

EXHIBITION GUIDE

Mayunkiki

Siknure - Let me live

9 September – 13 November 2022

Second Floor Galleries

In the artist's own words:

Siknure means “to keep something alive” or “to ensure something survives” in Ainu language.

In 2020, Upopoy, the National Ainu Museum and Park, was established in Hokkaidō. In Japanese, it is called “民族共生象徴空間”, which literally means “symbolic space for the coexistence of ethnic groups”. However, I'm uncomfortable with their use of the word “coexistence”, because the fact is that we cannot really say that Ainu and ethnic Japanese (wajin) are living together in mutual harmony.

Living as Ainu in Japan, we have always faced discrimination and prejudice. Since Upopoy was built, I feel, in a real sense, that Ainu have enjoyed an extraordinary amount of admiration. It is as if, in a way, Ainu is a hot topic. There have been even more idealistic and intrusive views directed towards Ainu people, which are associated with primitive images and a curiosity about our existence. In such a situation, it is very difficult to learn from a broader perspective whilst developing one's own definite ideas without becoming self-conscious.

While it feels “difficult to live” in various situations, I also feel I must always consciously think about “being myself”.

Without giving up, I keep thinking about what I can do, and continuing my practice of singing and writing. They are indispensable in my life, and each makes me who I am now. I just want to be honest to myself, and collect and carefully convey what I need to keep myself alive.

These days, I'm particularly focused on maintaining the viewpoint of “I” as a subject for things that are often considered to be from or in the past, sharing issues I am “forced to face” with my dear friends as we discuss our respective thoughts. As well I'm trying to show courage in facing my relationship with my family – something I'd previously neglected.

I don't want to impose any expectation on how anyone looks at or perceives things through this exhibition. I would be very happy if *Siknure* became an opportunity for viewers to think about what it means to make themselves feel alive.

IKON

The exhibition comprises Ainu artefacts, filmed interviews with Mayunkiki and family photographs.



Ainu artefacts

A small selection of Ainu artefacts, on loan from the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford are displayed throughout the exhibition. 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. These include another *mukkuri*, *ninkari* (a pair of earrings), photos of *lomante* (a traditional ceremony), a bear carving, *rekutunpe* (decorative band worn on the forehead), *ipapkeni* (deer whistle), pot stand and kimono.



Filmed interviews with Mayunkiki

On the subject of *Siknure*, Mayunkiki conducts four filmed interviews with Otomo Yoshihide, musician; Hiroshi Nakagawa, Professor of Ainu language; Kanoko Tamura, translator and Brook Andrew, artist and curator.

A new video, 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 asks him to reflect on his previous experience within their family and in the wider world.



Family photographs and handwritten statements

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.

The exhibition is supported by [The Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation](#), [The Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation](#) and the [Japan Foundation](#).

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

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.

EVENT

[Towards A Liveable World: Learning From Ainu Culture](#)

Friday 7 October 2022, 6 – 7.15pm

Free, [book tickets](#).

Eiko Soga, Artist and Researcher at The Ruskin School of Art, and Marenka Thompson-Odlum, Research Associate at Pitt Rivers Museum, share their research on Ainu culture with Jonathan Watkins, Ikon Director. Together they consider the re-labelling of Ainu artefacts, on loan from the Pitt Rivers Museum.

This event is in partnership with the [Japan Foundation](#).

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Free entry, donations welcome

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