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TIAAT TAIWAN INTERNATIONAL
AUSTRONESIAN ART TRIENNIAL 2023

Kim Lowe

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Kim Lowe

As an artist of mixed Chinese–Pākeha heritage and a member of a whānau who whakapapa to Kāi Tahu, Kati Māmoe and Waitaha, I have always been drawn to the visual and cultural links between East Asia and the Pacific and have often wondered if investigating the Austronesian links to Aotearoa may lead to further understanding about my own Chinese ancestry. As a fourth-generation Chiwi, I am aware that much of our Chinese cultural understanding had been assimilated out of our knowledge; like the many migrants who embarked on new beginnings in colonial countries, our whānau was no different, resulting in generational loss of language. Artistic careers were discouraged because time was better spent in creating a new life in the jobs that were allowed to us – like running a fruit shop and restaurant, or studying for one of the three approved professions: doctor, lawyer or accountant.

Part of my long-term research has been to connect with Asian artists and find cultural links as a way to personally revive and relearn some of this forgotten cultural knowledge that was once held by our Chinese tūpuna through the establishment of artist-led networks. The Shared Lines Collaborative, an artists' network with a focus on resilience and connection across borders that was born out of the Christchurch and Tohoku (Japan) earthquakes and following tsunami of 2011; and the Aotearoa Chinese Artists (AChA), that morphed into Asian Aotearoa Artists Hui and culminated in the large-scale AAAHui 18, 23 and 24 (led by Associate Professor Kerry Ann Lee at Massey University) are two such initiatives.

Because of my limited language knowledge, I have had to learn about the culture of my ancestors through a Western lens – my interest in Mātauranga Māori and indigenous and traditional practices from throughout Asia Pacific is intended to counter this. Following fate, opportunity and/or intuition, and throwing the net wide to see what sticks, is my way of networking and fishing for interconnection. Thanks to a Te Pūkenga research grant and the connections suggested by Shared Lines trustee Ngaroma Riley (Te Rarawa, Te Aupōuri), my sister Lee-Ana, daughter Haani and I were able to travel to Taiwan to attend the inaugural TIAAT Taiwan International Austronesian Art Triennial 2023, where we were fully immersed in indigenous life for a few days.

Taiwan has an interesting colonial history. It was fiercely independent and guarded by its many indigenous tribes from both Chinese and Japanese influences up until European expansion into East Asia began during the silk, spice, and then the opium trade and related wars during the sixteenth century. From then on, Taiwan was fought over and ruled by successive nations including the Portuguese, Dutch, Spanish and of course China and Japan.¹ It was during the 40 years of occupation by the Dutch East India Company between 1624 and 1662 that the Chinese population in Taiwan increased from fewer than 5000 to nearly 50,000, as Chinese labourers were brought in to help with trade and agriculture.² During this time, the local indigenous tribes that had occupied the coastal areas for millennia and fought off all intruders were displaced; they were relocated further and further inland and driven into mountainous regions.

Austronesia spans about two thirds of the Earth's surface, from Madagascar right across to the Americas, and encompasses the great oceanic areas of Moana Nui-a-Kiwa, the Pacific Ocean, Micronesia, Melanesia and South East Asia. Genetically and culturally, Taiwan can be regarded as a stepping-off point for early explorers who then went

on to populate the far-flung island nations of Austronesia. In the television series *Origins*,³ presenter Scotty Morrison describes Taiwan as an early Hawaiki, as oceangoing groups spread out, developed and populated the islands of the Pacific and lastly Aotearoa.

In his TIAAT exhibition essay, "Our Distance from the Sea," Dr Yuan-Chao Tung characterises the loss of knowledge among Taiwan's indigenous tribes about traditional maritime skills, travel and sustainable living as "contemporary blank spaces in memory."⁴ The kaupapa of TIAAT was to strengthen the 'meshworks' of indigenous Austronesian artists and practitioners; and give indigenous knowledge-holders a place to share, exhibit and revive some of these practices in Taiwan, the Austronesian motherland. With the Ocean given priority over land, the event was intended to "present 'an oceanic perspective' of the Earth, emphasising the openness of the ocean to avoid the traps and barriers associated with nation states."⁵ Island hopping, maritime culture and the watery highways are placed at the centre; the narrative is flipped and connection and commonality is prioritised over country, state and political differences, moving away from a continental mindset.⁶

The theme of the inaugural triennial, "RamiS: Tracing Origins," was especially significant; *ramis* means 'root' in proto-Austronesian, and the event focussed on connecting artists from the many tribal areas of Taiwan as a source of creative inspiration. The paper mulberry tree was also used as a symbol of RamiS and as a connector; it is a common plant in Taiwan, while also being culturally significant throughout the Pacific, where it is used to make *tapa* cloth, *siapo* or *hiapo*, and must have been transported on many of those early settlement voyages. It is intended that TIAAT will eventually connect with indigenous artists from across the wider Austronesian region but, being the inaugural event, most of the 25 artists and collectives attending were from local Taiwanese tribes. Only three of the participating artists were from other nations: Lisa Reihana (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Hine, Ngāi Tūteauru), with her 2019 video *Nomads of the Sea*; Balinese sculptor and Taiwanese resident, I Made Sukariawan, who showed his collection of intricately carved forms emerging from polished driftwood; and kinetic sculptor Chee Wai Loong from Malaysia.

The venue for the triennial, the Taiwan Indigenous Peoples Culture Park, is a government-funded heritage site situated in Pingtung County, in the interior of the southern mountain region. Covering an area of 83 hectares, the park weaves its way up the mountains; it can be accessed through Majia township, which forms a crossroads for at least three mountain tribes, the Sandimen, Majia and Wutai.⁷ The first exhibition hall, located close to the entrance of the park, housed the sub-section "Becoming Spiritual." Curator Nakaw Putun (Pangcah) asked if returning to a state of spiritual animism could be the answer to our collective futures. Nakaw suggested that taking the time to appreciate all living things, give thanks, be mindful and call on the deities could be a way to slow consumption and fully appreciate the time and effort it takes to procure and source natural materials. Themes of identity and re-indigenising practices were prevalent amongst her choice of artists.

Aluaiy Kaumakan and members of her tribe created an installation, *Cevuji (Path of a Family)*, comprising stitched and rubbed banners. The installation weaves together rubbings made from the ruins, abandoned houses and rocks from the river where the displaced Paridrayan tribe once resided. After Typhoon Morakot (2009), the Paridrayan people were displaced and forced to relocate further down the mountains. Aluaiy Kaumakan gathers ash and pigments from ritual burning and traces tribal memories through frottage rubbings. "As I rub, tears flow. Perhaps it's because the original materials are mixed with tears, my rubbings are particularly grey."¹⁸ For the artist, it is the work expended in bringing the community together to perform ritual and ceremony, the time taken to rub, stitch and sew while recounting family stories which are more meaningful than the finished product.



Figure 1. Tanivu Tapari (aka Wang Yu-Hsin), *Awakenings*, 2023, tafalong clay, rebar, terracotta fragments, cement and wood. Installation view, with the artist in front of the TIAAT banner.



Figure 2. Aluaiy Kaumakan, *Cevuji, Path of a Family*, 2023, fibres, mud-dye cloth, charcoal and ash. Installation view.

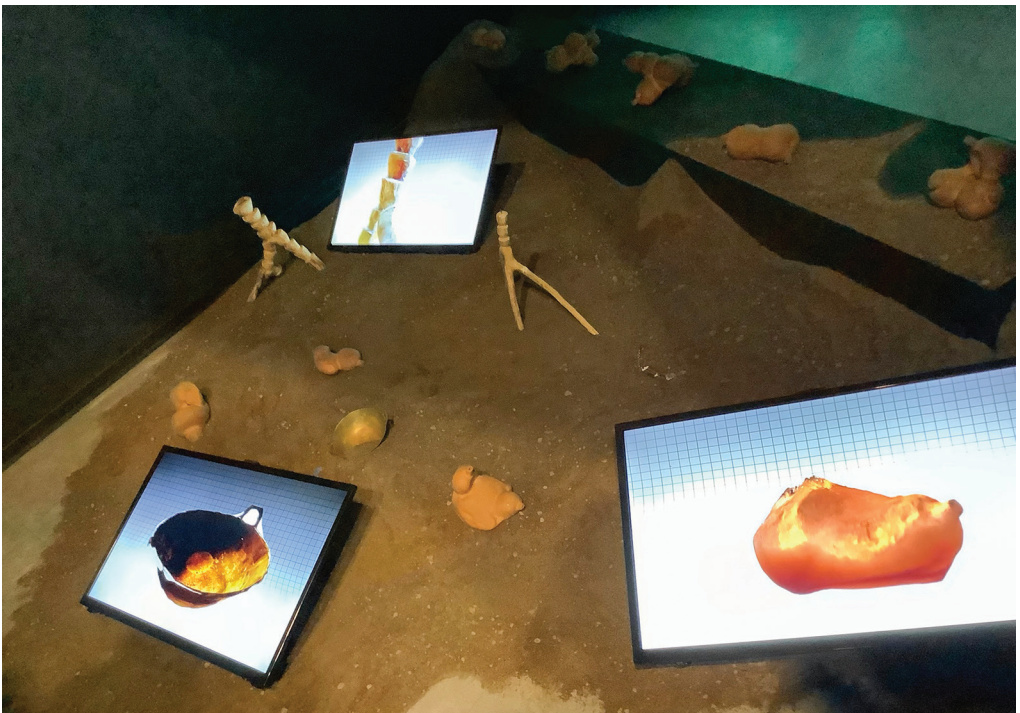


Figure 3. Ciwas Tahos (aka Anchi Lin), *Finding Pathways to Temahahoi – Artwork Series*, 2022–23, installation detail, with ceramic ocarina instruments, and single-channel HD video.

I had previously encountered the work of Ciwas Tahos (aka Anchi Lin) when she gave an artist talk at the Physics Room Ōtautahi earlier in 2023. This was presented alongside her exhibited double-channel video work, *Perhaps She Comes To/From Alang*. This iteration of *Finding Pathways to Temahahoi* was a more extensive realisation, achieved through her installation of objects (three-person musical instruments and divining rods); wall and window drawings with links to her animated virtual world; and haunting sound and performance videos, accompanied by enlarged details of her ceramic sound instruments (and brass pots representing colonial gifts to her people that had caused infertility). Exploring indigenous perceptions of gender, Ciwas created a world based on an ancient and mythical society of Temahahoi women who were able to self-fertilise and communicate with bees.

The pavilion curated by Etan Pavavalung was about a ten-minute bus ride uphill to the History Museum. Etan is originally from a Tavadrán village that was also destroyed during Typhoon Morakot; the tribe now lives in Rinari village at the base of the mountain. With the recent passing of his father and tribal leader Pairang Pavavalung earlier in 2023, he has become the leader of his tribe. Etan and his wife Grace also help to run a community arts centre equipped with carving studio and artist residency, and they were our generous hosts during our stay in Rinari. Etan's curatorial theme was "Why We Are Us," and by bringing together artists from indigenous tribes throughout Austronesia he was aiming to create a space to be strengthened, grow and learn from indigenous shared origins. He talked about *lima* (handicrafts) and how they are used to tell cultural narratives and tribal stories. Etan's focus is on making pathways to interconnect with each other as tribal people; with other Austronesian tribes; with the environment; and with the universe through space and time, sharing handicrafts, knowledge and ritual of the past for the benefit of future generations.⁹ Many of the artists he gathered had created works using naturally found or grown organic materials, including paper mulberry, driftwood, rattan, natural pigments and dyes.

Even though the artforms exhibited were different, many of the themes felt familiar. Walking through I Made Sukariawan's entranceway through the mouth of the Barong Lion into the Indigenous Lifestyle Exhibition House was like walking into a wharenuī. His colourful jig-sawed cutouts and beautifully carved, polished half-animal forms reminded me of Cliff Whiting's mixed use of power tools and traditional carving methods. The carved boats of Sya Man Misrako reminded me of Simon Kaan's waka forms. Milay Mavaliv's crochet and woven hangings suspended from the ceiling were a softer version of Mataaho Collective's woven *Te Puni Aroaro* at Te Papa,¹⁰ elevating domestic, repetitive work done by women in a monumental way. Our English-speaking Rinari contact Sutipau Tjaruzaljum, also known as Chen Liang, Angela or Angy (a name given to her by her Kiwi father), had collaborated with fellow Paiwan artist Ljaljeqelan Patadalj to create an installation made up of video and large-format photos of tribal elders that had been cut, stripped, then rewoven back together – perhaps representing the artists' tribal loss and reclamation efforts.

I would have liked to have spent more time with some of the artworks, especially the large, multi-coloured land-and island-form woodblock prints of Ali Istanda (aka Hu Chia-yu); or the contemporary avatar-like sculptures and assemblages of Anguc Makaunamum (aka Kao Min-Hsiu), whose sculptural work spoke of hybridity and navigating an urban and tribal identity. But because we were reliant on our translators, we only had a few minutes to view each of the works as we stuck to the planned itinerary.

Throughout our stay, communication with the artists and organisers was made through our Japanese translator and photographer Yasuhiro Iguchi – also known as Alan, a Paiwan name given to him on a previous residency – and his friend and business partner Yuta Iguchi. Language and translation was very fluid. While we mostly connected in English, because many older Taiwanese learned Japanese during the Second World War, Japanese is still commonly spoken, along with Mandarin Chinese, local Taiwanese dialects and English. However, like the political revitalisation of te reo Māori in Aotearoa, and because there is a move to revitalise the tribal indigenous languages, we tended to converse using our very limited knowledge of New Zealand Cantonese, Mandarin, te reo Māori and few words from tribal languages which we picked up. The language didn't matter – it was karaoke (thanks, Haani), food and drink, smiles, laughter, humility, generosity and a love of art that connected us all.

As Nakaw reminded us to connect with resources through spiritual animism, and Etan made space and time for reconnecting with tradition, the whakatauki “Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua comes to mind: “I walk backwards into the future with my eyes fixed on the past” – a reminder to keep traditions alive and continue reinventing them for future prosperity. Learning, sharing and reconnecting with practices that value natural resources and reworking these into our everyday practices as a way to support sustainability and meaning for future generations.

Perhaps in future triennials we will see more Māori and Pacific representation as the TIAAT grows in reach and branches out from its RamiS beginnings.

Sabau; mali mali; kia ora rā.



Figure 4. Reretan Pavavaljung. One of the 19 paintings in his *Innumerable Differences, One World* series, 2023, acrylic on canvas.



Figure 5. Anguk Makaunamun (aka Kao Min-Hsui), *Memory Tablet Series*, 2023, photographic paper and locally sourced natural materials, with the artist.





Figure 7. I Made Sukariawan, *Oh Water?*, 2021, wood, with the artist.

Figure 6. Anguk Makaunamun (aka Kao Min-Hsui), *Memory Tablet Series*, 2023, detail, photographic paper and locally sourced natural materials.



Figure 8. Ali Istanda (aka Hu Chia-yu), *After the Flood, There are Islands*, 2022, detail, 434x88cm, woodblock printing.

Kim Lowe is an artist and printmaker based in Ōtautahi Christchurch and Artist in Residence at The Climate Action Campus in the Christchurch Red Zone. She completed a Masters in Fine Arts in Printmaking from Canterbury University in 2009 and was the recipient of the Olivia Spencer Bower Award for 2019. Kim is a Senior Academic in Art and Design at Ara Institute of Canterbury.

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- 3 Brook Bell, dir. *Origins* (season 1, episode 3), 2020.
- 4 Yuan-Chao Tung, "Our Distance from the Sea," in Jow Jiun Gong, *Austronesian Internationalism: The Art World Map Redrawn by Contemporary Indigenous Art*, Triennial, TIAAT Taiwan International Austronesian Art, RamiS: Tracing Origins (Indigenous Peoples Cultural Center; Council of Indigenous Peoples, Majia Township, Pingtung County, 2023), 51–5.
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- 10 Museum of New Zealand | Te Papa Tongarewa, "Mataaho Collective: Te Puni Aroaro," 2024, <https://www.tepapa.govt.nz/visit/exhibitions/toi-art/mataaho-collective-te-puni-aroro>

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High standards of writing, proofreading and adherence to consistency through the Chicago referencing style are expected. For more information, please refer to the Chicago Manual of Style, 17th edition; and consult prior issues for examples. A short biography of no more than 50 words; as well as title; details concerning institutional position and affiliation (where relevant); contact information (postal, email and telephone number) and ORCID number should be provided on a cover sheet, with all such information withheld from the body of the submission. Low resolution images with full captions should be inserted into texts to indicate where they would be preferred, while high resolution images should be sent separately.

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