

# IKON

Ikon Gallery  
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0121 248 0708 / [ikon-gallery.org](http://ikon-gallery.org)  
free entry / donations welcome  
Registered charity no. 528892

## Mayunkiki

### *Siknure - Let me live*

### 9 September – 13 November 2022



Tosa Monno, Mayunkiki's great-grandmother plays the mukuri (mouth harp).  
Historical family photograph © Mayunkiki

Ikon presents *Siknure - Let me live* by Ainu artist and musician Mayunkiki (9 September - 13 November 2022). It is the first solo exhibition by an Ainu artist in the UK.

Born in 1982 in Asahikawa, on the island of Hokkaidō in Japan, Mayunkiki's artistic practice arises from her Indigenous identity. Through a variety of works, this exhibition conveys the predicament of her community in recent times. Like many Indigenous people, the Ainu have suffered systematic marginalisation by a central government and Mayunkiki is especially concerned to raise the profile of their traditional culture, including Sinuye (traditional tattooing practice for Ainu women, banned by the Hokkaidō Development Commission and

not yet fully lifted) and Upopo (traditional Ainu music rooted in rhythmic patterns and singing in a trance-like chorus).

On the walls throughout the exhibition are a number of historical family photographs - to illustrate literally where Mayunkiki is coming from - and also handwritten observations, in English, made by her. One is an overview:

I knew that I was Ainu, but I had no idea what that meant or how it affected me until I was about 23 years old, when I began to consciously study Ainu culture. However, I always had the impression that the word "Ainu" was associated with more negative than positive images, and I always felt this a little from the air that flowed whenever someone used the word "Ainu", and from the expressions on their faces.

A new video work, commissioned by Ikon, is concerned with the relationship between the artist and her father. It was he, above all others, who insisted on her Indigenous identity: "You are Ainu". Now with more time as he reaches an older age, Mayunkiki proposes an Ainu "to do" list, with an idea that he will fulfil all the items, and therefore die "as an Ainu".

Another body of work, exhibited here, is based on a small selection of Ainu artefacts, on loan from the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford. These include a necklace of globular trade beads, a wooden soup-ladle, a coat made of Attush (fibre from the inner bark of the elm tree) and a mukkuri (mouth harp). For Ikon, the existing (original) labels are replaced by extended captions written by Mayunkiki, to reflect her own experience and understandings, stopping them from becoming "relics from the past".

The museum objects, placed in vitrines, are seen alongside personal objects that Mayunkiki has chosen to reflect the nature of her everyday life - now as a resident of Sapporo, Hokkaidō's bustling capital city. She is concerned to assert her cultural heritage whilst acknowledging the pervasive influence of contemporary popular culture. In a [recent interview](#) she explains: "... identity should be more flexible. As we live in Japan, I don't know why we have to struggle with our identity as Ainu, and why we even have to think about our identity - of course history is a different story. It would be much better if we could talk about Ainu more comfortably without worrying about identity issues. We are seen as special just because we're Ainu, but if we can go beyond that and just normalise Ainu, it will become easier for everyone to learn about our history and rights."

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue, with installation photographs of Ikon's exhibition, a dialogue with Mayunkiki and her team and an introduction by Jonathan Watkins, Ikon Director. A public programme includes a performance by Mayunkiki and Surge Orchestra (Friday 9 September) and a panel discussion on Ainu culture (October) with anthropologist Marenka Thompson-Odlum and artist and researcher Eiko Soga. For more information, please visit [ikon-gallery.org](http://ikon-gallery.org)

The exhibition is generously supported by The Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation, The Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation and The Japan Foundation.

This exhibition follows a number by Ikon featuring Indigenous women artists, including Meryl McMaster (Canada), Judy Watson and Yhonnie Scarce (Australia) and Britta Marakatt-Labba (Sweden).

For more information, high-res images and to request interviews please contact Rebecca Small and Muskeen Liddar by email [r.small@ikon-gallery.org](mailto:r.small@ikon-gallery.org) and [m.liddar@ikon-gallery.org](mailto:m.liddar@ikon-gallery.org) or call Ikon on 0121 248 0708.

Social Media Handles - Instagram, Twitter and Facebook: @ikongallery #IkonGallery  
Links: [ikon-gallery.org](http://ikon-gallery.org)

## Notes to Editors:

1. Mayunkiki still lives and works on the island of Hokkaidō. She participated in the 22<sup>nd</sup> Sydney Biennale (2020) at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia.
2. Ikon is an internationally acclaimed contemporary art venue situated in central Birmingham. Established in 1964 by a group of artists, Ikon is an educational charity and works to encourage public engagement with contemporary art through exhibiting new work in a context of debate and participation. The gallery programme features artists from around the world and a variety of media is represented, including sound, film, mixed media, photography, painting, sculpture and installation. Ikon's off-site programme develops dynamic relationships between art, artists and audiences outside the gallery. Projects vary enormously in scale, duration and location, challenging expectations of where art can be seen and by whom. Education is at the heart of Ikon's activities, stimulating public interest in and understanding of contemporary visual art. Through a variety of talks, tours, workshops and seminars, Ikon's Learning Team aims to build dynamic relationships with audiences, enabling visitors to engage with, discuss and reflect on contemporary art. [ikon-gallery.org](http://ikon-gallery.org)
3. Ikon is open Tuesday – Sunday and Bank Holiday Mondays, 11am - 5pm. Admission is free. Ikon Gallery is supported using public funding from Arts Council England and Birmingham City Council. For the latest news and events follow @ikongallery on [Twitter](https://twitter.com/ikongallery), [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/ikongallery) and [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/ikongallery).
4. Arts Council England is the national development body for arts and culture across England, working to enrich people's lives. ACE support a range of activities across the arts, museums and libraries – from theatre to visual art, reading to dance, music to literature, and crafts to collections. Great art and culture inspires us, brings us together and teaches us about ourselves and the world around us. In short, it makes life better. Between 2018 and 2022, ACE will invest £1.45 billion of public money from government and an estimated £860 million from the National Lottery to help create these experiences for as many people as possible across the country. [arts council.org.uk](http://arts council.org.uk)