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the Arts

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# ***CREATING UTOPIA***

Imagining and Making Futures  
Art, Architecture and Sustainability

Lorne Sculpture Biennale Inaugural Conference 2018

Editor | Lindy Joubert

# UNESCO Observatory

## Multi-Disciplinary eJournal in the Arts

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### ABOUT THE E-JOURNAL

The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal that promotes multidisciplinary research in the Arts and Education and arose out of a recognised need for knowledge sharing in the field. The publication of diverse arts and cultural experiences within a multi-disciplinary context informs the development of future initiatives in this expanding field. There are many instances where the arts work successfully in collaboration with formerly non-traditional partners such as the sciences and health care, and this peer-reviewed journal aims to publish examples of excellence. Valuable contributions from international researchers are providing evidence of the impact of the arts on individuals, groups and organisations across all sectors of society. The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is a clearing house of research which can be used to support advocacy processes; to improve practice; influence policy making, and benefit the integration of the arts in formal and non-formal educational systems across communities, regions and countries.

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### COVER IMAGE

Leon Walker

Photography at

The Lorne Sculpture

Biennale 2018

## EDITOR'S LETTER

The sixth Lorne Sculpture Biennale, March 2018, was a vibrant festival celebrating the best of Australian and international sculpture. The stunning Lorne foreshore became a picturesque pedestal for a curated landscape of sculptures, presented alongside an exciting program of events devoted to pressing global issues of nature and endangerment, under the distinguished curation and visionary direction of Lara Nicholls, curator at the NGA Canberra. The inaugural conference, *Creating Utopia Imagining and Making Futures: Art, Architecture and Sustainability* was held at Qdos Gallery, Lorne, as part of the Biennale's curatorial theme of 'Landfall, Nature + Humanity + Art'. Keynote and invited speakers – conservationists, visual artists, architects and academics – reflected on issues and processes of social and environmental degradation, transformation and regeneration. The presentations came from a diverse and thought-provoking range of viewpoints offering innovative, and well researched future directions to the world's mounting problems.

*Creating Utopia* examined the green revolution – greater than the industrial revolution and happening faster than the digital revolution. The speakers were introduced by the inimitable Design Professor, Chris Ryan, whose elegant and thoughtful comments to each presenter added a distinctive contribution. Mona Doctor-Pingel, an architect from Auroville, India delivered her keynote address, 'Journeying to Oneness through architecture in Auroville, South India', discussing the natural and built landscapes found in the unique, social utopia that is Auroville, with an emphasis on experimental building techniques using local materials and craft principles, inspired by biology. I would like to thank all the presenters for their valuable contributions and this issue, volume 6, issue 1 of the 'UNESCO journal, multi-disciplinary research in the arts' [www.unescojournal.com](http://www.unescojournal.com) is testament to their important research and life's work.

The conference was considered by all who attended to be a wonderful success. Inspired by the beautiful setting amidst the gum trees and singing birds surrounding the Qdos Gallery. Sincere thanks to all who attended, the excellent list of speakers, the team - Graeme Wilkie OAM for his overall, tireless support; Lara Nicholls the LSB curator for her helpful ideas and professionalism; Gillian Oliver for the superb food; Laurel Guymer, the behind the scenes angel of 'La Perouse' at Lorne who managed the bookings and accommodation and our diligent rapporteur, Jeremy Laing. The excellent Deakin intern student managed all computer glitches, problems and presentation hurdles. A very sincere thankyou to Evelyn Firstenberg who generously and professionally edited all the conference papers and most importantly, a very special thankyou to Seraphina Nicholls who has tirelessly and superbly designed and managed the collation and publication of this special issue. These people and others, the LSB committee and particularly Deakin University who gave generously for the LSB Education Program, enabled the 'Creating Utopia' conference to make a significant contribution to issues relating to climate change, environmental and global futures and the role of the arts and sustainable planning.

### Lindy Joubert

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# Creating Utopia: The creative spectrum of Taiwanese Indigenous artists

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## ABSTRACT

This paper is about the transformation of traditional ecological knowledge held by ancestors into a renewed collective consciousness among Indigenous communities of Taiwan and the creation of a shared idea of utopia. By 1516, the idea of utopia had become more conceivable with Thomas More's social-political writing. In the early twentieth century the European avant-garde believed that utopia could only be achieved through radical means. Dada artists for example believed that a destruction of art needed to occur for artistic rebirth to take place. In contemporary Taiwan, there exists another vision: the avant-garde Indigenous artists believe that they must break tradition in order to regenerate tradition. Through this regeneration, Indigenous artists have nourished their tribes, thus building a socio-cultural vision for a better future.

Through the art of Lahic Talif and later Eleng Luluan I will examine how this remarkable development has played out in Indigenous Taiwanese art practice. For example, Talif was one of the first artists to use driftwood to create sculptures without traditional tattoo. This driftwood served as a metaphor for the Taiwanese 'diaspora'. Five to six years later, the Lukai princess Eleng Luluan was living in a second-hand van that she drove from the southern tip of Taiwan to the east coast in order to join the driftwood creative endeavour. Both Luluan and Lahic started studios at Dulang, a little east-coast village, to nourish the younger generation, emphasising their inheritance from the spirit of their ancestors. Their legacy lives on through the PULIMA award named after the Pei-wan word Pulima, recognising the value of the skilled person in the tribe. Winners of the Pulima award have included Lahic's disciples — the artist In-Ming, and brothers Sabu and Iyo Gejo as well as Eleng's disciple and nephew Pasulane. With these artists, art and life have merged. This paper aims to explore this deeply meaningful development in Indigenous Taiwanese art practice as a means of imagining a vision of utopia.

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## KEY WORDS

Utopia | Sculptures | Mutualism | Ecological knowledge | Socio-cultural consciousness

By 1516, the idea of utopia had become more conceivable with Thomas More's sociopolitical writing. In the early 20th century, many European avant-gardists believed that they would not be able to achieve utopia without being radical. The Dadaists, for example, consciously destroyed art—a destruction through which they created an opportunity for artistic rebirth. In contemporary Taiwan, there exists another version: the avant-garde indigenous artists believe that they must break tradition and at the same time regenerate tradition. Through this regeneration, these indigenous artists nourish their tribes, thereby building a sociocultural vision for a better future.

In this paper, I introduce the wide spectrum of creativity of these Taiwanese indigenous arts, which represent the plurality of values in modern society. One vision is from the natural world we share; another is their own culture, which is derived from, and deeply respects, the natural world. Nature and culture would never, in their utopian ideal, be in conflict, because their culture is based on the spirit of nature. In terms of the production of culture, Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things: Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, points out the significance of psychoanalysis and ethnology in the representation of the world. Foucault focuses not on what the world is, but rather on how people decipher the world through their own experiences and categories; that is, why and how people create the signs of the world that construct sociocultural codes. These signs represent the order of things, which depends on identity and difference.<sup>1</sup>

Gilles Deleuze, in his book *Bergsonism*, also considers the idea of difference. Difference creates intervals between one subject and another because each subject owns different experiences of the same object. These differences between the subjects create vital forces.<sup>2</sup> Repetition is produced by event-making, with event being the everlasting process of change and the creativity of the eternal return. Deleuze also focuses on the concept of plural values and creativity, which transcend categorised experiences. In Taiwanese indigenous art, artists' works are never confined by binary logics, but rather by blurring the boundaries of art. When they identify with their ancestor's spirit, they understand the idea of event-making to create difference, and the myriad possible relationships between nature and culture.

Rahic Talif was born in 1962 to an Amis tribe on the east coast of Taiwan. He is a wiseman who always wants to go back to the ancestors' wisdom. Before the age of eighteen, he was a construction worker and a fisherman. He agonised over how indigenous people were suppressed and oppressed by the Chin dynasty, the Japanese government and, later, Taiwanese society, and he rebelled. He even considered inciting young people of the tribe to engage in a revolution. However, he always wanted to go back to his ancestors' wisdom. (Figure. 1) Years later, in the 1990s, his agony was transformed through his artistic creativity.

He began noticing the abandoned driftwood everywhere along the seashore of the island of Taiwan, and transformed it into vital driftwood sculptures.

Figure 1 (Left)  
Rahic Talif. The Eight  
Age-Based Hierarchy.  
2006.  
(photo by Rahic Talif)



Figure 2 (Right)  
Rahic Talif. The Cover of Land.  
2004.  
(photo by Rahic Talif)



Indigenous arts are traditionally associated with totem, which is composed of patterns. However, totem should be related to the spirit of what the indigenous people sense and feel, as well as their living tradition. As a pioneer of art and culture, Rahic was one of the first Taiwanese indigenous artists who created sculptures using driftwood without the traditional totem. (Fig. 2) Rahic's driftwood could be seen as a metaphor for "diaspora", the status of the indigenous Taiwanese people for the past hundred years. Rahic's art was inspired by the eight age-based hierarchy which organises the various ages of people in the tribe. He was inspired not by nostalgia but by a self-consciousness, or self-knowledge, of his ancestors. Rather than cutting the wood, Rahic just smoothed the texture of the wood. His intent was to both create art, and make furniture, which is for daily need rather than simply for desire. Rahic was also indirectly influenced by the style of Henry Moore's sculpture during his early career. Moore had himself studied indigenous art. However, Rahic chose to convey the organic and smooth style, which led Rahic to Moore as a reverse influence, demonstrating a great encounter between indigenous and modern art. (Fig. 3)



Figure 3  
Rahic Talif. The Space of Fifty  
Steps Series.  
2015.  
(photo by Ching-yeh Hsu)

After establishing his reputation, Rahic also began attempting to rebuild a better future for his tribe on the east coast of Taiwan. Although he went only as far as junior high in the Taiwanese school system, he understood the significance of education. He was concerned with the indigenous knowledge of young people, and so began to teach the younger generation.

Iming Mavaliw (Fig. 4), from the Puyuma ethnic group, is almost the same age as Rahic. He is Rahic's disciple, yet they also have an oath of brotherhood. Iming also learned concepts from the master Ju Ming, who was trained as a woodcarver and created the great Taichi Series pieces presenting void and fullness. It was from Ju Ming that Iming learned that, in Chinese traditional culture, when the shepherd plays a flute or the woodcutter sings a song, it is often regarded as a sound from the heavens. Another of Iming's teachers was the master Hagu, chief of one Puyuma tribe and a self-taught wood sculptor. He created a realistic but primitive style of modern indigenous art, and Iming learned techniques of woodcarving from him. Many years later, Iming innovated a new style that furthered his concerns about social and ecological issues. Among his works are *Taken Away* (2012) and *The 0.1 second of the Earth* (2016) (Fig. 5), as well as *Passing Through* (2017) (Fig. 6), that presented a gesture for consideration of environmental protection and Nature. In the statement for *Passing Through*, Iming noted that when human beings build a tunnel through a mountain for our own travel convenience, we destroy the balance of the environment. He also observed that human life is much shorter than "the 0.1 second of the Earth", yet human beings treat nature in ecological ways. Iming brings an attitude to art that interprets himself as a man in the universe—the idea of singularity. In every single decision, he creates an event for the art-making.

Figure 4  
Iming Mavaliw.  
(photo by Ching-yeh Hsu)

Figure 5  
Iming Mavaliw.  
*The 0.1 Second of the Earth*.  
2016.



In this way, his works depend not on form but on event-making. Like many indigenous artists, Iming always sips a little wine to open up his inner search, which has been suppressed and oppressed. Whenever he drinks, he dips his finger in and sprinkles drops of wine on the land, to represent his respect for the land and to memorialise his ancestors.



Figure 6  
Iming Mavaliw.  
Passing Through.  
2017.  
(photo by Ching-yeh Hsu)

Rahic's other disciples include the brothers Sapud Kacaw and Iyo Kacaw.(Fig. 7) According to Sapud, "The making of art is the best way to get to know oneself and his or her tribal root."<sup>3</sup> His piece of Connect, for example, inherited its ideas from the tribal age-based hierarchy. It also echoes the Amis word "nepololan," a word close to Sapud's heart, that means "connections," "thought," "discourse," "correspondence" and "unity," as well as "renovation."<sup>4</sup> He expressed the tribal experience that is the unity, as the collective desire according to the eight age-based hierarchy. Sapud was also interested in the concept of connection and unity within an ant colony. His work Ant Hive (Fig. 8.1 & 2) shows the workers' busy and dedicated collaboration in one way, and a mutualism in another. His skill as a construction worker was useful in smoothing the surface of the ants' hive. His younger brother Iyo Kacaw is more interested in hand-made and ready-made materials.

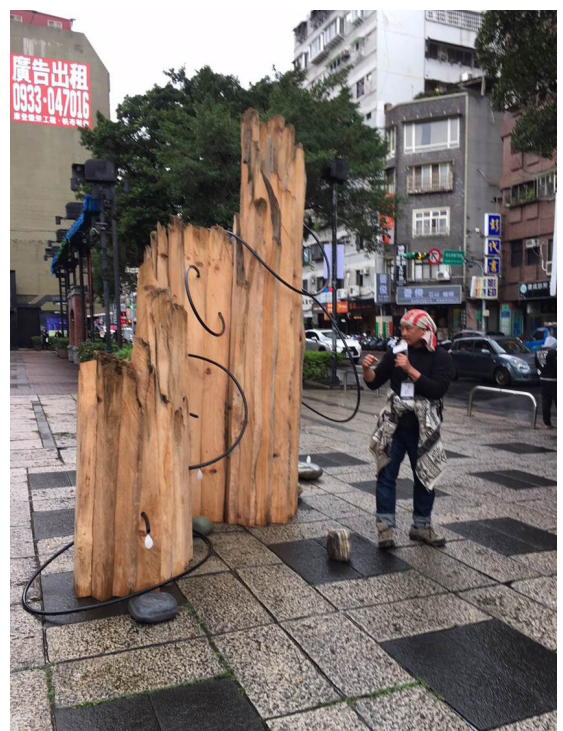


Figure 7  
Sapud Kacaw and Iyo Kacaw



He used strips of wood and pieces of abandoned blue-white plastic canvas to make a camping tent, called Enjoying the Sea Breeze under the Tree Shade. (Fig. 9) It is always important to him to incorporate his art into the environment: he installed this piece at the foot of a mountain and at the edge of the sea.



Figure 8.1 (Left)  
Sapud Kacaw  
2016

Figure 8.2 (Right)  
Ant Hive  
2016  
(photo by Ching-yeh Hsu)

With these artists, art and life have merged. Their art is deeply rooted in nature, as well as in their indigenous social culture. For example, they dive for fish almost daily, yet when they collect sea urchins, they take no more than what is necessary for their daily survival. The fishers keep secret the location of abundant lobsters' holes, passing the secret on only to their descendants. (In 2007, when I participated in a symposium on Iming's first art exhibition, I was surprised that he treated the spectators to sea urchins and lobsters fresh from the sea.)

Another example: their use of organic materials or abandoned junk—often deposited or displaced by typhoons—to make art, is an embodiment of their vision for mutualism with their environment. Iyo is very aware of many crises of the environmental cycle. He put a question to his spectators, “Where does the water come from?” This question may seem simple, but in fact he was attempting to expose and criticise the carelessness of the public. He went on to say, “Trees strive to provide air for the planet, producing fresh air with their leaves. They retain water and liquid that nourish all things on earth taking roots deep into the ground. Yet, the ruthless exploitation of human on nature has caused malfunction of the ecosystem, damaging the balance of nature. The increasing occurrence of natural disasters tells us that if the root and foundation are lost, life will not be able to continue.”<sup>5</sup>



Figure 9  
Iyo Kacaw  
Enjoying the Sea Breeze  
under the Tree Shade.  
2016  
(photo by Ching-yeh Hsu)

Around the year 2000, the Lukai princess Eleng Luluan was living in a second-hand van that she drove from the southern tip of Taiwan to the east coast in order to join the driftwood creative endeavour. (Fig.10) She began to merge traditional weaving techniques into her sculpture creations. Both Eleng and Rahic started studios at Dulang, a little east-coast village, to nourish the younger generation—emphasising their inheritance from the spirit of their ancestors. In this way, what their art circle created was not just techniques, but more importantly the atmosphere of reflexiveness and immanence. Eleng created a public sculpture near the cliff of Dulang called The Healing Innocence (Fig. 11), a large, swinging bamboo cradle where she invited everyone to lie down to enjoy the breeze and be comforted.



Figure 10  
Eleng Luluan  
(photo by Ing-Hwei Kao)



Figure 11  
Eleng Luluan. The Healing Innocence.  
2016  
(photo by Ena Chang)

Eleng often recalls her childhood playing in the forest as the happiest time in her life. Her works echo the mystery of children's imaginative nature. For example, she wove black ropes into pillar-like sculptures as a field of forest, reminiscent of Max Ernst's great Surrealist masterpieces that recalled his early memories in the forest. However, perhaps the early memory would best interpret her ethnological roots. Her work *The Last Sigh Before Gone* (Fig. 12) earned Eleng first prize in the Pulima Art Award in 2016. An award organised by the government for indigenous artists, the Pulima Award, was named after the Peiwan word Pulima, recognising the value of the skilled person who owns invaluable ability in the tribe. In 2012, the inaugural year of the Pulima, the first prize was awarded to Iming Mavaliw. Other winners of the Pulima Art Award have included a number of Rahic's disciples—the brothers Sapud and Iyo Kacaw—as well as Eleng's disciple and nephew, Pasulange Druluan.

Pasulange Druluan (Fig. 13) eagerly created mythic heroes by using organic driftwoods or grass, as in Thanks for Giving My Life (Fig. 14). For example, he created the hero Peleng from Rukai village legend. In fact, Peleng is the hero who makes the Luluan family become the chief family. The mythic hero always reflects the desire to get strength and power in his mind. According to Pasulunge: “Under the mask, there is untouchable spirit. My expression leads me to find everything about him. The strong physical power and the heart of being with the people of the tribe.”<sup>6</sup>



Figure 12  
Eleng Luluan  
The Last Sigh Before Gone.  
2016.  
(photo by Eleng Luluan)

One of Pasulange’s best friends, Lafin Sawmah, is also a distinguished artist. Lafin always presents the solidarity of human features that are the faces of indigenous people in his heart as in The Face of Earth (Fig. 15). Perhaps this solidarity of features is represented in his self-portrait, for which he collected driftwoods and cut them into different-sized cubes, then arranged them as a huge face upon the earth. The impression on the spectator is that he respectfully seeks the ancestor’s guidance when he installed this face looking up to the sky.

Tafong Kati ‘s ambition is to use visual expression to recount tribal legends and myths, because he believes that when the Amis in the Hu-Don Valley lost their language, they lost their cultures (Fig. 16). In his work, Tafong uses driftwoods, bamboo, and iron scraps from the junkyard in order to construct his shelter-like pieces step by step. His sculpture Pa-hanhannan, the Rest Place (Fig. 17) is a shelter-like piece in the shape of a sea horse. He installed this protecting shelter in front of the Little Horse Catholic Church in the Amis community of Xiaoma to memorialise the European-Taiwanese priest who dedicated his whole life to helping indigenous people.

Figure 13 (Left)  
Pasulange Druluan  
and Lafin Sawmah.  
2015.  
(photo from Lafin  
Sawmah)

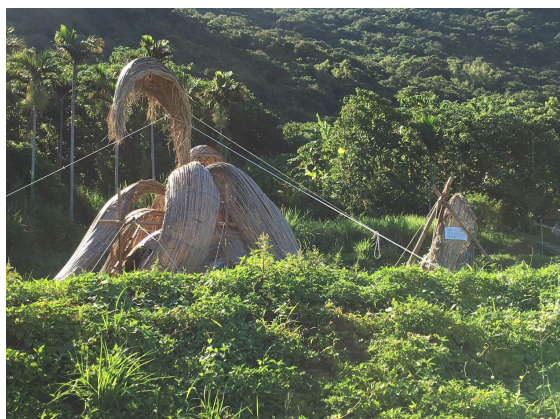


Figure 14 (Right)  
Pasulange Druluan.  
(photo from Lafin  
Sawmah)



In the spirit of Pulima (invaluable skill), the Paiwan brothers Sakuliu and Etan Pavavalung, who inherited excellent craftsmanship and ideas, used them to help reconstruct the tribal communities after the 2009 typhoon which damaged homes and brutally swept away—displaced—the tribes in the mountains and valleys. Their accomplishment was not just rebuilding, but also redesigning and re-envisioning the community of the tribe. Like Rahic Talif, Sakuliu Pavavalung struggled with his indigenous identity, although he did so earlier. In the 1980s, he participated in “Return Our Names,”<sup>7</sup> the social movement for indigenous people, and went on to encourage the younger generation to return to their home towns to know their own roots. He led villagers in the tradition of helping each other build traditional houses. In his early years, he rode a motorcycle door to door to repair electricity and plumbing in his community. His sculptures always deal with the lives of workers, such as the life of a construction worker. Sakuliu presented the show *Boundary Narratives: A Memory of Light* by Sakuliu in 2015, and won the National Prize of Literature and Arts in Taiwan in 2018. (Fig. 18)

Figure 15 (Left)  
Lafin Sawmah  
*The Face of Earth*  
2016  
(photo from Lafin Sawmah)



Figure 17 (Right)  
Tafong Kati  
*Pahanhannan, the Rest Place.*  
2016  
(photo by Ching-yeh Hsu)



Gieh-Wen Lin (Labay) is an emerging female artist. She was born to a Seediq father and a Taiwanese mother. She says, “After my thirtieth birthday, I strongly realised that I am a woman... both as part of a collective identity and as an individual.”<sup>8</sup>Gieh-Wen always called herself a Truku. Both Seediq and Truku are branches of Atayal. Perhaps she is attempting to mingle her ethnic identities as a gesture that the critical theories of identity and difference could be like the blurring of boundaries in art.

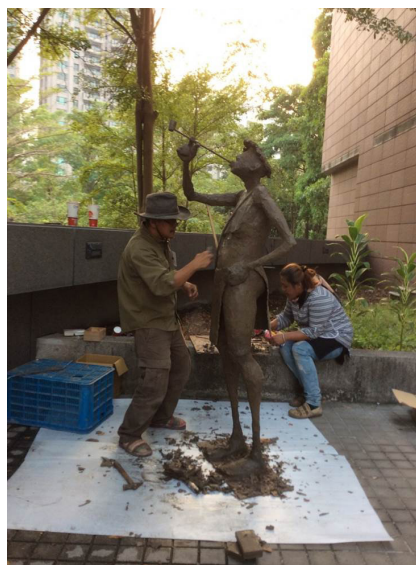


Figure 16 (Left)  
Tafong Kati  
2016  
(photo by Ching-yeh Hsu)

Figure 18 (Right)  
Sakuliu Pavavalung  
Sakuliu was working on his sculpture for *Boundary Narratives: A Memory of Light* 2015.  
(photo by Ching-yeh Hsu)

She first studied metalworking and architecture in Spain. She is exceptional at orchestrating various fields into an art work. For example, she merged traditional weaving found objects and readymade objects as soft sculpture into an architectural installation, *Nomadic Soul*. (Fig. 19) According to Gieh-Wen's artist statement: "... I use found objects and fabrics to a great extent. I sculpt with crochet hooks and sweaters, drawing on two types of weaving techniques from the Seediq craft tradition... I like to represent time through powerful visualisation because I believe the transformation of time into artworks is one of the most intuitive abilities of the human being."<sup>9</sup> She contemplates the paradoxes between collective and individual identities, regarding them as the ruptures of folds to be connected through art.



Figure 19  
Lin, Gieh-Wen  
*Nomadic Soul*  
2016  
(photo by Ching-yeh Hsu)

The spectrum of creativity among these indigenous Taiwanese artists — from the well-recognised artist Sakuliu Pavavalung, to mentor-artists like Rahic Talif and Eleng Luluan, to an emerging artist such as Gieh-Wen Lin — is energetic and expansive. Their identities—as avant-garde artists and as members of their tribal communities — make them connect with each other, and nourish each other, when their communities suffer from natural disasters. As in the rites of the Harvest Festival, they sing and dance together to worship the gods and the ancestors; they face the future, and acknowledge the past, hand in hand. Their belief in breaking with tradition, and regenerating tradition through the ecological knowledge of their ancestors, has been transformed into a renewed collective consciousness, and a shared idea of utopia.

## NOTES

1 Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. (New York: Vantage Book, 1973), 46, 52-53.

2 Deleuze, Gilles. trans. Tomlinson, Hugh and Habberjam, Barbara. *Bergsonism*. (New York: Zone Book, 2011), 93.

3The 2nd Pulima Art Award. *Exhibition Catalogue*. (Taipei: Taipei Culture Foundation/ MOCA, 2014), 80.

4 Talif, Rahic. *The Continuity of the Dream, 2003-2007*. (Hwaliang: The Studio of Rahic Talif, 2008), 37.

5The 2nd Pulima Art Award. *Exhibition Catalogue*. Op.cit, 88.

6 Ibid., 136.

7 *Boundary Narratives: A Memory of Light by Sakuliu*. *Exhibition Catalogue*. (Kaohsiung: Kaohsiung Museum of Art, 2016), 127

8 The 2nd Pulima Art Award. *Exhibition Catalogue*. Op.cit., 60.

9 Ibid., 61

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