

# EXHIBITION GUIDE

RAE-YEN SONG 宋瑞淵  
•~*TUA*~• 大眼 •~*MAK*~•

18 SEP 26 - 14 FEB 27



FACT  
88 Wood Street  
Liverpool  
L1 4DQ

Wed - Sun  
11:00 - 18:00  
Free entry

TRAMWAY



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**



**Liverpool**  
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FOUNDATION**

The exhibition •~TUA~• 大眼 •~MAK~• is co-commissioned by TRAMWAY, Glasgow and FACT, Liverpool.

The exhibition includes animations co-commissioned by Film and Video Umbrella, Tramway, FACT, and Advanced Research Centre at the University of Glasgow, and supported by Thinking Culture, a cultural programme from the University of Glasgow's School of Culture & Creative Arts.

The sculpture *song dynasty* ○○○○ was commissioned by Creative Folkestone for the Folkestone Triennial 2025.

Textile printing was supported by Print Clan's Artist in Residence Programme (2024) at Print Clan CIC, supported by the National Lottery through Creative Scotland.

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# RAE-YEN SONG 宋瑞渊

## •~TUA~• 大眼 •~MAK~•

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

All of these frequencies resonate within •~TUA~• 大眼 •~MAK~•, which transforms the gallery into a darkened abyss, floating somewhere unknown between the deep sea and the skies above. At its heart glows a pond, home to a living ecosystem of organic matter, invertebrates and microscopic life. Rae-Yen has placed the ecology of the pond in dialogue with family mythologies and an array of creative human collaborators, to form a complex entanglement of life. This life is embodied in a network of costumes, tools, and energies. They drift throughout the spectral environment like celestial~oceanic soot, orbiting a delicately immense 'microbeast' which serves as a sanctum. The entire installation is imagined by Rae-Yen as a manifestation of a lost ancestor, known only through familial memories and myths, who drowned at sea aged thirteen in 1950s Singapore. That ancestor is known as *tua mak* 大眼 - "big eyes" in the Teochew Chinese dialect.

Many of the artefacts within this environment 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 expressions of a process of making-as-thinking. 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.

Rae-Yen considers the installation to be an expansive system of entangled energies - a working infrastructure of connections and transfers. Via microscopic cameras and live video analysis, the ecosystem of the pond controls the exhibition's ever-changing lighting state and parts of its sonic landscape - subtly imposing itself on our experience of the environment. The gallery becomes an open system of interrelation between the seen and the unseen: microorganisms, vibrations, ancestral spirits, humans. Constantly shifting, the exhibition is also a space of rehearsal, in which other energies will be introduced and distributed through a live programme of public events. These events – titled *OFFERINGS* – will entangle new bodies in the ecosystem of •~TUA~• 大眼 •~MAK~• through conversations, performances, and rituals.

#### 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 Bernico, Sabrina Henry, Rae Halliday, Sam Wood, Cara MacDonald

Programmer: Jennifer Sykes

Fabrication: Stuart Gurden, Allister Malcolm Glass, Glow Inflatables, Clare McGuinness, 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



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## •~pond~• (*tua mak's qi*)

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

•~pond~• (*tua mak's qi*) is the glowing nucleus of the exhibition. It teems with life - most of which is invisible to the naked eye. The pond houses two microscope video cameras, with live feeds projected on the gallery walls. A system of live video analysis allows the motion of microscopic lifeforms to control the exhibition's lighting, and trigger the sounds that emanate from beneath the pond - allowing it to become its own living musical instrument.

The pond sits at the centre of an earthen shrine to *tua mak*, adorned with five offerings:

### •~face~• (*ahma's mask*)

Paper; rice paste; paint; gold leaf; willow; waxed thread; sister's hair; glazed ceramic. 2025

### •~songs~• (*ahma's horn*)

Glazed ceramic. 2025

### •~tears~• (*ahma's gourd*)

Glazed ceramic. 2025

### •~hair~• (*ahma's sweep*)

Glazed ceramic; willow; waxed thread; sister's hair. 2025

### •~soul~• (*ahma's shoes*)

Screen printed silk; cotton; wool; rice paste; wood; glazed ceramic; waxed thread; sister's hair; combed cat fur. 2025

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## •~ghosts~• (*song~xian*)

Digital animations. 2025

Collaborating with a microbiologist allowed Rae-Yen to meet the microscopic inhabitants of the Song family pond, before reimagining them 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.

The ceramics were then 3D scanned and have now been transformed into lively beings. Physics-based digital animation allows them to sway, dance and contort, echoing the movements of the pond's microscopic lifeforms.

- ~•~• (dancing water)
- ~—~• (dancing earth)
- ~○~• (dancing pond)
- ~☀~• (dancing fire)
- ~°~• (dancing heaven)
- ~⚡~• (dancing thunder)
- ~🌀~• (dancing wind)
- ~△~• (dancing mountain)

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•~*microbeast*~• (*tua mak's skin*)

Fabric; PVC; LED. 2025

Rae-Yen imagines the giant translucent body that hosts the pond as *tua mak*, embodied as an immense microbeast. *tua mak* 大眼 (“big eyes” in the Teochew Chinese dialect) would have been Song’s mother’s sibling, but died before Song’s mother was born - drowning at sea aged thirteen in 1950s Singapore. 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. •~*microbeast*~• (*tua mak's skin*) is part ghost, part temple, and always a symbiotic host to other lifeforms.



## •~stone~• (*tua mak's tongue*)

Hand-dyed fabric; yarn; bells. 2026

This robe was made for movement. It is reversible, evoking the interplay of life and death. It was designed to allow a human dancer to embody *tua mak* at the moment of drowning. That moment is imagined as a threshold, beyond which an individual - whose body is fed upon by countless aquatic relations - is relieved of their semblance of one-ness, to return to a natural state of being many. The 16-legged creature's shifting form entangles past and present family memories, reimagining *tua mak* as an elastic, interconnected life-system that fragments across time.



## •~leaf~• (*ahma's armour*)

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

This armour comprises a breastplate and a cloak. With echoes of ancient jade burial suits, the breastplate's tiled ceramic surface maps *tua mak* as a landscape. It evokes 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.

The appliqué of the cloak depicts the slippage of *tua mak* between life~death~life. As a whole, the armour is influenced by the inner and outer landscapes of Daoist shanshui paintings. These were never only depictions of nature, but maps of inner cultivation: guides for journeys of the mind, body, and spirit; living drawings that situated the traveller within a cosmos that shifts and breathes with them.

The armour guards the itinerant wearer, but also serves as a vessel for myth and memory, preserving the story of *tua mak* for all eternity. It was made for *ahma* - Rae-Yen's maternal grandmother; *tua mak*'s mother.



## •~soot~• (*tua mak's scales*)

Glass; pond-controlled lights. 2025

Willow; hair; thread; hand-dyed fabrics; tassels. 2026

An array of objects floats in space, like particles of oceanic or celestial soot, raining down or drifting up. Some rotate gently; others flicker sporadically: communications from another realm.

Glass heads glimmer as bioluminescent presences. Across Rae-Yen's practice, the head appears and reappears. It is a fractal form, repeating in different materials and at multiple scales, with a frequency that makes it seem naturally-occurring - a common feature of the landscape of Rae-Yen's world.

Other suspended objects have served previously as headpieces, worn in performance. Now, they drift sculpturally as obscure, speculative lifeforms. Made from willow, hair and hand-dyed fabric, they are materially connected to other elements within •~TUA~• 大眼 •~MAK~•, as if family members.

In different ways, the soot is characteristic of Rae-Yen's material practice: nothing is ever just one thing at one time; everything shifts and changes, in motion, interconnected, repeating and becoming multiple.



## •~clouds~• (*tua mak's breath*)

Hand dyed canvas; assorted inherited fabrics. 2025

Five cloud costumes drift at height throughout the gallery. Rae-Yen 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.

## •~thunder~• (tua mak's voice)

Multi-channel soundscape. 2025

A soundscape composed by Flora Yin Wong cycles through periods of quietude and cacophony, weaving Flora's field recordings together with Rae-Yen's own: of family gatherings in Singapore; Gamalan music heard in Indonesia; meditation with Rae-Yen's father; sounds of the jungle; sounds of the sea; hydrophonic recordings of the interior life of the family pond; and sounds created using the sculptural offerings positioned around •~pond~• (tua mak's qi).

8 (Atrium)



song dynasty ○○○○

Assorted fabrics; willow; rice paper; rice paste; glazed ceramics; pond-controlled lights. 2025

song dynasty ○○○○ is an imagined beast: an ancient worm, descended from polychaete, with heads of ancestral fish. It gestures to the deep time of marine life and the shifting currents of migration. It 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.

As a five-person costume, it turns away from the patriarchal ferocity of traditional dragon and lion dances. Instead, it becomes a host, sheltering Rae-Yen's family members within its folds when worn during performative moments. An armour and a sanctuary, it honours those who wriggled their way into new worlds and made them home.

# RAE-YEN SONG 宋瑞渊

## BIOGRAPHY

Rae-Yen Song 宋瑞渊 is an artist flowing with the immigrant experience of flux and resilience, hungry to ever-evolve and build things. Guided by Daoist ways of worlding, Song considers family as a hybrid organism, radically entwined with all other living things – continuously swirling in multi- space and time. Song masticates their vibrating qi, and grows a big belly to hold all of this entangled ancestry ...plop plop plop... warm excretions of other life stories to be sewn, watered and sung.

Selected recent solo exhibitions include: Tramway, Glasgow, UK (2025-26, including Glasgow International performance commission, 2026); William Hine Gallery, UK (2025); CCA Glasgow, UK (collated research exhibition & live programme, 2024); Aspex, Portsmouth, UK (2023); Quench Gallery, Margate (2022); DCA, Dundee, UK (2021); esea contemporary, Manchester, UK (2020). Forthcoming exhibitions include: Frac Delta, Angoulême, France (2026); CCA Goldsmiths, London, UK (2027). Selected recent and forthcoming group exhibitions include: *British Art Show 10: A Chorus of Strangers*, Hayward Gallery Touring, UK (touring: Coventry, Swansea, Bristol, Sheffield, Newcastle-Gateshead, 2026-28, forthcoming); *Drawing Biennial 2026*, Drawing Room, London, UK; *Material Worlds: Contemporary Artists and Textiles*, Hayward Gallery Touring, UK (touring: Warwick Art Centre, Warwick; Djanogly Gallery, Nottingham; The Wilson Gallery, Cheltenham; Attenborough Arts Centre, Leicester, 2024-26); *How Lies the Land?*, Folkestone Triennial, UK (2025); 198th Royal Scottish Academy Annual Exhibition, RSA, Edinburgh, UK (2024); *Let the Song Hold Us*, FACT Liverpool, UK (2022); *Dislocations*, Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow (2021); *Fabric of Society*, Glasgow International, UK (2021); *SURVEY*, Jerwood Arts, London, UK (touring: BALTIC, Gateshead; Bluecoat, Liverpool and G39, Cardiff, 2018-19).



Rae-Yen Song 宋瑞渊, •~TUA~• 大眼 •~MAK~•, 2025. Installation view, Tramway, Glasgow, UK.  
Courtesy Tramway. Photography by Keith Hunter.

