

Rae-Yen Song 宋瑞淵

•~TUA~• 大眼 •~MAK~•

Rae-Yen Song 宋瑞淵 (b. Edinburgh, 1993) is a multidisciplinary artist whose practice is an ever-evolving exercise in world-building, informed by personal ancestral mythologies, Daoism, family ritual, more-than-human politics, and science fact-fiction.

Song has transformed Tramway's vast gallery space into a sub-aquatic world of spectacle, memorial and refuge. The exhibition immerses visitors in an otherworldly watery abyss, populated by ancestral characters from the Song family.

Occupying the entire space is an immense 'microbeast' which creates an architecture for an array of newly-commissioned artworks in ceramic, glass, textiles, sound, light and moving image. The artworks emerge from Song's heritage and family mythology; the installation as a whole draws on the origin tale of Pangu, the creation figure in Chinese mythology and Daoism whose decomposing body became earthly features such as mountains, water, air, plants and creatures.

Audiences are invited to explore the body of this vast microbeast, and meander through its outstretched tentacles to encounter the various artworks. These include a series of costumes created with inherited fabrics passed down in the Song family; a giant, suspended parasitic worm; and a series of mouth-blown glass heads containing animated visions of ceramic microscopic lifeforms.

The artist has hand-made many of these works, exploring the potential of craft to create a tangible heritage, and fashion a personal sense of belonging and history. Song directly involves family in these making processes, creating ritualistic objects and costumes which offer a sensory link to ancestry. Craft is also a form of transmission - embodied hands-on knowledge often survives written or oral histories. In this vein, Song prioritises forms of knowledge that are held within the body, whilst embracing the generative possibilities of craft to imagine alternative futures and expanded forms of kinship.

•~*microbeast*~• (*tua mak's skin*)

Fabric; PVC; LED; metal. 2025

Song imagines the sprawling microbeast as an embodiment of *tua mak* 大眼 (“big eyes” in the Teochew Chinese dialect) - a 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 lifeform, 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 a living ecosystem of pondlife occupies its core.

•~*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 teachers, in a programmed series of gatherings allowing participants to draw on the tenets of Daoism to imagine and rehearse hopeful and mutualistic relationships with nature.

•~*thunder*~• (*tua mak's voice*)

Multi-channel soundscape. 2025

Atmospheric changes are reflected in a new sound work composed for the installation by Flora Yin Wong, in collaboration with Song. 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; samples of Gamalan music heard in Indonesia; sounds of the jungle; sounds of the sea. These are mixed with recordings that Yin Wong and Song made together at the family pond, using a hydrophone to listen to the pond’s interior life.

•~*pond*~• (*tua mak's qi*)

Song family pond; glazed ceramic; perspex; underwater lighting; microscopic cameras; wood; cob; fabric; offerings; sound; projections. 2025

Decanted and transported from Song’s family home in Edinburgh, a pond sits as the glowing nucleus of the exhibition. Song describes it as “a heart, a brain; it is energy, *qi*.” It teems with life - some of which has taken up residence in two ceramic beasts, submerged within. The pond houses two microscopic video cameras, with live feeds projected on the gallery walls. A system of vision analysis enables 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 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. Crafted by Song with a varied palette of materials, these are imagined as the sacred items of *ahma* (*tua mak*’s mother).

•~ghosts~• (song~xian)

Digital animations; glass. 2025

1. •~°~• (dancing heaven)
2. •~—~• (dancing earth)
3. •~≈~• (dancing water)
4. •~△~• (dancing mountain)
5. •~✳~• (dancing fire)
6. •~_=~• (dancing thunder)
7. •~_~• (dancing pond)
8. •~∞~• (dancing wind)

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 dance fitfully - with movements echoing those observed in the pond's microscopic world.

•~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. Crafting them by hand becomes an act of veneration for ancestors past, present and future. Some characters have surfaced in earlier realms in altered forms, while others are awakened here for the first time.

Extremities:

- ~foot~• (ahma)
- ~foot~• (ahkong)
- ~foot~• (fatfish)
- ~foot~• (happy happy leaf)
- ~foot~• (buburcharcha~mooli)
- ~foot~• (kenghua)
- ~foot~• (papa)
- ~foot~• (maymay songuu)

•~leaf~• (*ahma's armour*)

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

This armour is a re-imagining of a Daoist landscape painting, 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.

Early Chinese landscape painting was never only a depiction of terrain, but a map of inner cultivation - a guide 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 move, transform, and re-emerge in ripples of fabric.

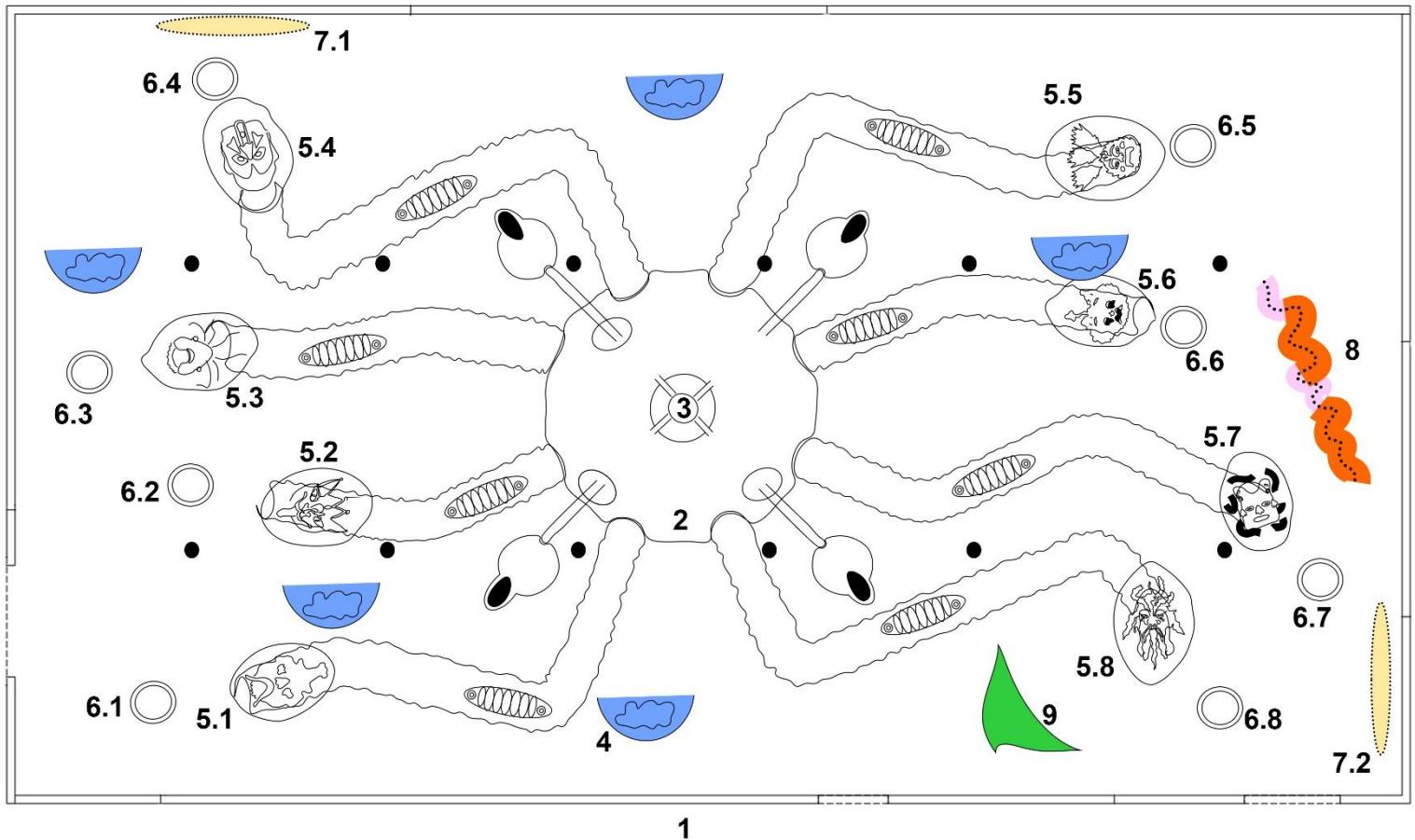
***song dynasty* ○○○○**

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 a quieter vitality. The parasitic worm becomes a host, sheltering family within its folds. 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 Mak Map

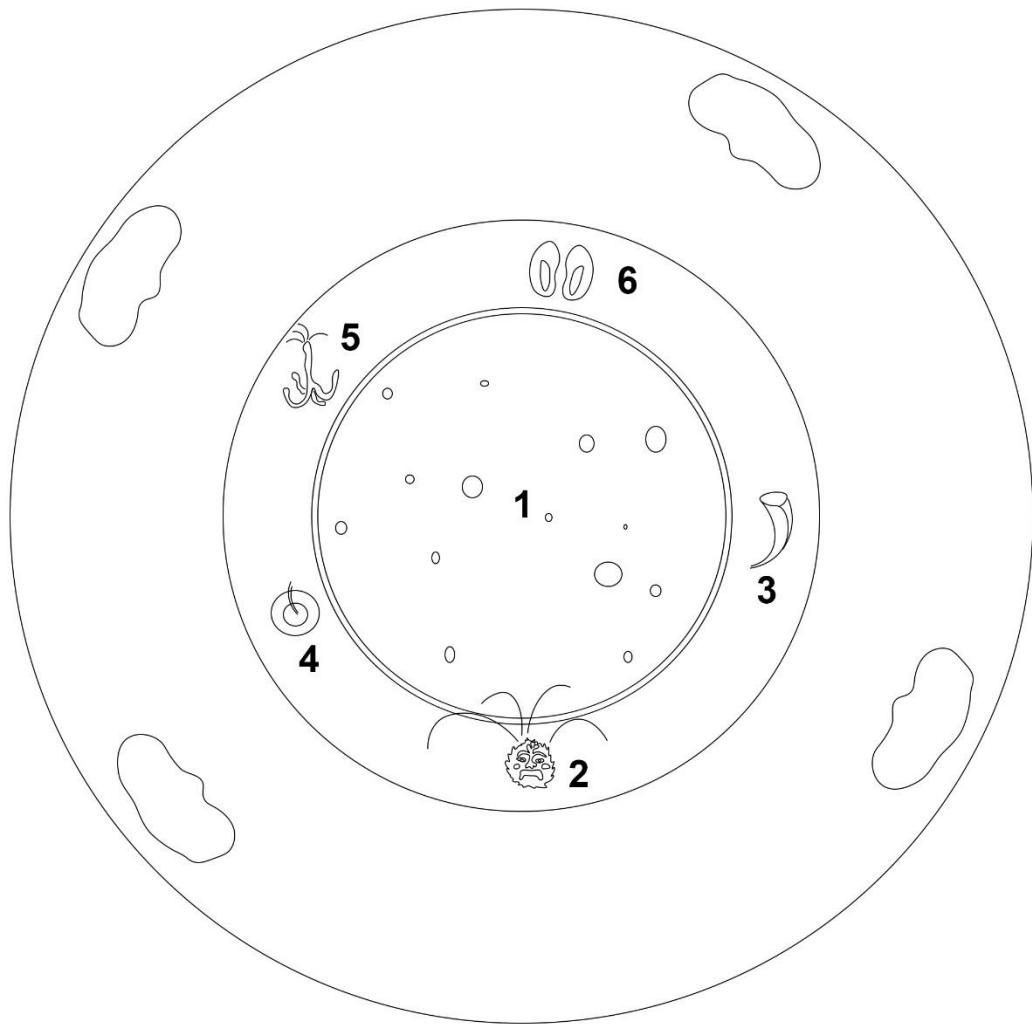
1. •~**thunder**~• (**tua mak's voice**) Multi-channel soundscape. 2025
2. •~**microbeast**~• (**tua mak's skin**) Fabric; PVC; LED; metal. 2025
3. •~**pond**~• (**tua mak's qi**) Song family pond; glazed ceramic; perspex; underwater lighting; microscopic cameras; wood; cob; fabric; offerings; sound; projections. 2025
4. •~**clouds**~• (**tua mak's breath**) Hand dyed canvas; assorted inherited fabrics. 2025
5. •~**mountains**~• (**tua mak's feet**) Assorted fabrics (hand dyed, inherited); willow. 2025 :

 - 5.1 •~**foot**~• (**ahkong**) 5.2•~**foot**~• (**buburcha~cha~mooli**) 5.3•~**foot**~• (**fatfish**) 5.4 •~**foot**~• (**papa**)
 - 5.5 •~**foot**~• (**ahma**) 5.6•~**foot**~• (**maymay songuu**) 5.7•~**foot**~• (**happy happy leaf**) 5.8 •~**foot**~• (**kenghua**)

6. •~**ghosts**~• (**song~xian**) Digital animations; glass. 2025 : 6.1 •~**~**~• (**dancing heaven**) :

 - 6.2 •~**—**~• (**dancing earth**) : 6.3 •~**~**~• (**dancing water**) : 6.4 •~**△**~• (**dancing mountain**) :
 - 6.5 •~**✿**~• (**dancing fire**) : 6.6 •~**—**~• (**dancing thunder**) : 6.7 •~**~**~• (**dancing pond**) :
 - 6.8 •~**~**~• (**dancing wind**)

- 7.1&7.2 projections from inside •~**pond**~• (**tua mak's qi**)
8. **song dynasty** ○○○○ Assorted fabrics; willow; paper; rice paste; glazed ceramics. 2025
9. •~**leaf**~• (**ahma's armour**) Glazed ceramic; willow; waxed thread; assorted fabrics (hand dyed, inherited); screen-printed silk; wool. 2025



•~pond~• (*tua mak's qi*) Map

1. •~pond~• (*tua mak's qi*) Song family pond; glazed ceramic; perspex; underwater lighting; microscopic cameras; wood; cob; fabric; offerings; sound; projections. 2025

Offerings:

2. •~face~• (*ahma's mask*). Paper; rice paste; paint; gold leaf; willow; waxed thread; sister's hair; glazed ceramic. 2025 An operatic mask, reinterpreting a gold ring - the only remaining object belonging to *ahma*

3. •~songs~• (*ahma's horn*). Glazed ceramic. 2025 An instrument, allowing a call to attention, or an expression of despair.

4. •~tears~• (*ahma's gourd*). Glazed ceramic. 2025 A water-carrying vessel.

5. •~hair~• (*ahma's sweep*). Glazed ceramic; willow; waxed thread; sister's hair. 2025 A tool for cleaning, perhaps on tomb-sweeping day.

6. •~soul~• (*ahma's shoes*). Screen printed silk; cotton; wool; rice paste; wood; glazed ceramic; waxed thread; sister's hair; combed cat fur. 2025

A pair of feline guardians, to protect and warm the extremities

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 Howard, Colin McDougal, Mhari McMullan, Lisa Mure, George Thompson, Barry Thomson



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