

### **Policy, Memory and Material Experiences: Labay Eyong and U.S. Aid to Taiwan**

The works of Labay Eyong, a contemporary Truku artist born in Hongye Village, Hualien, in the 1980s, through a variety of mediums that include soft sculptures, video art, metalworking, and even sites, explore the themes of women, ethnicity, environment, and society. In 2020, she was selected as a finalist for the Taishin Arts Award for her exhibition “The Dungku Asang Art Project,” which was carried out in the area of Ruixin Mine on Hongye Village Mountain—her home. Labay Eyong’s style is bright and brazen, and she holds a firm command over the subjects and themes she wishes to convey, excelling at weaving broader political, social, and ethnic issues with the body experiences of women. She is not just a “female” or an “indigenous” artist, but a contemporary one who is fluent in the language of contemporary art.

Labay Eyong’s artistic direction and explorations can, in part, be viewed as a microcosm of the historical development, displacement, and evolution of the subjective consciousness and ethnic politics in Taiwan in recent years. While moving from “Lin Jiewen” in her school days to “Lin Jiewen/Labay Eyong” now, she has walked the same path as many of her Han peers, moving to the North for her education and studying abroad, and along the way, she has “been” Atayal, Seediq, and finally now, Truku. Her intersectional experiences of being female and indigenous as well as the search for identity have invariably provided a source and layers to her creations. After obtaining her master’s degree in spatial design from Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona in 2008, Labay Eyong returned to Taiwan and initially developed indigenous-style jewelry and ornamental pieces using metal centered on the theme “Bubu’s Closet” (*bubu* meaning “mother” in Truku)—her grandmother’s closet. Being both a treasure chest and a womb for her creative works, the closet gives her an endless supply of inspiration with which to reflect on her own art and position.

After inheriting two hundred pieces of woven cloth from her grandmother’s closet in 2014, Labay Eyong began to learn to weave, essentially learning to become a Truku “woman.” She then launched a series of large-scale soft sculptures on the theme of weaving, three works of which are on display in the current exhibition. The bright colors of these pieces were inspired by tribe experiences during the period of U.S. aid to Taiwan when her grandmother and other women of the village received wool sweaters, but instead of wearing them, the material was dismantled and rewoven. These recycled, or “tambrigen” (“exchange[d]”), sweaters which were largely repurposed into blankets challenged the material restrictions and color schemes of the original weaving practices, not only reshaping the unidirectional, passive relationship between giver and receiver under complex international politics but also leading to a creative revolution within the tribe. With this context serving as a foundation, the works of Labay Eyong included in this exhibition elicit the tribe experiences and collective memories that resulted from these encounters and shifts. On an individual level, through this form of labor-intensive weaving, she both reconstructs her past family history as well as intertwining her experiences of shaping herself into a woman with each horizontal and vertical thread.

Labay Eyong's creations demonstrate how U.S. aid of the time altered the quotidian material experiences of ordinary people and how related memories create contemporary art. Within these processes, weaving is seen as an important material symbol of indigenous identity, and it is worth noting that such discourses are not unique to Labay Eyong, but shared by numerous contemporary female indigenous artists throughout Taiwan. The Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, possesses a wide collection of documents from the period of U.S. aid to Taiwan, many of which concern the establishment of imparting the weaving practices and skills of tribes, and within the framework of U.S. aid policy, indigenous weaving was considered a subject that needed to be rescued and reformed. "Policy, Memory and Material Experiences" juxtaposes these official documents with the contemporary art of female indigenous weaving to illustrate the complex relationships between identity politics and material culture through their gaps and divergent discourses, ultimately hoping to actuate even richer possibilities for future research.

## 政策、記憶與物質經驗：林介文與美援時代

八十年代出生於花蓮紅葉部落的當代藝術家林介文，作品探討女性、族群、環境、社會等議題，創作媒材跨越軟性雕塑、錄像、金工、地景等多元形式。2020 年更以其在故鄉紅葉山上的瑞欣礦區所策劃的展覽《裏山》計畫，入圍當年台新藝術獎。林介文的藝術色彩鮮豔大膽，對議題的掌握精確流暢，擅長以女性的身體經驗交織更大的政治、社會與族群議題，她並不是只是「女性」或「原住民」藝術家，而是能夠以當代藝術語彙進行溝通的當代藝術家。

林介文藝術探索之旅某一部分可以說是近年台灣主體意識與族群政治開展、位移與演化史的縮影。從求學時代的「林介文」到現在的「林介文 / Labay Eyong」，一路走來，她像很多同輩的漢人菁英一樣，北上唸書、出國留學，當過泰雅族、賽德克族、最後才是太魯閣族。「原住民/女性」的經驗與其認同探求的確為其創作提供許多豐富的養分與層次。

2008 年她從西班牙巴塞隆納大學取得空間設計碩士後回國，初期以金工為材質，並以「BUBU 的衣櫃」為題，發展原住民風金工飾品。這裡的「BUBU」在其母語中是「母親」的意思，指的是林介文的祖母。此祖母的衣櫃像是林介文創作的百寶箱與子宮，源源不絕提供林介文以物質反思自身的藝術與定位。

尤其在 2014 年，她繼承祖母衣櫃中的 200 條織布後，林介文開始學習織布，學習成為一個太魯閣族的「女人」。她發展出一系列以編織為題材的大型軟雕塑，包括此次展出的三件作品。這些色彩鮮豔的編織發想於美援時代的部落經驗，當時的祖母與全村婦女們收到美援毛衣時，不是拿來穿，而是拆解後再編織利用。這些被稱為「Tambrigen（交換）」的回收毛衣所製被毯，改變了原來部落編織的材料限制與配色，不但重編了複雜的國際政治下單向而被動的施與受關係，同時也在部落進行了一場創作革命。此次展出的林介文作品正是奠基於此美援時代的物質經驗變革，及此變革所產生的部落經驗與家族記憶。藉由身體勞動性的編織操作，林介文不但重編過去家族史，也使其成為形塑自己作為女人種種生命經驗的經緯。

林介文的創作展現了美援如何改變常民日常物質經驗，而這樣的記憶，又如何創發當代藝術。在這過程中，編織被視為原住民族群認同很重要的物質表徵，而這樣的論述並非林介文所獨有，可以說是為許多台灣當代原住民女性藝術家所共享。本所藏有非常豐富的美援檔案，其中有不少與部落設立織布技術傳習所有關，在美援政策的框架下，原住民的編織在當時被視為是需要被拯救、改造的標的。此展覽將這些官方的檔案與當代原住民編織當代藝術並置，希望可以由其中的空隙與彼此背離的論述中，呈現複雜的認同政治與物質文化的關係，以期開啟未來更豐富的研究可能。