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Introduction to “Land and Community”

Abstract

This essay introduces the second section of “Grounded in Place: Dialogues between First Nations Artists from Australia, Taiwan and, Aotearoa,” a special issue of Pacific Arts. “Land and Community” includes papers written by First Nations artists Judy Watson (Australia), Akac Orat (Taiwan), and Areta Wilkinson (Aotearoa New Zealand). These artists discuss their recent works that investigate the land and water as sources of learning, places of ancestral affiliation, parts of their community and ethnic identity, sites of contestation, and places through which to assert sovereignty in the face of the lasting effects of colonisation.

Keywords: *Justice, landscape, colonial, collaboration, decolonise, Indigenise*

In this section of “Grounded in Place,” titled “Land and Community,” three First Nations artists—Judy Watson (Australia), Akac Orat (Taiwan), and Areta Wilkinson (Aotearoa New Zealand)—discuss their recent works that investigate the land and water as sources of learning, places of ancestral affiliation, aspects of their community and ethnic identity, sites of contestation, and places through which to assert sovereignty in the face of the lasting effects of colonisation. Through their efforts, these artists have managed to reconnect with their lands and empower their communities.

Judy Watson contributes a visual essay based on the presentation she delivered at the October 2021 “Grounded in Place” symposium. It traces a body of work inspired by the ongoing connection Watson’s Waanyi community has to water and her investigations into the many massacres that have occurred over Australia’s scarred history. Framed within photographic documentation of her ancestors’ Country, the Boodjamulla National Park (Lawn Hill Gorge) in North West Queensland, Watson’s visual essay offers ruminations on the vital qualities of water and our role in preserving it.

In his paper, Taiwanese Indigenous artist and curator Akac Orat relates how his construction of a traditional Amis house was not about cultural revival nor an attempt to create a tourist attraction. Rather, it was an effort to rebuild relationships between humans, the land, and the environment; reconnect with

ancestral lands; and expose the ongoing struggles between Taiwanese Indigenous peoples and the nation-state. The artist imparts how Taiwanese Indigenous peoples' land is now complicated with numerous statutes and acts that do not comply with Indigenous peoples' philosophies and values. The existence of these forms of legislation demonstrates that Taiwanese Indigenous people are still in a colonial state, which is the major factor preventing them from being able to reconnect with their ancestral land and cultural values.

Māori artist Areta Wilkinson explores the intersection of applied art, specifically contemporary jewellery, as a form of knowledge and practice with Māori philosophies, especially *whakapapa* (genealogy connections) and a worldview informed by Ngāi Tahu perspectives. Her essay reflects on how Paemanu, a kin group of Ngāi Tahu contemporary artists, changed the curatorial paradigm at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery (DPAG). Since 2018, Paemanu has worked collaboratively with DPAG to curate two exhibitions, *Hurahia ana kā Whetū—Unveiling the Stars* (2021–22) and *Paemanu: Tauraka Toi* (2021–22), which are both the result of Paemanu's desire to demonstrate *mātauranga* (Māori values, concepts, and ideas) within a colonial art institution. Wilkinson argues that art institutions such as DPAG typically lack Māori perspectives and works of art. Through these exhibitions, it became possible to change the existing focus on Western art, and Wilkinson's contribution demonstrates salient efforts to decolonise and indigenise the gallery.

Dr. Fang Chun-wei is an associate curatorial researcher at the National Museum of Prehistory in Taiwan and an adjunct associate professor at National Taitung University. For two decades, he has conducted research on Austronesian communities in Taiwan, Indonesia, and Fiji. He has also been involved in Indigenous museum development and training projects in Taiwan since 2017. His work has focused on the cross-cultural and comparative studies of museological and cultural diversity. He has published on ritual, religious conversion, and emerging cultural revitalisation among Taiwan's Indigenous Bunun people, and has edited two books on Atayal weaving.