

# Sounding Performative Indigeneity and Visualising Sovereignty within Indigenous Taiwanese Curatorial Practice

SEEKING  
INDIGENOUS  
CONTEMPORARY ART  
FROM TAIWAN

探索台灣原住民當代藝術

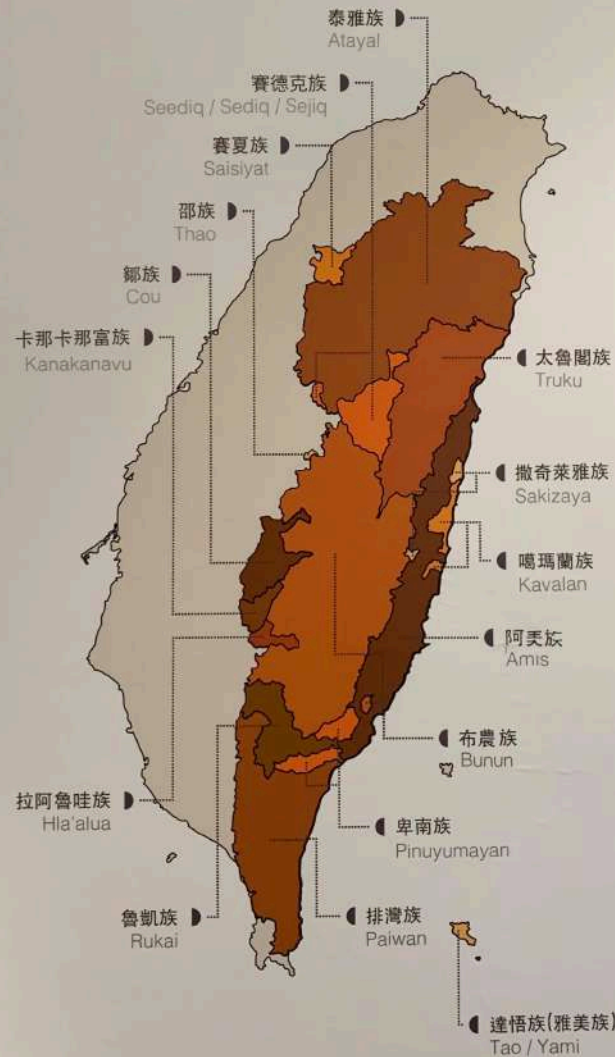
## Biung Ismahasan

PhD Candidate in Curating  
University of Essex, UK  
Goldsmiths MA Alumni 2014



# 臺灣原住民族分布圖

Distribution of Indigenous Peoples in Taiwan







*Dispossessions opening performance at Lower Atrium Space of Professor Stuart Hall Building, Goldsmiths UoL*



But this experience  
is both subject and beyond  
the outside, as another—an  
above is uncertainty — Stuart Hall

café

*Dispossessions* opening performance  
at Lower Atrium Space of Professor Stuart Hall Building, Goldsmiths UoL

But this experience of, as it were, experiencing oneself  
as both subject and object, of encountering oneself from  
the outside, as another—an other—sort of person next  
door, is uncanny — Stuart Hall



*Dispossessions* opening performance  
at Lower Atrium Space of Professor Stuart Hall Building, Goldsmiths UoL

Performance art exchange by  
Marita Isobel Solberg and Don Don Hounwn

Performative Encounters  
Betwixt Northern Sámi (Norway) & Indigenous Taiwanese Truku



24.05.2018

6-9pm

Goldsmiths, University of London  
Lower Atrium, Professor Stuart Hall Building  
SE14 6NW

\*Photography: Jon Eirik Boholm; Make up: Maja Linnea Jacobsen

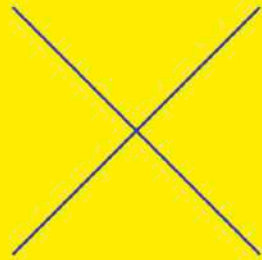
Dispossessions: Performative Encounter(s) of Taiwanese Indigenous Contemporary Art  
is curated by Biung Ismahasan at Goldsmiths, University of London, 21 – 25 May 2018



Marita Isobel Solberg (2018) *Chemical Chords*  
*Dispossessions* performance art exchange at Lower Atrium Space of Professor Stuart Hall Building, Goldsmiths UoL



**ELENG  
LULUAN**



**BIUNG  
ISMAHASAN**





**Eleng Luluan** is true to her artistic statement:

"I do not change existing shapes, but I arrange them differently in a virtual space, to make accessible to others the elegance [and] simplicity of using elastic cord and strapping for important structures, and new designs for inventing Indigenous minimalism and native inventions of installation art in Taiwanese Aboriginal culture."

**Eleng Luluan** 峨冷·魯魯安 (安聖惠)



*Dispossessions: Performative Encounter(s) of  
Taiwanese Indigenous Contemporary Art*

at Professor Stuart Hall Building, Goldsmiths, University  
of London, 2018. Curated by Biung Ismahasan.





## Mother's Garden

or 'Babelengayane ki ina' in the Rukai language appears, at first glance, to be scorched. But while the sense of loss pervades, what appears to be dead may in fact be over-wintering. For Luluan, sculpture is less about changing materials than arranging them to reveal connections. Constructed of black strapping and elastic cord, both flora and waters (in *Forest and River Water*) rely on the tools of the Indigenous farmer, while a series of monochromatic printing of scanned objects, elegant and quietly violent, expose the bond between the mother and the land. In *Hunting, Sharing, and Mother*, a woman's plaited hair could be the fibers of *Mother's Garden*, while a blanched wide boar's skull and vertebrae reference tribal hunting lands. Though men have traditionally engaged in the hunt, women have prepared the ceremony, shared out the meat, and honored ancestors and forest deities, who delivered the prey to the people.

### Mother's Garden

Forest and River Water

Strapping and elastic cord

PULIMA Art Award and Exhibition, 2016

Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts



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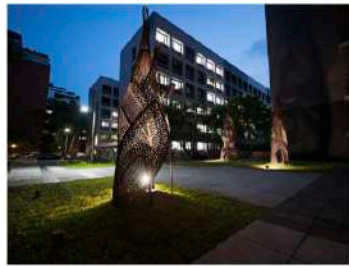
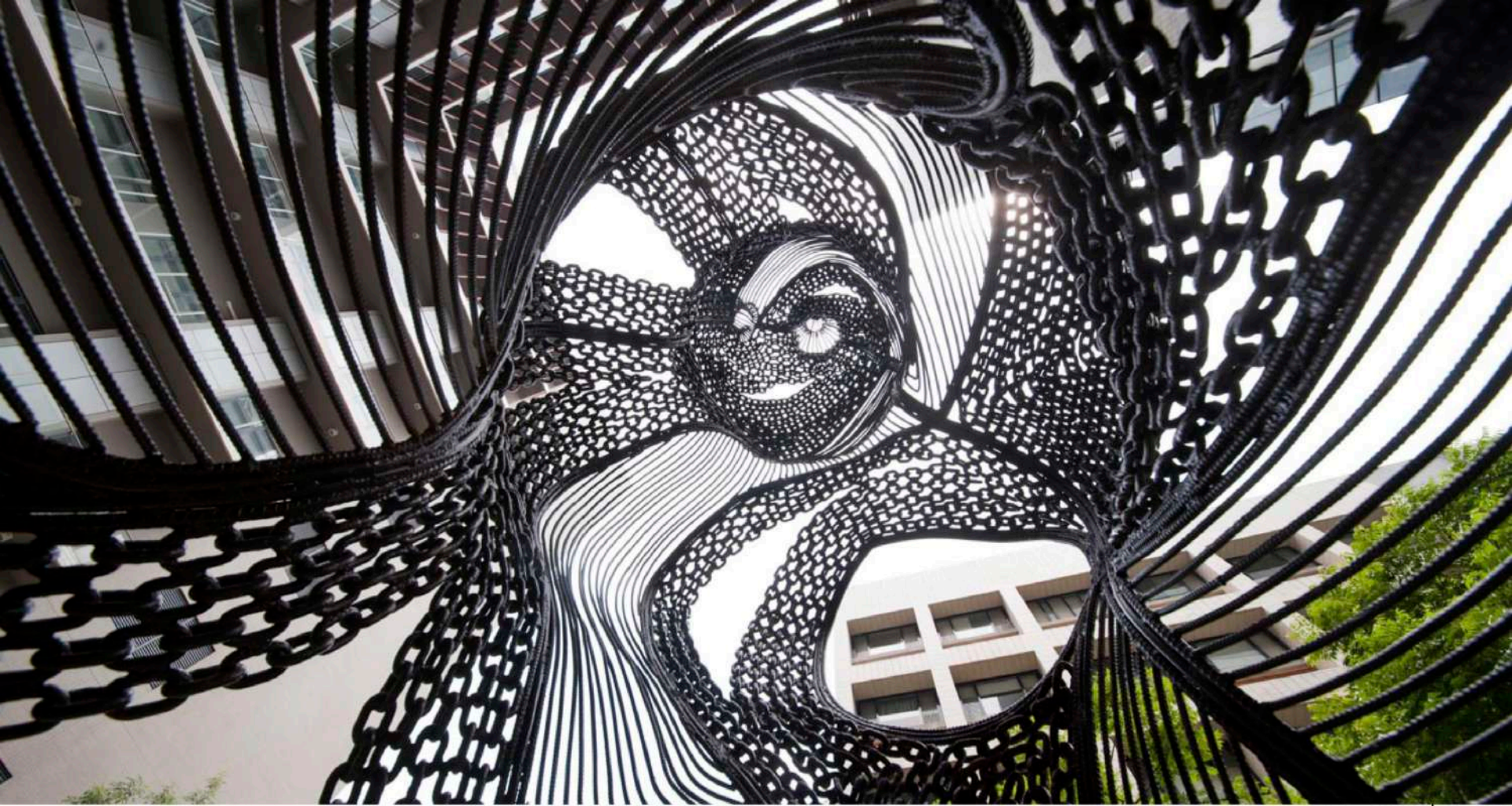
**Hunting, Sharing, and Mother**

Printing of Scanned Objects with  
crystal frame, 2016



**Clues of Mata (Eyes in Austronesian language)**

Metal material and cotton rope, 2019  
Taiwan Lantern Festival in Dapeng Bay, Pingtung



### Weaving Between Lands and Memories

Metal material and LED Light, 2018  
Interdisciplinary Research Building for Science and Technology  
Taiwan Academy of Sciences (Academia Sinica), Taipei



*Ngahi' Routes: When Depths Become Experiment*  
*Dispossessions: Dadugunu Stood In Kucapungane 2019*

Taoyuan City Indigenous Cultural Centre  
Curated by Biung Ismahasan







### **Sovereign Memories of Weaving**

Medium iron rod and cotton rope, 2019  
Dawo Tunnel Drain Land Art Festival, Miaoli, Taiwan

## Between Dreams

Styrofoam Strips, Wrapping Bags, Wrapping  
Paper Strips, 2018  
Kaohsiung Museum of Fines Arts, Taiwan



ABADAKONE





Eleng Luluan, *Between Dreams* (2019)  
Àbadakone | Continuous Fire | Feu continuel: Relatedness, Continuity and Activation, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa



Eleng Luluan, *Between Dreams* (2019)  
Àbadakone | Continuous Fire | Feu continuel: Relatedness, Continuity and Activation, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa



Elong Luluan, *Between Dreams* (2019)  
Àbadakone | Continuous Fire | Feu continuel: Relatedness, Continuity and Activation, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa



Eleng Luluan, *Between Dreams* (2019)

Àbadakone | Continuous Fire | Feu continuel: Relatedness, Continuity and Activation, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa



Eleng Luluan, *Meet the Artist* (2019)  
Àbadakone | Continuous Fire | Feu continuel: Relatedness, Continuity and Activiation, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa





Eleng Luluan, *Meet the Artist* (2019)  
Àbadakone | Continuous Fire | Feu continuel: Relatedness, Continuity and Activiation, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa



Eleng Luluan, *Meet the Artist* (2019)

Àbadakone | Continuous Fire | Feu continuél: Relatedness, Continuity and Activiation, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa



Eleng Luluan, *Meet the Artist* (2019)

Àbadakone | Continuous Fire | Feu continuel: Relatedness, Continuity and Activiation, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa



OTTAWA CITIZEN

LOCAL ARTS

## 5 things you can't miss in Àbadakone, the National Gallery's exhibition of contemporary Indigenous art

作者：LYNN SAXBERG

2019年11月8日 上午12:42

Àbadakone: Continuous Fire, the National Gallery of Canada's major exhibition of contemporary Indigenous art, opened this





# Pasulange Druluan

拔舒浪·魯魯安  
(安君實)





Pasulange Druluan, *Dispossessions: Returning To The Silence of Ancient Guide* (2019)  
Taoyuan City Indigenous Cultural Centre, Taiwan



Singaporean Choreographer Amin Farid Sultari demonstrates performative Indigeneity within Taiwanese Indigenous Rukai Nation artist Pasulange Druluan's driftwood installation, Taoyuan City Indigenous Cultural Centre, Taiwan

Cultural representation can therefore be a political act of defiance, affirming self-determination.

Because much of the endeavour is to recover and re-tell, Indigenous cultural revitalisation is not exclusively focused on male leadership, youth and novelty, but has become a site of political struggle where the roles of elders and women acquire a prominent position (2017:179).

In contrast to the more individualistic emphasis on achievement in Western culture, Indigenous cultural revitalisation has been based on the collective and the community (ibid., 180).

Indigenous cultural centres can also have important ambivalences and shortcomings (ibid., 182). More positively, a number of initiatives have emerged that go beyond museums and create new spaces for the articulation of cultural identities (ibid., 183).

Gigoux, C. and Samson, C., "Culture." In *Indigenous Peoples and Colonialism: Global Perspectives*, 177-197. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017.





# Curating Performative Space

*Anti-Alcoholism August 2017*  
by Biung Ismahasan (Bunun Nation)



Biung Ismahasan (2017) *Dispossessions I*  
Cemetery as an off-site space, Dakanuwa Community, Namasia  
Kaohsiung, Southern Taiwan, Photo credit: Rich John Matheson



Rich J Matheson

Biung Ismahasan (2017), *Dispossessions I (Anti-Alcoholism)*, off-site lived performance, Dakanuwa Community, Namasia, Kaohsiung of Southern Taiwan. Photo credit: Rich John Matheson



Biung Ismahasan  
(2017)  
*Dispossessions II*  
(Anti-Alcoholism)  
off-site lived  
performance,

Ningni Guest House  
Grass Site, Dakanuwa  
Community Namasia,  
Kaohsiung of Southern  
Taiwan Photo credit:  
Rich John Matheson



Special issue of the International Journal of Taiwan Studies (IJTS) on Public Diplomacy and Taiwan's Membership of the WHA

**Indigenous peoples and the cultural/public diplomacy of Taiwan:  
A case study of *Dispossessions: Performative Encounter(s) of Taiwanese  
Indigenous Contemporary Art***

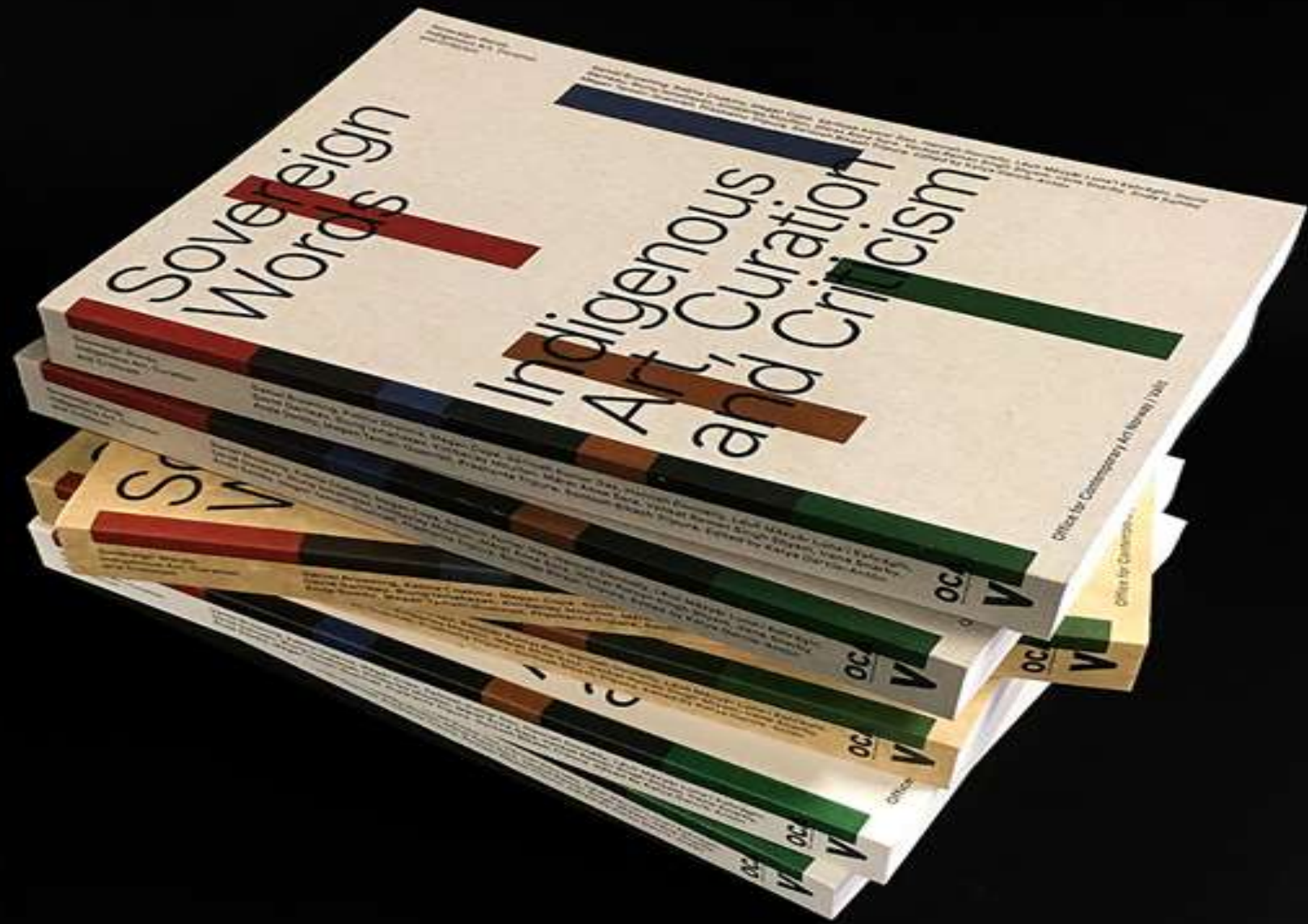
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# Sovereign Words

# Indigenous Art, Curation and Criticism

Sovereign Words:  
Indigenous Art, Curation  
and Criticism.

David Garneau, Prashanta Tripura, Santosh Kumar Das, Irene Snarby, Megan Cope, Maret Anne Sara, Añde Somby, Sontosh Bikash Tripura, Kimberley Moulton, Venkat Raman Singh, Shyam, Biung Ismahasan, Léuli Mäzyär Luna'i Eshrághi, Hannah Donnelly. Edited by Katya García-Antón.

Artists and cultural practitioners from Indigenous communities around the world are increasingly in the international spotlight. As museums and curators race to consider the planetary reach of their art collections and exhibitions, this publication draws upon the challenges faced today by cultural workers, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to engage meaningfully and ethically with the histories, presents and futures of Indigenous cultural practices and world-views.

Sixteen Indigenous voices convene to consider some of the most burning questions of our time. How will novel methodologies of word and voice-crafting be constituted to empower the Indigenous discourses of the future? Is it sufficient to expand the Modernist art-historical canon through the politics of inclusion? Is this broadening a new form of colonisation, or does it foster the cosmopolitanism of thought that Indigenous communities have always inhabited? To whom does the much talked-of 'Indigenous Turn' belong? Does it represent a hegemonic project of introspection and revision, in the face of today's ecocidal, genocidal and existential crises?

With the canonical power systems of the international art world increasingly under fire today, *Sovereign Words* makes a concerted bid for knowledge building and intellectual alliances that will frame the cultural and artistic processes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous futures.

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Eshrághi  
Hannah Donnelly

Edited by:  
Katya García-Antón

*Ethno-Spatiality as Sovereignty.*  
*Curating Performative Encounters with*  
*Taiwanese Indigenous Contemporary Art*  
Biung Ismahasan



Biung Ismahasan, *Curation of Ethno-Spatiality Part I*, 2017. Curatorial experiment in collaboration with contemporary dancer Hsueh Yu-Hsien. Dakanuwa community public cemetery, Namasia, Southern Taiwan. Photo: Rich John Matheson. Courtesy of the artist.

<sup>125</sup> 'Indigeneity' and 'Indigenous' have been capitalised throughout this paper in order to demonstrate the centrality of cultural identity and suggest the rights of sovereignty.

This paper explores the ethno-aesthetic nature of Taiwanese Indigenous performative art through the works of Truku performance artist and activist Don Hounwn, Rukai sculptor Eleng Luluan and myself, a Bunun curator (Turku, Ruaki and Bunun are three of Taiwan's sixteen Indigenous groups).<sup>125</sup> Our performative approaches and curatorial strategies are examined as Indigenous artistic practices, particularly those pertinent to cultural loss, recovery and activation, and in relation to the discourse of surrounding Indigenous and cultural sovereignty. The site-specific performance, for example, is presented as an alternative space for Indigenous intervention and curatorial activism. The paper begins by looking at how Hounwn performs Indigeneity, sorrow and solitude, exposing hybrid identities. It goes on to demonstrate how Luluan uses her Indigenous minimalist installations to explore intrinsic and extrinsic performativity, material objects and soft sculptures. Finally, it looks at how I structured a performative encounter with Taiwanese Indigenous contemporary art by curating in an off-site and culturally resonant space.

126

One of the most significant phenomena is the emergence of Indigenous artist, Yuma Taru, who tends to use the binary terms 'traditional', 'contemporary' and/or 'two worlds' that are often associated with an Indigenous background and artistic content since the 1990s. Her works have taken a series of themes including: the individual in an unequal society, the breakdown of tribal communities, gender, educational turns, human-environmental relationships, and the results of colonial struggle with the mainstream society of Taiwan.

127

The attempt is to decolonise Indigenous practice in order to achieve an authentic understanding of it, which requires more resources than are currently available.

128

This phrase is borrowed from Indigenous literary theorist Chadwick Allen. Drawing on his work, we can contextualise Indigenous relational art in the broader field of 'trans-Indigenous' cultural practices asserting that 'centring the Indigenous has become a new standard'. Chadwick Allen, *Trans-Indigenous: Methodologies for Global Native Literary Studies* (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 2012).

129

Smapux is the name in eastern Taiwanese Indigenous communities of the ancient magician Truku. I use it here to emphasise the complexity of Indigeneity defined by Hounwn. He is the inheritor of several traditional arts and cultures in his tribe, such as this magician who can connect the spirituality between ancestor and tribal people in the Truku language.

Introduction

Since the democratisation of Taiwan's politics and the advent of the Indigenous Art Movement,<sup>126</sup> Taiwanese Indigenous Curatorial Practice (henceforth ICP) has experienced great expansion and transformation, effectively voicing issues surrounding decolonisation.<sup>127</sup> Performance and performativity are fundamental to understanding the emergent, processual and contextual nature of Indigeneity, which is for many a politically enabling construct in resisting ongoing colonialisms and expropriations – Indigeneity expressed as performance as a form of radical resistance. Even as this paper explores essentialism, it defies expectations of primitivism and primordialism. It emphasises how artists fashion and refashion identities through self-conscious experience and reflexivity, embodied speech and immersive action expressed as Indigenous performance and installation.

The paper emphasises 'ethno-spatiality' as one of many productive ways of approaching Indigenous curation. In this context, 'ethno-spatiality' refers to a systematic experimentation with and expansion of Taiwanese Indigenous curation. The aim is to produce knowledge about Indigenous/decolonial aesthetics and to create a discursive space for performative exhibitions. It not only harks back to the radical/performative art spirit of the 1990s, but also reveals how performance can be a tool to rethink ICP uses and aesthetics, mobilising the ethno-aesthetic nature of Taiwanese Indigenous cultures and the ephemerality of performing as a means to voice issues around the theme of decolonisation. In order to debate their specific desire for recognition, self-determination and cultural sovereignty, artists perform Indigeneity, including the remediation of Indigenous representations and the on-going processes of inventing modernity within ICP.

By going back and forth between my own participation as an independent curator and engagement in critique as a researcher, I ask: in contemporary works of performance and installation arts – where culture and art have already become self-defined categories – how do the concepts of Indigeneity



# Contribution

Indigenous Curating Art of Taiwan: is an emerging category that extends and adapts Aboriginal ways of knowing and being into the contemporary moment and into spaces beyond our home territories. **Indigenous criticism of Indigenous art begins with the knowledge that I am part of a community.**

The Curation of Ethno-Spatiality refers to a strategic approach for reclaiming counter-narratives of cultural traditions, asserting embodied sovereignty, and embracing land-based philosophies within an expanded and spatial experiment in Indigenous Taiwanese curation.

Indigenous Performative exhibition: as a medium for the process of curatorial conceptualisation to stimulate demands in socio-cultural, activist-oriented and environmental changes of Indigenous society, elaborating how 'performativity' can be embodied within Indigenous Taiwanese curating in the contemporary art world.

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# Indigenous Performative Encounter(s) 2014 – 2019