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Introduction to “Site and Materials”

Abstract

This essay introduces the “Site and Materials” section of “Grounded in Place: Dialogues between First Nations Artists from Australia, Taiwan, and Aotearoa,” a special issue of Pacific Arts. Employing a range of media, from bull kelp to industrial steel wool and rami fibre, artists Mandy Quadrio (Australia) and Yuma Taru (Taiwan) discuss their respective artistic practices in relation to the loss and recovery of ancestral and creative connections with Country and community. Their essays reflect upon the past and the impact of colonisation on Indigenous communities and cultural traditions. They also demonstrate the increasingly important role artists play in raising awareness about the survival of Indigenous peoples and cultural practices, and the value of the environment for future generations.

Keywords: *First Nations artists, Indigenous art, land, place, identity, community, sovereignty, Aboriginal Australia, Taiwan*

This section of “Grounded in Place” explores the theme “Site and Materials” through the artistic practices of Mandy Quadrio (Australia) and Yuma Taru (Taiwan).¹ These two artists seek to reconnect with their Country, literally and metaphorically, and shed light on their ancestral histories and material cultures, which are deeply embedded in place. Their papers reflect on the complex and often contested relationship between land/site as a valuable natural resource and as a place of belonging and sovereignty.

Mandy Quadrio is a Trawlwoolway artist from Trouwunna (Tasmania), currently living in Meanjin (Brisbane), whose practice spans sculpture, installation, photography, and mixed media. Quadrio’s paper explores her connections to Country through several key works that are deeply personal and symbolic, describing them as “anchored in an enduring and ever-developing sense of place and ground.”² Seeking to reclaim and reassert Palawa identity and agency, Quadrio observes the significance of the materials she uses in her work, specifically Tasmanian bull kelp and industrial steel wool, which allude, respectively, to the adaptability and endurance of the Palawa people and colonialist efforts to remove or erase them from their land and from history. She

also persuasively argues for the need to challenge and disrupt Western colonial and patriarchal structures in a museum context, and describes the exhibition tactics she employs to inspire and generate political and social change.

Since the early 1990s, Yuma Taru has dedicated herself to the revival of Atayal culture and knowledge systems, particularly Atayal traditional weaving and dyeing techniques. Yuma received a Han Chinese education, and as an adult rediscovered her Atayal heritage and reclaimed her name. In her paper, Yuma describes her personal and artistic journey of returning to her community through learning about and cultivating the ramie plant, which, prior to colonisation, was commonly grown and used to make Atayal clothing. Yuma identifies three stages in this journey: the revival of ramie as a weaving material, the revival of culture, and the revival of traditional Indigenous lifestyles. For Yuma, the ramie plant is not simply a material she uses to create her fibre installations; it is a reminder of the displacement of Atayal communities brought about by colonisation and urbanisation and the resulting loss of their cultural heritage and traditional practices. Ramie is the cultural fibre that reconnects her to the land and to her community.

*Dr Sophie McIntyre is a senior lecturer at the Queensland University of Technology, and a curator and writer specialising in art from Taiwan and the Asia-Pacific region. She is the author of *Imagining Taiwan: The Role of Art in Taiwan's Quest for Identity* (Brill, 2018), and has published widely on visual art, museology, cultural diplomacy, and identity politics. McIntyre initiated the 2021 symposium [Grounded in Place: Dialogues Between First Nations Artists from Australia, Taiwan and Aotearoa](#), which she co-organised with Dr Fang Chun-wei and Dr Zara Stanhope. McIntyre has worked as a director and curator in museums in Australia, Taiwan, and New Zealand. Her curated exhibitions include *Ink Remix: Contemporary Art from Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong*; *Penumbra: New Media Art from Taiwan*; and *Islanded: Contemporary Art from New Zealand, Singapore and Taiwan* (with Lee Weng Choy and Eugene Tan).*

Notes

¹ A third artist, Sarah Hudson (Aotearoa New Zealand), also participated in the symposium, but was, unfortunately, unable to submit a paper to this volume.

² Mandy Quadrio, "Grounds for Existence," paper presented at the "Grounded in Place: Dialogues Between First Nations Artists from Australia, Taiwan, and Aotearoa" symposium, October 9, 2021.