

## Eric Bridgeman



### Introduction

Born 1986 in Redcliffe, Queensland Australia  
Artwork Title: *SUNA*, 2020  
Artwork Location: Cockatoo Island

Eric Bridgeman is a multi-disciplinary artist based in Australia and Papua New Guinea (PNG). His work takes form in photographic portraiture, video, performance, sculpture, installation, drawing, painting, and a combination of all. The dominant focus of his work involves the discussion of social-cultural issues. Over the past decade, Bridgeman has developed a series of collaborative projects which are carried out with family and community in PNG's Chimbu province as Haus Yuriyal. These projects focus on the crafting and design of traditional shields from his family's region to practice and learn about culture.

For the 22nd Biennale of Sydney, Eric Bridgeman and Haus Yuriyal present a replica of Bridgeman's home which was built for him by his family in PNG using traditional techniques and cultural knowledge. This house became an important meeting place for relatives and extended family as a site for exchange, learning, community participation and art making.

A project based between Australia and Jiwaka Province, Papua New Guinea, Bridgeman employs a workshop model of collaborative multimedia practices with family members of the Yuri Alaiku clan to deliver an inclusive, multi-functional space on Cockatoo Island.

The two structures are home to paintings, weavings and multimedia artworks as well as public forums, screenings, performances, workshops and events that facilitate engagement between the local Australian, Asia-Pacific and International arts communities. Eric's family creates an autonomous space within the Biennale by working to an elastic schedule dependent upon the times of those contributing to the project, rather than the convenience of an audience. While the more public-facing picture house will hold permanent activations like video, the roundhouse occupation ebbs and flows naturally around a set of key occupations, as a way of challenging the history of the display of Indigenous and non-Western bodies in exhibition formats. For the artist, the project of building and using these structures forms part of a broader interest in learning about the cultural practices of his family.

Image: Eric Bridgeman and Haus Yuriyal. *SUNA* (Middle Ground), 2020, multimedia installation, round house, picture house, painting, bilum weaving, photography, video, audio; dimensions variable. Installation view for the 22nd Biennale of Sydney (2020), Cockatoo Island. Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with generous support from Arts Queensland and the Australia Council for the Arts. Courtesy the artist; Milani Gallery, Brisbane; and Gallerysmith, Melbourne. Photograph: Jessica Maurer

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### Inquiry questions

- Look at the images of the artwork. What do you feel? Which colours do you see?
- Have you seen any houses like this before? Where have you seen them?
- The roundhouse is a safe place for gathering, exchange, sharing and learning. Describe some activities that might happen in this type of space?
- Collaboration is a key element of this artwork. How has Bridgeman's collaboration with the community contributed to the meaning of this artwork?
- The work is called *SUNA*. Suna is a word in Yuri language used to describe a middle ground, a safe and central location in a village ideal for gathering, and distant enough from potential conflicts at the borders. Why do you think the work is titled *SUNA*?

### Creative learning activity

Sketch the interior of the house. Try to practice slow looking at the image of the house for at least 5 minutes. What aspects are you drawn to and why?

### Reflection

- Eric Bridgeman utilises a model of collaborative multimedia practices to engage with his culture and family. What activities do you do with your family that are important?
- What did you learn about the cultural practices of the Jiwaka Province of Papua New Guinea?
- What is the significance of round buildings in Papua New Guinea? What social/cultural/practical function do they serve?

### Extension

- Can you imagine this house at one of the other Biennale venues like the Art Gallery of New South Wales or Museum of Contemporary Art, Australia? Why or why not?