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ZARA STANHOPE

Introduction to “Place and Space”

Abstract

This essay introduces a section of “Grounded in Place: Dialogues between First Nations Artists from Australia, Taiwan, and Aotearoa,” a special issue of Pacific Arts. “Place and Space” includes texts and images by artists Leah King-Smith (Australia), Anchi Lin (Ciwas Tahos, 林安琪) (Taiwan) and Ngahuia Harrison (Aotearoa New Zealand). The contributions of these three practitioners—all involved in lens-based and digital media—speak to loss of sovereignty and ways forward through contemporary art. Their reflections on recent projects prove their practices to be forms of claiming personal and culturally political territory in the face of centuries of exclusion and prejudice in colonial contexts.

Keywords: *First Nations, Australia, Taiwan, Aotearoa New Zealand, Art, photography, digital media, sovereignty, queer*

In the following section of this special issue of *Pacific Arts*, titled “Place and Space,” three practitioners involved in lens-based and digital media—artists Leah King-Smith (Australia), Anchi Lin (Ciwas Tahos, 林安琪) (Taiwan), and Ngahuia Harrison (Aotearoa New Zealand)—discuss their work, speaking to the loss of sovereignty and ways forward through contemporary art. Their reflections on recent projects prove their practices to be forms of claiming personal, cultural, and political territory in the face of centuries of exclusion and prejudice in colonial contexts. First Nations peoples are having to fight for inclusion and legal justice in systems that ignore customary rights. These three essays reinforce how artists have a role to play in righting the exclusion they experience within their multilayered worlds.

King-Smith (Bigambul peoples) offers an evocative experience of being in Aboriginal Country at Quandamooka, Queensland, Australia, through her short photo essay and poem. Her works aim to disrupt Western concepts of physical reality and time. Evoking ideas including the “simultaneous present” in which many times can come together, King-Smith evidences how photo works can create slippages of meaning that offer a place for self-determination.

Anchi Lin (Ciwas Tahos, 林安琪; Atayal peoples) describes her practice as an autobiographical search for the Atayal self. Brought up in Taipei and disconnected from her ancestral land, Lin's practice arises from her hybrid identity as a queer artist who is reconnecting with her ancestry. She examines the forces of cultural displacement and the marginalisation she experiences being non-binary in gender and sexuality. Her work questions how she can reclaim visibility of embodied queerness or philosophically "weave" in an Atayal worldview. Moving into virtual space on the Internet allows her to work in ways that avoid hetero-patriarchal boundaries.

Through her ongoing series *Coastal Cannibals*, Ngahuia Harrison (Ngātiwai and Ngāpuhi) raises awareness of how photography can be a force for change by evidencing customary ways of being and practices that fall outside colonial world views and legislative frames of government. For Harrison these photographs convey that a lack of accountability by government and industry, and a failure to uphold the Treaty of Waitangi and Māori sovereignty, has resulted in the development and destruction of the ancestral coastline.

Dr Zara Stanhope is director of Govett-Brewster Art Gallery (GBAG) / Len Lye Centre, New Plymouth, Aotearoa New Zealand; an adjunct professor at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University, Australia; and an adjunct professor at Auckland University of Technology, Aotearoa New Zealand. A widely published curator and writer, she actively seeks collaborations that foster cultural connections and increase an understanding of who we are across the Global South. She is focused on the strategic direction of GBAG as an active partner under Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi) with mana whenu (people of the land) and of deepening experiences of contemporary art from Aotearoa and Te Moana Nui-a-Kiwa (the Pacific Ocean). She was the lead curator for Aotearoa New Zealand at the La Biennale di Venezia in 2019.