



Exhibition Details

Date: 16 September 2025 to 20 February 2026

Venue: Institute for Australian and Asian Arts and Culture, Building EA, Parramatta South Campus, Western Sydney University

171 Victoria Road, Rydalmere

Gallery Opening Hours: Monday – Friday (9:30am – 5:00pm)

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Introduction

The Institute for Australian and Asian Arts and Culture (IAC) at Western Sydney University is proud to present *Notations: Red Scale* 音譜：鱗動, the first institutional solo exhibition by acclaimed artist Rainbow Chan 陳雋然 and IAC's major exhibition of the year. Chan is a celebrated interdisciplinary artist, vocalist, musician, and performer. With remarkable fluency across artforms, she forges distinctive and ever-refreshing connections between sound, image, and performance, creating works that are at once intimate, experimental, and expansive.

At the heart of this exhibition is Chan's reimagining of the cultural legacies of the Weitou people—Hong Kong's first settlers and her matrilineal ancestors. Drawing on the tradition of bridal laments—folk songs sung by young women before arranged marriages—Chan illuminates the voices of Weitou women, weaving their histories into contemporary forms. Her earlier critically acclaimed one-woman performance, *The Bridal Lament*, reinterpreted wedding rituals through song, textiles, and installation. *Notations: Red Scale* extends this exploration, transforming ancient cultural practices into a resonant, contemporary art language.

Through silk painting, performative calligraphy on xuan paper, sculptural wall works, and an interactive sound installation, Chan creates a multi-sensory environment that moves fluidly between past and present. Her live, improvised performance with guzheng player Chenmeng Jiang at the exhibition opening—marking her first collaboration in this format—is also an integral and innovative part of the exhibition. The works on display embody Chan's highly individual approach, cultivating eye- and mind-opening connections between ancestral traditions and contemporary humanity.

The exhibition space becomes a site of vibrancy and rhythm, where colour, sound, and gesture converge. By entwining visual art, music, and performance, Chan both preserves and reinterprets diasporic traditions, amplifying voices that risk disappearance while opening them to contemporary audiences. *Notations: Red Scale* affirms her position as a vital and innovative voice in contemporary art, one that bridges heritage and experimentation with extraordinary sensitivity.

Rainbow Chan is a proud recipient of the IAC Chey Fellowship for this exhibition. The fellowship is to strengthen the artist's practice and support the arts by fostering collaborations between the artist and IAC.

Professor Jing Han

Director, Institute for Australian and Asian Arts and Culture

About the Artist

Chun Yin Rainbow Chan (陳雋然) is a celebrated interdisciplinary artist, vocalist, music producer, and educator based in Naarm/Melbourne. Working fluidly across contemporary visual art and popular music, her practice examines themes of cultural representation, (mis)translation, matrilineal inheritance, feminist expression, and diasporic identity. Grounded in her ancestral ties to the Weitou people—Hong Kong's first settlers—Chan's work revitalises endangered women's folk traditions, most notably bridal laments, reinterpreting them through immersive installations, silk painting, traditional weaving, sound, and performance, for contemporary audiences.



Photo by Abdela Igmiren

Chan holds a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) from the University of Sydney and a Master of Fine Arts (Research) from the University of NSW. As a highly acclaimed visual artist and musician, she has exhibited and performed widely across Australia and internationally at art institutions and festivals, including the Sydney Opera House, Phoenix Central Park, Carriageworks, Melbourne Music Week, Iceland Airwaves, National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Tai Kwun Contemporary, M+ in Hong Kong, SXSW, 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, Firstdraft, Art Gallery of NSW, Cement Fondu, Blindside, Queensland University Art Museum, Australian National University, and I-Project Space in Beijing.

Chan's work has garnered significant recognition through major commissions and presentations. In 2024 she was commissioned by both the Yokohama Triennale (Japan) and the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia for *Primavera: Young Australian Artists*. Her music is celebrated for its innovative fusion of experimental pop, electronic production, and traditional Cantonese influences, positioning her as one of Australia's most distinctive voices in contemporary sound. Her genre-defying releases, including *Spacings* (2016), *Pillar* (2019), and *Stanley* (2021), have earned critical praise from outlets such as *The Guardian*, *Rolling Stone Australia*, and ABC. Her documentary *Songs from a Walled Village* (ABC Radio National, 2021), was a finalist in the Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union Prizes. Chan won "Artist of the Year" at the 2022 FBi Radio SMAC Awards and was named among the "40 Under 40: Most Influential Asian Australians" for her contributions to arts and culture.

Her one-woman performance *The Bridal Lament*—a reimagining of Weitou wedding rituals through song, textiles, and installation—has been presented at Arts House, OzAsia, Liveworks, and Riverside Theatres as part of Sydney Festival. The work was co-commissioned by Performance Space as part of Liveworks Festival 2023 and OzAsia

Festival 2023, with support from Carriageworks, the City of Melbourne through Arts House and Contemporary Asian Australian Performance.

Through her interdisciplinary practice, Chan continues to illuminate the voices of Weitou women, preserving and reinterpreting their stories while exploring broader questions of identity, language, and cultural inheritance.

Artist's Statement

Notations: Red Scale 音譜：鱗動 draws upon the endangered bridal laments of the Weitou/Waitau (圍頭) people—Hong Kong's first settlers and my matrilineal ancestors. Traditionally performed by young women before their arranged marriages, these songs are acts of protest and mourning in the face of change. The ritual begins with the song *Opening the Mouth* 開口歌, which likens the sunrise to red fish scales cracking open the eastern sky. Symbolising awakening, grief and transformation, this vivid image lies at the heart of the exhibition.

Through silk painting, calligraphy on xuan paper, and sculptural wall works, I explore the mouth as a vessel—a site of inheritance, rupture, and abundance. Lament lyrics are inscribed with traces of incense and soot, transforming writing into a form of notation. My process becomes a performative calligraphy that evokes both ritual and embodiment. Words ignite, breathe, and smoulder, shifting between representation and abstraction.

The red scale functions as both a visual and conceptual motif. It gestures toward a quasi-musical notation system while echoing the fish imagery found in the laments. It holds a tension between beauty and rupture, presence and absence. Fragile materials such as silk, ash, smoke, and xuan paper carry emotional and cultural weight. Burning the words becomes an act of both inscription and erasure—a careful balance between transcribing the lyric with flame and extinguishing the fire before it consumes the word. The process flows naturally yet remains controlled, much like how laments contain unruly grief.

The tessellation of fish scales also inspires me to think about grids, which, in turn makes me reflect on how I produce music on the computer. In my music practice, my primary methodology is to chop up samples and rearrange them into new compositions on a metric grid. I am interested in how unexpected melodies emerge from sonic collages. Though unplanned, I found a similar joy in rearranging paper offcuts bearing beautiful painted marks and gestures. Instead of thinking “bigger is better”, I turned my attention to how a 3x3cm grid could contain a universe. This process of piecing together small fragments is not only about finding harmony and dissonance in unexpected patterns but also about fostering sustainability—reusing and honouring what I have on hand. These “Recapitulations” are among my favourite pieces in the exhibition.

Throughout the show, I play with absence and presence through perforation. The works hover between void, shadow, and light, almost dancing in and out of existence. Using ceremonial joss sticks, a pyrograph pen, or a craft knife, I find a calming release in these destructive methods of making. Each material responds differently: xuan paper burns quickly, though less so with rice glue or chalk; silk sings and carries the scent of burnt hair. The process activates all my senses, grounding me in the present moment.

Perforation is also central to *Twin Melody for Music Box (Flowers)*, a new interactive work featuring a hand-cranked music box. I created a strip of xuan paper—layered, distressed, glued, and manually hole-punched—that produces sound when fed through the mechanism, much like a piano roll. Once played through, the strip can be flipped and replayed, each direction revealing a mirrored version of the tune, or what I call a “twin melody.” Instead of composing in the traditional sense, I traced floral patterns from Weitou architecture and translated them into perforations. In this way, images generate unexpected sounds, blurring the boundary between seeing and hearing. Visitors are invited to turn the handle and bring the piece to life.

Notations: Red Scale 音譜：鱗動 reimagines Weitou laments through a diasporic lens, presenting them not as relics but as living forms. These works are more than translations—they are deeper resonances, a way of listening to what is nearly lost.

I am deeply grateful to Jing Han for her vision and support in curating, developing, and producing my first institutional solo show; to Kurt Chan and Bouie Choi for their generous artistic guidance; to Chenmeng Jiang for lending her talents on the guzheng; to Oliver O’Riley for his technical assistance; and to the Chey Fellowship for financially supporting the creation of these new works. Lastly, heartfelt thanks to my mum, Irene, and to all my Weitou female elders for sharing their stories with me.

Biographies

Dr. Natalie Seiz is the Curator of Asian Art at the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW). She completed her PhD in Art History and Film Studies at the University of Sydney in 2013, focusing on the emergence of contemporary women artists in Taiwan from the late 1970s to the 2000s. Her research and curatorial practice explore issues of gender, identity, and diaspora in contemporary Asian art.



Natalie has published widely, including contributions to scholarly anthologies and exhibition catalogues. She was guest editor of the *TAASA Review* special issue on *Asian Women Artists* (Vol. 24, No. 4, 2015), and her writing appears in publications such as *Asia Through Art and Anthropology* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2013),

HOME: Chien-Chi Chang and Chen Chieh-jen (SCAF, 2014), and *Yi-Chen Hung: Collected Works* (Red Gold Fine Art, 2025).

At AGNSW, she has curated a diverse range of exhibitions, including *Shirin Neshat* (2005–06), *Dadang Christanto: They Give Evidence* (2012), *Tsukioka Yoshitoshi: One Hundred Aspects of the Moon* (2016), *Beyond Words: Calligraphic Traditions of Asia* (2016), *Fearless: Contemporary South Asian Art* (2018–19), and *In One Drop of Water* (2019–2021), and *Outlaw* (2022–23), one of the opening exhibitions for the Sydney Modern Building. Her upcoming exhibition, *And Still I Rise*, opens 8 November 2025.

Chenmeng Jiang is a guzheng player and Music Therapy student at Western Sydney University, bringing a unique interdisciplinary perspective to traditional Chinese music. She began her guzheng journey at age five, developing a profound connection with musical expression. As president of her school's Chinese Traditional Music Club during high school and university, she organised numerous performances and cross-cultural exchanges, passionately exploring artistic dialogues between guzheng and other Chinese instruments.

Her academic path took a distinctive turn through her Bachelor's degree in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), where she began investigating the physiological impact and psychological resonance with TCM's five-element emotional correspondences (e.g. liver-anger, heart-joy, spleen-overthinking, lung-grief, kidney-fear). This inspired her current Master's research in Music Therapy at Western Sydney University, where she develops clinical applications for guzheng improvisation—honouring the instrument's heritage while advancing its role in cross-cultural therapeutic communication.

Chenmeng's practice synthesises TCM's holistic mind-body philosophy with contemporary music therapy frameworks. She believes that when instruments from diverse cultures "speak" in therapeutic settings, wordless cross-cultural dialogue begins.



Photo Gallery



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