



Diana Lui

I Will Not Give Names to Trees – A Personal Mythology

Artist's statement:

I will not give names to trees. In naming them, I lose touch with their essence. In naming them, I think *I know*, and familiarity will surely be the death of curiosity. In naming, we categorise, in naming, we own.

Nature is not to be acquired but to be *felt and experienced*, the only way to understanding her and our inextricable connection to her.

My first childhood memory of meeting ancient trees was in Fraser's Hill. A mixture of fear and fascination vibrated my whole being as I walked the foggy jungle trail, I was inside the body of a slumbering giant beast!

As a young adolescent, I lived near Orang Asli land between Damansara Jaya and Damansara Utama. I used to take morning walks with my father along the outer edges of the forest. I would pick leaves and seeds from the forest floor and hide them between my father's books as my mother was adamant about not bringing insects into our home. Many houses were still to be built then. It was an awkward sight to see half-built semi-detached homes with forest looming just behind as bulldozers continued to plow into the trees.

Today my parents live in Damansara Perdana, right inside former Orang Asli land reserve. There are remnants still of this forest just in front of the high-rise condominium where we are located but for how long will this beautiful forest canopy remain?

Our human destiny has been so intertwined with trees it's a tragic wonder how much we have forgotten. Our ancestors the hominids lived on trees, our bodies are even shaped like trees, myths abound of men who became trees again when they died. Our ancients believed trees act as messengers between the netherworld and the heavens above. In Ancient Egypt, the goddesses Isis and Hathor transformed themselves into sycamore trees to feed the pharaohs in the other world, the sycamore fig being associated with eternity and the mysteries of Rebirth and the womb of our Primal Mother. The Philosophical tree held the alchemical knowledge of the great mages, trees symbolised spiritual awakening, the old parable of the tiny mustard seed growing into a tree is an inspiring story of self-transformation through self-knowledge. Trees kept our treasures and secrets safe, buried our dead, fed us, cured us from sickness, accompanied us in our living, our suffering, our death.



This exhibition is dedicated to trees. The entire exhibition could not have existed without their generosity, from the drawing paper to the photographic paper to the black Chinese ink (made of soot and resin) down to the frames that hold the work in place.

Trees are the guardians and the library of this planet, their gifts to us are limitless. Today they continue to provide us with precious oxygen and water, absorb the sun's rays, regulate Earth's temperature, keep floods in check, nourish the earth with which we plant our food, recycle everything organic that rots and dies, store minerals and nutrients, build our homes, provide cures to cancer and other yet-to-be-discovered diseases through the knowledge of indigenous people and science...

Part of the proceeds from the sale of art works will be given to support the community learning centers run by the Orang Asli in their villages, as facilitated by the Center for Orang Asli Concerns (COAC) and the PDK Coordination Coalition. Their gradual integration into our world is necessary as they were here before us. As Malaysians, they are the least represented and the least protected due to lack of education and tools to compete in the local and world economy. Our capitalist world has taken over and destroyed their homes, their livelihood, their identity: the rain forest. We owe it to them to help them adjust to our world yet they must learn not to abandon completely their own for ours. They need to regain their pride in their identity and culture once again, to become independent and to find new confidence through self-empowerment as an individual and as a community. A better protection of land and environment must be developed for both a more sustainable forest economy and for housing development projects due to a growing Malaysian population. Both worlds have much still to learn from one another, a balance and harmony must be struck. This exhibition is a small step but it's a step towards that direction.