

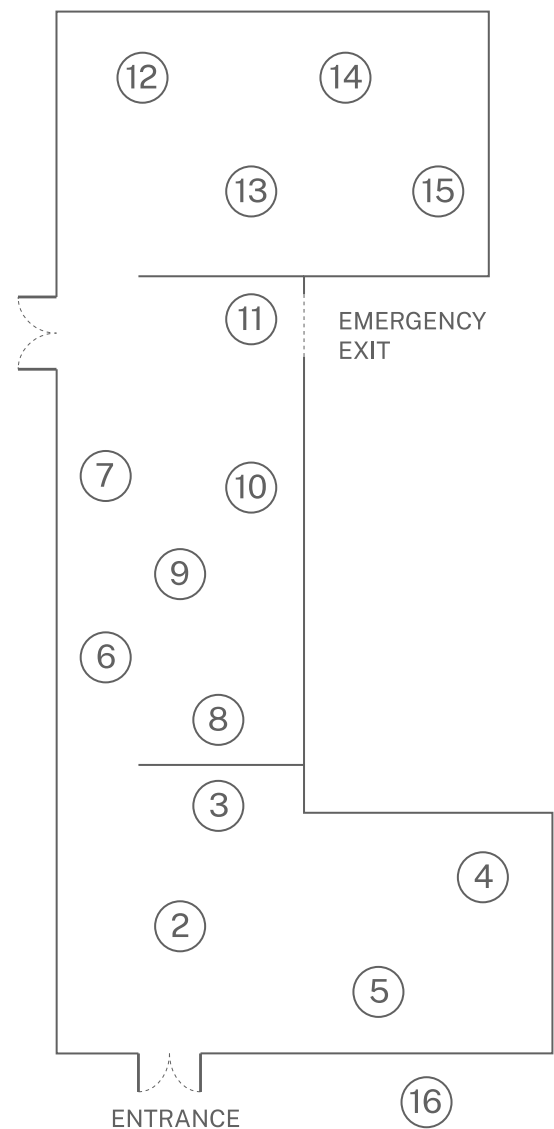
YEE I-LANN

MANSAU

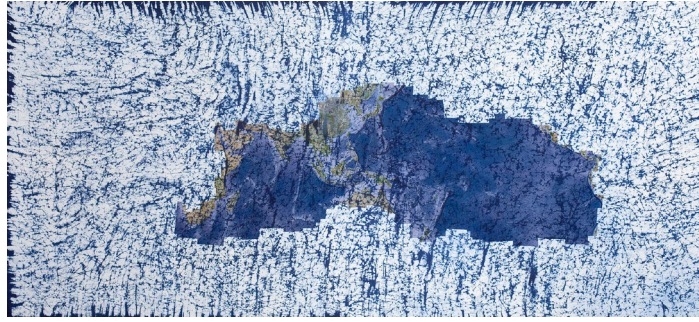
— ANSAU

4 DEC 24—23 MAR 25
TANJONG PAGAR DISTRI PARK

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Mansau-Ansau in the language of the Dusun and Kadazan of Sabah means “to walk and walk” or to journey without predefined destination. It refers to an act of wandering with the chance of getting lost, thereby discovering new destinations in its course. It is also the name given to a woven pattern created by Sabah artist Yee I-Lann and her collaborators Julitah Kulinting, Lili Naming and Shahrizan Bin Juin of Keningau. By convention, a weave is a repetition of interleaved material; but this new *mansau-ansau* pattern confronts and escapes the formulaic limitations of this definition. As an exhibition title, *Mansau-Ansau* extends to a reorientation of frame, route and border in a call to attend to the moment with curiosity and an embrace of one’s path and rhythm.



Fluid World

2010

Direct digital Mimaki inkjet print with acid dye batik crackle,
Japanese Ai natural indigo on 100% silk twill

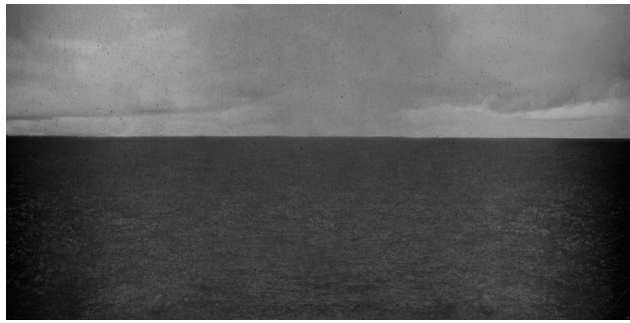
Collection of Singapore Art Museum

Fluid World is a maritime map with Southeast Asia as its centre, produced using satellite images archived by Google Maps.

It presents the historical and international reach of the peoples of the region travelling across and around the world.

This watery territory has witnessed many attempts at definition and division—voyages to expand empire, colonial claim, and the sovereignty of national borders and seas of our present time.

Paradoxically, this space of contest and struggle is in pursuit of a sense of belonging and home. The batik effect is derived from a method of wax resist that prevents dye absorption, routing and rerouting dye between its fissures and cracks. In reimagining for a reimagining, *Fluid World* is a reminder of the intrinsically unfixed assignment of geography that can change like the random cracks in batik wax through which dye flows.



Horizon series: Horizon

2003

Archival pigment inkjet on Epson Premium Photo Luster

Collection of the artist

A horizon is a shifting line of sight. It encircles and stretches as far as the eye can see, yet recedes when approached. It fascinates in its unwavering bisection of sky, sea and land, even as it pins you to where you stand. In 2003, Yee had a three-month residency in South Australia during which she created the *Horizon* series and penned these words:

“I love the open desert. I love having so much space. I love stretching my eyes to a distant, distant point that’s not interrupted by a tree, a building or a hill. I love that huge sky that gets heavier and heavier the longer I look at it and it lightly embraces me with all the knowledge and possibility of the universe. I love the disc of the earth, the horizon that circles me, marks me and places me Here. At this point. Here. I love having perspective. I am the center of the universe and this is my proof, everything stems from me. I can see it, it is real; it is true.

And then I take a step and everything changes, the horizon moves with me, stalking me yet running away with its continuous line; it’s joining and separating, suffocating me. It teases me, questions me, challenges me and always,

my here, my perspective, changes and I am lost, uncertain, confused at the centre of this disc that won't let me think, that won't let me be. The sky in concert with the horizon seals my escape, joining and separating. It denies its own existence as it denies mine. I have no mine. It is all illusion, it is not real but it is still true."

Written by Yee I-Lann in South Australia in 2003

Yee I-Lann, "Horizon," in *Fluid World* eds. Beverly Yong and Adeline Ooi (Kuala Lumpur: Valentine Willie Fine Art, 2010), 69.

Sulu Stories

2005

Archival pigment inkjet on Epson Premium Photo Luster

Collection of Singapore Art Museum

Geographical proximity that enables travel, along with the tides of politics and history, form the visible and invisible lines that intimately connect Sabah with southern Philippines.

This shared seascape is a storied space from which the artist's visual dioramas emerge, produced using digital collage to combine her photographs of seas and skies with images and information collected from archives and libraries (Filipinas Heritage Library in Manila, National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration [NOAA], Sabah State Museum and Sabah State Archives). Layered upon their expanse are the myths and imaginaries of sea nomads and natives, the conflicts and alliances of colonial conquest and contemporary political manoeuvres, as well as the symbol and nature of wildlife, all held in place by a horizon that reveals, as much as it conceals, that which is above and below this common waterline.



Barangay

Barangay in Tagalog denotes the smallest local government unit in the Philippines and is also used to refer to a small community. The origin of the word is *balangay*, meaning “boat.”

The image is made of multiple islands in the Sulu Sea near Coron and Palawan, sutured together.

The Manunggul Jar was found in the Manunggul Cave in Palawan and dated 710–890 BC. The anthropomorphic figures on the lid of the burial jar represent souls sailing to the afterworld in a death boat.



Awn Hambuuk Sultan

Awn Hambuuk Sultan in Tausug translates to “There was a King”. Tausug refers to the largest Islamised group in the Sulu archipelago, with their name meaning “people of the current.”

“Aku, bay ku ntuu jaga luma” is Mapun for “Me, I’ve been here, the houseguard.” The Mapun language belongs to the Sama-Bajaw (Bajau) group of languages of the Austronesian peoples, many of whom in this region were subordinate to the Sulu Sultanate, a highly successful trading empire.

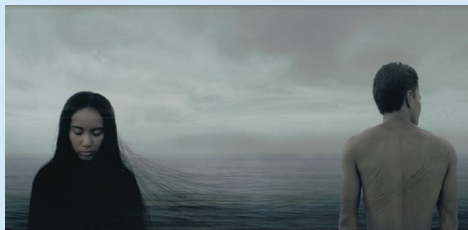
The Spanish-built walled city of Jolo is the world’s smallest walled city and the capital of the Philippines’ Sulu province. The Tausug (also called Moro or Moors by the Spanish) were hostile to the Spanish occupation of Jolo, so the Spanish authorities constructed a wall around the settlement they referred to as Intramuros, meaning “bar the entries of the Moors.” It later became known as the Walled City of Jolo.



The Archipelago

Featuring Sultan Jamalul Kiram II, one of the signatories of the Bates Agreement in 1899 (with reference to Brigadier General John Bates), this agreement was intended to recognise American sovereignty over Sulu, replacing the Spanish after the Spanish-American War.

The raintree (*samanea saman*) was photographed in the Manila American Cemetery in Metro Manila. Native to South America, this tree has been dispersed and naturalised throughout the East Indies.



Map

This woman identified herself as Bajau Kagayan (also known as the Sama Mapun in the Philippines). She was photographed by Yee in her village, Kampung Buli Sim Sim, Sandakan.

This man identified himself as Suluk (also known as Tausug in the Philippines). He was photographed by Yee on Pulau Selingan, at the Malaysia–Philippines border.

The Sulu Sea was photographed near the Malaysia–Philippines border, looking towards the Philippines.



Borderline

In 1996, the governments of Malaysia and the Philippines signed the Turtle Islands Heritage Protected Area Agreement in Manila to establish the world's first trans-border protected area for marine turtles. The agreement covers the seas around all nine islands in the Sulu Turtle Islands chain, encompassing six Philippine islands and three Malaysian islands in the Sulu Sea.

The cement pillars were photographed in the sea of Bacoor Bay, Cavite, referencing the Philippine Declaration of Independence signed in 1898 in Cavite, Philippines. The declaration was not recognised by either the United States or Spain.

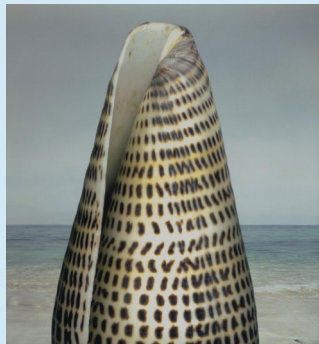
The green back turtle (green sea turtle, *chelonia mydas*) depicted is an endangered species, though it remains fairly common in the Sulu Sea. Female green sea turtles first breed around 30 years of age, returning to the beaches where they were hatched to lay their eggs. No one knows why these ancient creatures return to the same beach where they were born, seeming to navigate via a biological compass.



Sarang

Sarang in Malay translates to “nest, spider’s web or den.”

Monitor lizards or *bayawak* (*biawak*) are known to prey on newly hatched turtles. They use their tails to locate the nesting hole and their legs to dig up the eggs.



Shell

A Conidae shell (*conus litteratus*) found by Yee in Coron, Sulu Sea, measuring approximately 120 mm in height.



Sarung

Sarung or Sarong in Malay translates to “sheath” and is a common clothing item in the region, consisting of a piece of fabric wrapped around the lower body, worn by both men and women. The term *sarung* also refers to the sheath of a weapon like a *keris*.

Highly valued Chinese *naga* (dragon) jars have been traded in the Sulu and Borneo region for centuries. They have played very important socio-cultural-spiritual roles in many communities. They are used as fermentation vessels, as death jars and for storing food and water.



The Landmark

The Landmark is a Filipino Department Store chain. Yee purchased the miniature *vinta* boat-in-a-bottle tourist souvenirs from The Landmark. The barcode is from a souvenir.

The *vinta* is a small sailboat with a shallow drift and usually has outriggers for added stability and a central mast with a colourful striped sail. It is common among the Tausug peoples and is used for transporting people and goods across short distances in the archipelago, becoming a symbol of the Sulu Province.

The image “A tribe of natives near Jolo” was photographed by Lieutenant (j.g.) Leonard Johnson in 1926, US Coast & Geodetic Survey (C&GS), and found in the US Department of Commerce, National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration Historic Coast & Geodetic Survey (C&GS Collection), under the category
“Philippine Islands/Coastal Views Native Culture.”



Song of the Keris

The image titled “Jamalul Kiram II 1903” is from Dionisio Encinas’s *Moros as seen in Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago*, published in 1903, Filipinas Heritage Library. The description reads:

“The Sultan of Sulu is shown with an aide after one of several peace conferences held in 1903 on the Cedula Tax imposed on the natives of Mindanao. The natives resented and openly opposed the rule that adult males get a registration certificate costing 2 pesos. Cotta (trench) fighting between the American forces and the Muslims broke out that year.”

The *sarimanok*—resembling a rooster with a fish hanging either from beak or claws—is, in ancient indigenous symbolism, a messenger of love, a mediator between earthly and heavenly realms and a symbol of good luck and communication.

The *lepa-lepa* boat, pictured from the collection of the Sabah Museum, is a small houseboat common to the traditionally nomadic sea peoples such as the Bajau and Orang Sama of the Sulu Sea.

The *keris*, *kris* or *kalis* is a symmetrical dagger found throughout the Malay Archipelago. There are several regional differences but as objects, they all share powerful community-specific cultural and spiritual significance with links to the spirit world. Traditionally, no man would leave home without his *keris*.



High Noon

The image from 1925 is from the US Department of Commerce, National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration Historic Coast & Geodetic Survey (C&GS) Collection under the category “Philippines/Tourists,” and is accompanied by the following text: “Fooling Around – Cornelius Meaney staging fight – sometimes this was for real. In 1941, a C&GS officer was seriously wounded by a bolo-wielding *juramentado*. Occasionally Christian crewmen from North would disappear in the Muslim South.”

(Image credit: Family of Captain George L. Anderson, C&GS)

High Noon is an American western “cowboy” film directed by Fred Zinnemann in 1952 and starring Gary Cooper.



Brothers in Arms

Colonel Gaddafi, leader of Libya from 1969 to 2011.

Tun Mustapha (Tun Datu Haji Mustapha bin Datu Harun), an ethnic Tausug with distant ties to the Sulu Sultanate, was the first Governor of Sabah from 1963–1965 and the Chief Minister from 1967–1975.

Colonel Gaddafi and Tun Mustapha, in partnership, were the primary source of arms, funding and training for the Bangsa Moro People's Liberation Army under the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), which was a pro-independence movement for a Muslim Mindanao in the 1970s, soon after the Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos had imposed martial law in 1972.



The Ch'i-lin of Calauit

Ferdinand Marcos was the 10th President of the Philippines, serving three terms from 1965 to 1986. Imelda Marcos was Marcos' wife and partner in their political life.

Calauit is an island northwest of Palawan. In 1977, a shipload of Kenyan savannah animals was brought to the island on the MV Salvador in response to an international appeal to save endangered African animals from war and drought.

The animals translocated were giraffes, zebras and various species of antelope: impalas, gazelles, elands, waterbucks, bushbucks and topi. The animals were housed on what has become the 3,700-hectare Calauit Game Preserve and Wildlife Sanctuary. The indigenous Tagbanua people that inhabited the island were relocated.

The traveller's palm tree (*ravenala madagascariensis*) is native to Madagascar.

The Orang Besar Series

2010

Direct digital Mimaki inkjet print with acid dye, batik canting, Remazol Fast Salt dyes on 100% silk twill

Collection of Singapore Art Museum

In Southeast Asia, the *orang besar* (big person) refers to someone with economic wealth and socio-political influence. Their elevated standing is often by virtue of others giving up labour and power in return for security and well-being, with this dynamic replicated to higher and higher levels.

The *kain panjang* (long cloth) is worn with more formality than the *kain sarong* (long sheath), as it is wrapped tightly from waist to ankle, with this restrictive style rendering it less practical for the working-class body. It also differs from the *kain sarong* which may feature a *kepala* (head) design and is generally shorter in length.

Combining features of the two, the artwork comments on past and present relationships between the powerful and powerless in society, further illustrated by flora familiar to the region: the “parasitic” hemiepiphyte banyan that relies on a host tree whilst providing shelter to others; the “petulant” mimosa (*pokok semalu*, shy plant), with its sensitive leaves that fold and close when triggered; and the “carnivorous” pitcher plant, which attracts with its nectar only to consume its guests.



The Orang Besar series: Kain Panjang with Carnivorous Kepala



The Orang Besar series: Kain Panjang with Petulant Kepala



The Orang Besar series: Kain Panjang with Parasitic Kepala

Picturing Power & Measuring Project

Yee's primary visual medium is photographic, though she is not always the one behind the camera. In referring to herself as a "reader" of photographs rather than a "maker," we are made conscious of the interpretation and frame of the photographic act and its enterprise beyond the subject that is seen. She often involves found images and uses collage to retain the trace and origins of images, as well as their sense of time. Her digital collages reconfigure, by reframing and reversing visual and semantic relationships and hierarchies, suggesting new narratives and possibilities.

LEFT

Picturing Power

2013

Giclée print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag Ultra Smooth Fine Art, 310 gsm
100% cotton rag paper

Collection of Singapore Art Museum

Picturing Power capitalises on the archives of the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam (Museum of the Tropics) to reveal the history of colonial violence in Malaya through the banality and ubiquity of administration, governance and education. What one wears, how one sits or squats, and the instruments one can wield all subtly, but incontrovertibly, mould the person, their outlook and therefore their world.



Picturing Power: Wherein one surreptitiously performs reconnaissance to collect views and freeze points of view to be reflective of one's own kind



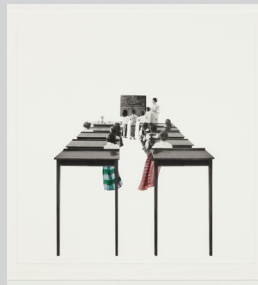
Picturing Power: Wherein one, in the name of knowledge, measures everything, gives it a name and publicises this, thereby claiming it



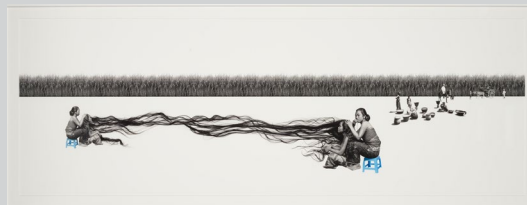
Picturing Power: Wherein one nods with political sympathy and says I understand you better than you understand yourself, I'm just here to help you help yourself



Picturing Power: Wherein one tables an indexical record of data-turned-assets and rules like the boss you now say that you are



Picturing Power: Wherein one claims the hearts and the minds of the innocent and gives them the knowledge that is to be learnt



Picturing Power: Wherein one cultivates cultural codes, the noble endeavours of mankind and thereby puts them in their place



Picturing Power: Wherein one hands over the ways of seeing loot, land and labour and thereby builds complicity in the exculpation; you are now partners in crime



Picturing Power: Wherein one's legacy comes full circle and posits that you too can exploit and subjugate and fluff yourself up in a splendid game of one's own jolly adventure

RIGHT

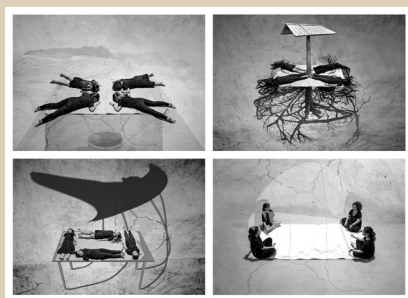
Measuring Project: Chapters One to Seven

2021–2022

Digital inkjet pigment print (Giclée) on Hahnemühle Photo,
Rag paper

Collection of Singapore Art Museum

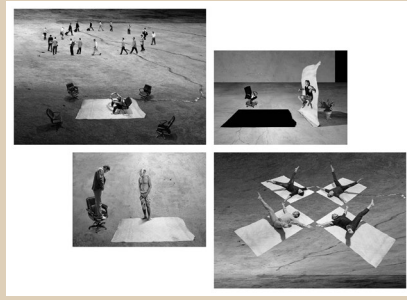
Produced a decade after *Picturing Power*, *Measuring Project* provides an anti-colonial antidote in the woven mat, with its fundamentally egalitarian and literally grounded form. In prompting a re-seeing and re-learning of value systems, *Measuring Project* invokes and connects with ancestral knowledge and their communities to suggest new futures easily found in the realignment of the body from chair to mat.



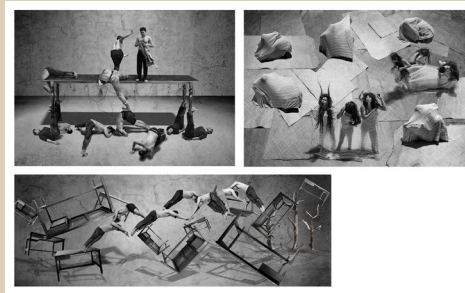
Measuring Project: Chapter One



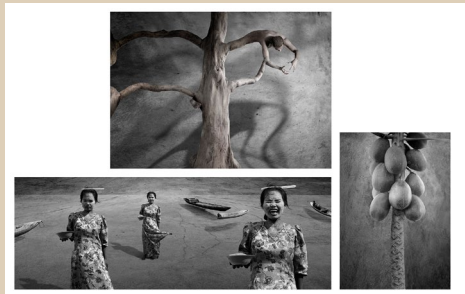
Measuring Project: Chapter Two



Measuring Project: Chapter Three



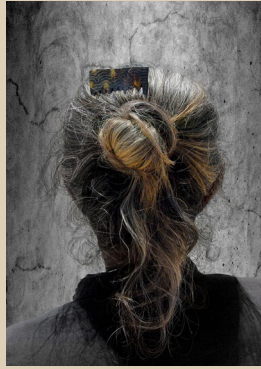
Measuring Project: Chapter Four



Measuring Project: Chapter Five



Measuring Project: Chapter Six



Measuring Project: Chapter Seven



The Tukad Kad Sequence #01

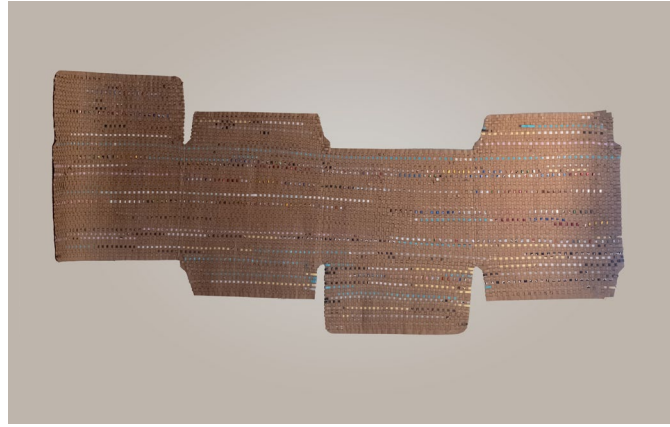
Weaving by Dusun Minokok weavers Julitah Kulinting, S Narty Raitom, Julia Ginasius and Zaitun Raitom at Batu Lunguyan, Keningau

2021

Split bamboo pus, kayu obol black natural dye, matt sealant

Collection of the artist

Tukad kad describes a basic stepped pattern in the languages of the Dusun and Murut. It also refers to the ridges on the roof of the mouth which become pronounced in conditions of heat or acidity that it can be felt by the tongue. By varying this tessellated pattern, geometric images and motifs can be derived, such as to produce the image of louvre windows with a lenticular effect found in this work. This architectural feature recalls for the artist her childhood bedroom and the memory of home while simultaneously registering in its function the regulation of air and heat between the exterior and interior of a building. The desk depicted is the artist's own table seen tossed and restless like the *guik* which is Kadazan for "worms," a reminder of the warnings of her grandmother against playing barefoot outdoors, and by extension a mining of ancestral and hidden knowledge in the literal meaning of *guik*, which is "to dig." This work is the first of the *Tukad kad* series of experiments where the weave becomes pixels for new forms and spaces, both pictorial and conceptual.



Flatten The Box

Weaving by members of Pertubuhan Wanita Kampung Song-Song (WANIS), Kota Belud led by Salinah binti Bakri; Dyg. Hamidah binti Abdul Ghani, Fauzi@Fauzimah binti Stoh, Noraini binti Ati, Nurhakimi bin Haiman, Nuriani binti Seri, Salbiah binti Lokman, Serbiah binti Preeh, with field coordination by Tressie Yap

2024

Found cardboard boxes, aluminium drink cans, aluminium ribbon strips

Collection of the artist



TIKAR/MEJA/PLASTIK

Weaving by Aisyah Binti Ebrahim, Alini Binti Aniratih, Alisyah Binti Ebrahim, Ardih Binti Belasani, Darwisa Binti Omar, Dayang Binti Tularan, Dela Binti Aniratih, Endik Binti Arpid, Erna Binti Tekki, Fazlan Bin Tularan, Kinnuhong Gundasali, Kuoh Binti Enjahali, Luisa Binti Ebrahim, Makcik Lukkop Belatan, Makcik Siti Aturdaya, Malaya Binti Anggah, Ninna Binti Mursid, Noraidah Jabarah (Kak Budi), Roziah Binti Jalalid, Sabiyana Binti Belasani, Sanah Belasani, Tasya Binti Tularan, and Venice Foo Chau Xhien

2023

Pulau Omadal Bajau Sama Dilaut heritage pandanus weave, commercial chemical dye, collected plastic waste

Collection of the artist

The colonial imprint of the table is found in its name—*meja* in Malay, derived from *mesa* in Portuguese—registering its foreign arrival in the sixteenth century. On the other hand, the *tikar* or woven mat has had its place across the Nusantara archipelago, with its vernacular names and historically familiar domestic and social functions. Used for sitting, sleeping, dining and in burial, the *tikar* challenges the table in a transposition that “consumes” and flattens its form into mere silhouette and shadow.

Woven by the Bajau Sama DiLaut community, these mats combine heritage with contemporary patterns and incorporate present-day materials such as collected consumer plastic waste washed up on the coast of Sabah. Woven by the womenfolk and their daughters, these mats embody the transmission of heritage as much as contemporary innovation. Their inheritance also highlights the precarity of the craft and the indigenous knowledge belonging to the stateless coastal community, who are administratively rendered invisible even in postcolonial times.



A map of Mansau-ansau

Weaving by Lili Naming, Shahrizan Bin Juin

2024

Split bamboo pus (*Schizostachyum pilosum* S.Dransf.) weave, Multifilla
Matt Sealant

Collection of the artist

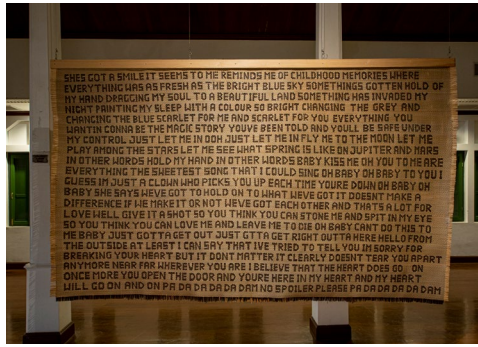
Mansau-Ansau is the name of a weave created by Yee and her collaborators, Julitah Kulinting, Lili Naming and Shahrizan Bin Juin of Keningau in 2018. Produced in an exploration of motifs, they attempted to create a challenging new style that would constantly change its course, finally succeeding once intention was surrendered and the pattern was simply allowed to emerge. The word *mansau-ansau* in the Dusun and Kadazan languages means to wander almost nomadically, and its movement, as realised in this weave, can only be observed after it has found its path.

PANGKIS, “hello from the outside”, TEPO PUTIH

The *tukad kad* stepped weave is named after the ridges on the roof of one's mouth that become pronounced under conditions of heat or acidity. This trigger site, and the mouth as gateway into our bodies, are given focus in the video work *PANGKIS*. The word “pangkis” refers to the warrior cry of the Murut in Sabah, used to call the community together, signal victory and even protect one from harm. *PANGKIS* captures the performance of Sabah's Tagaps Dance Theatre that combines traditional and contemporary movements to the sounds of this war cry whilst wearing the Murut *lalandau* jungle hat. Conventionally, the hat has spires representing trees of the jungle, adorned with feathers of the *lalandau* or argus bird. Instead, these spires are connected as if a canopy conjoining the warriors as their war cry is heard in reverse, its hypnotic sound returning into the body.

Voices and memories also conjoin in karaoke's embrace. “*hello from the outside*” weaves together songs that have become popular across communities and peoples, their lyrics inevitably causing one to sing along when read.

Completing this room is *TEPO PUTIH*, the unembellished mat that is usually the space of rituals. Here, the ritual is *kenduri*, or the gathering, and you are invited to take a seat.



“hello from the outside”

Weaving by Lili Naming, Siat Yanau, Shahrizan Bin Juin, Juraen Bin Sapirin and S. Narty Raitom

2019

Split bamboo pus weave with kayu obol black natural dye, matt sealant

Collection of Singapore Art Museum

List of Songs

1. *Sweet Child O' Mine* -Guns N' Roses
2. *Something's Gotten Hold of My Heart* -Gene Pitney
3. *Lily* -Alan Walker, K-391 & Emelie Hollow
4. *Fly Me to the Moon* -Frank Sinatra
5. *You to Me Are Everything* -The Real Thing
6. *Livin' on a Prayer* -Bon Jovi
7. *Bohemian Rhapsody* -Queen
8. *Hello* -Adele
9. *My Heart Will Go On* -Celine Dion
10. *I Love You 3000* -Stephanie Poetri

TEPO PUTIH (White Mat)

Weaving by Bajau Sama Dilaut weavers from Pulau Omadal: Kak Anjung, Makcik Bagai, Makcik Braini, Kak Ebbuh, Makcik Gangah, Kak Ginnuh, Kak Gultiam, Makcik Indah Laiha, Kak Kanuk and Makcik Kuluk

2019

Sama Dilaut natural pandanus weave

Collection of Singapore Art Museum



7-Headed Lalandau Hat

Weaving by Lili Naming, Siat Yanau, Shahrizan Bin Juin

2020

Split bamboo pus weave with kayu obol black natural dye, matt sealant

Private Collection Singapore

PANGKIS

Weaving by Lili Naming, Siat Yanau, Shahrizan Bin Juin. Choreography by Mohd Azizan Danial Bin Abdullah; Dancers Jay Adner James, Carey Didier Chin, Mohd Hairul Azman Peter, Addam Jesley, Shahhijaz Khan, Mohd Nazri Adam, Earl Steiner (Tagaps Dance Theatre). Cinematography by Al Hanafi Juhar; Lighting by Candy Yik (Huntwo Studios). Location: The Factory @ Inanam

2021

Video, Single-channel, 9 min 30 sec

Collection of Singapore Art Museum



Kerbau

2007

Collection of the artist

Within Southeast Asia, the water buffalo recalls agrarian pasts and livelihoods. As urbanisation increases the rarity of its sighting, the historical “beast of burden” has come to be associated with passive sentimentality and nostalgic idyll. However, the contemporary water buffalo in Yee’s *Kerbau* are recalcitrant and active in their claim of space and street—their “grassroots”—depicted by the artist in a collective gathering to celebrate their great strength and will.