

## THE HUNTERS

By LIR (*Mira Asriningtyas and Dito Yuwono*) and Kittima Chareeprasit

Once upon a time, there were two mighty hunters: Barata, living under an active stratovolcano where elephants freely roamed the island of Java<sup>1</sup> in Indonesia, and Ta Jung Kung Dang Daeng (ต่าจิ้งซ่งดั่งแดง), who wandered around what is now known as Thailand and Laos, along the Mekong<sup>2</sup>, where Naga<sup>3</sup> slept peacefully under the river.

Barata's story came from a time before Kingdoms were named and cities divided, where there were more elephants than humans in Java. As men tried to build civilization on the island, they started to hunt elephants down, declaring war, pushing them further into extinction. Of all the hunters, there was one man stronger than the others and respected by many. His name is Barata<sup>4</sup>. He is fearless and killed more elephants than anyone ever had. Celebrated by many, he married the prettiest woman and settled in the village under the volcano. Men all over the island continued to hunt the elephant down, while villages were built and families expanded. One day, a young high-spirited elephant accidentally stepped on, and killed, Barata's only daughter. Heartbroken and lost, he realized that only by saving the lives of elephants would he gain peace of mind once again. So, he retreats to the far end of the volcano where wounded elephants come to die, to heal them. One day, there is only one remaining wounded elephant alive. Barata tells the elephant that the only way to keep him safe is to cast a spell to turn him into a tree, as the hunters will not stop until the last elephant falls down and dies. For years, this elephant lived as a white banyan tree and Barata lived inside of it. However, civilization caught up with him.

The land is now brimming with a human civilization, with the need for more and more land, higher up to the farthest side of the volcano. A road had to be built and the white banyan tree was in the way. It was ordered to be cut down. At that time, there were no more hunters, but there were men with axes who came to kill the tree. However Barata, who lived inside the tree, was very powerful. With every attempt, the life of one man was lost. "The tree is sacred, leave it alone", says one lady with a gifted eye, who could see the elephant, and Barata, inside the white banyan tree. But no, just like the hunters before them, the men with axes did not listen, thinking nothing is too sacred

<sup>1</sup> Java (Indonesian: Jawa, Indonesian pronunciation: [ˈdʒawa]; Javanese: ꦗꦮ; Sundanese: ᮊᮔ) is an island of Indonesia, bordered by the Indian Ocean on the south and the Java Sea on the north. With a population of over 148 million (Java only) or 152 million (including the inhabitants of its surrounding islands), Java constitutes 56.1 percent of the Indonesian population and is the world's most-populous island. Formed mostly as the result of volcanic eruptions from geologic subduction between the Sunda Plate and Australian Plate, Java is the 13th largest island in the world and the fifth largest in Indonesia by landmass at about 138,800 square kilometres (53,600 sq mi). (source: <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Java>)

<sup>2</sup> The Mekong, or Mekong River, is a trans-boundary river in East Asia and Southeast Asia. It is the world's tenth longest river and the sixth longest in Asia. Its estimated length is 4,909 km (3,050 mi), and it drains an area of 795,000 km<sup>2</sup> (307,000 sq mi), discharging 475 km<sup>3</sup> (114 cu mi) of water annually. From the Tibetan Plateau the river runs through China, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam. The extreme seasonal variations in flow and the presence of rapids and waterfalls in the Mekong make navigation difficult. Even so, the river is a major trade route between western China and Southeast Asia. (source: <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mekong>)

<sup>3</sup> In Thai-Laotian beliefs, Nāgas are considered the patronage of water. Nāgas are believed to live in either water bodies or in caves. According to a popular legend, the Mekong River in northeastern Thailand and Laos was said to be created by two nāga kings slithering through the area, thus creating the Mekong and the nearby Nan River. The Mekong is synonymous with the unexplained fireballs phenomenon which has long been believed to be created by the nāgas that dwell in the river. (source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nāga>)

<sup>4</sup> Barata is the fictional elephant hunter character in "Merapi Omahku" (Merapi My Home) book by Elizabeth D. Inandiak. The fictional story reimagines the birth of a sacred white banyan tree and the elephant stone that is present in real life at Kaliadem-- a village at the slope of Mount Merapi, Yogyakarta. The fictional figure of Barata portrays one of many ancestral figures known by villagers around the Mount Merapi area.

compared to providing for their family. So, they try to cut the tree anyway. Barata realizes it is time to set the elephant free. So, he casts another spell and together, he and the elephant walk all the way to the highest point of the volcano, beyond human reach. One day, the elephant could not continue the journey, so Barata casts yet another spell to turn the elephant into a stone forever. Sometimes, when the night is still, you can still hear the sound of an elephant calling in the distance and a blurry sighting of Barata, as he roams the peak of the volcano. The story of Barata the elephant hunter is a fictitious one, but an elephant stone similar to that of the fictional book can be found in Kaliadem village, surrounded by hundreds of lava tour jeeps and tourists.

In another not-so-far part of the world, there is another prolific hunter. His name is Ta Jung Kung Dang Daeng. This hunter was of such great stature that it is said children could be seen running around in his nose. One day, the hunter decided he wants to hunt a silver buffalo. Coming across his prey along the Mekong river, the hunter stalked the buffalo to a watering hole. As he was preparing to let loose the killing arrow from his crossbow, a merchant appeared, rowing his boat downriver, thus frightening the buffalo away. The hunter, angered by the narrow escape of his prey, concocts revenge against the merchant. With his great strength and stature, the hunter used numerous large boulders to block the flow of the river, stopping any merchants from ever passing by the river ever again.

Unbeknownst to the hunter however, blocking the river also meant that local villagers who relied on the river for fish, were now unable to do so. The villagers, wishing for a return to their original way of life, prayed to the gods for assistance. One of the local deities, having heard their pleas, takes the guise of a traveling monk and approaches the hunter. Seeing how the hunter is carrying his boulders by hand, one at a time, the monk advises him to instead use a bamboo rod to carry multiple rocks at once instead. To the hunter's misfortune, the sharpness of the bamboo rod cut a slit in his throat, causing him to thrash around in pain and agony. In his suffering, the hunter falls into the river and dies.

This folktale of Ta Jung Kung Dang Daeng is the story behind the name given to the area today - Kaeng Khut Khu - which can be translated into 'cradling islet'. Located in the Chiang Khan district of the Loei province in Northern Thailand (near the border with Laos), this area has become a prominent tourist attraction in recent times, where the symbiotic relationship between the locals and their river way of life continues to thrive. Revisiting the legend of this hunter and the silver buffalo brings to mind the modern 'hunters' of today, who manifest as massive man-made structures. Merely two hundred kilometers from the Kaeng Khut Khu area, the lower parts of the Mekong are now stifled by the Xayaburi Dam for the purposes of hydroelectricity production. However, unlike the folktale, it isn't just boat travel that has been disrupted, nor just that the fishermen cannot earn a living; but it impacts the natural flow of the river, leading to unseasonal rise and drop in water levels. This in turn has produced a devastating impact on the local ecosystem, leading to the extinction of numerous fish species, as well as local agricultural ways of life. Even worse than the actions of the folk-tale hunter, these developments have far reaching consequences for the local communities as well as nature itself.

### The Trail of The Hunters

We, the curators, followed our curiosity in such folkloric hunters to the forest and along the river. Together with the invited artists, Maryanto and Ruangsak Anuwatwimon, we point to the figures of Barata and of Ta Jung Kung Dang Daeng respectively, to give ethical insight to the different figures of the 'hunter' today - from the water company, tourism industry, illegal sand mining industry, industrialization, hydroelectric dam and mega-governmental project.

In Indonesia, LIR and Maryanto took a trail down Mount Merapi in Yogyakarta<sup>5</sup>, an active stratovolcano, walking its forest and sacred water source, amidst the sand mining industry that is interspersed amongst various tourism sites at its base. A connection between the world of the human and the non-human, the visible to the invisible, and the mythical to the 'real' world is especially present in Yogyakarta, due to its proximity to Mount Merapi. Mount Merapi is considered one of the two most powerful mythical kingdoms in Yogyakarta, connected through an imaginary axis with the Sultanate of Yogyakarta and the mythical Queendom of the Southern Sea—an ancient covenant that

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<sup>5</sup> Yogyakarta is the capital of the Yogyakarta Sultanate and served as the Indonesian capital from 1946 to 1948, during the Indonesian National Revolution<sup>[1]</sup> and thus gained its Special Region status with the Sultan as King, as well as Governor of Yogyakarta. source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yogyakarta>

supports each other. Around Mount Merapi, the ontological knowledge of Javanese cosmology used to coexist with Islamic values, a tradition rooted in the knowledge of Hinduism and animism. Local people believe that they are sharing the living space with not only animals and plants, but also with the ancestor spirits, deities, and supernatural beings and protectors of nature. Living side by side, it is important to respect and protect each other to keep balance and reciprocity. Every volcanic eruption, earthquake, natural disaster, and pandemic is suggesting a new equilibrium is being scaled, and through the stories passed down between generations, there is evidence that the world has been resistant and humans continue to seek control.

One day, undertaking a field-trip at the base of Mount Merapi, we trailed through forest that got struck with pyroclastic flow ten years before, in one of its biggest eruptions. Here, we found how tree trunks were burnt, of how the tree fell but the roots were resilient and continue to grow — some growing horizontally before heading up to find more sun. After a while, the landscape changed. We arrived at an open field that led to a pasture. Here we found a big tree on the ground. The old white bark was like that of an elephant's wrinkled skin. It reminded us of the story of Barata, the elephant hunter, and it intrigued us. It was difficult to imagine that once upon a time, on the very same island (now home to over 148 million people and considered as the world's most-populous island), elephants once ran free. Scientists have conflicting opinion as to when the Javan elephant (*Elephas maximus sondaicus*) became extinct, but their presence was described in the carving of Borobudur and in the semi-fictional book, 'Merapi Omahku (Merapi My Home)', written by Elizabeth Inandiak.

Smaller scale industry of sand mining under Mount Merapi can be traced back to the 1980s. Later, the government allowed heavy machinery to be used on the river to reduce the volume of this volcanic material so that it would not spill onto the farmer's field, or cause further flood downstream in the city. If this sand is mined with respect and caution, balance can be restored. But human greed knows no limit. The sand mining industry turns out to be a very profitable business and no matter how tight the government's attempt to regulate it, illegal miners continue to operate. As a result, water reservoirs are gone, water sources have dried up, and farmers find great difficulties in accessing sufficient water for their fields. The regulation for sand and volcanic material mining should actually be reviewed regularly by the government, but a lot of miners are getting by without the proper documents, thanks to local mafia and corrupt law enforcers. As soon as they run out of volcanic material in the river, the miners start taking sand from people's fields, dredging hills, taking it from the National Park area, and even start stealing sand from under trees (resulting in massive environmental damage and casualties). Local people hold rallies, protests, and campaigns against this environmentally damaging practice, but with no sign of success, even after years of trying.

In Thailand, Kittima and Ruangsak follow a trail to the majestic streams of the Mekong River where numerous dams have been constructed along the length of the river, with additional plans to blast rocky outcrops to facilitate transport of commodities, agricultural machinery, as well as using the river as a power supply. The rapid rate of industrialization for the purpose of economic gain has unfortunately led to the neglect of ecological conditions, with myriad organisms now facing threat of mass extinction. Ruangsak refers to the aforementioned story of Ta Jung Khung Dang Daeng, as an allegory for the various forms of natural exploitation seen today- the construction of dams for the purpose of agriculture and power generation have become new forms of 'hunting', bringing with them the rapid and unchecked overexploitation of natural resources, causing an imbalance in the natural order and disruption of thousands of lives that rely on it.

The Mekong River is a crucial body of trans-boundary water in East Asia and Southeast Asia, flowing down from the Tibetan Plateau through China, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Spanning approximately 4350 km in length, the river is a source of nourishment for the over 70 million lives in various Southeast Asian countries as well as the diverse range of diverse organisms. In Thailand, the Mekong acts as a natural border, flowing through 8 provinces in the Northern and North-Eastern regions. Local communities that live along the river also contain their own myths and legends regarding the river, folktales that relate to the unique ways of life and physical properties of the area.

Following the trail of Ta Jung Kung Dang Daeng, Kittima and Ruangsak learn more of how this mythical story told since before the birth of the Thai nation, has greatly motivated tourism today for the Chiang Khan district of the Loei province, where this tale rests. With picturesque views of mountains, stone tributaries, and rocky crags that separate

the two sides of the Mekong river (acting as a borderline between Thailand and Laos), the journey begins with a July 2019 news story concerning the unnatural drought of Kaeng Khut Khu, an area in Loei province, as a consequence of the construction of the Saiyaburi Dam, the first of its kind in the lower Mekong area that is closest to the Thai border.

This disruption to the river's natural cycles led to a phenomenon known as 'hungry water', where the color of the Mekong river turned blue as a result of the lack of minerals and silt. The newly-operational dam isn't the only factor influencing the health of the Mekong, with 11 more dams located upstream in China, which have affected the water's flow for the past decade. In July of 2020, we were able to travel to the site of the Ta Jung Kung Dang Daeng folktale, to see with our own eyes the changes that are occurring, looking through Google Earth for our next destination - from the site of the myth's origins to what is considered to be the deepest segment of the Mekong, known locally as 'Mekong's Belly Button', in Bueng Kan province. Many areas we observed have become utterly transformed compared to the satellite images, with testimony from the local populace to the changes that are merely beginning, with an endpoint no one can predict. The construction of the dam is therefore an example of the mass-exploitation of nature that has been perpetuated by humans as 'hunters'.

### 'Once Upon a Time'

Along the trail of the two hunters, we encountered many more tales, myths, anecdotal evidence, and folklore. Most of it started with 'once upon a time'. Such tales are usually used as a means to pass on 'local embodied knowledge' from one generation to another. 'Local embodied knowledge' is here understood as 'local wisdom' within the Indonesian context; or as 'local spiritual knowledge' within the Thai context. Both these attempts at translating local words "kearifan lokal" and 'ภูมิปัญญาท้องถิ่น' into English are, however, insufficient. In short, 'local embodied knowledge' refers to the practice of learning, whereby the body receives 'practice' in specific sites, with specific rituals. It is understood that the experiential knowing of knowledge and its continuous presence in community – via oral storytelling, spiritual or religious ritual, folkloric superstition – are undervalued or little taught within the dominant cultural memory of both countries.

The phrase 'once upon a time' is used to introduce a narrative of past events or of something out of one's imagination. From the stories we heard along the way, we could easily imagine a Naga as a mythical being, but when pondering the fact that extinction could turn the Javan elephant into a mythical being, is something unthinkable for us. Along the way, we found ourselves using that phrase a lot more. Undertaking field research was not the idyllic landscape we experienced during our childhood. Every now and then we would say, "Do you remember, once upon a time when we were young we could swim in this river and now it has almost dried out?" We saw an alteration of nature to the point that we didn't recognize what was once our childhood playground, due to years of continuous extraction of the land and river.

Such changes became the main concern for both invited artists. Through his field research, Ruangsak explored the transformation of the Mekong River's physical ecology, and the effects of over-damming on the lives of those living alongside and within. The installation 'Excavated Gods' raises questions regarding the rapid changes occurring around the biospheres surrounding the Mekong River, this diorama visualizing landscapes found along the river's length, a total of 858 kilometers from Kaeng Kut Ku in Loei province - the birthplace of the Ta Jung Kung Dang Daeng myth - to the edge of Thailand's Mekong River boundary in Khong Chiam district, Ubon Ratchathani province. The artist skirted along the Mekong's edge, stopping in various districts along the way, witnessing the increasingly volatile and unpredictable changes in the river's water levels. These changes are conclusive proof that the ecosystems along the Mekong's edge have been transformed. The artist collected carcasses of dead organisms, from various species of fish, land-dwelling organisms, shells, to freshwater vegetation that has become all but extinct from the loss of seasons. These remains are then used to form the base of the exhibited diorama.

The artist initiated this research by saving digital images of satellite imagery used to indicate soil levels and topography, before creating a structural framework for the diorama using pulp paper and covering it with soil samples collected from the various areas he surveyed. He then recreated the Mekong River using a special type of

blue paint found in local paintings found in the Esan region, which is mixed with a powder paint extracted from minerals found in China, where the 11 dams erected in the river's headwaters have had profound effects in the areas downstream. The animal remains used to form the foundation of the diorama acts as an under-layer meant to represent the rich biodiversity that is currently being destroyed by human hands, as it is these very organisms that were responsible for the abundance of life in the area. In other words, this installation acts as a monument dedicated to the verdant environments and lifeforms, all of whom have long acted as the protectors of the Mekong River's natural balance.

Beside this installation is a glass sculpture '17 million years - 57 years', which acts as a time capsule that preserves the Cladophora algae, a symbol of the Mekong River's dwindling wildlife. Cladophora is a type of fresh-water plant found in the Mekong River and is considered an indicator of a healthy ecosystem. A rich source of nutrients for the dry season, it was once a crucial economic crop for locals that made their homes along the river bank, both in Thailand and Laos. Cladophora can be naturally found growing on the rocks and beaches of the Mekong, though the formation of a dam on the lower reaches of the river - combined with the impact from 11 other dams constructed upriver in China - have led to tumultuous water levels in the river since 2019, in turn stunting the growth of Cladophora, resulting in smaller growth compared to before. In this time capsule, the artist attempts to reflect several methods of how this water system has maintained its natural abundance, that has been cultivated over millions of years (though hugely decimated in the last five decades) thus preserving a rapidly disappearing symbol of life in the Mekong.

For the exhibition, the artist has collected samples of Cladophora from the Loei Inland Aquaculture Research and Development Center, Loei Province, mixed with water from the Mekong River. Ruangsak chose to display the sample in a double-layered borat-silicate vial, a highly heat-resistant glass used in scientific experiments. Any materials placed within the vial will be able to maintain a constant temperature, leading to increased longevity and permanence. The vial is placed on a carved wooden sculpture of a Naga, believed by many Southeastern cultures to be the guardian deity of the aquatic realm responsible for maintaining the abundance of the Mekong River (this wooden Naga head sculpture is also commonly used as an ornament for the mandolin, a musical instrument local to the Esan region).

In addition, 'Beyond Blue' presents video documentation sharing photographic information from satellites, contrasted with photographs of a rapidly changing Mekong riverside landscape. The genesis of this project came about when the artist noticed photographs of the Mekong River turning blue, an unprecedented phenomena. Locally referred as 'hungry water', this occurs when a body of water lacks the essential minerals and sediment as a result of constructing dams on the river source, turning the Mekong's once mineral-rich brown waters a turquoise blue that resembles ocean water. In Ruangsak's diorama, the image of dying *Homonoia riparia* (a tree depended upon by the migrating fish colonies during flooding season) is prominently featured for it has been decimated from unseasonal movements of water. Ruangsak was also interested in how satellite images can paint a picture completely at odds with reality. This video work reflects the conflicting truths, the unsuspecting pictures gained through scrolling along the Mekong's length on the computer contrasted with images of the very real crisis occurring along the river's shores today. It is perhaps too soon to even definitively calculate the overall damage inflicted by the extinction or disappearance of numerous species across such a wide area; Ruangsak's alternate chronicle aims to shine a light on the impact of pursuing natural resources by corporate entities, who have mercilessly exploited this 4000 kilometers river (eg. construction of hydroelectric power plants).

For Maryanto, he collected fables and ghost stories that were experienced by people along the river under the volcano where the sand miners continue to operate. These fables and ghost stories embrace the myths of Mount Merapi's native animals, often told when people gather around fire, inside a tent, or general social interaction. Maryanto thus chose to create several 'tent-like' interactive installations, the surfaces of these 'tents' covered in his ink paintings that, once sitting within, you begin to hear voices that share the tales of Merapi's spirit and ghost community. This interactive sound-installation; titled, "Nek Wani Ojo Wedi-Wedi, Nek Wedi Ojo Wani-Wani" (If You

Dare, don't be Half-Hearted, if You are Afraid, Don't Act as if You are Brave) invites the audience to listen to memories of villagers while sitting inside the tent that depicts the mythical animals surrounded by sayings written in Javanese alphabet. The particular, almost iconic, style of mythical animal painting was taken from a Javanese fortune-telling book, known as 'Primbon'.

The other tent-installation titled "Urip Iku soko Sopo?" (Who Gives Life?) present a low tent structure typical of sand miners' temporary shelters for their tools such as hoe, scoop, and the gravel or sand itself. Inside the tent, there is another sound piece that reflects Maryanto's concerns of the impact of sand mining on the destruction of nature along the river at the slope of Mount Merapi. Inside the tent is a sound piece, one story within shares how 9 trucks were buried by the mudflow, shared by a local villager (one of the paintings also depicts this moment), this memory sharing how nature often gives warnings of exploitation in the form of mudflows that drown trucks, or even taking the lives of miners.

People who believe in a form of ecological wisdom would acknowledge Mount Merapi eruption cycle as a blessing, a cycle for renewal, and prosperity. After every eruption, the soil will become more fertile than before, the next crop will be better, and the volcanic material can be taken in moderation. Smaller scale sand mining industries can be traced back to the 1980s. Later, the government allowed heavy machinery to be used on the river to reduce the volume of volcanic material so that it won't spill to the farmer's field or cause material flood downstream in the city. If the volcanic material is being taken cautiously, balance can be restored. But human's greed knows no limit. Massive mining activities are thus considered a form of non-compliance with Nature.

The painting titled "Sing Bahurekso Gunung Merapi" (The Sovereign of Mount Merapi), is the first artwork you encounter upon entering the gallery space, exposing the multi-imaginary of Mount Merapi, depicting an accumulation of differing eruption images of this volcano, alongside local memories. "Ojo Adigang Adigung Adiguna" is a large-scale painting evoking the river flow of Mount Merapi's volcanic material after the big eruption in 2010. The lanes of the roads, engineered by mining trucks, have become part of the landscape, a manifestation of the arrogance of humans who desire to colonize and conquer nature. This man-made landscape is devoid of humans, however their tools symbolize the dominance of industrialization over man's previous respectful relationship with the inanimate world. Three other paintings further expose illegal sand-mining activity and how this particular trade carves the landscape along the volcanic river. In these images, the denial of the human figures is violently felt. The spatial feel of the painting gives you a sense of being in a strange landscape that is hard to distinguish as man made or natural. The perspective is flat and the charcoal is blurred, giving the sense of a folklore scenario that is almost abstract. The street that the sand miner's truck made looks indistinguishable with the river flow but once you see it in detail, it triggers curiosity: why so many trucks? where is everybody? what is going on?

In the context of this 'Pollination' project, 'local embodied knowledge' is particularly explored in relation to ideas of human ecology and its natural environment. We want to understand how the practice of 'local embodied knowledge' seeks to balance human desire with awareness of repercussion, attempting to present ways in which the impact of human production can/should be measured sustainably. It is time to reconsider our life of consumption by reintegrating ourselves with nature. The question on how to cope with our ecological crisis might be hard to answer, but we must acknowledge it as a consequence of an accumulation of our extractive habits, our reliance on industrialized society deemed a fundamental element of modern life. How to cope may be answered by studying the multiplicity of context that we decided to leave in order to attain the singular concept and knowledge of modern living, this multiplicity of context, which we refer here as 'local embodied knowledge', becoming largely marginalized by the imposition of Western scientific thinking<sup>6</sup>,

'The Hunters' is an exhibition that strives to understand the relationship between humans and their natural surroundings, referring to learnings gained through bodily experiences under specific circumstances, as well as those passed down orally from one generation to another in the form of local rituals, ceremonies, and beliefs in the

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<sup>6</sup> This is referring to the idea of pluriversity by Walter D. Mignolo in his book "The Darker Side of Western Modernity" (Duke University Press: Durham & London, 2011)

supernatural. The artists have immersed themselves in these local cultures, learning from their stories, reflecting them within their art. This exhibition also presents the artistic research processes of these two artists through interviews conducted with the locals of the Mekong area, travel footage from the walks under Mount Merapi, artist sketches, as well as research documents, curator's research report, articles, and general comparative texts. Also on display is a video recording of a conversation between the two artists, further unpacking their art with regard to this notion of the 'hunter'.

While we may commonly refer to our natural surroundings, through musings of 'remember what this place used to be like?', we need to register such nostalgia with social agency, acknowledging our own role in the destructive transformation of nature. In a way, local embodied knowledge is a kind of tool that prompts such awareness, the merging of local hunters into mythical creatures a way for us to refer to the majesty of volcanoes and rivers, with respect.

### **About 'Of Hunters and Gatherers'**

*On the day when our first in-situ meeting for Pollination #3 started, the first Covid-19 case in Indonesia was announced. In Thailand, it was announced a few weeks before. The crisis escalated to a global pandemic status and a global collective experience, highlighting the performance of a system and governments' capability in facing critical moments. At the same time, the pandemic cannot be separated from the environmental crisis of the earth. What was once infecting animals<sup>7</sup> transmitted to humans and soon mutated to many specific different strains in response to human mobility and movement, the virus can be seen as a form of strike imposed by the earth to push pause for degrowth. As borders close and lockdowns are imposed, mobility is restricted for a better cause. Instead of widening the geographical scope of our research, we try to dig deeper and primarily focus on 'local embodied knowledge' and how to balance human desire with its object that measures impact sustainably to both human and non-human alike. Instead of flying across the sea and widening the geographical scope of our research, we follow local trails of rivers and mountains, sinking island and backyard cemetery, to the home garden and deforestation cases across South East Asia, and other environmental issues closer to home.*

*'Of Hunters and Gatherers' proposes we intertwine with nature, prompted by the artistic methodologies of Maryanto and Ruangsak Anuwatwimon, explored as an exhibition titled The Hunters, at the MAIIAM Contemporary Art Museum in March - April 2021. Simultaneously, the idea of local embodied knowledge is being investigated further through a discursive online symposium, titled The Gathering, co-hosted by Selasar Sunaryo Art Space and The Factory, which will also launch a dedicated project website, titled 'Of Hunters & Gatherers', at in May 2021 with contribution from Tita Salina, Sutthirat Supaparinya, Prilla Tania, The Forest Curriculum, Wut Chalanant (artists); and Elizabeth D. Inandiak, Adam Bobbette, JJ Rizal, and Napak Serirak (writers, academics); as well as contribution from the artists Maryanto and Ruangsak Anuwatwimon and curators Kittima Chareeprasit and LIR (Mira Asriningtyas & Dito Yuwono). Edited by Zoe Butt and Lee Weng Choy.*

### **CO-ORGANIZED AND CO-SPONSORED BY:**



<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7487339/> and <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-020-17687-3> The covid-19 case was first suspected to be carried and transmitted from animal to human although the role of animal in this case turns out to be still up for debate.