



Crossing boundaries: Exploring the power of Art and Culture Workshop report





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Convened by the Vibrant Forest Landscapes Lab at the Faculty of Forestry University of British Columbia, Emily Carr University of Art + Design Aboriginal Gathering Place, and Tanah Air Beta

13th – 15th December 2023, Prana Dewi Mountain Resort, Desa Wongaya Gede, Bali



Summary:

The Vibrant Forest Landscapes Lab (VFL) at the University of British Columbia, the Aboriginal Gathering Place at Emily Carr University of Art + Design (ECUAD) and Tanah Air Beta (TAB) are collaborating to explore different ways in which artistic expressions and cultural processes can act as “boundary tools” to achieve sustainable landscapes. Drawing from approaches in Indigenous material practice and participatory art, we seek to understand **how artistic expression and processes can create access to different ways of knowing and bridge different views** among diverse, and sometimes opposing, groups.

The ***Crossing Boundaries*** workshop invited participants to share their experiences using various forms of artistic expression to cross boundaries in a diversity of contexts such as environmental management, biodiversity conservation, sharing traditional knowledge, science communication, and cultural understanding on human-nature relations. Participants included conservation

practitioners, researchers, artists, and traditional leaders, each of whom shared their experiences with art and cultural processes. Our goal for the workshop was to connect with each other, connect with place, and advance understanding of how the power of artistic expression could contribute to achieving sustainability.

Drawing from the power of place and cultural values, we dedicated significant time in the workshop to learning from Balinese culture. Participants joined in Balinese artistic and cultural activities, including preparing offerings (*banten*) with women's group, gamelan music and dance with Prof Wayan Rai and Dewa Putra Diasa, carving with Made Wong, a visit to the Batu Karu temple, and a discussion led by high priest Mpu Jaya Brahmananda Pitana. As Prana Dewi is located in Wongaya Gede village adjacent to the World Heritage Jatiluwih Rice Terraces, we invited local leaders and to learn about the traditional *Subak* water management system as an integral part of Balinese culture.

We closed the workshop with a shared goal of bringing the ideas that emerged in the workshop to other parts of our work and life. We hope to maintain a network interested in artistic expression for sustainability and facilitate cultural exchange between Canada and Indonesia. This report summarises the activities during the workshop. We are especially thankful to Prana Dewi and the village of Wongaya Gede for hosting and welcoming us to this village.

Day 1

Introductions

We introduced our workshop as an opportunity to reflect on how artistic expressions and cultural processes may have helped bridge and maintain boundaries for sustainability. In sustainability science, boundary objects are typically collaborative products, created by bringing people together with different forms of knowledge to solve a problem. More broadly, boundary work includes efforts to create, maintain, and break down boundaries, for example, boundaries may be useful when sensitive information can not be shared publicly, such as traditional knowledge. Boundaries between sectors, traditional and scientific understanding, art and science, balancing production and conservation, or other divides. Breaking down boundaries might include opening new communication channels to confront a conflict, such as songs, story telling, films, and other visual mediums. Material practice can be a way of understanding traditional materials and culture. How can art connect with multiple aspects of identity, land, language, colonization, and current issues of discrimination. In this way, material practices create access to different ways of understanding, breaking-down boundaries between people with cultural diversity or worldviews. We noted that the word boundary can have a lot of meanings and consider boundary work to encompass many ways of engaging with different communities and groups.

Intu Boedhihartono present some background on the interests in Arts & Science and the link to conservation and sustainable development. She introduced activities conducted in Vancouver with Emily Carr University of Arts + Design and the proposed activities in Prana Dewi, Wongaya Gede. Local leaders contributed to our introductory discussions. Participants shared experiences and ideas linked to the workshop theme.

Some of the interests included:

- Choreographing new dances to raise awareness of nature and biodiversity
- Teaching Balinese gamelan and music to promote cultural heritage – by bringing people to villages, not performances in hotels
- Using visualisation with local communities to build capacity and awareness in disaster risk reduction
- Art as a form of resistance – a political tool
- Mapping social and spatial problems
- Nature-based schooling
- Art that is not just about aesthetics but with power and purpose
- Creativity and “language” to create connection to the land and speak for the planet
- Balancing values
- If we protect nature, nature will protect us
- Art in communication and messaging to meet target audiences for conservation
- Create a Climate Hub using art and visual methods
- Documenting art and culture that are disappearing or transitioning in the new era



The *Kepala Desa* (head of the village) of Wongaya Gede – I Nengah Bagiada, opened our workshop by sharing his perspective on the future of the area. He spoke of the cultural significance of the *Subak* system – the traditional irrigation of the Balinese rice terraces. He also pointed out the challenges in maintaining the traditional farming system. He argued for incentives to preserve the traditional agricultural systems, to avoid land use change in the region. He believes diverse cultural expression such as dance, gamelan and music are essentials in keeping their cultural heritage and transferring the traditions for the future generation.

The power of place – Bali

Following introductions, we made Balinese offerings (*banten*) and visited Batu Karu temple where the priest led us in prayers. We then had a performance by the local gamelan group and dancers. Everybody had the opportunity to join in Balinese dance. Part of this experience was learning about *Tri Hita Karana* - the Balinese philosophy of Life, which covers three relationships which includes harmony with God, harmony among people and harmony with nature; these relationships have to be maintained to achieve harmony and prosperity. We also learnt about other Balinese concepts; Prof Rai (Institut Seni Indonesia) taught us about *Tri Kaya Parisudha* and *Bayu Sabda Idep* - the philosophy that encourages positive thoughts and influences personal

happiness and 'life success' among Balinese. These concepts teach us that humans have the ability to think, talk, and act – and this should influence our approach to life, ensuring that we do not just think and talk but also act in a positive way. These concepts support diverse values and keep good relationships between different people. More importantly, these experiences allow us to connect with each other, help each other with offerings, laugh during dancing, and bring positivity into the workshop to carry through into discussions the following day.



Preparations for the offerings (banten)

Day 2

Honouring Indigenous knowledge through art education and material practice

We began the second day with a sharing circle, led by Connie Watts (ECUAD) to bring everyone into the room. Participants were asked to share one word that described how they felt. Some of the words included: happy, thoughtful, curious, excited, warm, inspired, and healing. Connie and Brenda Crabtree (ECUAD) then shared their work at the [Aboriginal Gathering Place](#) in Vancouver, Canada. They told us our Indigenous Material Practice – involving students and communities in making using traditional materials – can help to reduce vulnerability and open dialogue. While sharing their experience of workshops and personal art, they spoke of political resistance, decolonizing education systems, building networks among international Indigenous artists, and maintaining a space for Indigenous students to (re)connect with culture. They noted research styles of witnessing and documenting connections, perpetuating oral knowledge sharing – that may be uncommon or unappreciated in conventional research and education institutions. The discussion raised questions on how communities might keep traditional practices alive through collaboration and the need to respect intangible benefits. Intangible benefits may be difficult to

measure (or should not be measured?) but can transfer into other values (i.e. monetary, happiness, etc.) if given the space to flourish.

Bird Visualization: Promotion, education, and public awareness

Ria Saryanthi and Desita Dyah Dwiwahyu (Burung Indonesia / Birdlife Indonesia) presented work on creating conservation awareness through games, animated films, social media, colouring books, and other visual methods. Discussions centred on the role of art in changing behaviour. Participants noted the need for different approaches in different areas – ideally connected to local traditions or ways of knowing and their environment. The importance of starting simple was also discussed. For example, using simple language (rather than IUCN red list status) and make it fun. The discussion linked to nature-based schooling – the value of educating children who can then educate their parents. Burung Indonesia worked with high school students to create a short animation on the harms of bird capture and trade. Songbirds are in high demand in markets Indonesia. We also discussed the challenge in balancing conservation with tradition; some communities use materials from threatened species in their customs and rituals. The goal might therefore be awareness not a complete ban in use, as using materials can also help conserve them.



Visiting pak Yus – the bird specialist in Wongaya Gede

Culture, nature and spirituality

High priest Ida Pandita Mpu Brahmananda Pitana joined the workshop to share his knowledge of Balinese culture and tradition. In Bali, local management systems are often combined with forms of artistic expression, balancing livelihoods, biodiversity conservation, ecosystem restoration, and cultural identity. The Balinese philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana* (harmony with God, harmony among people and harmony with nature) is a fundamental principle for achieving prosperity that links spiritual, social, and environmental domains. Spiritual ceremonies, taboos and ‘*superstitions*’ may help preserve the equilibrium of nature and local livelihoods in Bali. These diverse acts of worshipping the Gods and ancestors through diverse artistic and cultural expressions and multiple

cultural actions and performances may offer pathways for sustaining environmental values of sacred forests and changing landscapes.



Mpu Brahmananda Pitana explain about Balinese heritage and Subak system

Mpu spoke about the Subak system, Balinese culture, and how it is changing:

- In the Subak system, all activities must start and end with rituals. More than 30% of activities of the Subak system are rituals – more than 30% of expenditure of Balinese households are spent on offerings. Offerings are way to maintain culture and are connected to environmental values. For example, rules on logging trees or polluting water resources.
- The Subak system in Bali is recognized by UNESCO as World Cultural Heritage. Jatiluwih became the site to show case the Subak system and promote economic development through ecotourism and agro-tourism. In this way, tourism strengthens the conservation of the Subak system. In Jatiluwih, tourism benefits are shared equally between farmers – not only those farmers exposed to tourists. All rituals, planting, and other activities are funded through tourism. The problem is that farmers want to find other ways to benefit, such as opening *warung* (small restaurants). This creates an inequality that might cause conflict.
- Balinese culture is an agrarian rice-based culture. Most art draws from agriculture (paintings, dance), there is a God of Rice, *Dewi Sri*, and offerings are made to her throughout the life cycle of the paddy. Young Balinese are very proud of their culture but they do not want to work in agriculture. This creates a question over the future of Bali as an agriculture-based society. There are two major threats to the Subak system: economic transformation and land-based transformation. Who will benefit from these transformations?



little shrine for Subak

- Pak Ida Bagus Sukarya (Subak leader from Gianyar regency) noted that government support for the Subak system and *Desa Adat* are not in balance. The Subak system received only 1/6 the amount of funding compared to *Desa Adat* (traditional and customary law system). Subak can do more for nature conservation, which is why it needs more support and funding.

The use of wood

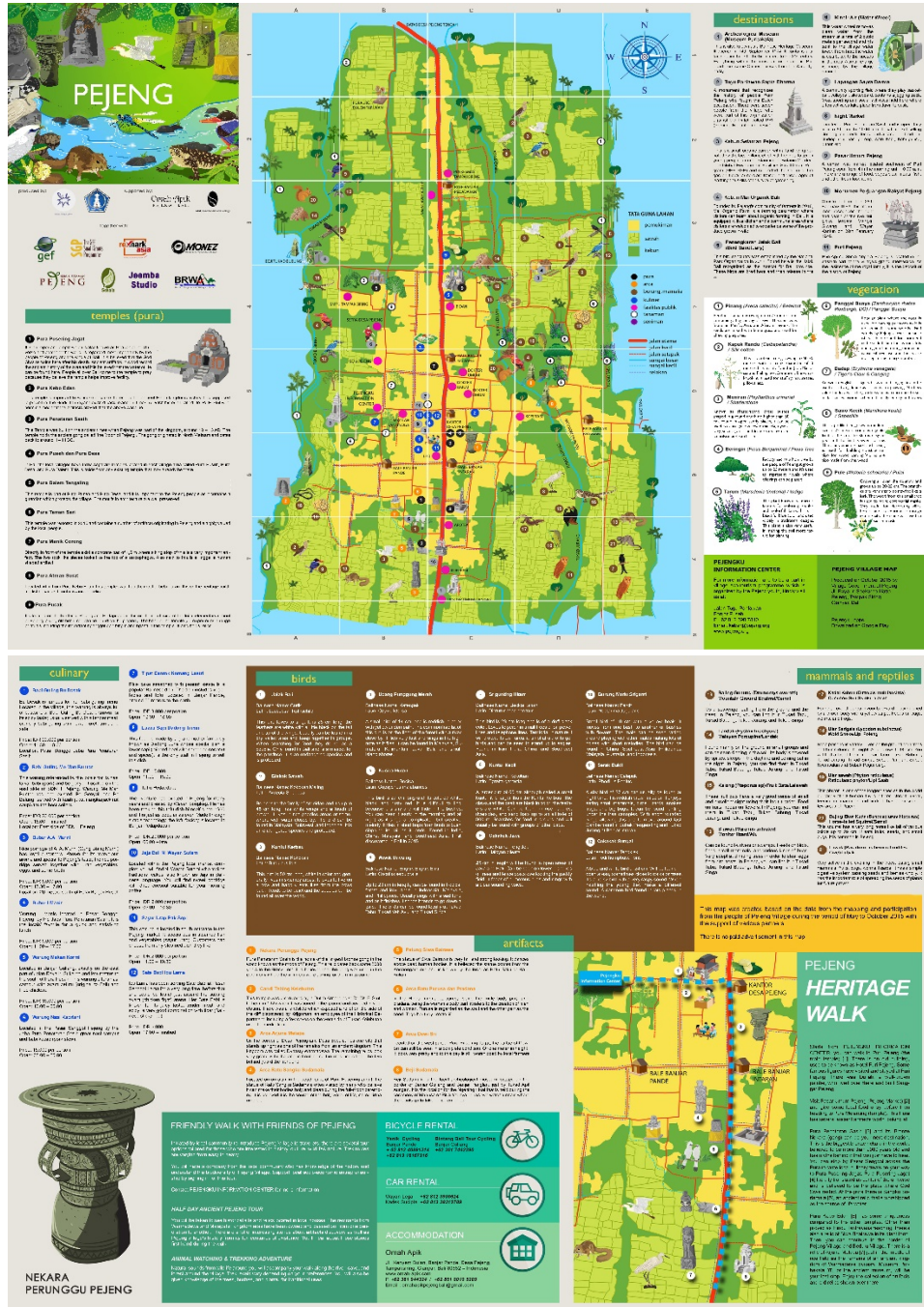
In the afternoon Chris Gaston (UBC wood science department) presented his work on Opening Doors, a collaboration with ECUAD AGP and First Nations artists in BC. The project involved young First Nations carvers, supported by Master Carvers, in which each carver created a design on a door, then replicated the design as limited editions using CNC (Computer Numerical Controlled) technology. Chris emphasized the value of collaboration, capacity-building, networking, and connecting young and old carvers through the project. Following this, local carver Pak Made Wong, joined the group to share his work. He demonstrated the process of carving teak designs for housing, which he sells online (Facebook: Made Wong Mesa Woodpecker).



Pak Made Wong and his carving

Cultural, economic, and environmental mapping with Bali Lite Institute

Dicky Lopulalan (Bali Lite Institute) presented a project in Bali in which the Pejeng village community developed a map that showed the broad range of assets in the village, including environmental, social, economic, and physical assets. A short film sharing the project can be found here: *Biodiverseni: The biodiversity and social-cultural map of Pejeng village*. The collaboration between Bali Lite and Pejeng village combined the art of illustration with biodiversity and social-cultural data, translating knowledge into a fun and interesting platform, creating a map for the community to use and share.



Biodiverseni – biodiversity and socio-cultural map of desa Pejeng

Botanical Art with the Indonesian Society of Botanical Artists (IDSBA)

The second day ended with botanical art led by Eunike Nugroho and Deinitisa Amarawi (IDSBA). Dei began with a short presentation on [IDSBA](#), a society of botanical artists involved in several exhibition and outreach activities on plant diversity. She explained that botanic art offers a way to connect with nature, both learning and appreciating through the art of drawing and painting of plants / botany. Botanical Art aims for accuracy but is different from scientific botanical illustration in that it does not need to contain additional information about the plant. The IDSBA run workshops for people interested in learning botanical art, encouraging participants to see nature through a different lens. Keke and Dei guided participants through the process of using watercolours to paint leaves and foliage, introducing some workshop participants to painting for the first time. The activity was a way to demonstrate that anyone can try botanical art, bringing people together to learn, create, and try something that might be outside of their comfort zone.



Learning the basic of botanical illustration with IDSBA

Day 3

Closing reflections

We spent the final morning sharing reflections on the workshop – key take-aways and ways we might pursue these ideas further. We opened the morning with a sharing circle, asking for one word describing a connection to the land (on which the meeting was held). Some of the words were: lush, honoured, home, inspired, tranquility, diverse, fun, learning. Reflections on the workshop centred on connections between nature, art, and learning:

- For some, Balinese culture demonstrated how youth could learn about cultural identity by taking part in traditional ceremonies, music, dance, etc. – something that does not happen in all communities.
- Many commented on the intangible benefits of the workshop - the connections made through eating together, discussing outside of presentations, and spending time with people with different backgrounds and interests (i.e. conservation practitioners and artists). Particularly the way that everyone brought their own experiences into the workshop and arrived with an open-mind. *We're not doing this alone.*
- Damar Ayu Tjahjani (BRIN) noted that whilst this workshop focused on visual expression, some communities have oral traditions like folk songs, poems and poetry - on how ancestors lived in harmony with nature. These traditions can also be valuable in maintaining ways of knowing and connecting to nature.
- Participants commented on feeling re-energised after the workshop - ready to try new approaches in their work. Mercy Rampengan (UNIMA) spoke of the ways in which the activities during the workshop could apply in disaster risk management and identifying resilience of communities in handling changes. Alyandra Gusman / Ale (WWF) expressed interest in trying the sharing circle in community work to begin a meeting, and using painting as a way to create conservation awareness in schools. *We should not be afraid to use art even if we are not artists.* Syahbandi Syahril explained the program of primary school kids where he teaches and creates dance to understand the link with nature and environment.
- Tiurma Siagian (RER APRIL) thinks that the private sector might be able to do more with local communities by using fun ways and methods to communicate about conservation and restoration programs.
- We discussed the difficulties of incorporating more art, culture and practice into grant-funded projects. Grants often require linear outcomes that don't acknowledge intangible benefits. But Yanthi noted the need to educate the donors too – they are part of the target audience. Delivering messages or trying new approaches takes time, it's ok to start simple. *Revitalization, promotion, perpetuation.*
- There is also the challenge of working with different disciplines. As Chris highlighted, economists want to put a value on everything and try to predict behaviour. Similarly, conservationists tend to see issues as too complex to be resolved through something 'simple' like art. Attempting to reconcile these differences may be part of future activities, by directly engaging those who might be challenged by the ideas discussed here.

- Putra Diasa emphasised the importance of cultural identity and believes that young people's links to their land can be strengthened by artistic activities of many kinds (gamelan, music, dance, theatre, painting etc).

Conclusion

The workshop in Bali was an opportunity to explore new ideas, exchange with new people, and create an international community interested in building connections through artistic and cultural expressions for sustainability. As in Balinese philosophy, we must think, talk, and act. The next steps following this workshop will be to collate these learnings and use them to address sustainability challenges in a landscape. We hope to trial this in both Indonesia and British Columbia, and share these experiences in an exhibition in 2023.

Acknowledgement

We would like to thank all participants of the workshop, local communities and numerous colleagues who helped with the preparation of the event and welcoming the visit of our team in Bali.



Visit Wongaya Gede primary school and Tanah Air Beta



Visit and ritual at the Batu Karu Temple with Jero Mangku



Visit to the Institut Seni Indonesia in Denpasar

Agenda

Monday 12th December	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants arrive and check-in • 6pm: Welcome dinner at Prana Dewi 	
Tuesday 13th December	
Morning	9am: Welcome by Intu Boedhihartono and Wongaya Gede village leaders <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participant introductions • Crossing boundaries: discussion on boundary tools & artistic expression
Afternoon	The Art of Making: Balinese Offerings (<i>Banten</i>) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants join in the making and learn about the links between Balinese culture and materials to the local environment led by Intu and Pak Putra • Visit to Batu Karu Landscape (Temple, Subak and Sacred Forest) 4pm: Learning from Balinese Dance and Gamelan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion led by Prof Wayan Rai (ISI) • Participants join with Wongaya Gede gamelan group in Gamelan performance and exchanges with the locals
Evening	Dinner at Prana Dewi
Wednesday 14th December	
Morning	9am: Honouring Indigenous knowledge through art education and material practice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brenda Crabtree and Connie Watts (ECUAD Aboriginal Gathering Place) 10am: Culture, nature and spirituality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mpu Jaya Brahmananda Pitana (High Priest)
Afternoon	Opening doors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chris Gaston (UBC) • Carving led by Made Wong Linking art to conservation practice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology and film led by Yanthi (Burung Indonesia) and Dicky • Painting and illustration led by Intu and Eunike (IDSBA)
Evening	Dinner at Prana Dewi
Thursday 15th December	
Morning	Workshop conclusion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we follow up on our discussions – what are promising lines of enquiry and examples of art helping to cross boundaries
Afternoon	Participants depart

Background

The workshop is hosted by the local NGO [Tanah Air Beta](#) – Our land and water, in collaboration with UBC Faculty of Forestry’s Vibrant Forest Landscape Lab (VFL) and Emily Carr University of Art + Design Aboriginal Gathering Place (ECUAD). Our workshops are part of our collaboration on *Exploring the power of Indigenous art as a catalyst for linking economic growth to sustainable landscapes*, funded by the Canadian Tri-agency Research Councils under the New Frontiers in Research Fund. We are also engaged in other activities as part of this collaboration, including strengthening knowledge of Indigenous art and livelihoods and preparing an exhibition to share and exchange examples of art bridging boundaries.

For some resources on past activities conducted by **ECUAD Aboriginal Gathering Place** and the **Vibrant Forest Landscapes Lab** see below. Our team includes:

[Intu Boedhihartono](#), Tanah Air Beta and Faculty of Forestry, UBC

[Brenda Crabtree](#), Director, Aboriginal Programs, ECUAD

[Connie Watts](#), Associate Director, Aboriginal Programs, ECUAD

[Chris Gaston](#), Faculty of Forestry, UBC

Rebecca Riggs, Post-Doctoral Fellow, Program coordinator, Faculty of Forestry, UBC

About the collaboration

<https://vibrantforestlandscapes.forestry.ubc.ca/our-work/exploring-the-power-of-indigenous-art-as-a-catalyst-for-linking-economic-growth-to-sustainable-landscapes/>

Previous work:

[Mural Paintings](#), led by Intu Boedhihartono

[Opening Doors](#), led by Chris Gaston and Brenda Crabtree

ECUAD Aboriginal Gathering Place Cultural Resources

https://aboriginal.ecuad.ca/cultural_resources/

For more photos and a selection of articles linked to boundary work, please access the google drive link here:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1EImPO4YaElZ4c4f5wl_5D8HzKMZRKvT?usp=sharing