



# Decolonial Monument Project

## Phase I - Pacific Listening Tour Report

In the month of November, co-director of Right to Democracy, Adi Martinez-Román, visited American Samoa, Guam and Northern Mariana Islands to have listening sessions with local artists. In it, we explored their understanding of colonialism, how it has affected their artistic endeavors, the challenges faced in their work and their perspectives on how monuments can be decolonial. The approach is centered in the power of listening, and as an exploration of the possibility of a decolonial monument as a cross-territorial, participatory and healing endeavor.



Dialogue Session in Guam.



Dialogue Session in Northern Marianas.



Artist Reggie Meredith Fitiao, of American Samoa, explaining what Right to Democracy means to her.

### Listening as the first step to co-create.

- Learn about how participants see the relationship between colonialism, public monuments, the arts, and culture, particularly how colonialism impacts their artistic work.
- Identify how artists think about decolonial artistic endeavors and how they visualize, if possible, a decolonial monument.
- Build engagement within territory/diaspora around the goal of denormalizing U.S. colonialism through arts and culture.
- Identify those artists that want to engage further in fundraising strategies to bring resources to the territories, for their participation in the Decolonial Monument Project or other individual projects in general.



**Local artists - creative and strong voices.**  
**American Samoa.**



**Reggie Meredith Fitiao**

Regina (Reggie) Meredith Fitiao is a Professor of the Arts, both contemporary and traditional. She is a fourth generation siapo maker who acknowledges her great-grandmother Saiselu Tuimalealiifano Meredith as one of the women who made siapo in Leone. Meredith intends to perpetuate the art form in the rooted foundation that was set for her to the next generation.



**Jaiyah Saelua**

Jaiyah Saelua has a passion for football, advocacy, art, traveling & spending time with her family. Jaiyah is best known as the world's first (out) transgender person to play in a FIFA-sanctioned tournament. She has since used her platform to raise awareness on the existence of indigenous SOGIE-based identities, and is now the Program Manager of the Fa'aafine Rural Project.



**Su'a Uilisone Fitiao**

Su'a Uilisone Fitiao is a Tufuga Ta Tatau, wood carver, and siapo maker. Su'a Uilisone is now a Tufuga ta Tatau, a traditional Samoan Tattoo master. He embraces and helps to manage the ancestral and sacred art forms of tatau and siapo, working to ensure that these unique and meaningful parts of Samoan culture last for generations.

**The Marianas (cont. on page 6).**



**Edward de Leon Guerrero**

Edward Leon Guerrero, a native of the island of Guåhan. Driven by a passion for sharing accessible and engaging information about Pacific, Micronesian, and CHamoru history and culture, Edward founded PulanSpeaks, an educational YouTube channel. His art, research and activism are dedicated to CHamoru identity, language revitalization, and indigenous resurgence.



**Knilis N. Tuhuweitae**

Knilis N. Tuhuweitae is a is a Certified Bilingual Teacher who has effectively imparted knowledge and fostered an appreciation for both Chamorro and Carolinian languages in the Public School System. Having earned a B.A. in Chamoru Studies from the University of Guam, Knilis is deeply rooted in academic understanding and practical application of indigenous cultural practices. Knilis has honed skills in traditional healing arts, embodying the roles of Suruhåna/Sóusafey.



**Joseph (Joey) Certeza**

Joseph (Joey) Certeza is an Indigenous Artisan and Community Organizer from Guam. As an engaged member in community his goal is to use art and creative expression a vehicle of conservation and perpetuation of our heritage in the Mariana Islands and intention is crucial throughout the process. The passions of collectively working with other's passions can bring out the best quality and genuine work when common goal are set and moral is ready to go.



# American Samoa.

“Our monuments are our mountains, our seas.”



American Samoa’s dialogue was the first one and, according to the participants, it was also the first time all of them were in a room together. The environment of excitement a love was palpable. We talked with 13 artists, who explained that there is no direct translation in Samoan for the western concept of “art”. In their culture, nature is the sacred provider, and natural elements are carriers of their stories and legends.



Monuments, therefore, would be the mountains, rocks, trees, the sea. Just mentioning the only human-depicting statue in Pago Pago, threw all of them in a nervous laughter. Monuments should not celebrate individuals, period. Yes, monuments can be decolonial, but only if they are natural, sacred and useful to the community.



## The centrality of culture.

*In Samoan culture, traditions and stories are passed verbally, and our environmental elements are holders of such stories. Mountains like the Matafao Peak and the Rainmaker, the two highest peaks of the island of Tutuila, share important cultural legends and sacred stories of our people. Our culture, emphasizes communal gatherings and approaches. We always honor each other, rather than honoring ourselves as an individuals.*

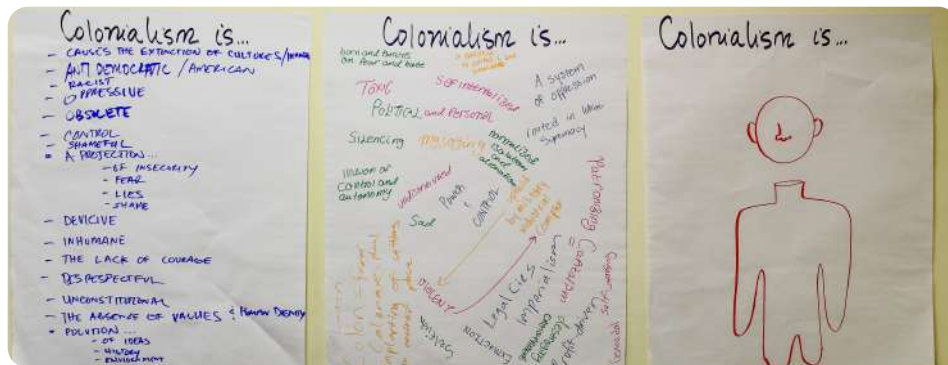


# Guam/Guåhan

**“CHamoru culture was deconstructed by colonialism. Our art is a form of resistance - a form of renaissance.”**



Guam's artists highlighted the importance of centering nature in their work, using natural materials, non-extractive processes, and creating art that is sacred, useful, and rooted in their cultural traditions. They emphasized the impact of monetizing their art, as those who determine worth do not represent them or their culture. Art is not just as a way to live but a way to preserve and honor their heritage.



The dialogue explored their experiences with colonialism, their culture of resilience, the lack of resources that often stifles artistic creativity, and their belief that decolonial monuments should reflect their environment—sacred, natural, and meaningful.



## Art as a form of resistance.

*Our ancestors used tools and made art with materials such as Hima, which comes from a seashell that federal government is currently proposing to prohibit its use. This jeopardizes the continuation of the practice of traditional CHamoru carving, and is a living example of how colonialism keeps affecting our art. Because there has been so much extraction, we've been making art as a form of resistance. This need to change, as we should be able to do art just for creativity and joy.*



# Northern Mariana Islands

“The most sacred monuments are already here. They were passed down to us.”



In the Norther Mariana Islands, the listening session took place with a very varied group of 12 artist, cultural practitioners and artisans, all of diverse Chamorro, Carolinian and other ancestries. Nature as the center of any monumental endeavor was also a theme, since they also prioritize their culture and history which has been preserved in the stories transmitted by natural sites, such as monuments and the sea. Any decolonial monument will have to be linked to the indigenous knowledge, work with the environment, not against it, and should be by and for the people of the place. A decolonial monument should create space for indigenous artist to thrive.

In the dialogue the artist explored the challenges faced by the monetization of their art and the appropriation through colonialism of their resources, including the prohibition to use some materials. The artists are very determined to protect their culture and environment, and be included in any decolonial monument endeavor.



## Connection in order to be decolonial.

*The knowledge of our people is contained and passed through our natural environment, the mountains, the sea. These are our monuments. Our monuments are not “erected” by purely human hands, but through something divine and sacred.*

*To do art work, the artist should not be worrying about how much it's worth. It should be a work of passion and creativity, where pricing is not the center of the piece. When worrying about how much it is worth, it kills the art in a fundamental way.*

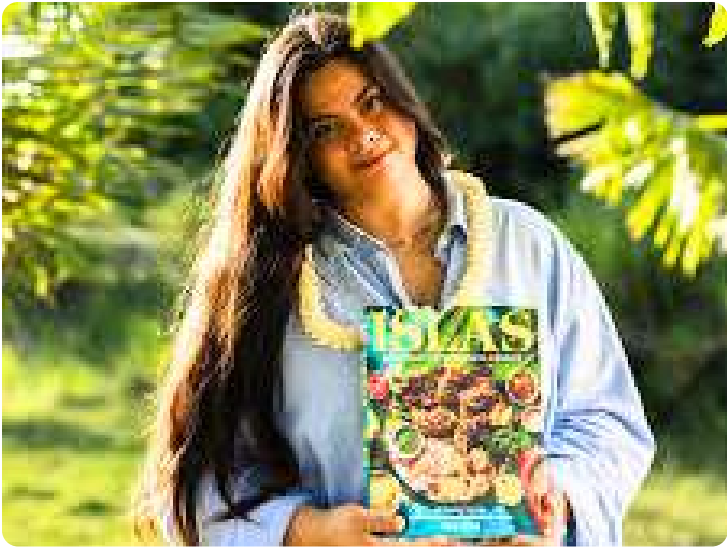


# Local artists - creative and strong voices.

The Marianas.



Hila'an San Nicolas



Cami Diaz Egurrola



Analee Villagomez (Pueshafa)



John Castro



**Roberto Santos** is a web developer, cultural practitioner and artist from Saipan, where he grew up learning to weave and perform music and dance. After studying music in the University of Colorado, playing with the Denver Philharmonic Orchestra and continuing his career and studies in Hawaii and Japan, he returned to the Mariãnas where he is able to integrate his passions for cultural and human rights advocacy, performance, linguistics, and history while also making time to be outside and in the ocean with his loved ones.