

without

centre

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Lafin Sawmah

Eleng Luluan

Akac Orat

Malay Makakazuwan

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Ko te whakairatanga o tēnei whakaaturanga i te tau 2022, nā ngā ringatoi tokowhā o te paeroa o Taiwana i tārei, hei tūkanga ki te whakatinana i ngā hononga, ā, ki te akiaki i te tikanga whakawhitiwhiti, ā te wā heke, i waenga i Taiwana me Aotearoa— i te ātea o ngā hekenga nui me ngā tātai whakapapa tuku iho.

Ka tohaina ngā whakaaro o nāianeī me ngā take e pā ana ki ngā ringatoi—ko Lafin Sawmah rātou ko Eleng Luluan, ko Akac Orat, ko Malay Makakazuwan—mā ngā mahi hōu i waihangatia mō Govett-Brewster Art Gallery i muri i te wānanga rua wiki te roa i Aotearoa nei.

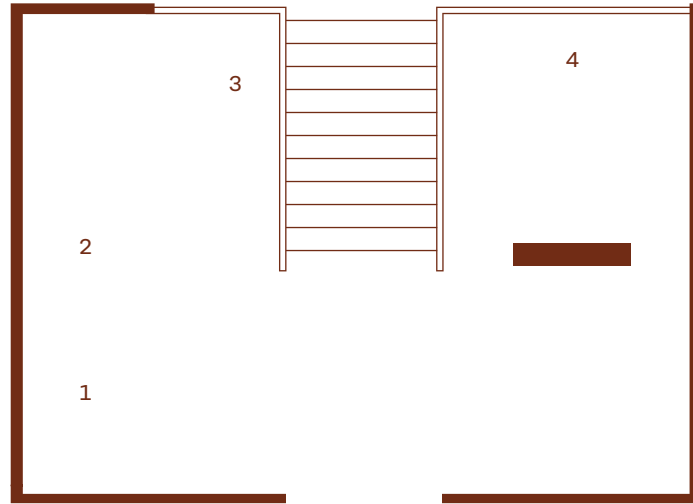
Ka tāmāua e ia ringatoi ngā wheako me ngā hītori motuhake ake o ia iwi, ki te whakahaumanu i ngā kura o roto i ngā pūrākau me ngā rauemi taketake o hō rātou ahurea. Ko te whakatinanatanga o hēnei mahi ka kitea i te rangitāmīrotanga o ngā whakapono ki te mahi i te ngākau tapatahi, i te wairua o te whakaaro tahi, kia toitū te hononga ki te whenua me te moana, ki hō rātou ake aho tāngaengae e kore e motukia—e whai tikanga ana hēnei whakaaro katoa i tēnā pito o Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa ki tēnei pito i Aotearoa nei. Kāore he pito, kāore hoki he taiepa i te pitomata o tēnei takiwā, i hēnei hononga hoki.

This exhibition by four artists from South and East Taiwan was conceived in 2022 as part of a process to enact connections and encourage future exchanges between Taiwan and Aotearoa— a space of shared migration and enduring whakapapa ties.

Insights into the contemporary life and concerns of the artists— Lafin Sawmah, Eleng Luluan, Akac Orat and Malay Makakazuwan— are offered through new works created for the Govett-Brewster after reflecting on time spent together during a two-week residency in Aotearoa.

Each artist draws on their personal experience and distinct tribal backgrounds to invigorate their indigenous material cultures, narratives, and knowledge. The resulting works are grounded in the shared beliefs of collective responsibility, community spirit, an inseparable connection to land and sea, and the unbreakable bond between past, present and future—all ideas from the edge of Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa which have a resonance here in Aotearoa. The possibilities of this space, these relations, are conceived as being without a centre, and without limits.

— Dr Zara Stanhope & Taarati Taiaroa



1. Lafin Sawmah, *Dreaming of Kuroshio* 2021
Wood

2. Lafin Sawmah, *The Direction of Fuis* 2023
Wood

3. Lafin Sawmah, *Loop of Ocean* 2022
Wood

4. *Lafin* 2023
single-channel digital video, sound, 6 min, 59 sec
Directed by Chen Kuan-Yu, Huang Hui-lin. Video supplied by the Alliance Cultural Foundation International, USA and the Alliance Cultural Foundation, Taiwan

rakat

no riyar



Lafin Sawmah

These sculptures, carved by Amis artist Lafin Sawmah, reflect his concern for the life-force of the sea and his desire to retrace and embody the adventurous spirit of his ocean voyaging ancestors. After visiting Aotearoa in February 2023, Lafin was inspired to create *The Direction of Fuis*. Its arms are suggestive of a spar and boom that hold the sail on an ocean-going vessel. Splayed open they suspend signs—sun, stars, birds—used by Pacific navigators to traverse Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa, the great ocean that connects Taiwan to Aotearoa.

The title *Rakat no Riyar* was given by Lafin's elder to this presentation of his works – it means 'the path or way of the ocean'. In 2018 Lafin reflected on his preoccupation with the ocean:

I see the ocean as another unknown universe. It contains history and the origin of life. The ocean is more than just a colour; it is a spirit. We often realise how much the ocean has changed after we dive into the water; it is faced with problems including global warming, marine debris, and other environmental issues. Taiwan is an ocean nation, but it seems that the respect for the sea has not been passed down. This is why I want to create art inspired by the ocean's mysterious side and make sculptures that will slowly grow in the vast, mysterious sea, as I continue to search for the origin of my life and embark on a meaningful journey.



Lafin Sawmah

Lafin Sawmah (1983 – 2023) belonged to the Pangcha (Amis) tribe, located on the east coast of Taiwan in Taitung County. Lafin worked and lived in the city before he returned to his hometown Changbin at age 26. There, he rediscovered his tribal culture, his passion for art and began specialising in woodworking. Lafin assisted several Indigenous artists before establishing his studio in 2011 with his wife, Heidi Yip. He became known for his carved sculptures and land art installation.

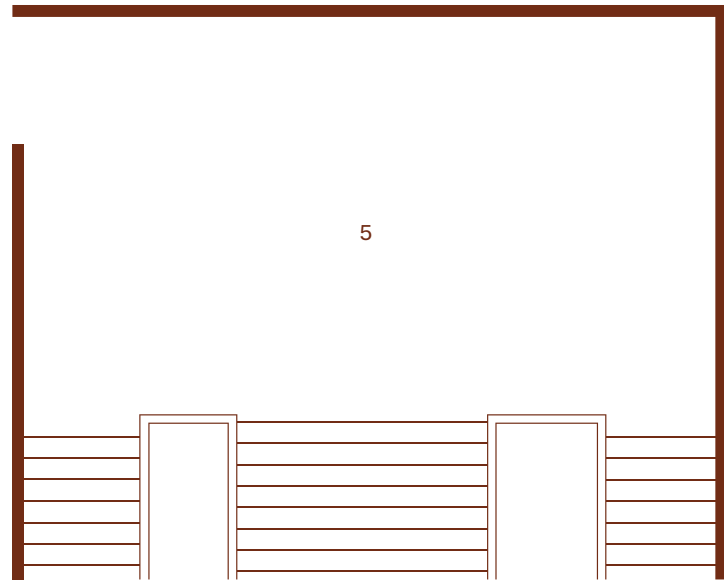
In recent years, Lafin's vision for his creative practice expanded as he sought to reconnect with the legacy of his ocean-voyaging ancestors. One of his most ambitious projects was the creation of an outrigger canoe, *Fawah* (2020–22), that brought together people from different tribes to revitalise ocean knowledge, ceremony, and community. Lafin tragically passed away in June 2023.

The title *Fawah* literally means 'to make a way ahead' in Amis language. The creation of the canoe was a speculative exercise. Without the existence of any physical canoes in the Amis tradition that he could study, Lafin consulted with knowledge holders and the few visual records that do exist as the basis to make his canoe. Conceived initially as a sculptural object, Lafin pursued the possibility of sailing his canoe after conversations with Hawaiian Hi'ikua sailor Kimokeo Kapahulehua.

On a fine day in summer 2022, *Fawah* was launched with ritual led by Kimokeo and joined by Lafin's village Chief, family, and friends from different tribes. This activation of *Fawah* through ceremony reflects Lafin's desires for his project: to be a vessel for the revival of Amis maritime knowledge, and to rekindle the deep connections that exist between Indigenous Taiwanese and Pacific peoples.

Ko ia te riyar, ko te riyar ko ia.

Moe mai, moe mai, moe mai rā te Hoe Urungi.



5. Eleng Luluan, *Maka Irualrumalane* 2024
Fishing net, rope, thread, coffee sacks

maka

Irualrumalane

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Eleng Luluan

When I visited Aotearoa in 2023, the bodily experience of the hongi at the welcome ceremony made a deep impression on me. The process and intimacy of exchanging breath conveyed unspoken meaning—it opened an ancestral space to foster connection. The environment in Aotearoa—with its crisp, fresh air—also differed from what I am used to. I felt the intensity of the sun’s rays and a sense of injustice that the people of Aotearoa must face the brunt of the global destruction of the ozone layer.

On a global scale, as humankind we are collectively experiencing the excess and collapse of globalisation: the stretching of political, economic, and cultural relations with impacts on religion, art, and culture. This is testing our abilities to imagine alternative futures.

The Rukai Nation concept of co-existence, which includes humility towards and respect for the earth, posits that our collective cultural and spiritual well-being requires us to find balance in all relationships—with each other, the land, our environment, and any affairs. *Maka Irualumalane* is a phrase from my mother tongue—the Rukai language—that embodies our community spirit and core value when confronting any challenge, including those we face about the earth, in our homes, and in our lives. It is taken from a Rukai saying:

Ikai ki sanakamanemanenga Kai ta
maka duru Ki dalaiy ubere. Palrapalra
ku kai du maka iya tinu kucingalrane
ku rathdane, Maka Irualumalane.

No matter what comes our way we
are not able to turn away or escape.
Never say I am an outsider, the
priority is co-operation, to compete
with each other to honour one
another.

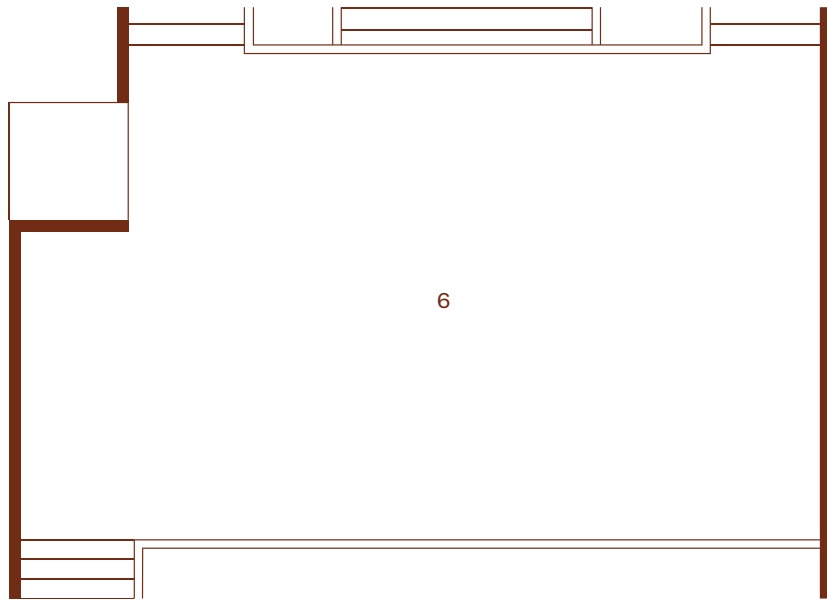
Through immersing myself in and nurturing our tribe, I have learnt from my community that no one is in the centre or at the periphery of relations and our responsibility to each other.



Eleng Luluan

Eleng Luluan was born in 1968 in the Kucapungane (Haocha) community, Pingtung County in southern Taiwan. In 2002, at the age of 34, she moved to the Dulan community in Taitung, Eastern Taiwan, where she was exposed to contemporary Indigenous art. There she was able to create a space for her own self-determination and an artistic life. Adhering to the concept of getting close to nature, her deeply intuitive making process results in works that evoke the senses, encouraging embodied experience and ways of knowing.

Eleng is renowned for her mixed-media sculpture and environmental installations that utilise natural and everyday materials. She constructs with and transforms materials whose tensile and conceptual strength challenge established gender identities and discourses of settler-colonial, diasporic, migrant, other transnational and transcultural histories. Her works address the monumental issues faced by Indigenous Taiwanese peoples—including enduring colonial wounds and effects of land disasters. In doing so, she invites us to bear witness and care about what we feel and see.



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Rattan can be used to lash structures, bind boats, weave baskets ... it has so many uses. Pido^do means to follow, flow with and trace in the language of my tribe, the Amis people. When we find rattan in the mountains, we first observe its growth. We follow it to find the root and its end, to know the extent of the rattan.

When I was first learning how to work with rattan, many of the elders or older people in the community often stood by my door and watched me working. They told me it was like seeing a reflection of their own fathers who had passed long ago. It had been a long time since they had seen someone of my age who knew how to weave. To them, it's a form of labour, but to me it is a craft.

Over time, some people started to invite me to go to their lands in the mountains. They said there were a lot of materials available there that I could use. Some even asked me if I wanted their land in the mountains, that they would just give me their whole mountain. At first, I was confused. Why would someone want to *give* me a mountain? Shouldn't their land be passed on to their children?

Once I started to become more familiar with the values of our traditional practices, I started to understand why. The reason they offered me parcels of land, plants, or other resources is because most people these days don't go into the forests or mountains or interact at all with the natural world. But they saw that I did and that I understand how to go into the mountains and actively care for the land.

While foraging and hunting are part of my daily life and I often talk about how *I* am hunting, the reality is that the mountains and weaving traditions *are hunting me*. I am the one being hunted. When an elder talks to me about taking care of the mountains ... it means that I'm bounded by it and responsible for this care all year long.

As for the ferns that grow in the mountains, they're a rare delicacy on the table of the Amis people but also respected as ancient souls whose wisdom is greater than big trees. Any excessive disturbance from human activities will destroy the ferns' habitat, so when we forage, we harvest the ferns in moderation. Spores of the ferns are blown away by the wind during harvesting—continuing the cycle of life. The path of the ferns cannot be erased.

I have come to feel that I've been drawn down paths given to us by nature, paths forged by the elders, and held captive. The environment gets a firm hold on you and won't let go. I believe, one day, my soul will be carried off by the forest, and I will become a part of a path that future generations will follow.

6. Akac Orat, *The Path of the Ferns* 2024
Rattan, paint



Akac Orat

Born in 1984 in Taitung, Taiwan, Akac grew up in the Puyuma tribe. At the age of 30, he lived in his mother's Amis tribe where he engaged in traditional craftsmanship, art education and curatorial practice. As a curator, he utilised the exhibition format as a discursive platform and a means to support the regeneration of indigenous knowledge and practices. As a teacher, he promoted an interdisciplinary understanding of art.

In recent years he has entered different domains of practice and engaged in field work. He built a traditional Amis thatched house—a centre for learning in which he passes on his skills to others—that has enabled him to reimagine an indigenous life for himself. His artistic production is focused on the maintenance of traditional values and cultural knowledge found within the practice of harvesting and transforming natural materials and caring for the land they grow on. He is a rattan weaver and responds to contemporary issues through this craft.

I was raised by my mumu (grandparents) in the Pinaski tribal community. Growing up there, I felt the impact of my parents and other community members having to move away for work. We must go back and forth from the tribal community to the city to make a living. In doing so, we gain something but also lose something too.

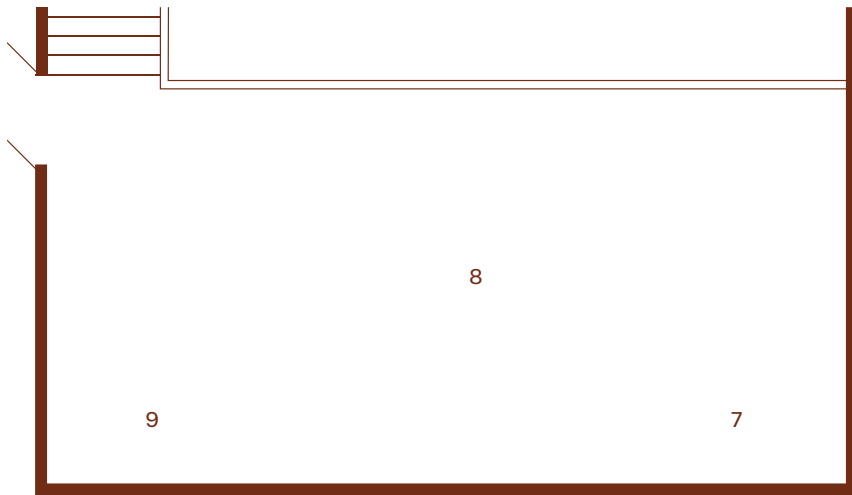
Once I had children of my own, I started to ask myself what I could pass on to them—growing up, how did I learn our cultural practices, narratives, and core values? At age 30, I traveled to Ruvoahan—the homelands of my tribe—to participate in ceremony. This is when I first observed the ritual of arranging palisiyan (betel nuts) and, perhaps more importantly, what the rahan (spiritual leader) says to the spirits in our tribal language. This personal experience had a profound impact on my understanding of our tribal traditions. I finally understood the sequence of the ceremonial practices, who we were worshipping and for whom we were singing.

Muvalis draws inspiration from the contemporary realities of my tribal community. It celebrates our cultural continuity and persistence despite the challenges we have faced and continue to face. We have survived because of our ability to adapt and transform while still retaining our core values, practices, and community.

Our ability to transform or shapeshift is core to who we are. It is reflected in the Pinuyumayan creation narrative that tells of five original ancestors who first emerged from the sea onto a land in darkness. Two ancestors made the sacrifice to ascend into the sky—to become the sun and moon. Immersed in the world of light, their three siblings gave birth to the stones from which the ancestors of the world’s different tribes hatched. One of these ancestors was the shapeshifter Valis who had a body that constantly changed and two faces—one that looked forwards and another that looked backwards. To move freely and make his way in the world, Valis erased his ‘backwards’ face. This decision is remembered in the Pinuyumayan tribal saying:

nu 'azi ta muvalis mu, 'azi karuwa za atrevung kana dalan i ngawayan.

Only transformation allows us to keep moving forward so that we can find the path to the future.



7. Malay Makakazuwan, *to be or not to be* 2012
Wool felt

8. Malay Makakazuwan, *Muvalis* 2024
Aluminum, chairs, hemp rope, clothing, boots, accessories

9. Malay Makakazuwan (Director), *Muvalis* 2024
single-channel digital video, sound, 9 min, 52 sec

Credits:

Artists: Malay Makakazuwan, Pan Panay, Lrimilrimi Kupangasane, Ansyang Makakazuwan, Tai Body Theatre, Formosa Aboriginal Singing and Dance Troupe

Choreographer: Pan Panay, Lrimilrimi Kupangasane

Screenplay: Huang Jin Cheng, Malay Makakazuwan

Performance: Pan Panay, Lrimilrimi Kupangasane, Ansyang Makakazuwan, Tai Body Theatre,

Formosa Aboriginal Singing and Dance Troupe

Photography: Jiang Yin Feng, Tommaso Muzzi

Editor: Jiang Yin Feng, Huang Jin Cheng, Malay Makakazuwan

Costume Designer: Malay Makakazuwan

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Malay Makakazuwan

Born in 1980, Malay lives and works in Hualien, Taiwan. Her parents were the first generation from her indigenous family to live in an urban area and were often away from the tribal community for work. As a result, Malay and her younger brother were raised by their mumu (grandparents) in the Pinaski tribal community in Taitung. Memories of her family and hometown have become a source of solace and inspiration in her creative endeavours.

Malay's works primarily consist of mixed media, with expressions often incorporating weaving techniques using found objects and natural materials. She draws inspiration from tribal stories and current events, exploring tribal culture and creation to give voice to the modern marginalisation of indigenous communities in Taiwan.



acknowledgements

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Artists' visit to Parihaka 23 February 2023.
Left to right, Jin-Cheng Huang, Hinemoana, Liyahu, Lafin Sawmah,
Akac Orat, Eva Lin, Malay Makakazuwan, Eleng Luluan.

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