SON DE BOSQUE
conference | exhibition | art installation

ESPACE BELLEVILLE - CFDT
4 boulevard de la Villette - 75019 Paris

32 Art Book
The installation «SON DE BOSQUE» (the sound of forest) is dedicated to the cause of the Batak tribe (Palawan Island, in the western Philippines). It has been proposed by 32 ART STUDIO and will take place in the cultural venue of the CFDT head office (french trade union, Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail) in Paris, FRANCE.

All elements of this exhibition will be discussed with, and should receive the approval of the Batak tribe through their "Batak Federation" (see below : « our partners »).
32 ART STUDIO (association loi 1901) :
« Que l’action devienne sœur du rêve ! »

32 ART STUDIO is a studio for artistic research pursuing a multidisciplinary approach and having a special focus on the cause of minorities. Amongst it various objectives, the association intends to use art as a potential form of resistance.
THE BATAK OF PALAWAN

Nowadays, like many vulnerable indigenous communities around the world, also the Batak are struggling to defend their forest and ancestral territory, on which their entire survival depends.

Palawan, is the fifth largest province in the Philippines. Because of its pristine forest, rich animal and plant diversity, UNESCO has declared it a "Man and Biosphere Reserve". The entire island is the target of a land management plan under the Philippines Republic Act 7611, also known as the Strategic Environmental Plan (SEP).

Since the late nineties, pressure on Palawan natural resources has accelerated at an alarming speed, with new competing claims being made by mining companies and agribusiness firms. Like many forest-based dwellers around the world, Batak survival is now being threatened by various forms of land grabbing, as well as by top-down forest conservation measures.

Batak are believed to originate from the first wave of Australoid populations which crossed the land bridges connecting the Philippine Archipelago with the mainland of Asia (probably around 45,000 – 50,000 years ago), and that are generically labelled as Negritos. Their population was estimated to be composed of about 600-700 individuals in 1900, while – presently – it has dropped to about 300 individuals. Batak have a heterogeneous livelihood, which combines various activities such as upland farming, collection of commercially valuable non-timber forest products (NTFPs), hunting and gathering.
THE BATAK URGENTLY NEED FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO DEMARCATE THEIR ANCESTRAL TERRITORIES AND HAVE THEIR «INDIGENOUS PEOPLE’S AND COMMUNITY CONSERVED TERRITORIES AND AREAS» (ICCAs) LEGALLY RECOGNIZED BY THE GOVERNMENT.

THROUGH THIS PROJECT «SON DE BOSQUE», WE AIM AT SUSTAINING BATAK STRUGGLE, WHICH IS BEING SUPPORTED BY CALG (COALITION AGAINST LAND GRABBING).
«L’ESPACE BELLEVILLE» : CFDT THE CULTURAL VENUE

The selection of "L’ESPACE BELLEVILLE" for this event is not a random choice. This location, in fact, was originally created to foster a stronger connection between 'the domain of work' and the 'domain of culture'. Since then, regular events have been organized in the gallery found within CFDT building (Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail), especially on themes dealing with sustainable development, human rights and the defence of minorities. These themes, indeed, are in perfect harmony with the overall approach and socio-political milieu of 32 ART STUDIO.
DARIO NOVELLINO

Dario is one of those admirable people who dedicate their lives to a just cause. His one is the indigenous peoples’ struggle for self-determination on the Island of Palawan (The Philippines). A fluent speaker of Batak language, Dario - over the last thirty years – has placed much effort in protecting the traditional resource rights of the Batak of Palawan and of other Southeast Asian ethnic groups. His efforts have been relentless, resulting in new and stronger forms of empowerment for the local communities. A revealing moment in the life of Dario happened in 1987, when he singlehandedly managed to protect a Batak community against a logging company that was about to exploit timber in their territory. As the Batak are swidden cultivators and hunter-gatherers, the loss of their forest would have meant the loss of their livelihoods and culture. It was then that Dario discovered the inebriating taste of being able to obtain major results only armed with determination, intelligence and a sense of justice. Because of his campaign, the logging company was stopped and the Tanabag Batak were saved.

But Dario was convinced that he could do much more if he would be equipped with more understanding of the people and cultures he so much cared about. He thus studied social anthropology (Master at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1995) and environmental anthropology (Ph.D., University of Kent, 2003).

He actually did research work and published in environmental anthropology, ethno-ecology, indigenous knowledge, shamanism, ritual, cosmology and the anthropology of development. But he always knew that his place was more with the people than with books and computers, and that he was ready to renounce comfort and salaries to follow his own sense of justice and solidarity with the oppressed. In 2014, he facilitated the establishment, empowerment and legal registration of the Batak Federation. He is also a research fellow at the Centre for Biocultural Diversity (CBCD) of the University of Kent (UK) and a staff of the global Consortium on «Indigenous People’s and Community Conserved Territories and Areas» (ICCAs). In recognition of his personal and long-term commitment for indigenous peoples he has received prestigious awards: the Royal Anthropology Institute’s ‘Urgent Anthropology Fellowship’ (2007-2009 - https://www.therai.org.uk/awards/past-awards/dr-dario-novellino), the Paul K. Feyerabend Award (2013 - http://pkfeyerabend.org/en/2013/06/20/english-dario-novellino-the-2013-paul-k-feyerabend-laureate/), the Darrell Posey Fellowship (2014 - http://www.ethnobiology.net/what-we-do/core-programs/fellowships/field-fellowships/).

Moreover, thanks to the support of the Firebird Foundation For Anthropological Research (http://www.firebirdfellowships.org/), Dario has been able to archive and translate valuable documentation on Batak culture which is now being used for the setting up of this installation by 32 Art Studio.

COALITION AGAINST LAND GRABBING (CALG)

The Coalition against Land Grabbing (CALG) [https://www.facebook.com/Coalition-Against-Land-Grabbing-CALG-411975619002144/timeline] is a national coalition of indigenous peoples and local communities based in the province of Palawan (the Philippines). In Palawan, CALG has been a driving force in the struggle against rampant land grabbing, and it has invested considerable efforts in providing para-legal assistance and advocacy training, especially to communities being impacted by oil palm plantations and other types of industrial agribusiness. In this respect, CALG has been the promoter of a petition calling for a province-wide moratorium against oil palm expansion being signed by more than 4,200 members of oil palm impacted municipalities The organization is a member of the Global Consortium on ICCAs (Indigenous peoples’ and community conserved territories and areas).

BATAK FEDERATION (Bayaan it Batak kat Palawan – BBKP)

The organization is composed of recognized Batak chieftains from seven different locations. Its primary objective is to defend people’s ancestral rights to land and resources. However, accomplishments made in the achievement of this objective are continuously being challenged by new pressures coming from the outside (e.g. illegal logging, illegal gold panning, unauthorized occupation of ancestral territories, etc.). The federation has existed informally over the past 20 years, but has not functioned on regular basis due to the lack of resources needed for mobilizing the communities, which are scattered in different locations. Only in October 2014, the Federation was legally registered with the Department of Labour and Employment. Since then, the organization has received a small grant from the Onaway trust to strengthen its capacities and additional support has been channelled through CALG from grants received by the German Ministry of Development (via Rainforest Rescue) and by the Paul Feyerabend Foundation (PKF). The Batak Federation is also member of the global Consortium on “Indigenous Peoples’ and Community Conserved Territories and Areas” (ICCAs).
«Son de Bosque», an art installation

The installation «SON DE BOSQUE» draws its inspiration from a Batak Foundation Myth (the legend of Kawali). This is a central theme of the yearly ‘lambay’ ritual, through which Batak propitiate an abundant harvest of wild honey and upland rice. By merging together Batak voices, sounds, images and videos, the installation provides an ‘artistic’ representation of the mystical environment surrounding the lambay. The construction of the ‘tree of life’, instead, symbolizes the connection between humans and superhuman beings (Diwata) during the mythical ‘golden age’, when people had a privileged relationship with the Diwata and, because of that, they did not suffer of illnesses and food was easily available. This is a recurrent element in Batak and other indigenous peoples’ cosmologies in Palawan.

In addition to the «art exhibition» and multimedia content, the installation «SON DE BOSQUE» has also a more descriptive educational component with texts, graphics and illustrations tackling various aspects of Batak everyday life. This serves to enhance visitors’ understanding of Batak culture and, more importantly, it provides a better context to describe the main threats faced by the Batak population. At the same time, the installation invites visitors to take concrete actions in support of the Batak cause.

Visitors are invited to support Batak struggle by purchasing a photo-book on the Batak that will be made available at the entrance of the exhibition. The proceeds of the sale will be entirely donated to our local NGO partner CALG (Coalition Against Land Grabbing) for the implementation of advocacy, livelihood and land demarcation projects amongst the Batak. Versions in English and Tagalog (language spoken in the Philippines) of the photo-book will be distributed by CALG amongst local schools in Palawan to raise awareness on the importance of preserving Batak ICCAs (Indigenous People’s and Community Conserved Territories and Areas).
Inspiration
«SON DE BOSQUE» goes behind cultural distances. Instead it offers an opportunity for building a moment of closeness and a possible empathy, between visitors and the Batak.

The event is divided into two different phases. The first aims at enhancing a sensory experience in visitors, as they walk through the installation and listen to the sound of the forest, Batak songs, percussions and witness, as well, sequences of images, videos and lightening effects; the second consists of a photo exhibition and texts describing Batak everyday life.

The sound of spoken words, music, shamanic songs and dances which resonates through the installation are exactly the same sounds that people employ to communicate with their forest environment, to attract bees and to establish a relationship with their the mystical Master (Ungaw or Aputa). In Batak own views, all the sounds they produce, especially during rituals, must be integrated into the totality of sounds unravelling and reverberating through the universe. This is because certain sounds, such as those of percussions, are perceived to embody specific qualities that are also found in the surrounding environment.
View of the installation at the entry hall of the CDFT head office - PARIS
The Myth of Kawai and the Foundation of the Lambay Ceremony

As narrated by Padaw, the shaman and translated by Dario Novellino

This is how our ‘grandfather’ (apu) Kawai was taken by the putiukan bees (Apis dorsata).

He spent a full day ‘searching for honey’ (lebet), but he could ‘not see the hives’ (dawga miarag). While searching for the hives, he came close to a lampanag (large flat stone in a creek). There, at the lampanag, a group of putiukan had gather together to drink.

Abe’ (exclamation of wonder) said Apu Kawai, it is really yourself drinking there! Where do you live?

The putiukan answered ‘what are you looking for’? (unu paguiman).

Look at me (said Kawai). I am trying to find some honey but I cannot find any.

Au (exclamation of understanding equivalent to ‘oh’) said the putiukan – although you are searching for hives, you will be unable to see them there. We are here to fetch water and, after this, we’ll return to gunay gunay (the mythical place of concentration for both bees and rice). Meanwhile, all of you (referred to people in general) must continue searching for honey until you see us again. When you see us – follow us.

How can I follow? (asked Kawai).

We (the bees) ‘will hold each other together’ (daramit tami), we’ll grab you, and carry you with us.

So the bees begin to clench to each other – hold Kawai by his arms and legs – and, all together, they fly to the gunay gunay.

After landing, Apu Kawai finds himself in front of the house of Aputa (the Master of the bees). There are beehives everywhere, below the floor, and along the pole of the house. Father, there is a man here, he has followed us (the bees are addressing Aputa).

Where is he? (asks Aputa).

Kawai answers: whatever you offer me, I will be pleased to accept it.

Aputa asks: are you hungry?.

Yes I am hungry (Kawai answers).

Tell me what would you like to eat (Aputa speaking), so that I can please you with haste. Would you like to try my arubang (nasal mucus)?

Kawai answers: whatever you offer me, I will be pleased to accept it.

So Aputa asks the bees to bring him a plate, then he blows his mucus until the plate is full. When Kawai finishes to eat the arubang, Ungaw (the Master of Bees’ proper name) asks him: would you like to eat my faeces?

Again Kawai answers: whatever you offer me, I will be pleased to accept it.

Aputa begins to like Kawai for his politeness and good manners.

So he asks the bees to bring more food, and he asks Kawai: what would you like for sada’an (side dish): chicken, pig, fish or vegetables?

Kawai answers: I only like vegetables.

Aputa really appreciates Kawai’s answer! (it is forbidden to eat animals at the gunay gunay). So the food is served. After eating, Kawai says: well, it is time for me to go.

Aputa answers: bring these things with you, I give you the pamumilakan (a ritual stone used during the Lambay), it is spotted (just like the beehives).

Then he gives him the uli [a mixture of parina resin (an Araliaceae tree) and other materials] and he says: you must use this when you cannot see the hives, you must rub it on the pablu’ed (the region of the eyebrows), so that you will be able to see the hives. Then Aputa adds: bring all these things with you. Although you have no knowledge
of the tarek dance – you must follow these instructions: fasten these things (the uli and the pamumiakan) to a stick of bagu (Gnetum gnemon), and then ask your wife to play the sabag (a type of percussion). After that, you must dance the tarek and you will see my children (the bees).

So Kawali leaves (returns to his community), and begins to follow all the instructions given to him by Aputa. He instructs his wife on how to play the sabag and he begins to dance. Before he starts, he pronounces these words: Apu, I am now beginning to dance.

The next day he goes to the forest and spends a full day searching for hives. He is late and the wife thinks that he has lost his way home but – before the day ends – here he comes carrying a jar on his back! He places the jar on the floor, it is full of honey!

(Later) the biras of Kawali (a kinship term here referred to name the husband of his wife's sister) returns from the forest after harvesting rattan. He informs Kawali that the forest is full of beehives. They are everywhere, also along the margins of the uma (the swidden field), as well as on the trees' lowest branches. The biras tells Kawali that he had kept harvesting honey for two consecutive days and now there are no more hives left in the forest.

On the third day, the biras returns to the forest to collect more honey. He walks a full day in vain without seeing a single beehive. Then, just when he is loosing all hopes, he spots a group of bees one on top of the other (tumpuk) drinking form a na’as (a pool of water at the end of a creek).

Oh it is really yourself there! – says the biras.

The bees reply: we do not reside here but in the house of our father (i.e. they want to stress that they came from a far-away place).

The biras adds: it does not matter how far is your place, just bring me with you.

So the bees come very close to each other, they hold the biras safely, and fly away with him like in a squad.

They land near the house of the Master of Bees, he sees the biras of Kawali and he asks the bees: who is he?

The bees reply: there is a man here.

Then Aputa asks to the biras: have you eaten already? Would you like to try my nasal mucus?

‘Certainly, not I!’ (adi aku) replies the biras.

Perhaps, you like to try my faeces.

‘No way!’ (iappai da aku), answers the biras.

‘Let’s cook for my friend!’ orders Aputa to the bees.

Grandson, (Aputa speaking) I like to ask you: is there a side dish that you fancy most? Pig, chicken, fish or vegetables?

Yes, chicken is really what I want!

The biras begins to eat with great voracity. When he finishes he says: it is late, I will go now.

Aputa answers: no way! you are not going anywhere – you are my chicken now!
So Aputa pulls his neck and devours him.

According to another version of the myth, narrated by Busingen, the types of materials to be used during the lambay were revealed directly by Aputa to Bagu (another mythical ancestor). In one portion of the myth, Bagu addresses Aputa with the following question: « what kind of thing is the lambay? » and Aputa replies: it’s about dancing the tarok at the sound of the sabagan and then he gives more details on the material to be used:

For constructing the sabag (the beating sticks) you need to use the woods of karumata, malinapug and balinaud, and for the sabagan (the wooden pole) you must use the wood of sanda’en.

According to the narrative, the sound of the sabagan will be interpreted by Aputa as a sign (tanda’an) indicating that people have no food available. So he will disperse (wasag) his children (the bees), and they will construct new hives in the forest.
**Comments on the Myth:**

As the myth suggests, beehives are not regarded as fixed supply of raw material that can be turned to for help, or other purposes when required. On the contrary, bees (and their products) are not perceived by Batak simply as 'things that are found in the environment', but rather as something which needs to be negotiated through appropriated behaviours and ceremonies. Clearly, the attitude of Kawali is not that of somebody seeking mastery over nature, but it is characterised by the necessity of keeping in constant 'consultation' with the Master of Bees. One fundamental feature of this negotiation is the acquisition of knowledge through socialisation and direct engagement. Moreover, the relationship between people and the Master of Bees and the Master of Rice must be restored constantly through the *lambay* ceremony.

In the myth, Kawali and the husband of his wife’s sister (*biras*) come to represent the best and worst traits. The latter is the breaker of taboos and customary norms, the epitome of inappropriate behaviour. He is punished by Aputa for his greed and boldness. This myth places emphasis on limited resources and condemns over-exploitation.
Lambay ceremony
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