



Yee I-Lann - multidisciplinary Malaysian artist with a clear message

MANSAU-ANSAU at the Kunstmuseum Thun (23 August to 30 November 2025) is the first major exhibition in Europe devoted to the work of Yee I-Lann. The multidisciplinary Malaysian artist explores traditional arts and crafts from a contemporary vantage point, delving into the narratives of her homeland and addressing the influences of colonialism and the persistence of Indigenous heritage and communities today.

Walking on and on, without a clear destination – this is an approximate translation of MANSAU-ANSAU from the language of the Indigenous Kadazan and Dusun tribes in Yee I-Lann's homeland of Sabah, Malaysia. The notion of this venturing into the unknown can be frightening, as there is always the risk of getting lost. But it offers an equal chance of discovering something new. The travelling exhibition, shown at the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) from 24 December to 25 March and on view at the Kunstmuseum Thun starting 23 August, sheds light on issues involving art and colonialism from a fresh point of view.

The centrepiece of MANSAU-ANSAU is a mat woven from bamboo that forms the basis for people to sit down and commune together. The mat symbolises a space for intimacy and, in the artist's view, offers a platform for local, democratic, feminist and social equality. "The mat is a place for storytelling and a way to discover new knowledge," says I-Lann.

In a broader context, Yee I-Lann (b. 1971, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysian Borneo) examines in her work the complex geopolitical history of Southeast Asia. Working closely with a collective of women weavers from her homeland gives the artist a way to expose oppression using art and craft. In addition to textiles, the exhibition also features photographs, video works and sculptures dealing with themes such as collective reorganisation, realignment and imagination as strategies for the personal and collective future.

Yee I-Lann has ties to Switzerland: her great-granduncle was a mountaineer in Zermatt at the turn of the last century and was buried in the cemetery there after a fatal fall. The fact that she is presenting her first major European exhibition in Thun, in an environment that displays "similar forms and a similar strength" to her homeland, is the result of a chance discovery. Helen Hirsch, Director of the Kunstmuseum Thun and curator of the exhibition, became aware of the Malaysian artist at Art Unlimited in Basel in 2022. "I was captivated by her independent, multidisciplinary

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and multi-layered form of expression and her respectful attitude towards the local communities she works with,” says Hirsch. Yee I-Lann always makes sure to include the names of the weavers on the labels for her works, something that distinguishes her from many other artists who have their textile works woven anonymously, for example in Morocco or South America. “She collaborates with the weavers on an equal basis.”

The exhibition includes works from the Singapore Art Museum’s collection, including early photo collage series (Sulu Stories [2005], Picturing Power [2013]) as well as a range of woven works, from batik on silk (Orang Besar series [2010]) to split bamboo (Tepo Putih [2019], Tika-a-gagah [2018-19]). Yee I-Lann’s commitment to deconstructing relationships and her incorporation of diverse symbols and aesthetics is evident in works that transcend time and media. All the while, however, her oeuvre is distinctly rooted in material and communal realities, especially those of Indigenous peoples.

Curator: Helen Hirsch, in collaboration with the Singapore Art Museum (SAM)

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Yee I-Lann (b. 1971, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysian Borneo) is a multidisciplinary Malaysian artist. Combining photography, collage, film, weaving and the recasting of everyday objects, she deals in her works with themes such as power, colonialism and neo-colonialism in Southeast Asia. In the process, the artist studies the effects of historical memory on today’s society. Yee I-Lann has been working with Indigenous communities in the state of Sabah since 2018.

www.yeeilann.com

Opening

Friday, 22 August 2025, 6:30 p.m., Kunstmuseum Thun

Supporting programme

All events at the Thun Panorama can be found in the [digital flyer](#) for the exhibition.

Media contact for interviews, previews etc...

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