

4A Digital Biung Ismahasan, Indigenous Relational Space and Performance: Curating Together Towards Sovereignty in Taiwan and Beyond //

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TRANSCRIPT



SLIDE 1

BIUNG ISMAHASAN: Kadaidazunku tu pasahahalan: saikin hai Biung Ismahasan Islituan Tainkasia Halavang. Taki sainik sia Taiuan tu Takau Kiing tu Namasia tu Bunun Sanamahtunag inak a mailantatangus anis hanitusial tausbauszang i sainchi tu dada'ingian anis mamuu tu taisis'an. Malisvala a kamun. Uninang at Mihumisang.

I spoke my Bunun language: my name is Biung Ismahasan. I came from Dakanuwa Community, Namasia, in the southern Taiwan. I am staying with my ancestors in this space to share the beauty of our cultures and arts. On the behalf of Taiwanese Indigenous Peoples, it is my greatest honour to share my cultures here.

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Though distinct from each other in many ways, the various Indigenous groups in Taiwan share certain customs with one another and with Austronesian peoples in other parts of the world. Over the centuries, while the more remote indigenous groups have tended to maintain distinctive communities, others have blended in with Han Chinese society. Currently, the 16 officially recognised indigenous groups are the Amis, Atayal, Bunun, Kavalan, Paiwan, Puyuma, Rukai, Saisiyat, Sakizaya, Seediq (or Sediq), Thao, Truku, Tsou, Yami (or Dawu), Hla'alua and Kanakanavu.

As of December 2015, the collective population of these groups stood at approximately 546,700 (including about 14,500 people who did not identify themselves as belonging to any one group), or 2.33 percent of the total population of Taiwan. The three largest groups – the Amis, the Paiwan and the Atayal – accounted for 70.98 percent of the indigenous population.

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I use 'Indigenous' to refer to peoples who are elsewhere referred to by their community, nation-specific or tribal names, or as 'Indigenous Groups,' 'local Peoples,' 'Native,' 'Aboriginal,' 'First Nations' or 'American Indian' when talking across those differences, and I spell the word that is subject of this issue using medial capitalisation and no hyphen: 'Indigenous Contemporary Art.'

As an Indigenous curator, my overarching aim of this practice-based thesis is to explore how Indigenous curatorial practice can be used as a medium and research methodology in order to expand Indigenous relational space through ways of curating togetherness and collaboration towards sovereignty and relationality.¹ Collaboration is fundamental to and characteristic of many artistic endeavours not only in Indigenous contemporary art but also in the artistic practices of different communities and spaces across the globe. Indeed, I believe that Indigenous artworks generally come into being by engaging many 'lima' ('hands' in many Austronesian languages) and relate to more than one mastermind. This curatorial research begins with the overarching question: How does an Indigenous curator

¹ In this thesis, I capitalise the words 'Indigeneity,' 'Indigenisation,' 'Taiwanese Indigenous Curatorial Practice' and 'Native.' I adopt the editorial practice used by Cultural Survival, a leading Indigenous human rights organisation, and follow the reasoning that such capitalisation accords these terms dignity and recognition as collective proper nouns or derived forms. In *Cultural Survival Style Guide* (Unpublished internal document, February 9, 2010).

articulate the 'Indigenous relational space and performance' of actors producing dialogic forms of solidarities and spaces of transformation through artistic collaboration and its curatorial approach with bodies in relational encounters?

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At the core of my approach is Indigenous curatorial practice, which has served as the principal means for responding to Bunun ontological relationships with *maluskun mas dalah* – the Bunun concept of co-existence/land, which also means humility and fear towards the earth, and, like in many First Nations cultures, posits a grounded relationship both culturally and spiritually.² In my work, the ultimate function of Indigenous curatorial practice is to articulate how a 'performative encounter' can be embodied by reframing the histories and narratives within Indigenous Taiwanese curating that conveys fundamental beliefs about the nature of reality and the relationship between humans and land. Visualising sovereignty in an Indigenous sense is similarly connected to land/*dalah*. In my practice-based research, the word 'sovereignty', appropriated from English language, thus becomes 'a critical source of self-determination for Indigenous peoples globally,' and has been used as a corrective strategy by Indigenous peoples to counter the ongoing dispossessions of our resources and lands.³ In a Bunun context, the phrase *maluskun mas dalah* can be defined as absolute sovereignty.

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When Taiwan's artistic subjectivity eventually evolved into a comprehensive understanding of diverse artistic creations, the question of subjectivity remained as an ongoing concern for the contemporary art community as well as for the emerging political class. The rhetoric

² Bunun means humans in Bunun Nation language of Indigenous Taiwanese

³ Jolene Ricard, 'Visualising Sovereignty in the Time of Biometric Sensors,' in *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Duke University 110, no. 2 (Spring 2011), 467.

of Taiwanese multiculturalism tended to be positioned within a context of globalisation. In terms of international cultural exchanges, the Taipei Fine Arts Museum held the group exhibition entitled *Ancestors, Souls and Life of Taiwan Aborigines* between Indigenous Taiwanese and First Nations contemporary artists from Canada. This landmark exhibition, curated by the National Museum of History in 1999, showed contemporary Aboriginal art for the first time in Taiwan.

During the phase of contemporary art development since 2000, Indigenous artistic and curatorial collectives stimulated interdisciplinary possibilities for the development of Indigenous contemporary art, in turn promoted by national cultural and creative industry policies. For instance, the Council of Indigenous Peoples played a vital role in producing Indigenous contemporary art discourse, responding to and often spearheading cultural revitalisation, decolonisation and cultural sovereignty.

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When in 2012, the Council of Indigenous Peoples and Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts sent the first Taiwanese delegation, a group of artists from the cradle of the Austronesian peoples and languages, to the 11th Festival of Pacific Arts in the Solomon Islands. This cultural exchange aimed at further strengthening the ties between the represented culture and forming a network by sharing the outcomes of artistic creation and curatorial practice with each other. In addition, the Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts organised the exhibition *Beyond the Boundary: Contemporary Indigenous Art of Taiwan*, which toured to the Tjibaou Cultural Centre with the aim of shortening the distance between each other through art and celebrating a performative encounter of Indigenous exhibition practice.

The Tjibaou Cultural Centre is a renowned centre of contemporary Pacific arts. Since 2007, the Centre has worked with the Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts in developing a platform for contemporary Indigenous artists in Taiwan and the other Austronesian islands to have

exchanges benefitting their artistic practices and forming connections. Such exchanges have helped to shed light on the commonalities and differences between both sides. The arts and cultures of Taiwanese Indigenous Nations constitute important cultural strengths for Taiwan.

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The Indigenous Peoples Cultural Foundation made a significant contribution to the development of milestone group exhibitions of Indigenous contemporary art in Taiwan. The biennial PULIMA Art Award, Exhibition and Festival is a showcase and celebration of contemporary Indigenous art and cultures.⁴ A diversity of topics is addressed in these Indigenous works, such as tribal lands, the natural environment, Indigenous histories, and the reinvention of traditions. Although varying in form and topics, all awarded works share in common the quest for and experimentation with ways of applying and reinterpreting the core values of Indigenous art traditions — ‘art in the service of the community’ — in the context of contemporary culture where individuality and originality are valued. The PULIMA Art Festival sheds new light on the curatorial intention of these exhibitions, focusing on how Indigenous curators not only position historical works of Indigenous contemporary art but also contribute to determining a curatorial theme for the group exhibition.

The PULIMA Art Festival is the first national art award dedicated to Indigenous peoples and communities. ‘PULIMA’ in Taiwan’s Paiwan language refers to a person with superb creativity and outstanding craftsmanship, while ‘lima’ means hands in many Austronesian languages. Each edition of the PULIMA over the years not only has uncovered the artistic energy of emerging artists but also has provided a platform for Indigenous artists to demonstrate their artistic competence and potential, further helping outstanding artists to connect to the international art scene. The theme of the 1st edition was ‘Faiths and Its

⁴ It is a biennial festival established by the Indigenous Peoples Cultural Foundation in 2012. As young as it is, PULIMA festival plays a very important role in the development of Indigenous contemporary art in Taiwan. The organising committee pays particular attention to the interaction between tradition and contemporaneity. There is a core, an origin of all creations and in which one’s heritage would be found. PULIMA seeks to encourage creators to reflect their personal connection with their own culture, also to explore ‘the future of the tradition’ as well as ‘the tradition in the future’ through their works, accessed August 23, 2016, <http://www.pulima.com.tw/PulimaENG/index.aspx>

Creation' and took place at Taipei Songyan Cultural and Creative Park in 2012; the 2nd edition was 'Urban Tribes' and held at the Taipei Museum of Contemporary Art in 2014; the 3rd edition was 'O loma no adingo' ['home, where the spirit dwells' in the Amis Nation language] and appeared at the Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts; and the 4th edition was 'MICAWOR' ['transformation' in the Amis language] and took place at the Taipei Museum of Contemporary Art. With 'Micawor' or transformation as its theme, the 4th PULIMA Art Festival attempted to till the fertile soil of Indigenous cultures and artforms, connecting various threads of a new Indigenous futurism. We, Indigenous artists and curators, are in the process of making major advances and hope to encounter a flourishing on a wider scale in the near future.

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Taiwanese Indigenous artists Yuma Taru (Atayal, see fig. 5), Walis Labai (瓦歷斯·拉拜 Seediq) and En Lei (雷恩 Paiwan), were invited to present works related to the themes of tribal identity, Indigenous aesthetic politics, the discursive production of creativity, and spiritual heritage through their artistic engagement at the 1st quinquennial exhibition of National Gallery of Canada. There, they presented Sakahàn: International Indigenous Art (17 May – 2 September 2013), which employed distinct approaches to show how Indigenous artists have created a rich and generative dialogue about what it means to be an Indigenous artist today.⁵ They articulated 'Indigeneity' and then offered perspectives on how the rise of Indigenous curatorial practice has influenced the development of contemporary art history in Taiwan.

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⁵ Meaning 'lighting up a fire' in the Algonquian language, accessed January 15, 2019, <http://www.gallery.ca/sakahen/en/>

Within the last year of this research project, I curated Luluan's *Between Dreams* at the 2nd quinquennial international Indigenous art exhibition *Àbadakone / Continuous Fire / Feu continuel*, which ran from 8 November 2019 to 4 October 2020 at the National Gallery of Canada.⁶ In keeping with the Gallery's first exhibition *Sakahàn* (2013), which means 'lighting a fire', the elders from Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg community felt that *Àbadakone* — 'the fire continues to burn' — was an appropriate title for the second exhibition showcasing Indigenous art and its makers from all over the world.⁷ In the elders' view, *Àbadakone* exists not in a ceremony but in each individual's internal flame. One elder Kiwekwad has a vision for the *Àbadakone* exhibition.

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Anchored in this idea, *Àbadakone* built on the themes of Indigenous epistemologies or ways of knowing, and addressed the key concepts of 'relatedness, continuity and activation'. Relatedness is the notion that all things on the earth are our relations (a fundamental idea to Indigenous worldviews); that continuity is relatedness across generations, histories and our futures; and that activation is about presence (e.g., how an artist animates a space, an object, or an idea through performance, video or viewer engagement).

⁶ The word *Àbadakone* in the Algonquin dialect of the Anishinaabemowin language translates into 'continuous fire' in English. In keeping with the metaphor of fire ignited with *Sakahàn: International Indigenous Art* in 2013, the title *Àbadakone* was provided by the Elders Language Committee of Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg. They felt that its connotation of a fire within each artist that continues to burn would be an appropriate title for the second presentation of this ongoing series of exhibitions showcasing Indigenous art from around the world. This project was realised under the curatorial leadership of Greg A. Hill (Audain Senior Curator of Indigenous Art), Christine Lalonde (Associate Curator of Indigenous Art) and Rachelle Dickenson (Acting Associate Curator of Indigenous Art) along with a team of invited curators and advisors across the globe, accessed December 5, 2019, <https://www.gallery.ca/whats-on/exhibitions-and-galleries/abadakone-continuous-fire-feu-continuel>

⁷ The Language Committee members Cobad (Stella Chabot), Kishkanakwad (Earl McGregor) and Pien Kiwekwad, also a Sacred Fire Keeper, from Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg explain that fire is sacred and spiritual to the Anishinabe people and is used in ceremonies.

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She believes in the ability of an installation to have its own language and own way of leading us somewhere new. *Between Dreams* rose out of Luluan's childhood memories. Whenever guests visited her home, they always brought a gift of expensive apples in a box. Each apple was displayed in a carton and covered with a white Styrofoam net for protection. In her memory, this protective net elicited a deep response. The Rukai people considered this a precious present and used to combine the netting with natural plants to make head ornaments. In Luluan's eyes, the white net was a meaningful creative material.

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Between Dreams demonstrates the hybrid relationship and diasporic flows between the body and mixed media, between space and memories. In this work particularly, she uses massive amounts of industrial material and Styrofoam to weave a shelter- and womb-like 'pure' space (see fig. 8). It expresses her inner and spiritual condition, her personal challenges revolving around environments, community values, and the desires and concerns of one's original homeland. During the installation's curatorial process, Luluan and I discussed the concept of relatedness in Australian Aboriginal artist Tracey Moffatt's work *Spanish Window* from the series *Body Remembers*.⁸ In 2017, Moffatt was the first Aboriginal artist to represent Australia at the 57th Venice Biennale. Her photography reshapes time, place, culture and memory; it raises the dilemma of tribal people facing the impact of contemporary society with a distinctive theatricality that resonates with

⁸ The title of the series was derived from the Greek modernist poet, C.P. Cavafy, whose poem 'Body, Remember' (1918) is an exhortation to remember the power of desire and passions to do with forbidden love. See Natalie King, 'Fall into My Fiction,' in *Tracey Moffatt My Horizon*, exh. cat. (Venice Biennale and Australia Council for the Arts, 2017), XX and 7.

references to the history of photography. There is a dialogical relationship and spatial discourse between Spanish Windows and Between Dreams. Installed in proximity to the view of the mother's back in Spanish Window, Luluan's Between Dreams corresponds with the perception, absence and existence of tribal women in a different time and space from that expressed in Moffatt's photographs (see fig. 9). The dialogue between these two works communicates a common sense of loss and resilience. Both works are rooted in time and space and visually express the situation of Indigenous peoples' land nostalgia, migration and diaspora. Both artists have migrated from one part of the world to another and express their unique experiences of culture and identity in the works they made.⁹ Between Dreams reflects an Indigenous woman's experience of the migrant as one of displacement, dislocation and hybridity (a mixture of experience and cultures) expressed in Spanish Windows.

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As such, Luluan attempts to define the features of her installation as a genre derived from precisely these concepts of Indigenous relational space and viewer. In a similar vein, Peter Morin, a Tahltan Nation performance artist, activist and scholar, not only performed around Luluan's work but also questioned how each Indigenous artwork is actually a village, or a collective of Indigenous bodies.¹⁰ To this end, he created the piece Land.Breath, which was designed to consider the body and its moment to Indigenous territories. At times, I was very literal in considering dialogues and how Morin's body comes into contact with the land, and its relation to Luluan's Between Dreams in the exhibition, merging Tahltan traditional territories and the Algonquin territory on which the Gallery is sited with Luluan's Indigenous territories of Kucapungane. I invited Morin to engage Luluan's work that seeks to unite Indigenous artists whose practices are rooted in the specificities of their territories and tribal lands via their travel – artistic, embodied and intellectual – and come to shape a highly specific and globally interconnected dialogue on Indigeneity¹¹.

⁹ For a discussion on the concepts of cultural identity and representation, see Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora,' in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 222–237.

¹⁰ Peter Morin, *land.breath: performing the collective history of walked paths on Tahltan territory* at the National Gallery of Canada on 11 January 2020, accessed January 3, 2020, <https://www.gallery.ca/whats-on/calendar/landbreath?>

¹¹ James Clifford, *Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 52.

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This chapter examines how collaborative curatorial practices may facilitate new relations between Indigenous-to-Indigenous cultural exchange and collaboration. In view of the aforementioned issues, I initiated a curatorial project in 2018 entitled *Dispossessions: Performative Encounter(s) of Taiwanese Indigenous Contemporary Art*, seeking to transcend the limitations of Indigenous performativity by treating performative curation as a method. Although we are accustomed to thinking there is sensorial experience and participatory engagement for performative work, this chapter argues that a tendency exists for individual projects to cluster around two distinct models for trans-Indigenous collaboration, which I refer as ‘the curation of trans-Indigenous connecting space’ and ‘Indigenous performative curation.’ They both focus on extending aesthetic process over time and place – from the studio to the gallery space and beyond – so that the dynamic of performativity may be condensed into aesthetic forms of sensorial experience and open-ended sociability. To this end, I will examine the work of two artists: Dondon Hounwn’s *The Face of the Road* (2012) / *The Brink between Perfection and Wreckage* (2014), and Eleng Luluan’s *The Last Sigh before Gone* (2016). I also consider my own experimental hybrid project *Anti-Alcoholism: Performative Curatorial Practices I & II* (2014–2017) that combines the performance and the exhibition as a springboard for questioning how non-colonial curatorial actions look, feel and sound. This chapter pays particular attention to the articulation of contemporary collaborative works of performance and installation.

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As Goldsmiths’ cultural relations and diplomacy studies scholar Carla Figueira noted, this exhibition promoted the performative encounters between spectators and collaborators that allow ‘Indigenous peoples to garner attention and harness influence and leverage in the

international sphere and in their domestic realm' in order 'to raise awareness of their condition(s) of dispossession and re-vindicate a fair and sensitive treatment of their issues — including health.'¹² I have spanned curatorial and artistic projects research into performative encounters and international Indigenous considerations of alcoholism, powerful objects (e.g., traditional millet wine) and resurgence. This exhibition has condensed into aesthetic forms of ambiguous sociability and sensorial experience, amongst myself regarding the limits of performativity, and resulting in the congealment of process. *Dispossessions* explores what sensing Indigenous performance art through embodied knowledge, togetherness, softness, openness and closedness teach us about how we might resurrect pre-colonial rituals by allowing for celebration and connection.

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Dispossessions conveys fundamental beliefs about the sovereignty of curatorial activism, the togetherness of reality and the symbiotic relationship between human and the land. I attempted to curate together towards sovereignty through relational art that believes in an Indigenous sense and is similarly connected to ourselves, our lands and self-determination. My curatorial statement explained how Indigenous performativity has become an art of encounter to privilege a sovereign space for sociability amongst audience, artist and curator.

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¹² Carla Figueira, Indigenous Peoples and the Cultural/Public Diplomacy of Taiwan: A Case Study of *Dispossessions: Performative Encounter(s) of Taiwanese Indigenous Contemporary Art*, *International Journal of Taiwan Studies*, no. 3 (2020), 62-92, accessed February 3, 2020, <http://brill.com/ijts>

'Indigeneity' is a politically enabling construct in the resistance to ongoing colonialisms and expropriations. Performance and installation art are conceived as vital expressions of the emergent and contextual nature of Indigenous cultures. As such, performative installation may be considered as an experimental form of resistance. *Dispossessions: Performative Encounter(s) of Taiwanese Indigenous Contemporary Art* defies expectations of primitivism and primordialism by emphasising instead self-made and re-appropriated identities. Offering an example of Indigenous curation from an Austronesian perspective, the exhibition activates the radical flourishing of Indigenous performance and installation art, despite – and in response to – social and environmental disruption, instability and change.

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By gathering Indigenous artists, the various generations and I collectively confronted coloniality, including the coloniality of knowledge, the coloniality of being and the coloniality of religion trapping spirituality (theological-Christian and Indigenous secular-liberal). I maintain an Indigenous-centrism as a counterpoint to stress the production of knowledge about curatorial decoloniality. As Anishinaabe curator Wanda Nanibush asserts, 'words like return, resurgence and rewriting all have embedded in them a colonial idea of time where we have not had continuity and contemporaneity or even modernity, even if otherwise than its European versions.'¹³ *Dispossessions* connects any process of decolonisation of Indigenous curatorial practice to question what the place of aesthetics in the colonial matrix of power, a machine that generates injustices, disavowals, silences at all levels by articulating performative utterance and visualising sovereignty of Indigenous land, bodies, cultures and communities.

¹³ Wanda Nanibush, *Contexts: Thinking and Engaging with the Decolonial, Afterall 45* (UAL Central Saint Martins: Spring/Summer, 2018), 29.

[Selected Artworks on display]

The two series of works I selected from Luluan became a spiritual, cultural and physical portal, a point of transformation from an institutional space into a connecting space. The first work is Babelengayane ki ina (Mother's Garden in the Rukai language) that appears as a large spatial extension of three-dimensional soft sculptures. Those works refer to 'scanned images' as pictures with disturbing, extreme, violent imagery. Luluan has created the art form of Indigenous performative installation, which brings together three types of Indigenous contemporary art: 'soft sculpture,' 'tribal environment[s]' and 'Indigenous relational installation.' 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 prints of scanned object, elegant and quietly violent, expose the bond between the mother and the land; and the second work is Hunting, Sharing, and Mother that depicts the relationship between symbolic and cultural materials, such as a wild boar's skull, women's plaited hair and vigorous vestige of mother's hands, and how such materials exemplify the connectivity between tribal peoples and traditional hunting territory. The series of works echoed Babelengayane ki ina through the view that all things on the earth are our relations, a form of traditional wisdom that is fundamental to Indigenous worldviews.

At this event, I selected two different performance pieces combined with mixed-media installations. The first piece is Smapux by Hounwn with co-performer Temu Basaw (鐵木. 巴紹 Atayal). The ritual of healing is like moonlight, revealing everything in darkness. Most Indigenous clans are deeply aware of the magical power of rituals but choose to hide it. Depicting a Truku shamanic initiation, centered around an ethno-alcoholic practice, Hounwn's Smapux explores the ritual's extrinsic and intrinsic evolution in the face of dominant-culture religious beliefs and global materialistic values. This work is composed of seven acts that represent the seven stages of the shamanic initiation ritual in the community; the second piece is Chemical Chords by Sámi artist Solberg. This work explores the complex identities of intrinsic Sámi and extrinsic Christians responding to the past, present and future of the rise of alcohol, drunkenness and the alcohol abuse in Sámi communities. Solberg has a toolbox of related objects, memories and stories, which she uses to discuss how drinking coincides with dispossession and is used as a form of protest.

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My curatorial work on this project directly impacted my understanding of how these perspectives (long separated discourses of settler-colonial, diasporic, migrant, other transnational and transcultural histories and Indigenous ways of knowing in contemporary art) enact and (co-)constitute the global when we work together.

Dispossessions is based on a collaborative curatorial model, one that is consultative and draws upon the knowledge and expertise of an advisory board to assist my aims for the curatorial process to be informed by Indigenous Taiwanese communities, knowledge and cultural protocols.¹⁴ Dispossessions was conceived as the construction of an alternative curatorial practice for international Indigenous contemporary art exhibitions and was accompanied by an extensive five-day intensive programme including an opening performance, musical performance, kitchen table talk, performative art exchange and workshop as well as closing performance.

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¹⁴ Advisory board members includes Carla Figueira (Director of MA Cultural Policy, Relations & Diplomacy / MA Cultural Tourism and Policy, Goldsmiths) and Michael Tymkiw (Co-Director of Centre for Curatorial Studies, University of Essex) and encompassing elders, artists, community representatives, the Council of Indigenous Peoples, the Indigenous Peoples Cultural Foundation and the National Cultural and Arts Foundation.

Luluan's material practice: from new soft sculpture, to tribal environment, towards Indigenous relational installation

The exhibition *The Last Sigh before Gone* addressed how Luluan has created a relational form of Indigenous performative installation, which, as noted earlier, involves three types of Indigenous contemporary art: 'soft sculpture,' 'tribal environment' and 'Indigenous relational installation.' I consider the open-ended activation and possibilities in installation and relational artworks an interpretative source to explore multiple social discrepancies between intrinsic and extrinsic performativity between material objects and soft sculptures, as displayed in her installation art. I divide the installation art discourse of Luluan's material practice into an interpreted trilogy that moves from new soft sculpture, to tribal environments and towards Indigenous relational installations. The series of work made from strapping and elastic cord, *babelengayane ki ina*, has a strong spatial presence. In my phenomenological analysis of Luluan's installation, I use the adjective 'new soft sculpture' as an indicator of other differences from previous Indigenous sculptural practices of driftwood. I justify the term by noting that the new soft sculpture, unlike plinth-mounted wooden sculpture, does not give ground to a metaphorical space.

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In my exhibition *Anti-Alcoholism: Performative Curatorial Practices I & II* (2014–2017), I attempted to express the ethno-aesthetics of my performative curatorial practice in collaboration with contemporary dancer Hsueh Yu-Hsien (薛喻鮮). I employed three strategies — 'curation of site-specificity,' 'neo-relational space' and 'curation of trans-Indigenous connecting space' — in an attempt to develop the processes and decision-making involved in creating the spatiality of the viewer-performer and interpreter. In the context of performative encounter, the viewer's presence, participation, viewpoints and likely response patterns were all taken into consideration in an Indigenous

performative installation that includes site-specific curatorial practices. As an Indigenous curator, I have a clear interest in ensuring that my curatorial approach departs from ethnographical modes of display. As such, I ask: what is the nature of ethno-aesthetics? What can it tell us about ourselves as Natives? Thus, I have an interest in unveiling the connections leading back to Taiwanese Indigenous peoples and contemporary art in order to echo a major component of the intersection of artistic collaboration and conversation associated with Indigenous environmental values and the varieties of Indigenous-to-Indigenous relations. Within such a curatorial field, can I find true expressions of ourselves through performative curatorial practices?

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After completing *Dispossessions* in June 2018, I decided to return back to Taiwan for a year's worth of curatorial fieldwork and expanded curation preparation. I hoped to bring London's *Dispossessions* exhibition to Taiwan Indigenous cultural sphere, for instance, the Taoyuan City Indigenous Cultural Centre, by raising the similar themes in order to provoke the discussion between Indigenous peoples and other Taiwanese citizens.¹⁵ In late 2018, I was called in to act as guest curator by the Taoyuan Indigenous Peoples Development Foundation for the yearlong exhibition *Ngahi' Routes: When Depth Become Experiment* to focus on Indigenous contemporary art's power to reflect on, contribute to and inform public debate.¹⁶ This show reflected our confidence in programming challenging works, collaborating with seven Indigenous artists from different communities and diverse mixed-media expressions in highly accessible and thought-provoking ways through social issues that include Indigenous artistic trajectories, approaches toward trauma and multiple identities. I used *Ngahi'* as an exhibition title not only to articulate Indigenous ways of knowing in curatorial implications but also to visualise sovereignty on artists' historical works, rooted engagement and their latest installations¹⁷. *Ngahi'* was defined as the symbol of each Indigenous artist, the humorous appellation used when we share, work and gather together. *Ngahi' Routes* established an institutional programme of an invited Indigenous associate curator (myself) to programme a yearlong exhibition at the Taoyuan City Indigenous Cultural Centre. Through the work of seven artists and related programming, the exhibition presented Indigenous contemporary art history in ways that critically acknowledge and visualise embodied sovereignty in local as well as international entanglements.

¹⁵ TCICC is one of the 29 Indigenous cultural centres across Indigenous communities and urban tribes in cities across Taiwan. Taoyuan is one of the centres in northern Taiwan.

¹⁶ Biung Ismahasan, *Ngahi' Routes: When Depth Become Experiment* exh. cat., accessed December 24, 2019, <https://biungismahasan.weebly.com/ngahi-routes-22320299163633524465>

¹⁷ *Ngahi'* means sweet potato in Atayal language, which is the large majority of Indigenous peoples living in Pyasan District (復興區) of Taoyuan County in the northern Taiwan

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[PRESENTATION PART 2 COMMENCES]

From the Donmong Community of Truku Nation in eastern Taiwan, performance artist Don Don Hounwn integrates traditional arts, composition techniques, and instruments – the lube (mouth harp), the tatuk (xylophone), song and ritual – into contemporary art technologies. Sharing contemporary narratives from cross-gender and cross-generational perspectives, his work is marked by a synthesis of strength and tenderness as expressed by his peoples' creative adaption to ever-changing environments.

Demonstrating a Truku shamanic initiation, centered on an ethno-alcoholic practice, Smapux means Shaman in Truku language, which is a deep spiritual healing ritual developed from the resonance of Don Don's healing power and stream of consciousness. Smapux explores the ritual's extrinsic and intrinsic evolution in the face of dominant-culture religious beliefs and global materialistic values.

In Don Don's arts of performative manifestation and movement, he reflected the traditional arts and cultures on controversial issues in order to invent his unique rhetoric. Indigenous peoples' multi-ethnicities have survived in different ever-changing environments with perseverance and tenderness in their hearts.

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He is in his element when telling stories or performing on the stage, demonstrating his natural gift as an Indigenous artist. Through his art, he continues to give contemporary narratives from cross-gender and cross-generation perspectives about how Indigenous peoples have been evolving and adjusting themselves to their ever-changing environments.

Drawing on Don Don's work, we could contextualise the Indigenous relational art in the broader field of 'Trans-Indigenous' cultural practices that assert 'centring the Indigenous has become a new standard.'

My definition and analysis of Don Don's performative curatorial practice seeks to highlight the utility of Taiwanese Indigenous Curatorial Practice as a strategic approach for reclaiming cultural traditions, asserting sovereignty, and embracing identity-based philosophies. Don Don, as an Indigenous artist and curator, aims to blur the exhibitionary boundaries that usually divide exhibition and production, forest-site space (environmental theatre at Donmong Community), studio and museum.

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The Activating Space on Don Don's performative works came to function as the main context and primary medium for the realisation of performing Indigeneity, which is the source of meaning. It has provided an alternative space for the development of a critical Indigenous curatorial practice that combines the process-focused manifestation of making, display and performing.

As the function and form of the Activating Space became increasingly familiar and innovative, further attempts were made for the contemporary Indigenous artist and curator to arrange a participatory engagement with the dialectical relationship between Indigenous independent curating in tribal public space and semi-official curation in museum space.

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I have curated a performance art exchange event at Dispossessions exhibition at Goldsmiths on May 2018. I have collaborated with northern Sami performance artist Marita Isobel Solberg and Taiwanese Indigenous Truku performance artist Don Don Hounwn. Supported by International Support for Galleries and Independent Exhibition Spaces (ISGIES) from Office for Contemporary Art Norway. Inspired by the concept of 'Performing Indigeneity', as defined by scholars Laura R. Graham and H. Glenn Penny, this show considers the continuing struggles, counter-narrative of alcoholism in Indigenous communities and identity-based philosophy of Indigenous peoples to resist erasure, and engages with the creative entanglement of the homeland, the tribal and the global.

SLIDE 13

Marita's work *Chemical Chords* explores a mix of past, present and future of the rise of alcohol, culpability and drunkenness and the exchange of goods and alcohol abuse in Sami communities. With a toolbox of related objects, memories and stories, this performance explore how drinking coincides with Dispossession and as a form of protest. Marita creates a series of moment with no words, only sounds, tones, timbre and songs. I question what do we take with us when alcohol addiction is part of our life in Indigenous community? Which values and expressions are handed down, transformed and sustained? What role does tribal-ritual millet wine and alcohol addiction play in a society shaped by cultural globalisation and environmental conditions, rapid travel and the constant flow of information?

SLIDE 14

On 3rd June 2018, we were invited by Office for Contemporary Art Norway Director and Chief curator Katya García-Antón to attend a closing symposium and dedicates a performance to a Papuan nature guardians Mama Yosepha Alomang which explores the legacy of this Eco-Indigenous uprising today, at a time of growing global Indigenous power related to environmental issues connected to current challenges across other Indigenous contexts.

SLIDE 15

Eleng Luluan was born in the Haocha Community of the Rukai Nation in southern Taiwan. She started her search for self-determination, self-realisation and artistic life in 2002. At the age of 28, she moved to the Dulan community in Taitung of the eastern coastal Taiwan.

SLIDE 16

Eleng plays the significant role of Indigenous artist as ethnographer and her installation *Between Dreams* delimits its own spatial boundaries, within which material objects and sculptures are displayed together. Her curation of ethno-spatiality in the form of an Indigenous minimalist installation points to an artistic construction and exhibition practice that goes beyond Western and Taiwanese Han-hegemonic discourse and interpretation.

Eleng is true to her statement: 'I do not change existing shapes, but I arrnage 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.'

SLIDE 17

The Last Sigh Before Gone is an example of such Indigenous performative installation, which involves three types of Indigenous contemporary art forms: soft sculpture, tribal environment and Indigenous minimalist installation. The considerations within Eleng's work range from intervening within and inhabiting a virtual, independently owned space, to the attempt to cultivate environmental art in a contemporary curatorial practice.

SLIDE 18

Eleng's Mather Garden sculpture is less about changing materials than arranging them to reveal connections. Constructed of black strapping and elastic cord. I use Eleng's material practice of installation artworks from new soft sculpture, to tribal environment, toward Indigenous minimalist installation as an interpretative source to explore multiple social discrepancies between intrinsic and extrinsic performativity in the curation of ethno-spatiality between material objects and soft sculptures displayed in her installation art.

SLIDE 19

The elastic cord is the exemplary tool for the Indigenous farmer. She invented the concept of Indigenous Conceptual Installation that describes movements in an expanded form of Indigenous contemporary art, especially in sculptural installation art, where the work seeks to expose the essence and identity of performative Indigeneity as a subject by eliminating all non-essential forms, features or concepts, such as traditional woodcraft sculpture or the totem pole. Thus, it is an example of the postcolonial or transnational turn within contemporary art, which according to Terry Smith draws upon “local traditions but stand[s] alongside modern art” in some way.

SLIDE 20

Cultural representation of Indigenous curatorial practice at Indigenous cultural centre 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. Indigenous cultural centres can also have important ambivalences and shortcomings. More positively, a number of initiatives have emerged that go beyond museums and create new spaces for the articulation of cultural identities (Carlos, 2018: 182-183).

SLIDE 21

In Indigenous communities, Eleng has been relocated twice in her lifetime. Constructing and deconstructing mixed media materials, whose tensile and conceptual strength challenges delimiting gender identities. Eleng reinterprets the weaving culture of Rukai women, whilst exploring her personal construction of selfhood in relationship to lost homelands. Her materials range from wood, plant fibers and sliver grass to Styrofoam for fruit protection.

Eleng applies her photography practice to a specific native context: LED boxes are the exemplary tools for the Indigenous forest across mountains. Her works significantly reflect her personal experience and memory of returning to ancient Hocha community.

SLIDE 22

I explore how Eleng has invented the concept of Indigenous conceptual installation. This expanded form of Indigenous contemporary sculpture with red strapping and elastic cords materials seeks to expose the essence of performing Indigeneity by eliminating all non-essential forms, features or concepts, like the traditional woodcraft sculpture or the totem pole.

SLIDE 23

This Land Trauma installation is an example what (Métis) scholar David Garneau (a Professor of Visual Arts from the University of Regina in Canada), he argues, Indigenous contemporary art synthesises new relations within past and present modes of native culture, as well as between native and colonial forms of experience, participation and spectatorship. He posits Indigenous art-making as a questioning and experimental practice of research – striving towards new relations of thoughts, feeling and identity at the nexus of both Indigenous culture and capitalist colonialism.

SLIDE 24

The curation of ethno-spatiality has contributed to an invented form of Indigenous sculpture and installation art, looking from the physical presence of Luluan's new soft sculpture to an expanding field of Indigenous Conceptual Installation. This then marks a turning point not just in Native art but also the mainstream. In contrast to the more individualistic emphasis on achievement in Western culture, Indigenous cultural revitalisation has been based on the collective and the community (Carlos, 2017:180).

SLIDE 25

By going back and forth between my own participation as an Indigenous curator and community engagement in critique as a researcher, I explore what approaches on Indigenous discursive and contingent spaces can an Indigenous curator organise and

engage in scholarly debate about international Indigenous modern and contemporary art. Indigenous criticism of Indigenous art begins with the knowledge that I am part of a community. In particular, I elaborate on the concept of 'Indigeneity' and consolidate our understanding of 'Indigenous' – is an emerging category that extends and adapts First Peoples' ways of knowing and being into the contemporary moment and into spaces beyond our home territories. Indigenous curators and artists must engage in collective, critical reflection on ourselves, processes and works for the articulation of cultural identities. My guidance of First Nation curator is to analyse traces of settler witnessing in contemporary writing on Indigenous art, outlining the challenges and demands of Indigenous art criticism by elaborating the obstructions that may emerge when enacting our own agency and sovereignty as Indigenous curators.

SLIDE 26

From Pink to Darker refutes the genetic explanation for Indigenous Taiwanese alcoholism. As abstract autobiography, recalling my donation of my healthy, pink kidney to my alcoholic father, it offers a counter-narrative to a socially-destructive theory.

SLIDE 27

The posing of questions is a way of hearing out an Indigenous language, making audible new forms of speech and performative actions. As a First Nation and Taiwanese Indigenous curator, I consider how the 'performative space' of Indigeneity beyond non-Indigenous hegemonic curatorial discourse formulates one possible alternative strategy for the concept and curatorial practice of international Indigenous contemporary art. I argue that Indigenous curating could be posited as a specific mode of research and may serve as a mediator to open up spaces for process-based performative art that converges around the concept of 'ethno-spatiality'. Broadly defined, 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 of Indigenous curation.

My overarching initiative of adjunct curator is to produce knowledge about Indigenous creative sovereignty and its aesthetics and to create a discursive space of modern and contemporary First Nation and Indigenous art exhibitions. Part of achieving this goal involves providing a more nuanced understanding of the extent to which the rethinking of Indigenous modern and contemporary art has become alternative geographies and multiple vantage points.

This is a participatory, performative installation, encompassing off-site performance, live ritual and painting. Informed by my Indigenous curatorial vision, the personal and social elide, and my materials are animated by multiple performances, including that of the audience itself. My video installation exhibited the aesthetic nuance of emergent identity, self-determination and cultural sovereignty in an open-ended space where Indigenous curatorial aesthetics have been utilised in an interactive display between screen and viewers.

SLIDE 28

Hsueh has participated in my performance project Dispossessions. She is a member of a troupe that teaches contemporary dance – combining flamenco and Indigenous Taiwanese dances – to teenagers in tribal communities in southern Taiwan.

SLIDE 29

Indigenous curatorial practice has rarely been considered within the context of relational, socially engaged art, and Taiwan's expanding field of performative exhibitions in recent years. This is partly why I have devised, through applied curatorial strategies, a systematic experimentation of curatorial form, which could be described as an anti-formalist approach to Indigenous performance art, and have sought to 'escape its earlier anthropological frame in a collective and performative sensibility.'

SLIDE 30

The trajectories of ethno-spatial curating in Hsueh's gestures and movements can forge an exhibition practice that simultaneously promotes, creates and reflects. Most significantly, this radical practice has elicited a question about the extent to which Indigenous curating has itself become a performative activity that foregrounds social issues, radical activism and art in the public interest and as part of community collaborations.

An exploration of how 'performativity' across Indigenous contemporary art became a medium to articulate a manifesto of ethno-spatiality elaborating how 'performativity' can embody within international Indigenous curating in the contemporary art world. 'Indigeneity' is grounded within complex relations derived from the inter-substantiation of our ancestral beings, our way of knowing and our land-based philosophies. Our sovereignty is embodied and carried by the body and differs from Western constructions of sovereignty.

I examine our performative approaches and curatorial strategies as Indigenous artistic practices, with a particular focus on cultural loss, recovery and re-activation in relation to the discourse surrounding Indigenous embodied sovereignty. The requirement of Indigenous curator is largely motivated by my attempt to nuance notions of 'Indigeneity' by considering the growing 'Indigenisation' and transformations at a time of global Indigenous turns.

ENDS

BIUNG ISMAHASAN is a Bunun (one of Taiwan's sixteen Indigenous Nations) curator, artist and researcher. He is a PhD candidate in Curating from Centre for Curatorial Studies at the University of Essex in the UK. His thesis entitles "Indigenous Relational Space and Performance: Curating Together Towards Sovereignty in Taiwan and Beyond." His research relates to contemporary Indigenous curatorial practice and aesthetics, focusing on Taiwanese Indigenous contemporary art. Ismahasan emphasises issues of participation, performativity and the historiography of Indigenous curation and exhibition design. He has received a MA in Cultural Policy, Relations & Diplomacy from the Institute for Creative and Cultural Entrepreneurship at Goldsmiths, University of London in 2014.

His most notable curatorial projects include Dispossessions: An Indigenous Performative Encounter 2014–2019, an international performance art exchange of Indigenous artists from Taiwan. He was a curatorial assistant of Let The River Flow: The Sovereign Will And The Making of A New Worldliness in April 2018 at Office for Contemporary Art Norway in Oslo; he has curated Dispossessions: Performative Encounter(s) of Taiwanese Indigenous Contemporary Art in May 2018 at Goldsmiths; he had curated yearly theme-based exhibition Ngahi's Routes: When Depth Become Experiment which have collaborated with seven Taiwanese Indigenous artists at the Taoyuan City Indigenous Cultural Centre in 2019; he recently curated the Rukai Nation installation artist Eleng Luluan's Between Dream in Àbadakone | Continuous Fire | Feu continuel at the second exhibition in the National Gallery of Canada's series of presentations of contemporary international Indigenous art between November 2019 and October 2020.

Curatorial project Dispossessions: Performative Encounter(s) of Taiwanese Indigenous Contemporary Art 2014-2019 is an international performance art exchange of Indigenous artists from Taiwan. The first research-based exhibition of Taiwanese Indigenous contemporary art in the UK was curated by Biung Ismahasan in the Lower Atrium Space of Professor Stuart Hall Building at Goldsmiths, University of London www.gold.ac.uk/icce/ (May 2018). This exhibition, performances and event series exploring the essential, expressive and ethno-aesthetic nature of Taiwanese Indigenous cultures. An Indigenous counter of performativity across London.

International collaborative curatorial project for Taiwanese Indigenous Rukai Nation artist Eleng Luluan 安聖惠 at Àbadakone | Continuous Fire | Feu continuel which is the second exhibition in the National Gallery of Canada's series of presentations of contemporary international Indigenous art, features works by more than 70 artists identifying with almost 40 Indigenous Nations, ethnicities and tribal affiliations from 16 countries, including Canada from 8 November 2019 to 4 October 2020.

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