

BATAK

In Southeast Asia, spreading between Tibet and Australia, a huge white area stands out in my picture of the world. For a long time I have been looking for an idea for an Earth Art Work project for Indonesia, the biggest island country and fourth most populous country on the planet. In September 2017 I visited SUMATRA together with Hendri Sitepu from the BATAK people, who gave the name to this project and whose culture I was keen to get to know.

The BATAK people immigrated to SUMATRA in several phases from the mountain areas of Thailand and Myanmar, and maybe also from Taiwan and the Philippines. At sometime they withdrew into the Toba highlands and lived there largely isolated from the coastal inhabitants. Although Marco Polo, on passing Sumatra in 1292, reported of man-eating mountain tribes with the name *Batta*, Europeans first arrived on the land of the Batak in 1824. Following the death of the last charismatic, Batak priest king, Sisingamangaraja XII., who had led a lengthy guerrilla war against the colonists, the Dutch obtained complete control over the Batak in 1907.

The Batak people can be traced back to six clans originally coming from Samosir, an island on lake Toba. Today, the settlements of the Batak-Toba, Batak-Simalungun, Batak-Karo, Batak-Angkola/Mandailing, Batak-Kalasam and Batak-Dairi have stretched far and wide from the lake. From the first three tribes, I collected 13 SOIL samples from historically or mythologically relevant sites.

The most important SOIL was collected from Pusuk Buhit, a holy mountain on lake Toba, where, as legend would have it, the Gods' hero Si Raja Batak (King of Batak) was born and from whom all BATAK people descend.

9 EARTH samples originate from the *Ring of Fire*; the volcanoes Gunung Sinabung, Gunung Sibayak and Gunung Toba on BATAK land.

In the rain forest of the Gunung Leuser National Park I looked into the eyes of the last free living Orang-Utans and excavated three SOIL samples.