

FULL PROGRAM BRIEF



Collateral Event

At the 59th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia

Title

Pera + Flora + Fauna: The Story of Indigenoussness and the Ownership of History

Date

23 April to 27 November 2022

Venue

Archivi della Misericordia,
Campo de l'Abazia, 3549 Cannaregio, Venezia

Commissioner

Nur Hanim Mohamed Khairuddin, General Manager of PORT, Ipoh, Perak State, Malaysia

Curators

Amir Zainorin and Khaled Ramadan

Associate Curators

Annie Jael Kwan and Camilla Boemio

Curatorial advisor

Alfredo Cramerotti

With the support of

Perak State Government, Malaysia; Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia; National Art Gallery Malaysia; Tourism Malaysia; Tourism Perak; Chamber of Public Secrets; Laterna Magica Museum, Denmark; Jambatan, Denmark;

Thanks to

Art Events, Dorian Batycka, RogueArt

Exhibitors

Azizan Paiman, Kamal Sabran, Kapallorek Artspace, Kim Ng, Projek Rabak, Saiful Razman, Stefano Cagol

Panelists & Moderator

Alfredo Cramerotti, Annie Jael Kwan, Camilla Boemio, Dorian Batycka, Henry Meyric Hughes, Ong Jo-lene.

Performers

Aida Redza

EVENTS

Forum

- Title : Pera + Flora + Fauna: The Ownership of Indigenusness and the Social Construction of Nature
- Date & Time : 22 April 2022, 5:30 PM
- Panelists : Henry Meyric Hughes, Alfredo Cramerotti, Camilla Boemio, Annie Jael Kwan, Ong Jo-lene
- Moderator : Dorian Batycka

Performances

- i. Title : Ssegar Angin: The Healing Art Project
- Date & Time : 1) 21 April 2022, 4:20 PM
2) 22 April 2022, 4:20 PM
- Artists : Kamal Sabran, Aida Redza

- ii. Title : The human status, Indigenous Me-We
- Date & Time: : 1) 21 April 2022, 3.00 PM - 4:00 PM
2) 22 April 2022, 3.00 PM - 4:00 PM
3) 24 April 2022, 3:00 PM - 4:00 PM
- Artists : Stefano Cagol, Dorian Batycka, Khaled Ramadan, Amir Zainorin, Ronnie Bahari and Yahya Torek
- iii. Title: : We the Mengkuang
- Date & Time: : 23 April 2022, 4:20 PM
- Artists: : Projek Rabak
-

CONTACT

For Press & Media Outreach

Venue:

Archivi della Misericordia,
Campo de l'Abazia, 3549 Cannaregio, Venezia

Openings:

Curators' talk and press opening - 21st April, 5.30 PM

Dignitaries and official inauguration - 22nd April, 7.00 PM

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THE PROJECT

Curatorial Statement

2020 was the year of accelerated statue wars. Controversial statues representing coloniality and dark chapters in human history were removed by an uncoordinated global protest movement in an attempt to rewrite human history and bring attention to the narrative of the so-called hidden history, the Indigenous saga.

For some, taking down urban memorials approximated censoring, whitewashing, and potentially forgetting history. According to this view, statues do not cause discrimination and can be used to fight prejudice if put into historical context.

This argument was countered by Rosetta Giuliani Caponetto. In *Art of Darkness*, Caponetto argues that the aestheticization of Indigenous populations and the propagandist production of photographs, drawings, and written accounts indicate that colonialism found a powerful instrument for capturing the Western imagination through depictions of the Indigenous individual as a dark phantasm to be conquered.

In addition to Caponetto's account, Sarah A. Radcliffe in *Geography and Indigeneity* and Bernard C. Perley in *Living traditions: a manifesto for critical Indigeneity*, both writers call attention to the embodiments, positionalities, and subjectivities of Indigeneity within the broader power dynamics of colonial histories, nationalistic formations, capital expansion, and Indigenous resistance.

Such explorations by Caponetto, Radcliffe and Perley and associated narratives continue to influence the discourse and perception of Indigenousness and Indigenous populations across the globe. Therefore, the many attempts of re-writing stories of Indigenousness independently from the mainstream Western socio-political consciousness remains an ongoing struggle.

The art world, including art events and museum collections across the Western world, are not immune to these discursive views. Until today, what some museums see as artifacts, native cultures regard as part of their beliefs, heritages and traditions that are being interrupted and redefined. This practice pushes them to look at their own history as something exotic and natural, but not cultural.

The fight over the right to keep certain artifacts as part of a museum collection or return them to their native communities has caused museums to become battlefields between different communities. What is seen as artifact worthy in the eyes of museums with colonial collections is regarded by the affected Indigenous people as an invasive and destructive act toward local Indigenous history that undermines the dignity of the colonized culture.

In this respect, contemporary digital modernity has left a considerable impact on the lives of Indigenous populations worldwide. History has no lawyers, but it certainly has witnesses and as the last witnesses, the Indigenous populations and their cultural identities, traditions and heritages across the globe, are in the final stage of disappearance.

As we were writing these words, Cristina Calderón, Chile's last known Yaghan speaker, died on the 16th of February 2022 aged 93. Calderón was recognized by the National Council of Culture and the Arts as a Living Human Treasure and for many, Calderón represented cultural resistance. She was the last-living full-blooded Yaghan person. Thousands of years before European settlers arrived, the Yaghan people inhabited the tip of South America. Today, some of their customs have endured, but the Yaghan are losing their tribal legends for good.

Indigenous populations across the world are sharing similar socio-political conditions. This includes the Orang Asli (First People - in Malay meaning Original People), the Indigenous population of the Perak region in Malaysia, at least to some extent. In *The Orang Asli and the UNDRIP: from rhetoric to recognition*, Colin Nicholas describes how Orang Asli toponyms fall into disuse when translated into the national Malay language. However, such place-names are valuable linguistic and Indigenous knowledge resources worthy of preservation as elements of cultural heritage. Affixed to quotidian landscapes, episodes from distant and recent pasts present themselves through names of places that people encounter to and from subsistence areas in the forest. Among these are heritage trees that stand as evidence of Orang Asli history and become part of the toponymic signification system due to their role as place markers.

This approach seems similar to the perception of land and place among other Indigenous people. In *Place Theory and Place Maintenance in Indigenous Australia* Paul Memmott and Stephen J. Long write that such territories appear as 'complete places' that guard against placelessness and encourage the continuation of customary place-specific behaviors.

The constant interruption of the history of Indigenous people everywhere and the diversion of their narratives into a constructed cultural mechanism based on majority-minority relationships, have given birth to a new Indigenous identity. There is an emerging call to consider how Indigeneity is actively constructed and produced in relation to non-Indigenous subjects, institutions, and ontologies, giving attention to power interplays under the prevailing economic, political, and social circumstances. Hence, there has been a reformulation of Indigeneity as a concept that is simultaneously grounded in roots and locality, as well as subjected to modernization and globalization.

The neo-Indigenous identity is a socio-cultural construct in transition. It is an impossible trap between history and modernity. What Indigenous populations are witnessing is not simply an evolution but rather a battle against total identity cancellation or intense identity expansion.

The Indigenous people of the Malaysian forests, as everywhere else in the world, celebrate their cultural heritage and costumes and are proud of their own outfits and traditions. At the same time, many are wearing modern clothing for a variety of convenient reasons. On occasion, they change from these often donated or self-obtained branded clothes to dress themselves with leaves, feathers, and body paint. This is done, not to celebrate their own feasts, but for what is called the anthropological party. This staging or performing for the lens has become a customary practice amongst Indigenous populations in different parts of the world. The particular performative simulation of becoming native again is in many cases done to please the relentless photographers, artists, journalists, academics, historians, and the list is long.

Although the staging is being filmed and documented on the Indigenous people's own modern communication gears, we still need to ask if staging has become an expansion of the socio-cultural activities and norms of Indigenous populations across the world?

After the anthropological party the Indigenous people tend to go back to their mobile phones, Western clothing, and semi digital routines. They have become objects of desire, but also objects of necessity and vital documentation under modern living conditions. These materialistic tools of technology in the hands of Indigenous populations have become useful in terms of witnessing their socio-cultural transition between the past and the future.

While the memory and history of the Indigenous populations remain their own, their natural territories and surroundings are shrinking for a variety of political, economic and cultural

reasons, at the hands of entities of dominant majorities in almost every country with Indigenous populations.

A recent example is the certain demolition decision of a historic chain of caves in Perak region full of unique cave drawings and figures.

Needless to say, Indigeneity remains one of humanity's most important living links to history. Despite time and space, Indigeneity still offers ecological wisdom through the ways of living with nature and the environment. In fact, many contemporary scholars are turning to Indigenous thinking and practice as a way of thinking about the healing of our planet from the excess of modern extractivism and production.

Curating Pera + Flora + Fauna, our project intends to address the story of Indigenes and the ownership of history by zooming in on the state of Perak and its native population. This is done while knowing in advance that the discourse about Indigenes and nature is largely affected by mainstream cultural attitudes of industrialized nations, the very nations that contribute to current global environmental problems. This leads us to question how Indigenous populations across the globe can challenge the mainstream documented (art) history written by the non-Indigenous? Can Indigenous populations achieve the liberty to collectively claim "their own history and narratives" antagonizing the dominant discourse?

By inviting 7 artists, art collectives and contributors to Pera + Flora + Fauna our intention is to present a different narrative and an aesthetic experience that builds upon research, knowledge and participation.

Pera + Flora + Fauna is meant to re-imagine nature and Indigenes in relation to ethics and aesthetics questioning who owns nature and who owns the Indigenous history.

Curators Khaled Ramadan and Amir Zainorin

19 February 2022; Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia.

About Pera + Flora + Fauna

Ownership of Indigenusness and the Social Construction of Nature

Nature - might it only be a state of mind? A dream: an idea inherited from someone who came before; an idea to relate to those who might come after?

That may depend on the social construction of nature. Re-imagining nature and indigenusness in relation to ethics and aesthetics demands a closer look at the state of the interrelations between man and nature. Some might even argue that the aesthetics of natural beauty can become a guide to socio-ethical behaviour and lead to the development of a better cultural persona.

In *Art of Darkness*, Rosetta Giuliani Caponetto argues that the aestheticization of native populations and the propagandist production of photographs, drawings, and written accounts, especially of African natives, indicate that Colonialism had found a powerful instrument for capturing the Western imagination in depictions of the indigenous as a dark phantasm to be conquered.

Such depictions and associated narratives continue to influence the perception of indigenusness. Therefore, visually capturing and representing nature as seen and understood in indigenous contexts and re-writing stories of indigenusness independently from the Western mainstream socio-political consciousness remains an unachievable dream.

Will this remain just a theoretical possibility or a futuristic romantic vision?

The global aestheticization of the notions of indigenusness and indigeneity are expressed in different ways. There is no consensual agreement on how to ethically or aesthetically document, archive or exhibit the historic narrative of indigenous populations across the globe, including in Malaysia.

Can indigenous populations challenge mainstream history written by the non-indigenous? Can indigenous populations achieve the liberty to collectively claim "their own history and narratives", antagonising the dominant mainstream discourse? Can practice of indigeneity provide strategies that resist or refuse the homogenising or divisive violence of nation-states?

Pera + Flora + Fauna intends to address these questions drawing on different perspectives of man, nature, and their interrelation.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

KIM NG

Bunyi Senyap Benih / The Silent Sound of Seeds

Human life depends on plants for necessity and most of the plants germinate from seeds.

The installation work *Bunyi Senyap Benih* (The Silent Sound of Seeds) attempts to make use of the form of seeds produced from local clay material as a symbolic gesture to address how mankind lives with nature, and how nature grows into a form of coexisting with mankind silently through strings of long hand-formed clay seeds to indicate the connection and correlation. The interrelationship of human and nature and the attachment of one to the other becomes a counterpart that cannot be separated and avoided like a string of beads. We share the planet with plants but unfortunately, we tend to destroy plants for development and evolution without kindness. Thus, preservation is a form of remedy to keep the plants from extinction.

The representational signage of the different fired clay seeds in *Bunyi Senyap Benih* (The Silent Sound of Seeds) indicates where most of the flora and fauna grow from and it encompasses many other life forms that develop and grow in relation to the natural history of the earth. The installation utilizes the clay materials, seed forms and suspended composition to portray the ambiguous approach towards nature, the environment and the people who own and share the land. The various colours of clay seeds become a form of metaphor to signify the essence of the origin and the beginning of the life forms in a conceptual manner to examine the problems of ownership, identity, hierarchy and the differences that are rooted deep inside the ground.

Silence does not indicate keeping quiet but waiting for an opportunity and just the right moment to surface from the ground; like seeds buried in the soil that will eventually germinate and be noticed.

The work *Bunyi Senyap Benih* (The Silent Sound of Seeds) takes into account the personal aesthetic perception and moral values of human behaviours in relation to the natural environment we live in. Through exploring the ideas about the relationship with place and

the natural environment, the work provides a resonance for contemplation and into discourse, argument, confrontation and also compromise and settlement on the ground we share. The installation projects silent voices from the clay seeds helplessly fossilized in time and place to reflect a situation of dependency and vulnerability at the same time.

The installation work is intended to bring the audience to confront the object and the archaeological-like discovery that has been in the preservation and suspended in the mid-air like an organism waiting to be regenerated again. The installation of seed forms is like a fossil or artifact being excavated from the ground and kept in a specific space for investigation, bringing a different aesthetic experience and perception towards the work that is made from conventional clay materials in association with contemporary art practices today.

AZIZAN PAIMAN

Stesen Jana Kuasa Dari Sumber Alam (SJKDSA) / Power Generator Station From Natural Resources

SJKDSA (Power Generator Station From Natural Resources) addresses constructions of ideology and how these change over time, and how these have enlivened narratives of political history. It is an installation work in the form of a narrative, inspired by readings of the political history of the Malaysian state of Perak.

The work has two objects, representing a natural resource with respect to the concepts of earth, fire, water and wind, shaped like a hot oven, along the concept of Duchamp's "La Boite-en-Valise". Each measure 61 x 61 x 210cm and can be broken down into 6 parts. Each has four floors, and on each floor, there is a space that resembles a gallery space, displaying miniature sculptures and paintings recording important events in the socio-political history of Perak over the course of 182 years (1840-2022).

This storytelling covers Perak's wealth of natural resources, migrants from other countries, the role of business magnates, migrants, civil war, secret societies, the presence of the British, the Birch assassination, leaders of nationalist movements, as well as leaders of political parties (right and left) that have colored the local political landscape.

SAIFUL RAZMAN

Rumah Saya dan Angkasa / My House and Outer Space

Rumah Saya dan Angkasa is a visual meditation on an ideal home. A two-channel video installation plays a visual poem singing the hopes and visions of a close friend as he refurbishes and renovates his first house in Kuala Lumpur, alongside an animation representing *rumah Kutai*, a traditional form of house native to Perak, dating back to 1800.

The video installation is set against a wall collage showing stylistic patterns of walls and roof of the traditional *rumah Kutai*.

Rumah Saya dan Angkasa tries to look at both facts and fictions of the ideal home, drawing together the aspirations of contemporary life in KL, and the model of a traditional house from a life of the past.

PROJEK RABAK

Hik Bersamak: Indigenous Pop!

Since the beginning of Projek Rabak in 2011, community has always been a constant. Though the landscape of art is ever-changing, the communal ethos stays forever collective. Our art process is like one big *kenduri*, a communal feast with people from all walks of life conjoined by the joy of creating, making noise, experimenting and playing together.

Apart from being an artist collective, we celebrate the spirit of camaraderie and friendship. In this exhibition and art project, we want to highlight the ongoing cultural erasure faced by the Semai people, an indigenous tribe in Peninsular Malaysia, in the midst of modernity. Collaborating with our Semai friends, we will showcase our outsider's perspective on the creative process and craft, whilst telling the stories of Semai people while preserving and documenting their heritage in the past and present.

Deeply inspired by the absurdity, playfulness and openness of pop art; the collaborative nature of Southeast Asian practices like *gotong-royong*, which is better known as 'joint bearing of burdens' or 'mutual assistance', we want to combine our creative philosophy and aesthetics while celebrating Semai culture.

Our exhibits invite visitors in the Biennale to explore, participate and immerse themselves in the Semai culture by interacting with the exhibit.

Our pieces symbolize our reimagined narrative whereby Semai culture is at the global forefront, as well as the Semai spirit of co-existence. Reimagining indigenous people as being central in the environment and the world, the 'fabric' of the traditional attire represents Semai's fabric of life. Through art, a meaningful connection to coexist and its sentimental value can be instilled between the Semai people and global citizens.

There is also an added emphasis on how indigenous tribes teach us about sustainable preservation of values, and such a topic is increasingly relevant considering the zeitgeist and conversations around our planet's current climate and way of life.

KAMAL SABRAN in collaboration with AIDA REDZA

Ssegar Angin: The Healing Art Project

Ssegar Angin: The Healing Art Project uses sound and body movement to heal the internal psychic and spiritual body based on Malay traditional healing performances such as Main Puteri and Mak Yong. Traditional healing performances have existed in Malay culture for hundreds of years up to the present day, and include the use of sound/music, movements, and mantras to address different kinds of ailments.

There are three elements in the Ssegar Angin performances – the music (soundscape by sound artist), body movements (choreography inspired by Main Puteri/Mak Yong), and Jjampi (mantras recited by bomoh). Ssegar Angin is a process of revitalizing the internal psychic and spiritual healing energy transpiring within the panggung, or stage, through sound and movement. It is an embodiment of the metaphysical relationship between creation and the Creator.

The sounds of the instruments, movements and chanting activate the angin or semangat of the participants and makes them receptive to the performance stimuli, surrendering (serah diri) their physical and psychic self to reverberate the music, movements and the chanting and thus re-energize the angin.

KAPALLOREK ARTSPACE in collaboration with RONNIE BAHARI

'Karoog Kiha Nyep' – Rapuh Kian Lenyap / Fragile and Disappearing

Archeologists suggest that the beginnings of human civilization are marked by the discovery of cave paintings. Through the evidence of such paintings using shapes resembling humans and animals, they have made the assumption that people in the stone age lived their lives by hunting and sitting in caves.

'Karoog Kiha Nyep' is a video documentary concerning cave paintings and indigenous communities in Malaysia. It carefully records the information, both paintings and wall surfaces, of cave paintings recently discovered by local archeologists in the Perak state, in the Kinta Valley in north peninsular Malaysia, believed to date back thousands of years, thus preserving these important artifacts for future generations.

STEFANO CAGOL

Far before and after (us): From the indigenous spatial knowledge through myths into the future

Stefano Cagol presents "Far Before and After (us)", a new video work completed in the last days of the boreal winter of 2022 reflecting on the times of humanity and nature, on divination and indigenous symbiosis.

Luminous signals attempt to communicate with the surrounding environment, triggered using movements and fires through a pseudo-divinatory practice, a ritual suspended between darkness and light, myths of the past, uncertainties of the present and challenges of futures beyond time and space, a dialogue with eternal ice that is no longer eternal, temperatures, winds and currents changing the course.

In this artwork, the ability to scrutinise what surrounds us in a direct and spiritual relationship inspires the artist, who recognises this sensitivity in the native populations, the only real possibility of symbiosis with nature.

The place, the Dolomites, the artist's homeland, is also a metaphor for this confrontation with space and time. Thousands of metres high, these mountains arose 200 million years ago from a tropical sea, like the one surrounding Malaysia: The Alps and Malaysia, apparently so different and yet, beyond the ages, so close.

Here the artist has acted in complete solitude, according to his custom - almost shamanic - using an essential and minimal technological mediation: tripod, HD video camera and drone, all under his sole control.

This video work sinks into the reminiscences of his Arctic experiences, both in practice and in content, and so does the new intervention that Stefano Cagol presents on the occasion of the preview days. It is a performative interaction with the collaboration of a person belonging to the Sami population, the only recognised native group in Europe. It enacts a minimalist confrontation, in which the artist himself and the Sami communicate through sound, a device/artwork between the contemporary and the archaic, a materialisation of this idea of "natural technology" of the natives, in a primal conversation about borders.

EVENTS / PERFORMANCES

Pera + Flora + Fauna: The Ownership of Indigenoussness and the Social Construction of Nature.

Panelists: HENRY MEYRIC HUGHES, Honoree president AICA, UK; ALFREDO CRAMEROTTI, Director of MOSTYN Wales; and curators CAMILLA BOEMIO and ANNIE J AEL KWAN
Moderator: Art writer and curator, DORIAN BATYCKA

The invited panelists will share their observations and interpretations around the concept of Ownership of Natural History, attempting to contextualize the notion of natural history and why it cannot be independent of the intellectual, artistic, emotional, and technological resources available to us in the industrialized world.

Additional questions to be addressed regard how we can make nature our intellectual and spiritual guide, how our current understanding of nature has been constructed, and how it has led us down the specific path of environmental destruction we currently follow.

This complex relationship between aesthetic experience and the development of an ethical attitude towards nature bring to our attention the need to search for new perceptual, normative values regarding how to experience nature, how to facilitate the beneficial effects of building an aesthetic connection with nature, and how to employ restorative value in nature so it can contribute to our contentment.

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STEFANO CAGOL, DORIAN BATYCKA, KHALED RMADAN, AMIR ZAINORIN, AND KAPALLOREK ARTSPACE

'The human status, Indigenous Me-We'

Statue wars were called 2020 was the year of acceleration of status removal around the world. Controversial statues that represent dark chapters in humanity's history were removed by an uncoordinated global protest movement in an attempt to rewrite human history and to bring attention to the other part of the story.

For some taking down urban memorials was to censor, whitewash, and potentially forget about history, a history being lost, arguing that statues do not cause discrimination and could be used to fight prejudice if put into historical context.

The special performative event addresses the dehumanization / re-humanization of the indigenous people around the world. The special event attempts to rewrite the status of indigenes, inspired by Muhammad Ali's short poem 'me/we', where life is about the spirit of sharing and generosity, community rather than individuality, and we rather than me.