

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Following Badan Warisan Malaysia's (BWM) conclusion of its webinar series, Spotlight on Sarawak, the NGO discussed the impact of Iban tattoos on heritage preservation and shone a light on one Sarawakian celebrating tradition through his work.

Founder of Borneo Ink and tattoo artist, Eddie David, who was driven by the sense that Iban traditional designs were slowly losing importance in Sarawak and Malaysia, celebrates his heritage through traditional Iban tattoos and has since made a name for himself.

"Borneo Ink has been around since 2002, and Iban tattoos were always a part of what we did."

"Nearly 40 per cent of the work

# Keeping art of traditional Iban tattoos alive

we do on clients are traditional Iban tattoos and tourists make up a majority of my clientele, learning about me from my features on National Geographic, CNN Travel, Discovery Channel and more," Eddie shared.

He shared that Iban tattoos are no easy feat, for the tattoo artist or the client.

"The method requires one person to stretch the skin, whilst the artist repeatedly taps a needled bamboo stick into the client's skin."

"It is a long and tiring process but the most skilled artists are able to produce machine-like quality work," he explained.

Though the feedback has been positive, preserving heritage in the modern day has its risks, like its misuse or appropriation.

President of the Sarawak Heritage Society (SHS) and fellow speaker for Spotlight on Sarawak, James Yong explained that art was made to be enjoyed by all.

"Yet, as art styles have evolved through time and are adapted by different communities, we risk having it exploited by those who do not have the same deep understanding for it, diminishing its value."

"Would patenting it be a solution? We might argue that this only limits the artist, making art and culture exclusive when it should be the exact opposite," Yong said.

He argued that the loss of



**YONG** stressing the importance of raising awareness and interest for heritage preservation through art, education and more.

understanding for traditional rites might not be due to its appropriation at all, but rather because of the global community's lack of awareness for the culture.

"This is what BWM and SHS are working so hard to achieve."

"Only in raising awareness and encouraging interest will we be able to convince people to help promote and preserve their heritage and tradition," Yong concluded.

Meanwhile, Eddie shared that social media had made it possible for people to learn about Iban

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culture.

"Perhaps the risk (of appropriation) is worth having our name and traditions shared with the rest of the world."

"We get to show the world that Iban culture is, in fact, one to admire."

BWM continues to seek additional funding for its educational and advocacy work. For more information, visit <https://badanwarisanmalaysia.org/> or email [heritage@badanwarisan.org.my](mailto:heritage@badanwarisan.org.my)



**IN** celebration of his heritage, Eddie continues to