives rise to an ongoing exercise in speculative worlding. Song's work shifts and changes as it tunes in to personal ancestral mythologies, Daoism, more-than-human politics, science fiction and entangled ecologies.

Tramway's gallery space has been transformed by Song into a vast, darkened abyss, hovering somewhere unknown between the deep sea and the skies above. At its heart glows a pond, home to a living ecosystem of plant and microscopic animal life, which quietly controls the entire environment. From this pond, a whole world unfurls. Its contours are shaped by a delicately immense 'microbeast' which floats throughout the entire gallery. The microbeast's tentacles become tunnel-like walkways for audiences to explore, and the central mantle is a sanctum in which to dwell. It is imagined by Song as an embodiment of *tua mak* 大眼 - a lost ancestor. The broader world which it inhabits emerges from a rich matrix of ideas, in which the ecology of the pond combines with Song's family mythologies, digital vision analysis systems, and multiple creative collaborations to form a complex entanglement of life. The artefacts bound up in this entanglement are presented as a network of costumes, tools, and energies, drifting throughout the spectral environment, like celestial~oceanic soot.

Many of these artefacts have been hand-crafted by the artist, who sees their intricate making both as the creation of a tangible, personal heritage, and as an act of reverence in respect of ancestors past, present and future. They are manifestations of a process of making-as-thinking, in which countless micro-decisions taken at an intimate material scale (the width of a stitch, the shape of a ceramic orifice, the junction of two pieces of willow) compound to create an entire macro-world.

Song considers the installation to be an expansive system of entangled energies - not an image of a system, but an actual, working infrastructure of connections and transfers. The ecosystem of the pond controls the exhibition's ever-changing lighting state, and constantly plays its own electronic musical instrument - subtly imposing itself on our experience of the environment. The human is not prioritised here. Ancestral presences drift and are as much a part of the entangled system as anything that we might think we understand. It is an open system of interrelation, between the seen and the unseen - microorganisms, atoms, vibrations, spirits. As such, the exhibition is also conceived as a space of rehearsal, to and from which other energies will be introduced and distributed. This distribution will come in the form of a live programme of public events – *OFFERINGS* – taking place over the course of the exhibition, which will entangle new bodies in the ecosystem of •~TUA~• 大眼 •~MAK~• through conversations, performances, workshops and rituals.

•~pond~• (*tua mak's qi*)

Song family pond from Edinburgh; tank; glazed ceramic; underwater lighting; microscope cameras; real time vision analysis system; wood; cob; fabric; offerings; sound played in real time; live video feed projections. 2025

•~pond~• (*tua mak's qi*) sits as the glowing nucleus of the exhibition. It teems with life - some of it visible, much of it not, and some of which has taken up residence in two ceramic beasts, submerged within. The pond houses two microscope video cameras, with live feeds projected on the gallery walls. A system of vision analysis uses those video feeds to allow the motion of microscopic lifeforms to control the exhibition's lighting, as well as the recorded sounds of the pond that emanate from beneath - allowing the pond to become its own living musical instrument.

The pond sits at the centre of an earthen shrine to *tua mak*, adorned with five offerings: a horn, a gourd, a sweep, a mask, and shoes.

•~microbeast~• (*tua mak's skin*)

Fabric; PVC; LED; metal. 2025

Song imagines the sprawling microbeast that floats throughout the gallery as an embodiment of *tua mak* 大眼 ("big eyes" in the Teochew Chinese dialect) - a human relative, known only through familial memories and myths, who drowned at sea aged thirteen in 1950s Singapore. *tua mak* would have been Song's mother's sibling - but died before Song's mother was born. Rae-Yen imagines the watery decomposition of *tua mak's* body and its consumption by innumerable others, conjuring *tua mak* as a dispersed life-system, cycling eternally in a process of continuous change and perpetual migration. Exploring the cultural and personal connections that have been broken through displacement, death and time, Song re-imagines *tua mak* as part ghost, part temple, and always a symbiotic host to other life-forms: glowing creatures support its tentacles, and the living ecosystem of the pond occupies its core.

The scale of the microbeast is such that it evokes a landscape, and the artist here pays respects to the origin tale of Pangu, the primordial creation figure in Chinese mythology and Daoism whose decomposing body became earthly features such as mountains, water, land, air, plants and creatures

•~mountains~• (*tua mak's feet*)

Assorted fabrics (hand dyed, inherited); willow. 2025

At the end of the microbeast's tentacles, eight tapestries depict ancestral characters. These extremities are at once feet, heads, and parasitic bodies; hybrid beings gazing outwards. They embody distinct presences - human and more-than-human, mythic and cosmic, earthly and ghostly. Song envisions them as portals for the flow of memory and imagination. Some characters have surfaced in earlier realms in altered forms, while others are awakened here for the first time.

•~ghosts~• (song~xian)

Digital animations; glass. 2025

In early 2025, Song began working with microbiologist Keira Tucker, who generated microscopic footage of organisms living in the Song family pond. Song reimagined these lifeforms as eight glazed ceramic deities. These drew from the Daoist tradition of *kim sin*, whereby statues of deities are themselves considered as spiritual presences, to which daily respects are paid in both temples and homes.

These ceramics were 3D scanned, and have now been transformed into lively, animated beings. Shimmering inside a series of mouth-blown glass heads, they sway gently, then gyrate and contort fitfully - dancing with movements echoing those observed in the pond's microscopic world.

•~thunder~• (tua mak's voice)

Multi-channel soundscape. 2025

A new soundscape composed by Flora Yin Wong, in collaboration with Song, cycles continuously through periods of quietude and cacophony. In response to the story of *tua mak*, Yin Wong has woven her own field recordings with a bank of Song's audio samples: of family gatherings and other recordings made in Singapore (between 2009 - 2016); sounds of the artist's father and Song meditating together; Gamalan music heard in Indonesia; sounds of the jungle; sounds of the sea. These are mixed with recordings made using a hydrophone to listen to the interior life of the family pond, as well as sounds created using the sculptural offerings positioned around •~pond~• (*tua mak's qi*).

•~leaf~• (ahma's armour)

Glazed ceramic; willow; waxed thread; assorted fabrics (hand dyed, inherited); screen-printed silk; wool. 2025

This armour is influenced by the inner and outer landscapes of Daoist *shanshui* paintings, with echoes of ancient jade burial suits. The ceramic relief tiled surface unfolds as an aerial view, of *tua mak* rendered as landscape: faces as mountains, limbs as pathways, parasites as islands. The armour becomes both topography and guardian.

Shanshui paintings were never only depictions of terrain, but maps of inner cultivation - guides for journeys of the mind and spirit. Before cartography fixed the world in place, maps were cosmograms: living diagrams that situated the traveller within a cosmos that shifts and breathes with them. The armour is designed not only to guard the itinerant wearer, but also to serve as a vessel for myth and memory, preserving the story of *tua mak* for all eternity. A cloak extends this storytelling; histories will move, transform, and re-emerge in the ripples of an epic garment made to be animated and distorted by the energy of future wearers.

•~leaf~• (*ahma's armour*) was made for *ahma* - Song's maternal grandmother and *tua mak's* mother.

•~clouds~• (*tua mak's breath*)

Hand dyed canvas; assorted inherited fabrics. 2025

Five cloud costumes drift at height throughout the gallery. Song imagines them as ancestral presences: all-seeing, scowling, judgmental. They hang on pulleys, to be lowered at points during the exhibition: they will be worn by invited artists, thinkers, family, and friends, in a programmed series of public events – *OFFERINGS* – which allow participants to entangle themselves in the shifting ecology of the exhibition.

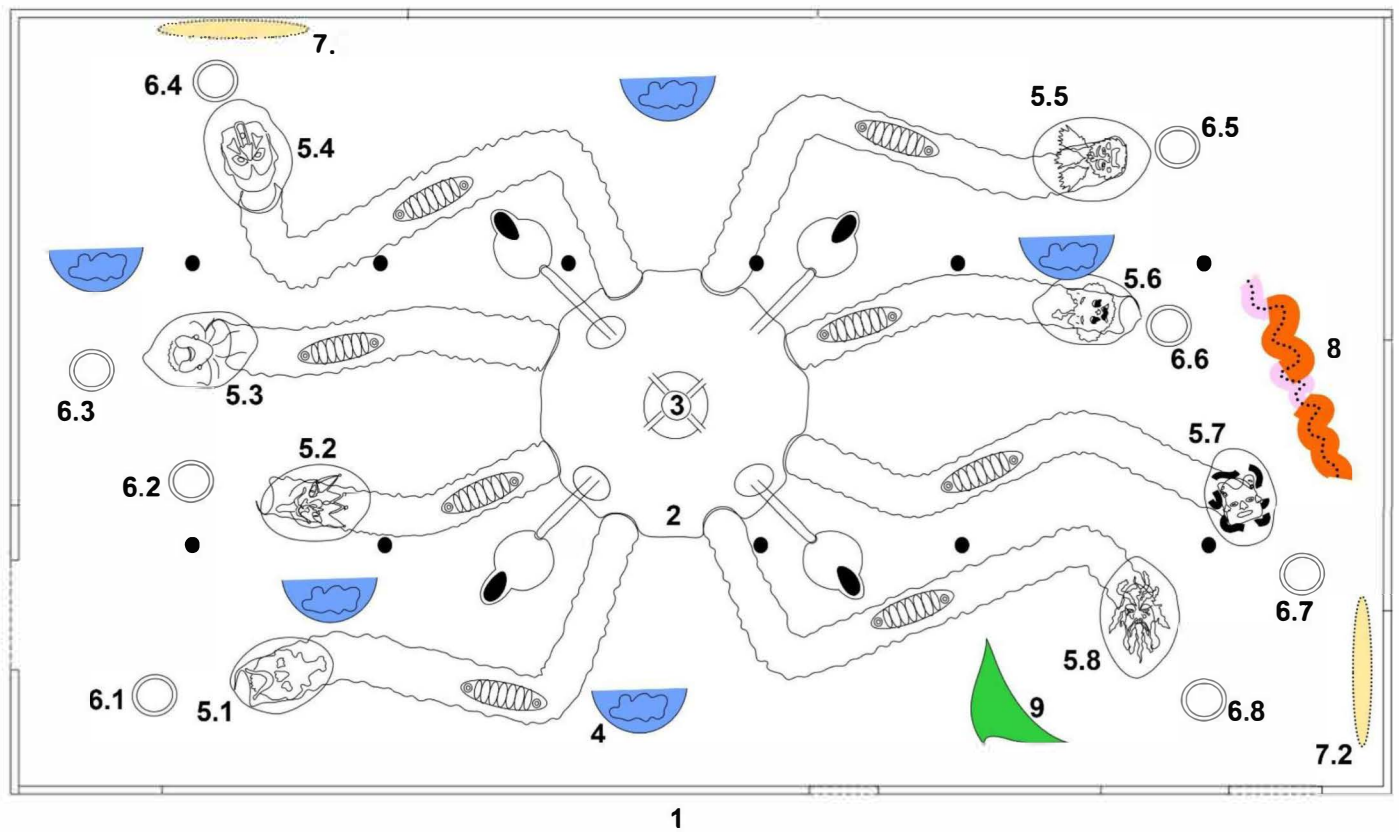
song dynasty ○○○○

Assorted fabrics; willow; paper; rice paste; glazed ceramics. 2025

song dynasty ○○○○ is an imagined chimerical beast: a parasitic worm with heads of ancestral fish. It gestures to the ancient and the intimate, to the deep time of marine life and the shifting currents of migration. The costume is crafted from inherited fabrics and adorned with ceramic talismans made by the artist's parents, embodying 五行 (*wǔxíng*), the five Daoist phases: wood, earth, water, metal, and fire.

Like the polychaete worms that inspired it, the work survives through adaptation; it exchanges the patriarchal ferocity of traditional dragon and lion dances for its own singular vitality. The parasitic worm becomes a host, sheltering Song's family within its folds during performative moments when it is worn as a five-person costume. An armour and a sanctuary, it honours those who wriggled their way into new worlds and made them home.

song dynasty ○○○○ continues a family collaboration, ongoing since 2017, in which the artist reimagines portraiture and archive as a living, breathing act.



•~TUA~• 大眼 •~MAK~• Map

1. •~thunder~• (*tua mak's voice*)
2. •~microbeast~• (*tua mak's skin*)
3. •~pond~• (*tua mak's qi*)
4. •~clouds~• (*tua mak's breath*)
5. •~mountains~• (*tua mak's feet*)

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| 5.1 •~foot~• (<i>akhong</i>) | 5.2 •~foot~• (<i>buburcha~cha~mooli</i>) |
| 5.3 •~foot~• (<i>fatfish</i>) | 5.4 •~foot~• (<i>papa</i>) |
| 5.5 •~foot~• (<i>ahma</i>) | 5.6 •~foot~• (<i>maymay songuu</i>) |
| 5.7 •~foot~• (<i>happy happy leaf</i>) | 5.8 •~foot~• (<i>kenghua</i>) |

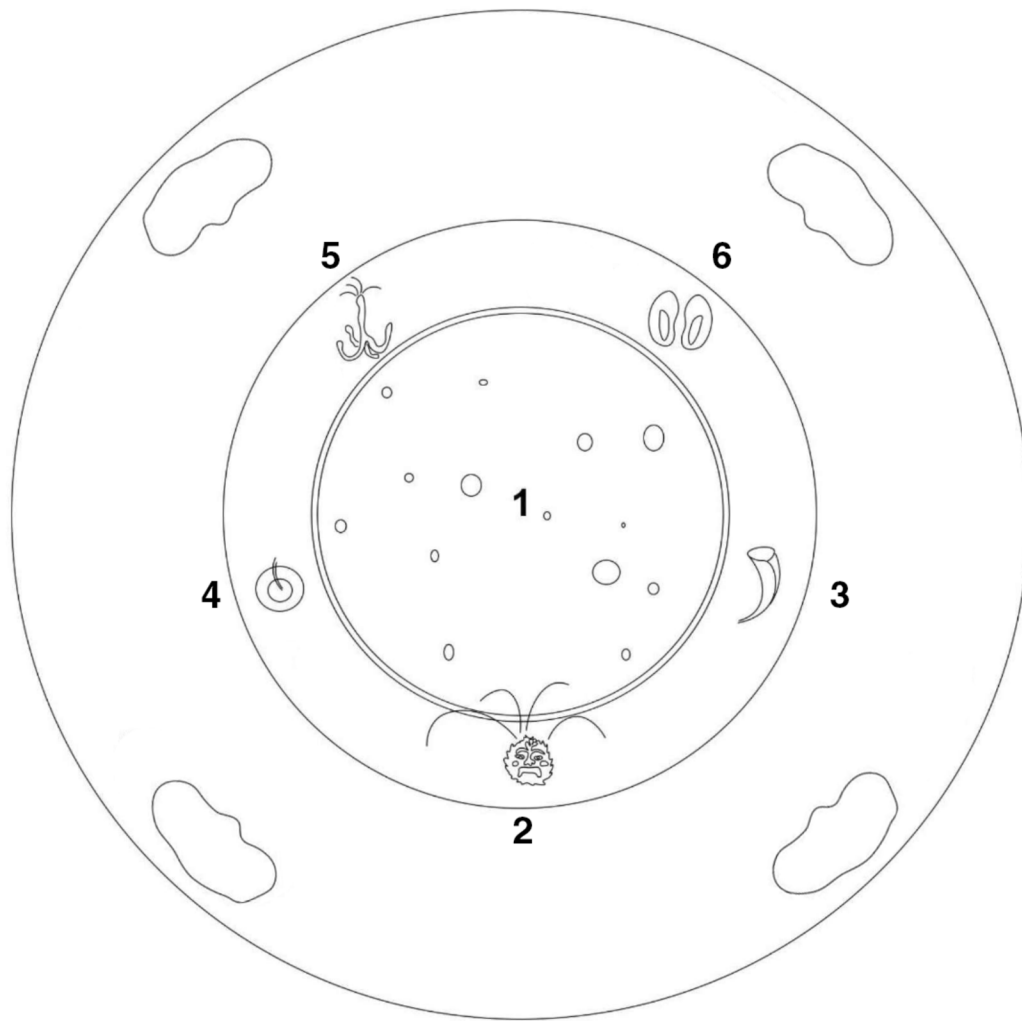
6. •~ghosts~• (*song~xian*)

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|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 6.1 •~•~• (<i>dancing heaven</i>) | 6.2 •~•~• (<i>dancing earth</i>) |
| 6.3 •~•~• (<i>dancing water</i>) | 6.4 •~•~• (<i>dancing mountain</i>) |
| 6.5 •~•~• (<i>dancing fire</i>) | 6.6 •~•~• (<i>dancing thunder</i>) |
| 6.7 •~•~• (<i>dancing pond</i>) | 6.8 •~•~• (<i>dancing wind</i>) |

7.1&7.2 projections from inside •~pond~• (*tua mak's qi*)

8. *song dynasty* ○○○○

9. •~leaf~• (*ahma's armour*)



•~pond~• (tua mak's qi) Map

1. •~pond~• (tua mak's qi)

Offerings:

2. •~face~• (ahma's mask). Paper; rice paste; paint; gold leaf; willow; waxed thread; sister's hair; glazed ceramic.
3. •~songs~• (ahma's horn). Glazed ceramic. 2025
4. •~tears~• (ahma's gourd). Glazed ceramic. 2025
5. •~hair~• (ahma's sweep). Glazed ceramic; willow; waxed thread; sister's hair. 2025
6. •~soul~• (ahma's shoes). Screen printed silk; cotton; wool; rice paste; wood; glazed ceramic; waxed thread; sister's hair; combed cat fur. 2025

Credits:

Created with Michael Barr

Song family collaboration (human and pond)

Microbiology collaboration: Keira Tucker and Sanika Pradhan, ASCUS

Sound collaboration: Flora Yin Wong

Studio assistance: Holly Smith, Taylor Wilson-Scott, Bryony Rose, Ezra Berrnico, Sabrina Henry, Rae Halliday, Sam Wood, Elvey Steadman

Programmer: Jennifer Sykes

Fabrication: Tramway, Stuart Gurden, Allister Malcolm, Glow Inflatables, Clare McGuinness, Piotr Pyrchala, QD Plastics

Animators: Tim Dalzell (3D Modelling and Texturing), Maurice Andresen (Rigging, 3D Animation & Rendering)

3D scanning: The Advanced Research Centre at the University of Glasgow

Curated by Claire Jackson

Lighting Design by Paul Sorley

Installation and Production Team: Mark Briggs, Stuart Gurden, Oliver Gorman, Malcolm Hay, Fraser Thomson, Gordon McDougal, Mhari McMullan, Lisa Ure, George Thompson, Barry Howard

