In July 2010, the University of Newcastle Chamber Choir made its first concert tour to China. The Choir gave concerts in Beijing, Wuhan and Shanghai and took part in its first international competition in the World Choir Games in Shaoxing.

Well known Newcastle photo-artist and arts co-ordinator Catherine Croll accompanied the Choir throughout its tour, recording the words, images and responses of Choir members. Dermod Kavanagh, as a member of the Choir and also a practising photographer, collaborated with Catherine to document the experiences of the choir through China. *China Song* features works that depict the experience of China - its people, sights, sounds, tastes and smells.

Many of the artists represented in the exhibition *China Song* have been artists in residence at the Red Gate International Residency Studios which are situated in an urban village on the outskirts of Beijing in Bei Gao, north east of the Metropolitan area. The responses of artists Michael Bell, Claire Martin, Johanna Trainor, Anne Graham and Allan Chawner reflect Beijing as a changing city, as its dramatic economic and physical transformations create a dynamic and exciting landscape.

Other artists in *China Song* include Pamela See, a Chinese-Australian contemporary artist who uses traditional paper-cutting techniques and Jen Denzin, an Australian artist who lived and worked in China for many years and for whom China continues to have a profound influence.
Michael Bell

Michael Bell has been painting and making art works for 30 years. He has held 16 solo exhibitions and has participated in many group shows including the Archibald and Sulman Prizes held at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

The recipient of the AGNSW studio in Paris in 2007 and a residency at Taronga Zoo in 2009, Michael is represented in the collection of the Australian National Gallery, Canberra.

In 2009 he worked in China as an artist in residence at Red Gate International Residency Studios with fellow Newcastle artist Claire Martin. Michael Bell is also the winner of the 2010 Cricket Art Prize.

Catherine Croll

For over 20 years Catherine Croll has been a practitioner involved in Community Cultural Development and Planning, as a facilitator and trainer.

In 2009 Croll took up the position of Director of Special Projects at the Red Gate Gallery in Beijing. This followed a six month stint as Director of the Red Gate Gallery International Artist Residency Program – Red Gate AIR. Accompanying the University of Newcastle Chamber Choir on their tour of China, Croll documented and shared with them many incredible experiences.

Dermod Kavanagh

Dermod Kavanagh is an Honours graduate from the University of Newcastle in 2005, an artist and also a member of the University of Newcastle Chamber Choir. While touring China, Kavanagh compiled a photo-documentary of the Choir’s experiences. This journey is presented as a slide series for China Song and its title Friendship and Harmony: Australian/Chinese Connection through song reflects the essence of the tour.

Kavanagh was selected to represent the University of Newcastle at the prestigious Calleen Art Award was a finalist in 2010: National Graduate Show Exhibition at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Art (PICA) - a national survey of recent graduate artists from across Australia.

Pamela See

Pamela See is an Australian artist of Chinese descent whose practice features a contemporary form of the traditional art of papercutting.

A graduate of Queensland College of Art in 1999, See has exhibited in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne.

In 2007, she made her first appearance in the Beijing art scene, featuring in exhibitions at 798 Red Gate Gallery, NY Arts and the Pickled Art Centre. Between 2005 and 2008, See’s work toured as part of Museum of Brisbane’s Echoes of Home: Memory and Mobility in Recent Austral-Asian Art.

Johanna Trainor

Johanna Trainor was an artist in residence at the Red Gate Art Gallery in August/September 2009.

In the short time that she lived in the village, buildings mushroomed weekly, as did 2nd story additions and courtyard enclosures. Stacks of bricks, piles of sand and building materials blocked the narrow streets. Finding locations to photograph with a clear view devoid of bodies or vehicles passing across her frame was virtually impossible.

Trainor’s photographs express the palpable transformation of everyday life, the energy and urgency of Beijing evolving into a modern city.

Dismantling

Huang Je Ping

In Denzin’s current work she investigates a residual ‘Asian’ aesthetic embedded in our visual culture through the mapping of historical and more specifically, visual connections between China and Australia. For example, the Spode willow plate, jade (or money) trees and rotundas are common denominators which connect both cultures.

Until recently little scholarship has addressed the influence of early Chinese migrants on small Australian townships and urban centres, yet there is an enduring Chinese population dating back to pre-goldrush transmigration.

Denzin’s work is also an imaginary navigation of the silent spaces in Australia’s early history regarding Chinese migrants. It visits spaces in our local history and local areas - as Newcastle’s west end was once a Chinatown of sorts.

Claire Martin

An artist and teacher, Claire Martin lives and practices in Newcastle. This year she has been awarded the prestigious Calleen Art Award was a finalist in the Adelaide Perry Prize for Drawing.

Martin worked in China with partner Michael Bell as an artist in residence at Red Gate studios in 2009. The surface and landscape of the village where they stayed and the moments experienced while there, have significantly informed the texture of works exhibited such as Dismantling Huang Je Ping.