Cultural Assets & Vernacular Materials:

exploring sustainability challenges in the creative economy (SE Asia) through creative practice

IMPACT CASE STUDY

2023

Funded by

BRITISH COUNCIL

INNOVATION SCHOOL THE GLASGOW SCHOOL OF ART

Borneo Laboratory

Acknowledgements

The C&VM team would like to express their deepest gratitude and appreciation to each of the practitioners, artisans and communities who participated and in, and supported, the programme.

Thank you to Yasmin and Asnida Iman from the Borneo Cultures Museum and Think & Tink for their generous support and hospitality.

Thank you to Dato Hii Chang Kee (Permanent Secretary of Sarawak Tourism Department - Arts and Cultures) for opening the Serumpun Exhibtion.

Thank you AnnMarie Chandra at The Star and Lorena Binisol at the Daily Express for featuring and support the programme.

The team would like to thank The Borneo Laboratory - in particular Kinai Wong, Jason Lim, Abigail Langgi, Valerie Juliet and Reening Lau; and The Glasgow School of Art.

C&VM has been funded by The British Council and the International Collaboration Award, 2022. In particular the team would like to thank Florence Lambert and Erica Choong for their invaluable support and guidance.

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Introduction
Overview of C&VM

The aim of C&VM was to explore the role cultural assets play in enhancing the creative economy in Borneo, SE Asia. Across this context, a range of complex sustainability challenges have created barriers for craft practitioners and artisans to actively participate within the creative economy. C&VM supported 11 projects with artisans, practitioners and grassroot initiatives from across Sarawak, Sabah and Kalimantan. Each project responded to a sustainability challenge facing the craft sector through exploring and experimenting with new vernacular materials, approaches to documentation and sharing, and prototyping new ways to engage with younger generations.

Each project process was documented in the creation of a project impact film, which sits alongside a diverse portfolio of project outcomes. The C&VM programme culminated with a public exhibition at the Borneo Cultures Museum (Dec 2022): "Serumpun: crafts across borders". Beyond this, the exhibition was hosted at Think and Tink in Kuching and travelled to the GoDown Arts Centre in Kuala Lumpur. C&VM has also been awarded a grant extension to trace and capture stories of the longer-term impact of the programme.

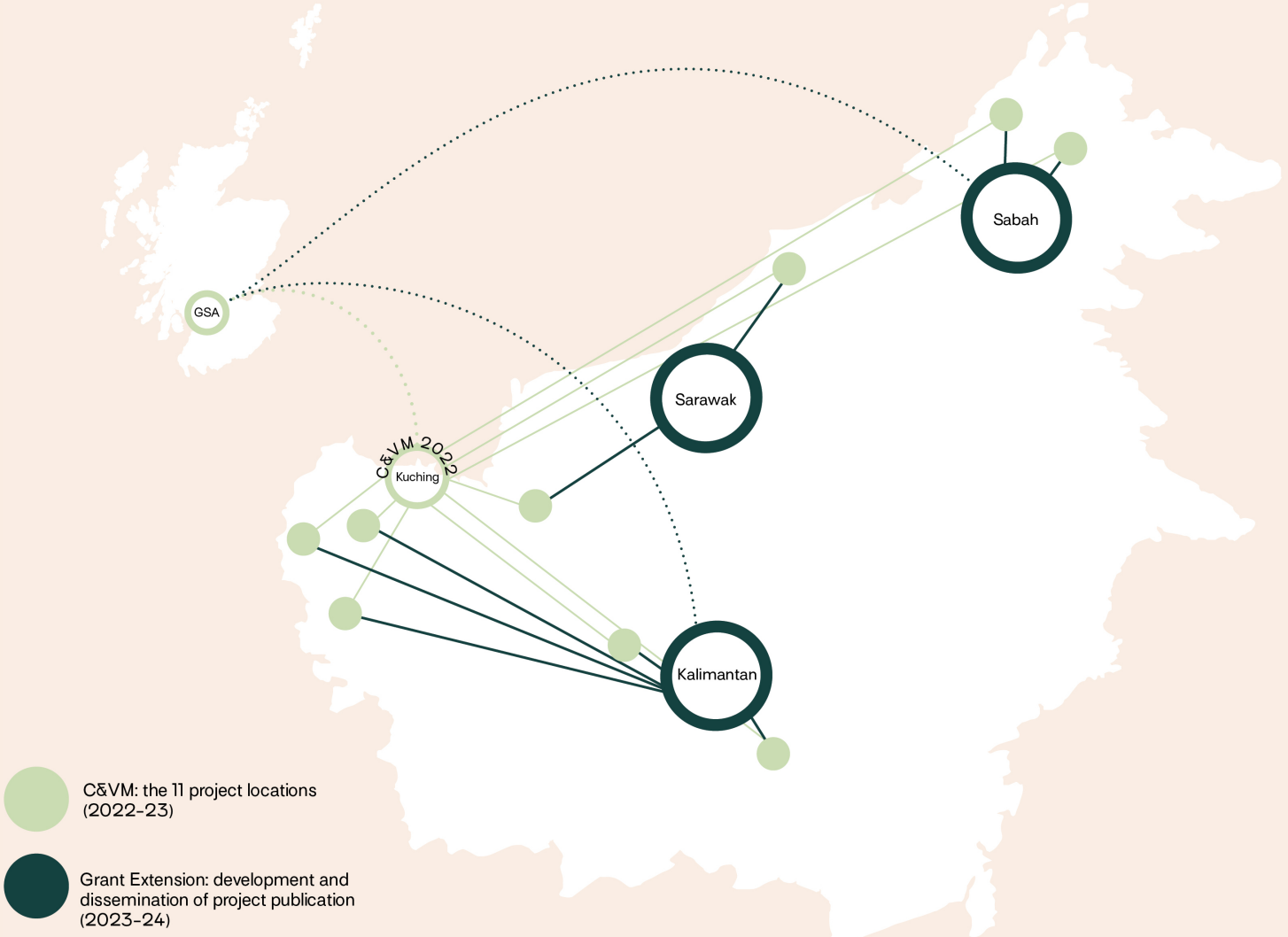
"...it was important for us to take a step back from our day-to-day and reflect on the workings of the practitioners whom we are working with. The programme enabled us to have these important conversations with a deeper thinking with our practitioners. That way, as a community-led company, we will hopefully be better facilitators and ensuring the impact will continuously be positive for both the aspect of livelihood generation as well as our cultural continuity."

Juvita T Wan

International Collaboration

The C&VM programme piloted a distributed model of international collaboration, which centred on a hub and spoke model and built on the mutually beneficial partnership between the Borneo Laboratory and The Glasgow School of Art (GSA).

This international collaboration assembled a range of complementary expertise, practices, networks and contextually-located knowledges. The C&VM programme built a network that spanned territories across Malaysia and Indonesia; collaborating with communities in the regions of Sarawak (Kuching, Betong, Miri and Long Moh), Kalimantan (Singkawang, Sambas, Palangkaraya and Jagoi) and Sabah (Kota Kinabalu, Keningau and Kampung Bau Lunguyan).



The Borneo Laboratory and The Glasgow School of Art

Wendy Teo, Creative Director of the Borneo Laboratory based in Kuching led on expanding the SE Asia network of practitioners and stakeholders as well as "on the ground" communication, curation and project and progress management. PhD-candidate Gamia Dewanggamanik has a deep subjective knowledge of the context and led on the recruitment and engagement with communities across the West Kalimantan region. Prof Lynn-Sayers McHattie and Dr Marianne McAra from GSA have in-depth experience designing and delivering distributed creative engagement, and each have experience working in the SE Asia context.

The C&VM team was supported by Florence Lambert and Erica Choong from British Council Malaysia who provided invaluable guidance, which was key to navigating the complexities surrounding programme delivery. In particular, this included support with constructing the participation agreement and briefing documents for the practitioners (such as advising on managing the payment schedule, handling copyright and intellectual property).

Wendy Teo
Director
Boreno Laboratory

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Sustainability Challenges

Over the last 12 months, C&VM has been exploring place-based sustainability challenges that are impacting the creative economy across Borneo. Led by a network of craft artisans, practitioners and community-based initiatives from across the regions of Sarawak, Sabah and Kalimantan, 11 creative projects were undertaken that experimented with new materials, ways of collaborating and community engagement, and documenting work. The projects reflect the changing landscapes in Borneo caused by climate change, coupled with the impact of deforestation and land clearances, which has led to a scarcity of the natural raw materials used in craft practices. In cases, this is forcing craft practitioners and artisans to adapt ways of making and explore the use of alternative materials that remain in harmony with nature. Against this backdrop, large-scale, low-cost mass production and imports are impacting artisanal trade; whereby ancestral wisdom and hand practices are becoming increasingly precarious and are at risk of being lost. In response to this competition, craft practitioners and artisans are innovating ways of making, exploring new materials to create unique products and adapting how they promote and sell their work. However, opportunities to enter craft markets are not always equal, particularly for women and young people. Factors such as access to education, training and financial support can impact the choices and livelihoods of craft practitioners and artisans. Furthermore, supporting and motivating young people to engage with and preserve craft practices can be challenging. This is because knowledges and skills are often not seen to be as relevant now than they were in the past. There is the need to explore new ways for older generations to educate and inspire young people to value and possibly take up craft-based careers.

The C&VM projects reflect the need to deeply consider plurality within the debates of inclusive innovation in an increasingly global-oriented development agenda, contributing to corresponding UN Sustainable Development Goals:

Goal 8: inclusive growth

Goal 10: reducing inequalities

Goal 11: sustainable communities

Project Scoping and Planning

Prior to commencing their projects, the C&VM network came together for a two-day workshop hosted at Think and Tink in Kuching. This workshop provided an opportunity for the group to meet and share experiences and insights surrounding key sustainability challenges facing their respective craft practices and contexts. This included, for example, working with new materials, ways of teaching and collaborating, and sharing work with new audiences. Creative activities facilitated by the C&VM team centred on scoping and mapping out project ideas and plans in the generation of project proposals, which were shared for peer review. Each project centred on one or more of the core themes:

- **changing landscapes and materials scarcity**
- **artisanal trade**
- **innovation**
- **documentation**
- **youth engagement**

The C&VM Projects

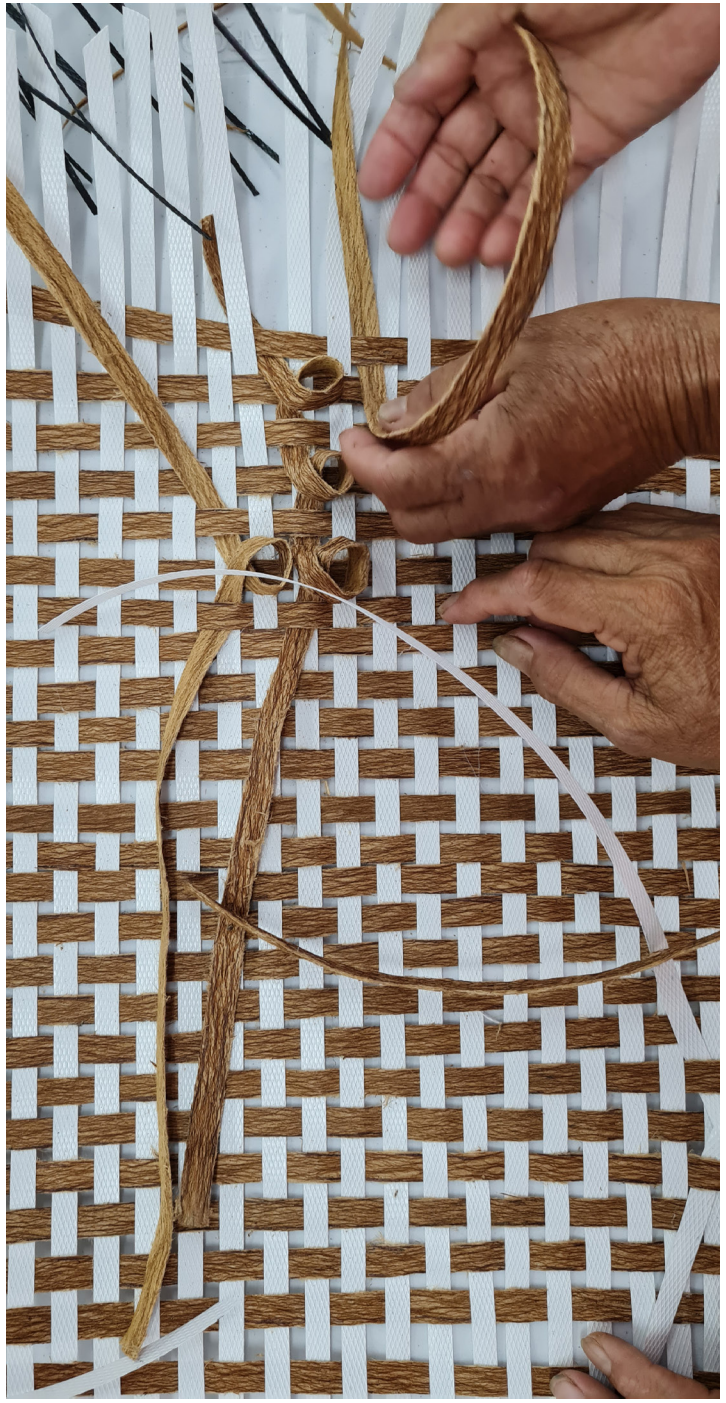
Approaches to collaboration in C&VM were underpinned by a commitment to practicing respectful, reciprocal, and relational co-creation with communities premised on asset valuing, mutual learning, community empowerment, and building sustainable capacity. Each of the 11 projects undertaken by the C&VM network led to a wider reach of over 350 community members of different generations across Sarawak, Sabah and Kalimantan.

To support the C&VM cohort, members of the C&VM team undertook a 'research road-trip' to visit the different communities to develop a deeper experiential understanding of the practices and projects. To capture this, an Impact Film was created by Wendy Teo's team from The Borneo Laboratory.

"Although there is a growing number of interest in seeing crafts as a commodity, at its current model it is not sustainable. Documentation in terms of process - of making crafts from raw material to finish product to ensure that the knowledge is recorded and made apparent to others... I realise that we cannot hope for our younger generation to keep making crafts that were traditionally made for functional purposes in a time when the way of life was very different. When seen as a commodity, we change the dynamics of the relationship of the maker to the crafts... Business and entrepreneurs must make it clear when they are doing business with the craft communities and be cautious about using words such as "helping" and "empowering" as it is condescending to the people they are working with... The makers need to understand how unique and precious their skills are so as not to be exploited."

Jennifer P Jinggi

The Impact Film



The Impact Film

SENTRA INDUSTRI KECIL BIDAI
Hasta Karya
Selamat Datang
Rombongan Tim Penilaian IKM
One Village One Product (OVOP)
Tahun 2022
di Sentra Industri Kecil dan Menengah Hasta Karya
kecamatan Jagoi Babang - Kabupaten Bengkayang

Salomon Gau

Salomon Gau, a craft artisan and musician based in Sarawak. Salomon focuses his work on becoming a cultural guardian for the Kenyah people. In his C&VM project, Salomon explored alternative timbers (to the conventional use of Apo'and Baa'tilang) sourced around the city of Miri to enable the making of the Jatung Utang (wooden xylophone). The timber best used for the wooden xylophone is mostly found in the interior or hilly land in the upper Baram. Conventionally, harvesting the timber follows certain moon phases, which affects a reduced glucose level in the wood.

Emily Jeneble

Emily Jeneble, a salingkawang weaver bamboo weaver from Sabah, documented her practice and life as a craft maker in the creation of an autobiographical entitled Sejarah Kraf Anyaman Buluh Emily Jeneble (Emily Jeneble's History of Plaited Bamboo).

"My grandmother is a traditional crafts person, who makes all kinds of products to help our community. These items are practical necessities such as the sirung, a traditional cap among Dusun tribes people, which helps people working in the rice fields to shield from the sun."

Jennifer. P Linggi

Jennifer. P Linggi, an architect from Sabah, and is passionate preserving craft knowledges for future generations by producing reference material of Borneo's traditional culture. In her C&VM project, Jennifer focused on conserving Murut and Dusun motifs and patterns used in bamboo craft making through digital documentation and the incorporation of the motifs into new products made from modern materials.

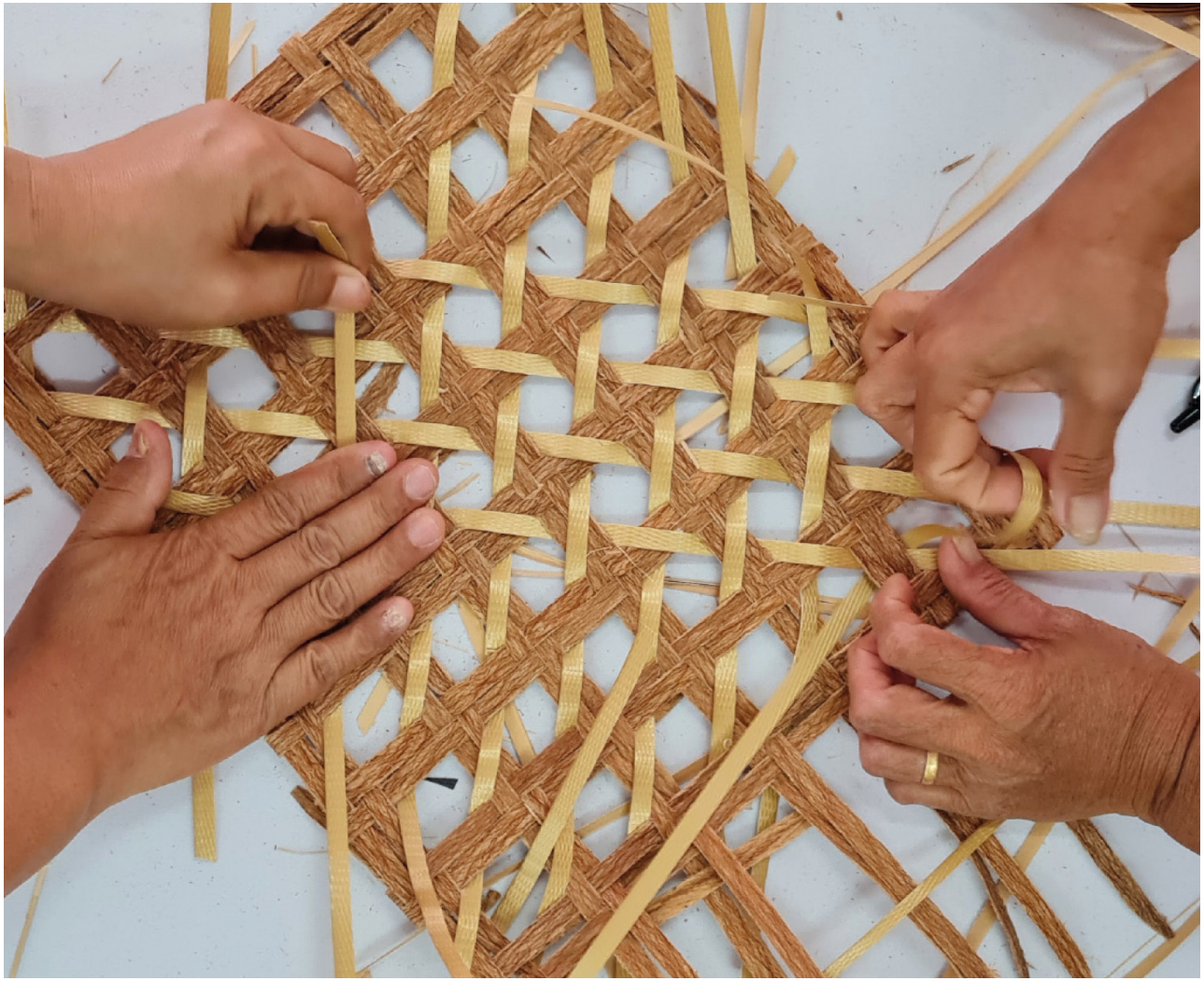
"In my project, I compiled traditional motifs and patterns used by the Murut and Dusun ethnic groups in Sabah with the aim of the compilation to be a reference guide for the weavers as well as designers."

The Sepatokimin Initiative

The Sepatokimin Initiative is a community-driven initiative that seeks to empower communities across Indonesia. The group undertook 2 projects: the first developed a digital archive to document the extensive history and cultural value of Singkawang songket; and the second developed new ways to archive vernacular cultural assets with a focus on rattan used by the Bidayuh Jagoi community.

"The open-ended C&VM objective allowed us to capture stories and build narrative from the communities and strengthen the story-telling experiences with current technologies like 3D scanning, augmented reality, and audio-visual content, which are more engaging to a broader audience."

Rosemarie Wong



Rosemarie Wong, a designer and entrepreneur based in Sarawak, is passionate about connecting with local artisans to raise awareness and inspire change in the preservation of crafts and heritage. In her C&VM project, in collaboration with Ar. Ivy Jong, Johnson Tan and the rural crafts women of Betong, she explored the use of alternative plant matter as a viable craft material, creating the 3-bark table lamp. Bark cloth has typically been regarded as a humble material. Through this collaborative exploration and the creation of a new collection, Rosemarie is keen to invigorate its use in contemporary craft as a desirable and viable resource for the future.

Handep

Handep is a social enterprise in Indonesia that works with artisans and smallholders to create an alternative sustainable village economy that aligns with ancestral wisdom and local resources. Angela Mayrina and the Handep team prototyped a competition model to foreground and renew interest in rattan weaving preservation and empowering women weavers in Central Kalimantan.

“We are reconnecting the people closest to us, to not only the lands and forest around them but to their long-lived tradition and values, in respect of nature and to preserve the world they live in, as it should be.”

Rasmah Rumambai

Rasmah Rumambai, based in Keningau, Sabah, is an accomplished bead artisan, a skill she learnt from her mother. Her unique beads are renowned for their intricate patterns (such as takin, tinantis and patod baru) that combine traditional motifs with contemporary details. Her C&VM project explored and prototyped new forms of community engagement to transfer the skill of beadcraft of the Murut Boakan. Through C&VM, Rasmah began teaching her skills to others through organising the first bead workshop for the Murut Boakan community in her kampung (village).

Sanggar Sarantangan

Sanggar Sarantangan are a creative community from Habang, Sagatani Village in Singkawang, West Kalimantan. Their project centred on youth engagement workshops exploring the cultural context of Jelai and natural materials (such as the jelai plant) to create new products.

“In this program, one of the main projects is about engaging the younger generation in managing natural resources in the village, in which a series of workshops were conducted at a local high school. Conducting workshops was also a new experience… now we get to learn how to teach others and share our knowledge and skills.”

Manai Jagoi – bidai

Ibu Roslinda is a Bidai Master Weaver based in Jagoi, Kalimantan, who along with Koperasi Hasta Karya, Deddi, Rino and Roy, facilitated a bidai competition in their C&VM project. The aim of the competition was to explore craft identity through reviving traditional patterns and developing new patterns inspired by Dayak Bidayuh narratives and the Jagoi natural landscape. As the domestic market has begun to grow, it is more important than ever now to revitalise bidai identity that deeply represents place. Whilst rattan-based craft in Jagoi Babang (in particular bidai) remains a promising commodity with a consistent demand from the Malaysian market; conversely across Indonesia it remains fairly unknown.

Manai Jagoi – rattan

The Manai Jagoi team brought together twenty rattan weavers from Kindau Village to explore alternative locally accessible materials to complement their staple material (rattan), which has become increasingly at risk to being lost to deforestation and land clearances.

"Many people are not aware about the diversities of rattan, people think of rattan very generally... In fact, each rattan has its own characteristics and serves different purposes. Not only can this educate us and the market, we think the outcome of this collaboration will be especially valuable for the future generation here."

The Tuyang Initiative

The Tuyang Initiative is a social enterprise based in Miri, Sarawak that is committed to ensuring continued cultural awareness of Borneo's indigenous people and cultural heritage. The group focused on ideas around 'slow craft', inspired by the intent of moving traditional cultural practitioners away from the growing push towards mass production methods.

"We aim to better educate or shift the narrative to help various stakeholders understand the differing values of craft done by various practitioners - and all versions of it are to be appreciated due to the craftsmanship, skills and creativity put in."

Programme Exhibition
Serumpun: crafts across borders

The 11 C&VM projects were exhibited in December 2022 at a public-facing exhibition: 'Serumpun: crafts across borders', which was hosted at the Borneo Cultures Museum (the second largest museum in South East Asia) and thereafter at Think and Tink in Kuching and at the Gotown Arts centre in Kuala Lumpur. The title of the exhibition **"Serumpun" means a bundle of grass that shares the same root**. In this project, serumpun helps us convey how knowledges, wisdom and material cultures across the borders of Kalimantan, Sarawak and Sabah connect together as part of a wider ecosystem. What connects each of the featured works were inspiring stories of innovation, creativity and education, which invited audiences to reflect both inwards on the deep wisdom and knowledges that live in the hands of craft practitioners and artisans, and forward towards sustainable futures. Significantly, this community-based exhibition was the first of its kind hosted at the museum, which was opened by the Sarawak Permanent Secretary. Furthermore, alongside the exhibition the C&VM cohort facilitated a programme of live demonstrations and workshops, which for many of them was their first time sharing their work outside of their local communities. The exhibition attracted more than 2500 in-person visitors and reached digital audiences through GSA, British Council and The Borneo Laboratory's combined social media following in excess of 100,000.

"We are so proud to have this whole experience, especially to be able to exhibit at the Borneo Cultures Museum. The highlight must be the interaction, conversation and the meaningful discussion with other practitioners as well as the organisers. I think that must be our first time participating in an exhibition where we're actually encouraged to have deep discussion about the social and environmental issues related to the craft."

Jebat, Pak Sujianto and Ania

Programme Exhibition
Serumpun: crafts across borders

Programme Exhibition
Serumpun: crafts across borders

Programme Exhibition
Serumpun: crafts across borders

EXIT ONLY
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BRITISH COUNCIL
SERUMPUN

Project Impact

Evidence demonstrates how the C&VM programme has catalysed significant community-based impact in tandem to fostering new collaborations (the establishment of new partnerships both within the C&VM network and beyond) and creating opportunities for follow-on activity, which are seeding pathways to longer-term, scaled impact.

"We are so proud [we] can participate in such a programme like that and exhibit at a really prestigious museum... When most people from our village go to Kuching to work as migrant labourers, even illegally, we've done something more meaningful and hopefully we can make our community proud. So this has been quite an achievement for our community."

Sanggar Sarantangan

Community-based Impact	Impact Story & Evidence
Rasmah Rumambai, Keningau, Malaysia. Beadwork: showcasing, sharing and safeguarding for indigenous craft practices and skills for wider community benefit.	After the success of Rasmah Rumambai's C&VM project in the village of Keningau, she has since garnered the support of the Murut Boakan Association as well as the Village Chief and has been offered (and since secured) a plot of land on the community grounds of Kampung Delayan Lama, Sook, to set up a galley to promote and deliver beadwork education and related crafts for the community.
Emily Jeneble, Keningau, Malaysia. Rattan and Bamboo Weaving: developed a community-based entrepreneurial model that supports female artisans and education for young people.	Emily's work has been recognised by the World Craft Council and endorsed with an Award of Excellence. Emily was awarded a Ministry Grant to expand her workshop and galley in Keningau, Sabah.
Jagoi Babang, Kalimantan, Indonesia. Supporting the Rattan Community: innovation through exploring the relations between rattan, growing, conservation and preservation.	Product innovation rooted in their Dayak Bidayuh tradition of 'bidai' mat making and rattan basket weaving. Ania Jembelia is teaching artisanal skill in the local school.
Handep and Desa Maha Dare (The Great Weaver Village), Kalimantan, Indonesia. Engaging the Next Generation of Dayak Weavers: alternative and sustainable village economies that align Dayak traditions, ancestral wisdom and local resources.	Innovating and advancing traditional crafts strengthen public appreciation through encouraging intergenerational collaboration and knowledge transfer.
Sepatokimin Initiative, Jagoi. Rattan Archiving: preserving craft knowledges and materials for future generations.	Since participating in the C&VM programme, the Sepatokimin Initiative have refined and further developed their printed and digital publication on rattan archiving in Jagoi and are now on their second print-run due to popularity. Sepatokimin are now planning to further develop and scale up their archival work and are currently applying for further funding and grants.

Project Impact

“C&VM programme also brought craft practitioners and initiatives together; it gave us the opportunity to also observe how each participant responded to the craft sustainability topics based on the diverse backgrounds and resources... We learned so many things from the projects, but the most meaningful one from our reflection about the craft documentation is no matter how good the cultural documentation project is presented, it loses its meaning when the locals are not actively engaged in the process... We think that youth engagement is a crucial thing to embed in our documentation scheme because it facilitates intergenerational knowledge sharing and gives them the opportunity to learn about their own ancestral wisdoms... We are now working on our next craft documentation publication in other region in Indonesia, adapting the scheme we developed on our C&VM projects. We also hope we can continue the Jagoi rattan documentation project in 2023.”

Sepatokimin Initiative

Community-based Impact

Sanggar Sarantangan, Sagatani, Indonesia. Jelai: engaging young people to support intergenerational knowledge transfer.

Manai Jagoi, Kindau, Indonesia. Exploring vernacular materials to support innovation in harmony with nature.

Contributing to new public engagement events

Impact Story & Evidence

Through this C&VM project, local young people were supported to conducted their own workshops to learn together and better understand the cultural context of jelai; exploring the potential of the material to become creative products and alternative economic sources. This year, Sanggar Sarantangan have been invited to expand their craft workshops for high school students in their village in Sagatani, South Singkawang.

With the growing concern of the scarcity of the raw material, the Manai Jagoi team brought together twenty rattan weavers from Kindau village to explore locally accessible materials to complement their staple material (rattan) through facilitating a competition. Their C&VM project showcases the artisans’ ability to utilise various types of rattan and other alternative natural materials. Since their C&VM project, the Manai Jagoi team are planning to set up a gallery in the village inspired by the Serumpun exhibition.

Between April and May 2023, Wendy Teo curated an multidisciplinary exhibition event and workshop series: “Tides that Bind: on senses”, hosted at Think and Tink. As described by Wendy, “we gather in Kuching [to] synchronize sentiments through workshops, film screenings, exhibitions, and sharing sessions. Our years of research, conducted with partners throughout Southeast Asia, inform this event. From April 28th to May 7th, we take a break from our capitalistic routine to explore the senses, ancestral wisdom, and narratives that surround us.”

Project Impact

"In relation to the increasing scarcity of rattan due to the oil palm plantation, initially we wanted to do something related to the preservation and conservation... We are so thankful to be connected with another group (Sepatokimin) to creatively approach this matter.... it was a revelation... it is inspiring to see the work they did and how they thought of a new way to learn about our cultural assets and natural surroundings, particularly highlighting local rattan diversities...Not only can this educate us and the market, we think the outcome of this collaboration will be especially valuable for the future generation here."

Jebat, Pak Sujianto and Ania, Manai Jagoi

New Collaborations	Impact Story & Evidence
The Borneo Laboratory has established new international partnerships with HE's in Germany.	In March 2023, The Borneo Laboratory will be collaborating with the University of Technology Sarawak, the University of Applied Sciences Berlin, and the Humboldt-University zu Berlin in the design and delivery of 2-week educational programme in Kuching, exploring the digitization of indigenous knowledge for extended reality and culture. This programme will be supported by the Borneo Cultures Museum and has received sponsorship from the Deutschen Akademischen Austauschdienstes (DAAD).
Residency programme	In February 2023 Zulfikli Lee, a contemporary artist (previously listed in Saatchi Gallery and Taksu), commenced a 2-month residency with The Borneo Laboratory, which is co-supported by the Cult Gallery in Kuala Lumpur. Inspired by the Serumpun exhibition, Zul Lee's residency seeks to develop further collaborations with the Jagoi Rattan Community, with the aim to increase the maker crafts exposure in the creative economy.
Dissemination in Kuala Lumpur	In February 2023, The Borneo Laboratory were invited to showcase the works and a preview of the C&VM Impact Film at the Borneo Heart Event at the Godown Arts Centre in Kuala Lumpur. This event was hosted by Borneo Artist Yee I-Lann, where Wendy Teo was joined by Jennifer P. Linggi to present the work. This event was documented by AnnMarie Chandra into an article to be included in the publication and news media.
Borneo and UK Audiences: local to global stories of innovation, development and impact	The C&VM team are exploring opportunities to disseminate the project to UK audiences as a way to share local and global stories and insights of sustainable development and innovation from their respective creative economies; thus prototyping the 'crafts across borders' concept internationally.

Tracing longer-term impact and legacy-building

The C&VM team have been successfully awarded with a grant extension, which will support the development of the newly established cross-border 'community of practice' fostered during C&VM in Borneo. This will centre on leveraging the project assets including the impact film, craft artefacts, tools and documentation to trace, evaluate and evidence the impact from the wider C&VM programme. The overarching aim is to capture the practitioners' stories as a 'living legacy' through the creation of a co-authored publication with the objective to capture and share the 'difference made' in meaningful and accessible ways with artisanal communities and inspire deliberation, collaboration and open dialogue as a platform to advance sustainable growth and innovation Borneo.

Building on the momentum of the 'Serumpun: crafts across borders' exhibition, the grant extension will support and empower the craft practitioners and artisans to embed the outputs of their C&VM projects within their respective place-based communities so to engage with existing and new audiences, and importantly with the next generation of young practitioners and artisans as emerging and future custodians of community-based cultural assets.

"It was such a valuable experience to be able to exchange stories, listening to their experience mobilising their craft and their community as well as learning about their challenges. It feels like we really bonded and formed new friendships."

Sanggar Sarantangan

Appendix

Serumpun Exhibition Brochure
Exhibition Panels

serumpun

crafts across borders

Kalimantan | Sabah | Sarawak
11 Communities & Craft Practitioners

Project Logo

Co-organised by

Supported by

Venues

events

5 exploration themes

THEME 01 | CHANGING LANDSCAPES	10 9
THEME 02 | ARTISANAL TRADE	8 7
THEME 03 | DOCUMENTATION	4 3 2
THEME 04 | INNOVATIONS	11 12
THEME 05 | YOUTH EDUCATION	5 6

participating practitioners

10 Salomon Gau (Miri/Long Moh, Sarawak, Malaysia)

9 Manai Jagoi - Rattan (Jagoi, Kalimantan, Indonesia)

8 Tuyang Initiatives (Miri, Sarawak, Malaysia)

7 Manai Jagoi - Bidai (Jagoi, Kalimantan, Indonesia)

4 Sepatokimin (Sambas/Singkawang/Jagoi, Kalimantan, Indonesia)

3 Emily Jeneble (Keningau, Sabah, Malaysia)

2 Jennifer P. Linggi (Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia)

11 HANDEP (Palangkaraya, Kalimantan, Indonesia)

12 The Ranee (Kuching/Betong, Sarawak, Malaysia)

5 Rasmah Rumambai (Keningau, Sabah, Malaysia)

6 Sanggar Sarantangan (Singkawang, Kalimantan, Indonesia)

1 Serumpun Collective (Malaysia/Indonesia/Singapore/UK)

Borneo Cultures Museum Site

Main Exhibition Venue | 1st Floor Art & Crafts Gallery

Event List

Opening Ceremony
3rd of Dec,10:00am - 12:00pm | Ground Floor Function Room

Plaited Bamboo Keychain Workshop by Emily Jeneble
3rd of Dec,13:00pm - 16:00pm | 1st Floor Art & Crafts Gallery room (A)

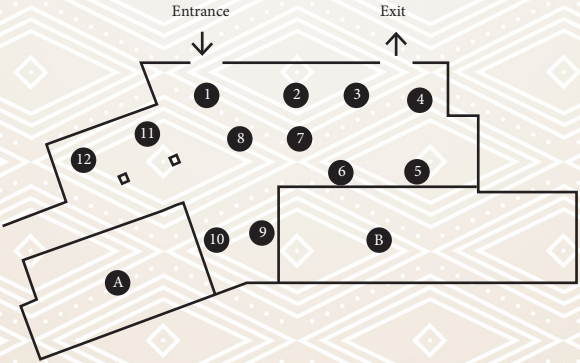
Manik Workshop for Earings by Rasmah Rumambai
4th of Dec,9:00am - 16:00pm | 1st Floor Art & Crafts Gallery room (B)

Plaited Bamboo Keychain Workshop by Emily Jeneble
4th of Dec,13:00pm - 16:00pm | 1st Floor Art & Crafts Gallery room (A)

Crafts Activism Sharing Session by Jennifer P. Linggi, Juvita Wan, Sujianto
4th of Dec,10:00am - 12:00pm | Ground Floor Function Room

HANDEP's Journey by Randi Julian Miranda
4th of Dec,13:00pm - 14:30pm | Ground Floor Function Room

Barking Up the Right Tree by Rosemarie Wong, Ivy Jong, Johnson Tan
4th of Dec,15:00pm - 16:30pm | Ground Floor Function Room



exhibition

curatorial statement

"Before the colonial governments came, we used to be Serumpun." This was stated by Sujianto, the Ketua Kampong of Sekida Village in Jagoi Babang during our pan-Borneo research trip, to visit the communities we work with.

"Serumpun" means a bundle of grass that shares the same root. In this project, "serumpun" helps us convey how knowledge, wisdom and material cultures in craft across the borders of Kalimantan, Sarawak and Sabah connect together as a wider ecosystem. Today craft communities across South East Asia are facing a range of complex challenges. From climate change to increased youth migration, there is the need to find new ways to protect craft as a 'cultural asset' to pass onto future generations.

The serumpun exhibition presents 11 craft projects undertaken individually and collaboratively by artisans, practitioners and initiatives from across Sarawak, Sabah and Kalimantan. Each project in this collection has explored and responded to a contemporary challenge in craft through experimenting with new materials, ways of making and ways of sharing. Connecting these featured works are inspiring stories of innovation, creativity and education which invite us to reflect both inwards on the deep wisdom and knowledges that live in the hands of craft practitioners and artisans, and forward towards sustainable futures.

This exhibition, designed by and for Borneo's craft communities, is the first of its kind hosted at the Borneo Cultural Museum. These projects and exhibition were supported by The Borneo Laboratory and The Glasgow School of Art, and supported by The British Council and the International Collaboration Award, 2022.

#connectingcraftspractices
#sustainabilityincrafts
#storyofborneocrafts
#InternationalCollaborationGrant

cultural assets and vernacular materials

In the "Cultural Assets and Vernacular Materials" (C&VM) programme, we engaged with a range for practitioners, artisans and communities to design and undertake projects to explore a key sustainability challenge in their craft practice. In total, 11 project took place. The outcomes, be it a book, a workshop, a competition or a product series, were produced and carried out on their own journey of conversing with their respective communities. To date, we witnessed a number of heartfelt moments created from the engaged practitioners with their communities.

This year-long programme and research, delivered in collaboration between the Borneo Laboratory and The Glasgow School of Art, explored sustainability challenges and craft activism in communities across Borneo, and has been supported by the British Council International Collaboration Awards.

@BorneoLaboratory @Thinkandtink.kch @glasgowschoolart
@gsofa @BritishArts @my_british @britishcouncil @britishcouncilmalaysia

serumpun

project partners

THE INNOVATION SCHOOL AT THE GLASGOW SCHOOL OF ART:
The Innovation School of The Glasgow School of Art is a leading centre for design teaching that applies Design Innovation to the key issues defining contemporary society. They examine design's role as a catalyst for positive change, and investigate its potential impact on people and places. Their students, faculty and researchers adopt a human-centred, research-driven design approach as they explore the "near future" and "next now" in search of actionable innovations. Not only that, they challenge traditional perceptions of design, and promote new ways of thinking, doing and designing, which applies to diverse and complex real-world contexts. Dialogue that drives innovation – the engagement with users, stakeholders, communities and organisations that shape collaboration – is a central part of their design process and philosophy.

BORNEO LABORATORY:
Borneo Laboratory is a creative agency and a Laboratory for Borneo Aesthetics. As a multidisciplinary platform for the experimentation of Borneo Aesthetics, they focus on aesthetic exploration that emphasizes collaboration and open dialogue. Since they began two years ago, Borneo Laboratory have held a number of regional collaborative workshop projects that have involved collaborators from France, Germany, the UK, Italy, Taiwan, Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia over the course of 30 days. Thus far, their production covers products ranging from publication, documentation, crafts, curation and architectural design. Regarding Borneo Laboratory's collaboration, they have been consciously engaging people of diverse disciplines. Regardless it is a publication or building, it is crucial for them to see their projects ended up delivering empathetic experience while embracing universal value.

BRITISH COUNCIL:
The British Council is the UK's international organisation that fosters connections, understanding, and trust between people in the United Kingdom and other countries through Arts, Culture and Education. It works with people in over 200 countries and territories and has offices in more than 100 countries. In 2021 to 2022 the British Council reached 650 million people. The organization show their support by providing grant services in order to promote and seed exciting arts and cultural exchanges between the UK and countries in South East Asia – Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Indonesia. They hope that these grants help build long-term relationships and collaborations between artists, cultural professionals, creative practitioners and art and cultural organisations, hubs, networks, and collectives.

Website:
https://www.gsainnovationschool.co.uk/
http://borneoartcollective.org/

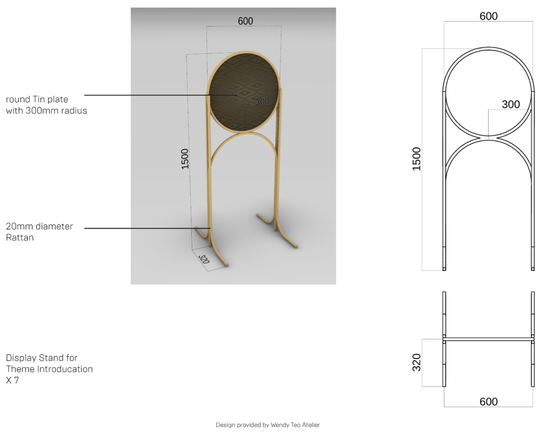
copyleft

initiative

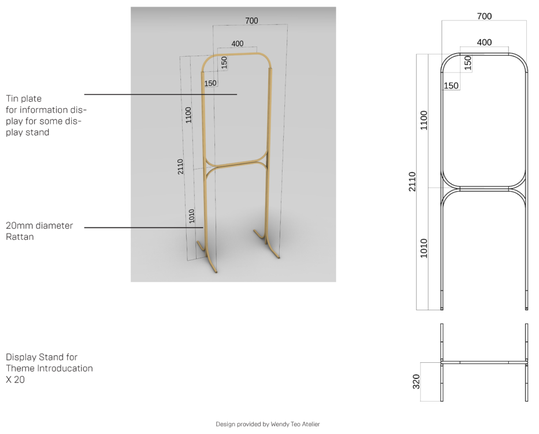
Copyleft project is an ongoing design bank initiative that was being created during the road trip, to enable products made through bridging the donated design from designers that are well versed with the market needs, and the skills from the rural crafting communities that are lacking exposure and opportunities to the craft market. 100% of the revenue goes to the crafting community if there is any sale incurred.

Based on a conversation developed along the road trip, this proposed project will attempt to examine the relationship of craft in relation to its social production and contexts in the differing communities in Borneo.

The initial effort of this initiatives includes coming up with a number of designs by Adeline Kueh, Wendy Teo, Gamia Dewanggamanik) made readily available for the crafting communities, which will be displayed during Serumpun exhibition



Design provided by Wendy Teo Atelier



Design provided by Wendy Teo Atelier

1 2 3

1,2 Design provided by Wendy Teo Atelier and made by Kalimantan rattan community
3 Design provided by Wendy Teo Atelier and made by Ibu Di'i with local pattern

changing landscapes

Climate change is having a direct impact on raw materials such as rattan and timber used in craft. Landscapes across Borneo are changing in ways that do not support nature resources to grow and thrive. Deforestation and land clearing are also leading to material shortages, forcing craft practitioners and artisans to adapt and explore the use of alternative ways of making that are in harmony with nature. In response to this challenge, craftsman and performer **Salomon Gau** explored alternative timber for his creation of Jatung Utang; and **Manai Jagoi** explored alternative fibres as a substitue or to complement rattan in their basketry.

artisanal trade

Opportunities to enter craft markets are not always equal. Factors such as access to education, training and financial support can impact the choices and livelihoods of craft practitioners and artisans, which impacts ways in which craft communities think and make. **Juvita Tatan Wan and the Tuyang Initiatives** explore this challenge in their project, which looks at practice in relation to loved ones, landscape and identity. In this exploration, bidai **Master Weaver Ibu Roslinda** facilitated a bidai competition, with the aim to explore craft identity through reviving traditional patterns and developing new patterns inspired by everyday life, Dayak Bidayuh narratives and Jagoi natural landscape. As the domestic market has begun to grow, it is more important than ever now to revitalise bidai identity that deeply represents the place.

documentation

Traditional practices and ancestral wisdom are at risk of being lost in today's craft industry. For example, ways of identifying and treating different types of material, harvesting material in certain moon phases, and crafting motives with certain beliefs. New ways of documenting and archiving craft processes are vital to protect and safeguard these knowledges for future generations. This challenge framed archival projects by **Jennifer P. Linggi**, **Emily Jeneble** and the **Sepatokimin Initiative.**

innovation

Craft production is changing. In places, large scale and low-cost manufacturing and imports are replacing traditional ways of making craft by hand. In response to this competition, craft practitioners and artisans are innovating ways they promote and sell, as well as developing new processes and unique products. **HANDEP** developed an innovative approach to engage Dayak weavers through organizing an annual weaving competition; the 'Ratu & Putri Dare (Queen & Princess of Weaving) Competition'. This year, instead of choosing individual winners, HANDEP selects one winning village as Desa MAHA DARE (The Great Weaver Village) with an aim to revive the collective spirit among the weavers. Kuching-based, **The Ranee** worked with a community of woman weavers from Betong division, Sarawak, on their natural fibre crafts. Exploring and innovating plant matter as a viable craft material, this time experimenting with bark cloth, with the input from design collaborators **Bengkel TanJong**.

youth education

Education is a collective effort. Supporting and motivating young people to engage with and preserve craft practices is challenging as these knowledges and skills are often not seen to be as relevant now than they were in the past. There is the need to explore new ways and opportunities for older generations to educate and inspire young people to value and take up craft-based careers. In their projects, **Sanggar Sarantangan** collaborated with their local school and worked with young people to explore local jelai beads as part of their curriculum; and **Rasmah Rumambai** of **Rose Elly Craft** designed and delivered a workshop attended by all members of Murut Bookan village, which was celebrated at a festival scale.

emily jeneble

Crafts Practitioner | Keningau, Sabah, Malaysia

Emily Jeneble is a Salingkawang bamboo weaver and up grew up in the small village of Kampung Bau Lunguyan, Sabah. Determined to continue the legacy of both her parents and grandmother, Emily's work focuses on opening up opportunities for anyone, regardless of age and gender, to learn this weaving practice and create products from it. Since she was a young girl, Emily's mother would carry her on her back to collect raw materials for weaving. Reflecting on this childhood memory, Emily described the significance of this craft in her family:

"My grandmother is a traditional craftsperson, who makes all kinds of products to help our community. These items are practical necessities such as the sirung, a traditional cap among Dusun tribespeople, which helps people working in the rice fields to shield from the sun."

Book entitled Sejarah Kraf Anyaman Buluh Emily Jeneble (Emily Jeneble's History of Plaited Bamboo)

This book covers 3 main aspects of Emily's life as a craft maker.

The first covers the stories of her grandmother and parents who are bamboo craft makers from which Emily learnt her skills. The second covers all the different bag designs which helped to build her 'brand'. Several of Emily's design has won major awards locally and internationally including one from the World Craft Council. And finally, the third segment covers how Emily expanded her craft making business to her community including the growth of many other craft communities through their involvement with her.

salomon gau

Performer, Instrument Maker | Miri/Long Moh, Sarawak, Malaysia
Credits to: Salomon Gau (Lead Exhibitor), Ngau Bilong

Salomon Gau is a musician and craft artisan, originally from Long Ikang, Baram, and now based in Miri, Sarawak. Deeply passionate about preserving his cultural heritage, Salomon has dedicated close to 20 years to researching, understanding and honing his craft. From undertaking apprenticeships with elders, to the sourcing and studying of materials – as a teacher, Salomon is also constantly learning. His talent and art form all started from performing the mighty warrior dance, to playing and learning the making of the Sampe', to singing Kenyah folk songs, to now playing and making the Jatung Utang (a traditional wooden xylophone) which has taken him close to 30 years to complete. Salomon is a celebrated traditional Kenyah Dancer and has performed with the renowned Hongkong Chinese Orchestra (2018). He was also part of the creative team and cast for Kelunan (2019), a musical-theatre production about the history of the Kayan and Kenyah people, produced by The Tuyang Initiative. Currently, Salomon is focusing his work on becoming a cultural guardian for the Kenyah people.

Jatung Utang (Cultural Wooden Xylophone) Material Exploration

Instead of using the conventional timber (Apo' and Baa'tilang), Salomon Gau explores accessible material around Miri city to enable the making of the Jatung Utang (wooden xylophone). The timber best used for the wooden xylophone is mostly found in the interior or hilly land like in the upper Baram. Conventionally, harvest of the timber needs to follow certain moon phase to enable the timber to be harvested on a reduced glucose level.

In this project, Salomon Gau explored 8 types of timber to make the Jatung Utang as replacement materials.

jennifer p.linggi

Crafts Activist & Researcher | Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia

Jennifer graduated as an architect from Oxford Brookes University, UK. After working in London and Brunei she returned home to Sabah, Malaysia in 2004 to pursue her first love - art. As an artist, she was involved in many group exhibitions locally and internationally. In her role as the Director of the Sabah Art Gallery for 12 years, she is no stranger to the art scene and has worked extensively with the creative communities. Having produced several publications on heritage skills, Jennifer continues to explore and research on culture through architecture, design and art. The primary motivation for her obsession is a desire to increase appreciation of these sadly waning ethnic craft skills and to preserve the knowledge for future generations by producing reference material of Borneo's traditional culture.

CONSERVING MURUT & DUSUN MOTIFS AND PATTERNS THROUGH VISUAL DOCUMENTATION

The relationship of people and culture is strengthened by learning and the handing down of knowledge and skills from one generation to another. Traditionally, indigenous knowledge was passed down verbally or learnt by observation. Some cultural documentation has been done but usually for administrative records or for academic research. For knowledge to be transferred effectively, the receiver must be able to fully comprehend the information through direct experience. Many of the older craft communities are not literate and written words are not the preferred method of sharing. This explains her approach to visually documenting aspects of local culture. Her focus for the C&VM project is conserving the Murut and Dusun motifs and patterns used in bamboo craft making through digital documentation and incorporation of the motifs into new products made from modern materials.

the ranee

Crafts Practitioner | Kuching/Betong, Sarawak, Malaysia
Credits to: Rosemarie Wong (Lead Exhibitor),
Ar.Ivy Jong & Johnson Tan (Design Collaborators- Bengkel TanJong)

Exploration and innovation of plant matter as a viable craft material

Rosemarie is a designer and entrepreneur based in Sarawak. With a Bachelor of Arts degree in printed textiles for Fashion (Central St. Martins, London) and Diploma in Interior Design (Chelsea College of Art and Design), Rosemarie has a lifelong passion for indigenous handicrafts and heritage buildings. As the owner and creative designer of The Ranee Boutique Suites, The Marian Boutique Lodging House, The Granary and Ranee Artisan Gallery, Rosemarie has a mission: to create, connect and collaborate with local artisans to raise awareness and inspire change in the areas of preservation of crafts and heritage. Ar. Ivy Jong is the founding director of Atelier Timur Sdn. Bhd. The first elected female chairperson of Pertubuhan Akitek Malaysia Sarawak Chapter. Johnson Tan is an architect who has recently returned to Sarawak after years of working in Australia and China. Currently attached to Zhejiang University of Science and Technology, he teaches architecture.Together, they set up Bengkel TanJong to explore design and craft beyond architecture.

3-Bark table-lamp is a collaborative effort between a trio of urbanite designers and the rural crafts women of Betong, Sarawak. The objective, to create a contemporary design lamp with the traditional bark cloth, and as its name suggests is a composition of 3 woven lampshades, set at various heights on an elegant marble base.

The lamp spreads a warm, intimate glow, and the open weave allows this light to filter through and create interesting patterned shadows and luminance. The veined marble and polished stainless steel stand with LED lights provide a strong textural contrast to the rustic woven shades. The intricate warp and weft weave consists of bark cloth strips interspersed with boxstraps, and overlaid with even finer strips to create a delicate lattice pattern.

The bark cloth has always been an understated material, we hope through this exercise to showcase its beauty, potentials and viability as a craft material, and hopefully revive an interest in its making.

sepatokimin

Craft Activist | Singkawang/Sambas, Kalimantan, Indonesia
Singkawang Songket - Credits to: Yohanes Arya Duta (Lead Researcher), Wisnu Purbandaru (Asst.Researcher), Gabriella Manurung (Textile Practicioner), Imaniar Rizki W, Katrina Rahmavika (Visual Designer)
Crafts Practitioners: Rohani, Adi (Singkawang Songket Weaver), Nadzifah Sub'in Dedare (Sambas Songket Weaver), Rahmat (Sambas Suri Maker), Andri (Local Practicioner)

Sepatokimin is a community-driven initiative that seeks to empower marginalised communities across Indonesia through creative economic development by supporting human, social, intellectual and financial capacity-building.

This creative documentation follows the life story of a husband and a wife that had a major role in the development of Songket in Singkawang: Nurhayadi and Rohani. Born and raised in Sambas, West Kalimantan, Nurhayadi learned to weave and make weaving tools from an early age. He later moved to Singkawang to work for a Songket weaving business owner. When the factory was closed in 2000, Nurhayadi's collection of weaving pattern technical drawings and vast knowledge of tool-making made the craft sustained in Singkawang.

Songket Singkawang: A Fragment of Songket Melayu History in Kalimantan

The pursuit of Songket Singkawang history leads us to Sambas, where we listened to stories of Songket Melayu that tied to the history of three Islamic kingdoms in the north of Borneo island: Kesultanan Brunei, Kesultanan Sarawak, and Kesultanan Sambas. As a cultural textile that is shared among many cultural groups across islands and nations, we can see the dynamic of Songket evolution through time and regions, and all the challenges it faced to be relevant today.

The technique, tools, and stories around Songket Singkawang were documented and presented through an interactive website page. This project is also the first fragment of "Antologi Temurun", an initiative in documenting traditional material culture of Indonesia through creative storytelling and various media.

sepatokimin

Craft Activist | Jagoi, Kalimantan, Indonesia
Jagoi Rattan - Credits to: Wisnu Purbandaru (Lead Researcher), Yohanes Arya Duta (Asst. Researcher), Gabriella Manurung, Imaniar Rizki W, Katrina Rakhmavika (Practicioner team)
Sujianto (Sekida Community Leader)
Crafts Practitioners: Di'i, Anik (Local Crafter)

Discovering Rattans Material in Jagoi Sekida is a documentary project to archive vernacular cultural assets - rattan used by the Bidayuh Jagoi community in Sekida Village, Jagoi Babang, West Kalimantan, Indonesia. Sepatokimin Initiative tried to identify this potential that has been commonly used for many generations for their daily household. Being the largest rattan-weaved producer, almost 80% of Sekida village members can do this artistry; however, the scarcity of this resource has been a prominent issue for the past years since the massive palm oil plantations have spread all over the areas.

Material Archives - Rattan Material

Rattan has more than 600 known species worldwide, yet each region has its local name for each type, and to date, there has yet to be any effort to distinguish each kind scientifically in Sekida. During our research, we took some specimens and worked with the botanical research center to discover each scientific name, which led to finding alternative methods to breed these species. We also conduct creative documentation from each type of rattan and the end products made from each species; thus, more people may become aware of these conditions and start a collective effort to tackle these issues.

HANDEP

Craft Activist | Parangkaraya, Kalimantan, Indonesia

HANDEP is a leading social enterprise and sustainable brand in Indonesia that works with indigenous artisans and smallholders to create an alternative sustainable village economy that aligns with ancestral wisdom and local resources. The name HANDEP is borrowed from the Dayak Ngaju dialect, which as a whole means “the spirit of working together and helping each other as a family or community.” Our work is centered around this philosophy, Randi said:

“We are reconnecting the people closest to us, to not only the lands and forest around them but to their long-lived tradition and values, in respect of nature and to preserve the world they live in, as it should be.”

Desa MAHA DARE

In their project, HANDEP has developed an innovative approach to engage current and future generations of Dayak weavers through organizing an annual weaving competition since 2020, i.e., the ‘Ratu & Putri Dare (Queen & Princess of Weaving) Competition.’ In particular, the competition aims to foreground and renew interest in raising awareness of rattan weaving preservation and empowering women weavers in Central Kalimantan. This year, under the C&VM Project, Angela Mayrina and HANDEP Team are reinventing their approach. Instead of selecting individual winners, they choose one winning village as Desa MAHA DARE (The Great Weaver Village) to revive the collective spirit among the weavers by creating a high-value sculptural piece that speaks of this renewed spirit. While pushing the weavers to innovate and advance their traditional crafts and improve public appreciation, the competition also encourages multigenerational collaboration and facilitates knowledge transfer from the older to the younger generation of weavers.

rasmah rumambai

Crafts Practitioner | Keningau, Sabah, Malaysia
Credits to: Rasmah Rumambai (Lead Exhibitor) and Elmie Georgey (daughter and assistant

Transfering of the skill of beadcraft of the Murut Boakan

Rasmah, an accomplished bead artisan has been making traditional bead accesories, a skill she learnt since young from her mother. Prior to the C&VM project, Rasmah made bead accesories to sell during cultural fairs and also to her friends. Through C&VM she decided to start teaching her skill to others apart from her daughters to ensure the continuation of the knowledge.

Organising the bead workshop was a first for Rasmah as well as the Murut Boakan community in her kampung (village). She garnered the support of the Murut Boakan Association as well as the Village Chief. This excitement and belief led to Rasmah being given a plot of land on the community grounds of Kampung Delayan Lama, Sook, her hometown. Rasmah will now look for funds to build her gallery and workshop where she plans to showcase many Murut Boakan artefacts as well as continue with her bead accesssories classes.

sanggar sarantangan

Crafts Community | Singkawang, Kalimantan, Indonesia

Sanggar Sarantangan are a creative community from Habang, Sagatani Village in Singkawang - West Kalimantan. The name is inspired by the Lake Sarantangan in their village. Two generations ago, Sagatani was a little village surrounded by lush rainforest and the majestic Sarantangan Lake. However, gold mining activities brought negative impacts to the village. The forest was cleared and the land was excavated; leaving massive pits scarring the landscape. The clear lake is now polluted with mercury and other toxins from the mine.

Learning together, making together: exploration of jelai beads

The Sanggar was first established due to ongoing concerns of the challenges faced by the young generation in their village such as youth unemployment & limited economic opportunities, high-rate of school drop outs due to involvement in illegal mining activities (locally known as dompeng), lack of access to higher education / no space for the younger generation in from the village to learn about their own culture and participate in positive activities. The sanggar has for the purpose of creating awareness and understanding to the young generations in the village of their cultural and natural assets.

manai jagoi - bidai

Crafts Community | Jagoi, Kalimantan, Indonesia
Credits to:Roslinda, Koperasi Hasta Karya, Deddi, Rino and Roy

Bidai with Local Motifs

Whilst rattan-based craft in Jagoi Babang (in particular bidai) remains a promising commodity with a consistent demand from the Malaysian market; conversely across Indonesia it remains fairly unknown. In this project, bidai Master Weaver Ibu Roslinda facilitated a bidai competition, with the aim to explore craft identity through reviving traditional patterns and developing new patterns inspired by everyday life, Dayak Bidayuh narratives and Jagoi natural landscape. As the domestic market has begun to grow, it is more important than ever now to revitalise bidai identity that deeply represents the place.

manai jagoi - rattan

Crafts Community | Jagoi, Kalimantan, Indonesia
Credits to: Jembelia Ania, Fitri Nurjana, Roslinda, Di'i, Lusia Si'an, Paula Livia, Rusmiati Apu, Sujianto, Geovani Jebat

Woven Products with Alternative Fibers

Rattan weaving practice in the Kindau village of Jagoi Babang has survived many generations where its knowledge and skill continue to regenerate. Almost every family can weave, old and young. Rattan is an important vernacular material for the local communities and is deeply attached to their everyday life. However, it has been increasingly difficult to obtain the material because much of the land and forest has been cleared for oil palm plantation.

With the growing concern of the scarcity of raw material, the Manai Jagoi team brought together twenty rattan weavers from Kindau village to explore locally accessible materials to complement their staple material which is rattan. The project showcase the artisans' ability to utilise various types of rattan and other natural materials.

the tuyang initiative

Craft Activist | Miri, Sarawak, Malaysia
Credits to: Juvita Tatan Wan (Lead Exhibitor), Adrian Jo Milang (Community Manager),
Cultural Practitioner: Suzy Imbah, Iban - Kapit; Rosiah Rinai, Lun Bawang - Long Tuma;
Jonita Ayat, Penan - Long Nen

Slow Craft

Established in 2017, The Tuyang Initiative is a social enterprise based in Miri, Sarawak that is committed to ensuring continued cultural awareness of Borneo's indigenous people and cultural heritage. Having left their village of Long San, Baram to pursue their individual careers; founders John Wan Usang and Juvita Tatan Wan experienced a deep physical and cultural disconnect. Inspired to return to their roots, this father and daughter duo established and grew the initiative, which takes its name "Tuyang" from their Kenyah language, meaning "friend". Juvita has 15 years of regional and international experience in diverse roles such as business development, product marketing and audio-visual production, and currently leads the Tuyang Initiative team. Their core ambition is to ensure Malaysia's indigenous cultural guardians gain access to opportunities that support meaningful and sustainable livelihoods and they are able to thrive and lead efforts for cultural continuity. The arts and creative management company also provides indigenous cultural consultation, curates exhibitions, demonstrations and showcases.

What if cultural practitioners were given the luxury of time to imagine and create? What if they were not pressured by external briefs or deadlines to deliver "products", returning to the ebb and flow of their environments in making something meaningful to them? Will they create something with greater artistry because they are following their natural rhythm - from time to harvest, to water levels, to material availability - the way it has been done for hundreds of years?

Inspired by the intent of moving traditional cultural practitioners away from the growing push into mass production methods, The Tuyang Initiative through this project will give three craft practitioners in different areas of craft and geography, the space to:
a) Shift mindsets away from mass production to artisanal craftsmanship
b) Reconnect with their own cultural expressions and traditions, continue their slow craft practices and document their knowledge
c) Exploring alternative value chain creation to benefit the wider community and their craft