



Rae-Yen Song

Exhibition Notes | Sat 11 December 2021 - Sun 20 March 2022

DCA
Dundee Contemporary Arts

152 Nethergate
Dundee, DD1 4DY
01382 432444
Scottish Charity No. SCO26631

Open Tue - Sun 11:00-18:00
Open late Thu 19:00
Admission free
www.dca.org.uk

INTRODUCTION TO THE EXHIBITION

This exhibition debuts a new body of work by Glasgow-based artist Rae-Yen Song.

▷▣●▷ gives viewers a glimpse of an alternate dimension, shaped according to the ancestral logics and imagined futures of Song's family. It serves simultaneously as a spectacle, a memorial and a refuge.

Within the gallery we are granted access to an array of work in sculpture, textiles, printmaking, sound and moving image. Structurally, these artworks form the head, body, bones and organs of an ambiguous being drawn from the artist's own heritage and familial mythology. These elements merge to form a speculatively sacred space from an uncertain point in time which floats somewhere between history, memory and imagination.

The characters that form the title of the exhibition pictorially symbolise the architecture in the gallery itself. ▷▣●▷ is pronounced 'seoh', which echoes the artist's mother's generation name. Seoh, in Hokkien dialect, loosely translates to 'precious'.

"I think of ▷▣●▷ as a temple, built from memories, ancestral stories and family treasure — to honour a distant but ongoing journey."

Song's practice explores self-mythologising as a survival tactic: using fantasy to create a personal cultural language informed by autobiography, family stories, relationships and memories. Adopting this language as a tool for self-definition and imaginative resistance, the artist creates multidimensional bodies of work that speak broadly and politically about race, gender, culture, identity and what it means to belong – or not.

Song builds worlds to make space for narratives that have been passed down through generations in the form of whispers, outbursts of emotion, hearsay, assumptions, madness and gossip. Objects and artworks are crafted with these fragmented tales in mind, creating new physical forms that connect elliptically to this intimate source material. The artist infuses this knowledge (or lack of) into the crafting of the exhibition and fills in the grey areas of unknown or forgotten details with an array of colours, shapes and forms, using imagination as a tool to carve out new methods of understanding.

Working through these stories using an eclectic mix of materials – from paper and silk to bronze and clay – allows Song to get closer to relatives and kin who may no longer be on this plane of existence.

“Guided by my mother’s tongue, this architecture is an enclave, a backdrop for an imagined dialogue with a long-departed grandfather. He was a being from another time and place, and my conversation with him addresses crossing, migration, loss, survival and labour.”

The entrance to the body of the being in the gallery begins with a stretch of fibrous coir (a material often used for doormats), allowing us as visitors to understand that we are passing over a threshold from a public space into a private environment. We are then invited further into the structure to take in other artworks covered in symbolic details, patterns, coded pictorial language and untranslatable knowledge that hint at the multiplicitous stories which collectively form this surreal space. There are worlds within worlds here, bodies within bodies, faces within faces. These characters and stories continually slip and slide around and through one another, merging and folding back onto themselves to create a constantly revolving and evolving space beyond linear constructs of time.

The artist and writer JJ Chan has said of Song’s work:

“Whilst there are seemingly no beginnings or ends to the stories Song offers, the stories flow alongside us, breathing and growing in time. Just as water flows eventually back to places it has been before, flowing always back to itself, to larger bodies of water, we are led to ask to and from what or whom we might be flowing. What kind of world might we head towards, and from what do we depart? What kinds of politics, logics and senses might we flood towards?”

As viewers, we can take questions such as these back into our own world to mull over after a visit to Song’s alternate dimension. It is important for us to understand that we are simply visitors. We are welcome in this space, but only for a finite time. We are temporary guests. This is not our world and we must remember not to linger too long; we must remember to leave again.

Through this work, Song uses lived experience as a starting point to reconstruct a sense of self uncoupled from cultural stereotypes and stigma based on gender and race. Using myth and fantasy, and actively rejecting Western narrative structures in favour of experimental forms, the work interrogates issues of diaspora and hybridity, in spaces created by the artist where cultural rules and social norms have been overturned.

Song’s works are always a form of personal activism, where alternative realities are proposed and ownership over biographical narratives is reclaimed.

GLOSSARY

Ancestral logics are particular ways of understanding formed through knowledge passed down through generations of a particular people or family.

Generation name is an English term used to describe one of the characters in a Chinese, Vietnamese or Korean given name, and is so called because each member of a generation (i.e. siblings and cousins of the same generation) share that character.

Hokkien dialect originated in Quanzhou, the southern area of Fujian, China, which was once an important centre for trade and migration, and has since become one of the most widely used Chinese dialects abroad. During the rule of the Qing dynasty, thousands of emigrants from Fujian arrived annually, thus making Taiwan a further major site of spoken Hokkien dialects outside of Fujian.

Enclave is a term used to describe a distinct territorial, cultural, or social unit enclosed within or as if within foreign territory.

Coir is a fibrous material found between the hard, internal shell and the outer coat of a coconut. Brown coir (made from ripe coconut) is often used as a raw material to make doormats, brushes, padding and sacking.

Diaspora is a term often used to describe people who live or have settled far from their ancestral homelands.

Hybridity, in its most basic sense, refers to a mixture of more than one thing. The term originates from biology and has been subsequently employed across various disciplines. It is often used in discourse relating to race, colonialism, identity, anti-racism and globalisation.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Rae-Yen Song (b. 1993, Edinburgh) is an artist living and working in Glasgow. Song studied at Glasgow School of Art, and works across sculpture, drawing, installation, video, sound, costume, family collaboration and performative actions in public.

Selected projects include: a LUX Scotland moving image commission for BBC Scotland (2021); *Dislocations*, Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow (2021); *Fabric of Society* (Glasgow International, 2021); *songdynasty.life* (Edinburgh Art Festival, 2020); **may-may songuu**, CFCCA, Manchester, 2020; *Survey*, Jerwood Space, London, 2018; *Platform*, City Art Centre, Edinburgh, 2018; Human Rights Arts Festival, JDA Perera Gallery, Colombo (2017). Recent residencies include with Talbot Rice Gallery, Edinburgh (2019-21); Hospitalfield, Arbroath (2019); Sura Madura, Sri Lanka (2017).

Song is also the co-founder of the collaborative projects YAKA Collective and Jarsdell Solutions Ltd.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Rae-Yen Song would like to thank:

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NEW PUBLICATION

We are publishing a new book in January 2022 as part of the project, also titled ▷▮▮▮●▷, containing newly commissioned writing on Song's practice by JJ Chan.

To launch the book, there will be a special In Conversation event with Song and Chan, please see the Talks and Events section of these exhibition notes for more information.

From late January, copies of the book will be available to read in the gallery and Information Space, and to buy in DCA Shop and online at a special launch price of £8 (usually £10).

NEW PRINT EDITIONS

Song has collaborated with DCA Print Studio to create a series of print works relating to the exhibition. Working with etchings on copper plate, woodblock printing and screen printing, with inclusions of embossing powder and holographic foil, Song has created experimental print compositions. The components made for these prints have been used to create a sculpture that forms an element of the gallery installation.

Three very different editions are being produced by DCA Print Studio and will be launched in January.

INFORMATION SPACE

Visit the Information Space next to the galleries to learn more about the exhibition. Here you will find a video interview with the artist, alongside the reading materials listed below that have been influential to their thinking.

READING LIST

Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*, 1976

Lewis Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World*, 1998

Kyoko Wada (Ed.), Polly Barton (translation), *Hokusai Manga*, 2019

Theodora Lau, *The Handbook of Chinese Horoscopes* (9th edition), 2019

Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, 2019

Ursula K Le Guin, *Always Coming Home*, 1985

Raymond Clemens (Ed.), *The Voynich Manuscript*, 2016

Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, 2016

Octavia Butler, *Bloodchild and Other Stories*, 1996

TALKS AND EVENTS

For more information and to book tickets visit www.dca.org.uk

The Dust Won't Settle if We're Dancing on the Surface: Rae-Yen Song and JJ Chan in Conversation

This event is being rescheduled to take place in late February or early March in line with current restrictions and guidance. Please check our website and social media for updated information.

We are delighted to be publishing a book as part of Song's exhibition at DCA, containing a new text by the artist and writer JJ Chan.

Join us to celebrate the launch of the book, and hear Song and Chan speak together about their correspondence over the last year. This dialogue has informed Chan's writing within the publication as well as nurtured some of the thinking in Song's new work.

The conversation will be followed by a Q&A chaired by DCA's Head of Exhibitions Eoin Dara.

The publication, printed in a limited edition of 400, will be available to purchase at a special launch price of £8 (usually £10).

JJ Chan is an artist working across and amidst sculpture, moving image, and writing. Their work draws from lived experience and stories stolen

from eavesdropped conversations, to explore the edges of our everyday realities and the ways in which we construct our identities. Through storytelling and world-building, the work (re)searches for an alternative space beyond aggressively progressive capitalist time, seeking new worlds from the ashes of the present. Born in Doncaster, they are now based in London, where they are currently Senior Lecturer in Fine Art at Kingston School of Art.

Curator's Tour

Thu 17 March, 18:00-19:00

Galleries

Free, but ticketed

Please book in advance

Join Eoin Dara for a tour of Song's exhibition in Gallery 2 and Tako Taal's exhibition, *At the shore, everything touches*, in Gallery 1.

Please note that tickets are limited for this event - we recommend booking in advance.

ARTIST'S CHOICE SCREENINGS

Rae-Yen Song has selected two films to accompany their exhibition:

“Studio Ghibli’s *Spirited Away* and Alejandro Jodorowsky’s *The Holy Mountain* continue to excite and influence my thinking around world-building. These cinematic portals are dripping in symbolism, ancient thoughts, warped traditions, wicked humour, fabulous costumes, weird sounds, wild colours, impossible architectures, difficult beings/objects, and more of everything else. I love it all – the obsession, the detail and energy that infuse life into everything. These imagined environments, drawn and built, continue to poke at the social order of things – forever slipping and sliding about.”

– Rae-Yen Song

The Holy Mountain

Tue 1 February, 20:30

Cinema

Please see website for prices and to book tickets

Mexico’s enfant terrible Alejandro Jodorowsky writes, directs and stars in this surreal, psychedelic cult favourite. Jodorowsky himself plays an alchemist leading a group of people up the titular mountain, but the mechanics of plot take a backseat compared to the film’s endless assault of vivid, rainbow-hued imagery. A bubbling miasma of chemically-enhanced absurdism,

tarot occultism, religious symbolism and a provocative, 1970’s penchant for sex and violence, it is undeniably the work of its singular director.

Dir. Alejandro Jodorowsky / 2h 02m / 18 / 1973 / Mexico

Spirited Away

Sat 22 January, 13:00

Cinema

Please see website for prices and to book tickets

Having just celebrated its 20th anniversary, this modern classic remains one of the jewels in the legendary Studio Ghibli’s glittering crown. A deceptively simple *Alice in Wonderland* adventure, young Chihiro is among the studio’s most memorable and relatable protagonists and director Hayao Miyazaki packs every gorgeously animated frame with invention, wit and a yearning sense of nostalgia, aided by Joe Hisaishi’s achingly wistful score. A beautiful work of art and essential viewing for audiences both young and old.

Dir. Hayao Miyazaki / 2h 5m / PG / 2001 / Japan

CREATE SPACE PROJECT DISPLAY

ST/ART@DCA:

Autumn Prints & Textiles

Wed 8 December – Sun 12 December,
11:00-18:00

Free, drop in

A vibrant display of print and textile work made during our Autumn partnership project with Tayside Healthcare Arts Trust. ST/ART@DCA works with adults who are isolated by long term health conditions, bringing small groups together to learn new print, craft and animation skills and to engage with DCA programmes. With thanks to Stafford Trust, Alexander Moncur Trust and Foundation Scotland.

FOR YOUNGER VISITORS AND FAMILIES

Create Space

From Wed 15 December
Tue – Sun, 11:00-18:00

Free, drop in

Children must be accompanied at all times

Create Space is located between Gallery 1 and the Information Space and is a flexible, comfortable and imaginative space; a space in which people of all ages can see, think, make and do together. The new design of the room includes pre-packed materials, activity sheets and 'makes' linked to the exhibitions in the galleries.

You can expect to find themes about family histories, colourful, imaginative and mythological characters and portraits with a difference.

Please respect our room capacity guidance and wear a mask (unless exempt from doing so). Hand sanitiser is provided outside the entrance to Create Space and throughout the building.

Family Art Labs: Rae-Yen Song and Tako Taal

Sat 29 January, Sat 19 February,
Sat 19 March, 13:00-15:00

Create Space

Free, but ticketed

Please book a ticket for each person attending

Family Art Labs offer time and space to get making as a family with creative activities led by local artists. You can stay as long as you like or leave when you need to, these sessions are flexible.

Each Family Art Lab is inspired by the exhibitions in our galleries; you can expect lots of materials, creative ideas and projects to finish on the day or to take home. We have safe, pre-packed materials bags for each family and child. We look forward to sharing lots of ideas!

GALLERY 2

At the shore, everything touches Tako Taal

Gallery 1

Sat 11 December – Sun 20 March

Running concurrently in Gallery 1, this exhibition marks Glasgow-based artist Tako Taal's first solo exhibition in a major UK institution, debuting a new body of work in Gallery 1.

Taal's work often considers the paradoxes of black subjectivities, and her artistic practice evokes cited, spectral and physical bodies to undermine history, destabilise images and disrupt ideas around identity. At stake in her work are the psychic structures of colonial relations and the question of how vivid they remain in the present. This exhibition comprises a new film and accompanying collage, painting and archival materials based on familial photographs and documents belonging to the artist.

In this exhibition, Taal reconstructs whispered anecdotes and artefacts from family archives to trace the shifts that merge and split boundaries between body, land and the state.

JUST ASK

Our friendly Visitor Assistants are always happy to help with your questions.

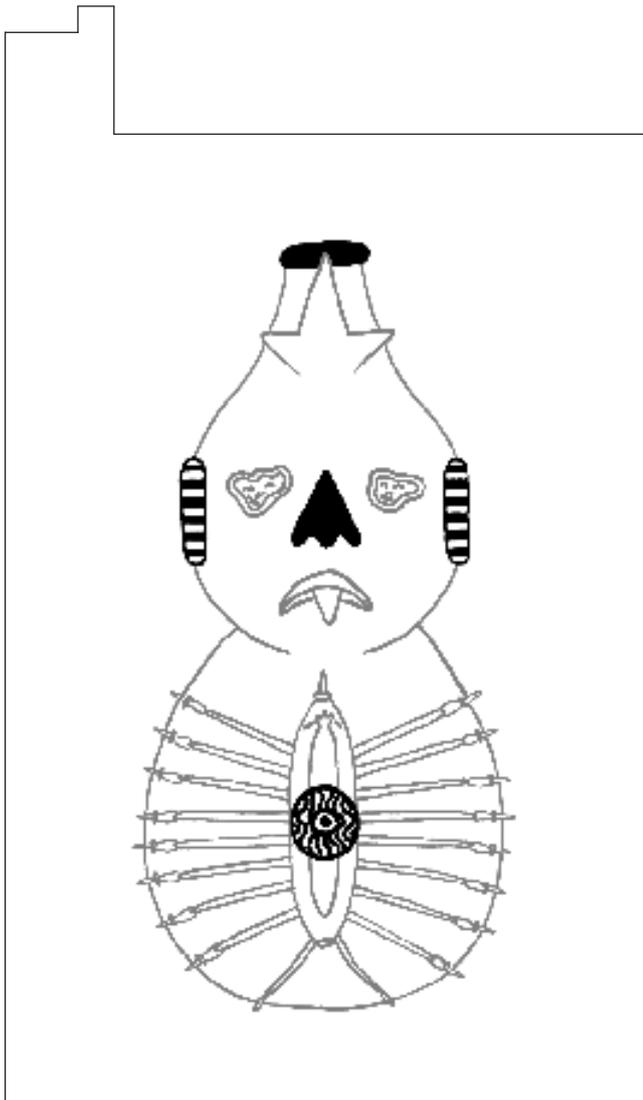
LARGE PRINT, AUDIO & BRAILLE

Large print, audio and Braille versions of this leaflet are available, please ask a Visitor Assistant for more information.

KEEP IN TOUCH

Keep up to date with the very latest from DCA by visiting www.dca.org.uk or by following us on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. Share your thoughts on the exhibition using **#helloDCA**.

EXHIBITION FLOOR PLAN



 *ah kong*, 2021

 ●*yap*● (eyeball), 7 minutes, 2021

 WUUUWUUU, 3 minutes, 2021

 *happy happy leaf*, 2018

 ●*yap*● (belly), 2021

MATERIALS IN THE EXHIBITION

Silk, cotton, faux fur, felt, polypropylene, imitation rice beads, coir, polyester, gold leaf, ceramics, sound, oil, latex, aluminium, PVC, paper pulp, dyed cotton canvas, timber, foam, 3-channel video, copper, motor, painted MDF, bronze, woodblock, engraved mirror acrylic, powder coated steel, and various other materials.

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