

Ancestral Constellations

◎yap◎ is one figure created by Rae-Yen Song amidst a coherent but ever-shifting universe populated by a complex network of characters, creatures and deities. Family histories, partially abstracted, surface, dip, dive and re-surface across sculptures, performances, installations, drawings and videos. The family (in all its iterations) becomes a constellation, a cosmology that both intimately looks inwards but also addresses macrocosmic concerns around migration, assimilation and diasporic survival. Crucially, Song critically asks: who has historically been given permission to create mythologies around themselves and their descendants? Can we dream ways of being away from the West's continued obsession with glorifying and mythologising imperialists?

Originally shown as part of a larger, grandiose installation at Dundee Contemporary Arts titled ▷▣◎▷, ◎yap◎ has a beguiling, singular presence. Monolithic and firmly rooted on the ground, there is also the impression that it could take off; levitate; fly. Gold and silver (imitation rice) beads trickle over cerulean blue cotton, fringed by a patchwork of silk, cotton and fur that splays over the floor, jellyfish-like in form. In the original installation, the figure sits between the legs (or are they ribs?) of a giant, protective deity, peering out between two dangling antennae. The figure is curious yet inviting: but there's also a steadfastness and stubbornness in the way it stands. The red embellishments and spiky head seem to signify a warning - *don't come too close*.

Song's family (past, present and future), feature explicitly and implicitly across the artist's practice. See the film *Song Dynasty* ○○ (2018), where the artist and family are adorned in costumes as they parade through the streets of Glasgow. In ≡pa●Opa≡, exhibited at Aspex, Portsmouth in 2023, we see the artist's father presented as part-deity, part-avatar. He inhabits a world that resists colonial 'modernity', one guided by Eastern spiritualism, science fiction and psychedelic subcultures. Song's practice reinterprets and reimagines how these familial and ancestral logics can

be shaped through fantasy and fabulation. The multitude of forms that inhabit the artist's practice manifest as dialogues that leapfrog generations of Song's family. This is more than self-mythologising; this is a process of remembrance and veneration that traverses temporalities, geographies and worlds. Unknown or forgotten ancestral histories are invoked and 'coloured in', sculpture becoming a physical conduit for whispers, gossip, hearsay and other forms of intimate communication to take form.

Song's fabulates a visual language to retain a sense of self-identity for cultural survival in the diaspora, in a context where assimilation and nationalism discourages duality. The artist retrieves those most intimate and vital aspects of self and lineage that assimilation so often attempts to erase and makes them visible through beguiling, thriving constellations. So many of us in the diaspora can attest to the realities of attempting to nurture familial lineages despite the omens of racism, (forced) assimilation and government policies such as the hostile environment. To resist this violence, Song creates dialogues with ancestors who have passed on, those with which contact has been lost, those the artist is yet to meet. Song describes this installation as 'a dance with, and reimagining of, a drifting, spectral ancestor; the shimmering skin of memories and myths illuminating the dark abyss.' When this dark abyss threatens to swallow us, it is often fantasy and speculation that rescues us; letting us dream about who we were, who we are, and who we will become.