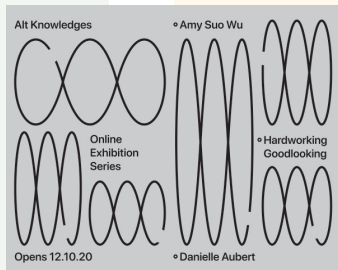INTERVIEW

Rejecting Exclusionary Othering: *Unfaithful Kami*
Insights on the exhibition with student curator Ji Yun Kim

by Sarah Chieko Bonnickson

Alt Knowledges Exhibition Series
Twitch streamed gallery hours in February 2021

Alt Knowledges is a student-led exhibition series exploring alternative design values. *Unfaithful Kami*, curated by students Ji Yun Kim, Kaja Berry, Yixun Li, Ruiyi Liu, and Janel Mitchell, features work from design collective Hardworking Goodlooking. This event is part of the Creative Citizens in Action initiative at CCA (CCA@CCA) and is funded by an endowment gift to support The Deborah and Kenneth Novack Creative Citizens Series, an annual series of public pro-grams focused on creative activism.

Alt Knowledges is a series of three concurrent exhibitions planned by groups of Graphic Design undergraduates taking chris hamamoto's Exhibition Design course during the fall 2020 semester. The course and resulting exhibitions sought to critically examine established models of distribution and production in Design by presenting projects from designers with overtly anti-capitalist and anti-colonial practices.

On a recent afternoon, I logged into Zoom to talk with student curator Ji Yun Kim, who—together with classmates Kaja Berry, Yixun Li, Ruiyi Liu, and Janel Mitchell—developed the exhibition *Unfaithful Kami* to showcase a selec-tion of projects and the working practices of design collective Hardworking

Goodlooking. In addition to discussing some of the concepts behind the show, our conversation also included the struggles of working remotely and the satisfaction of bringing ideas to life under challenging circumstances.

Early in the conversation, Kim apologized for uneven WiFi—an all-too-relatable reality that many of us face as we conduct our personal and professional lives online. It felt like an appropri-ate context to discuss some of the challenges of remote working, which served as a backdrop for Kim and her group's exhibition planning. In their group of five, Kim noted that she and her teammates were spread between three time zones in the United States and China, which made scheduling meetings that worked for everyone difficult. When synchronous meetings were impos-sible, the group used Slack to chat as a group, message one another individually, and share files all in one place.

Working long-distance is something that Kim's group had in common with Hardworking Goodlooking, whose design prac-tice is rooted in the Philippines with members living in the United States and the Netherlands. In planning *Unfaithful Kami*, Kim and her teammates needed to coordinate with Hardworking Goodlooking to gather materials for the exhibition while working transnationally. In Dropbox, Hardworking Goodlooking shared source files for some of their work, which Kim and her group printed out locally in the Bay Area using laser printers. This digital form of distribution combined with inexpensive local production was practical and thematically congruent with Hardworking
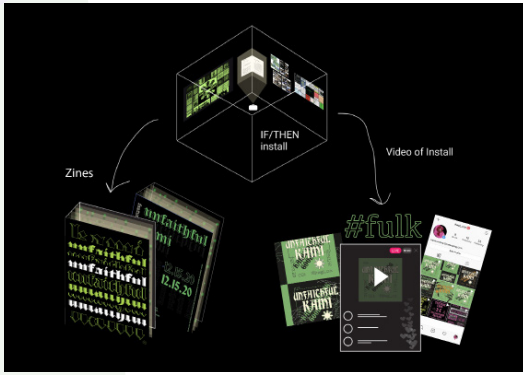
Installation planning for *Unfaithful Kami*.
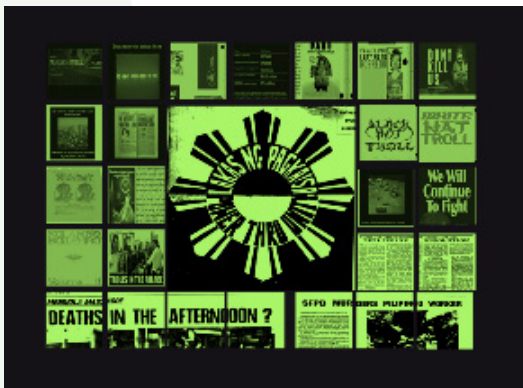
Hardworking Goodlooking's *Kulambo Bulleting*,
reformatted for *Unfaithful Kami*.

Photo credit: chris hamamoto

Photo of *Unfaithful Kami*, installed at IF/THEN gallery.

Goodlooking's commitment to equitable access to materials, demonstrated through their frequent collaboration with local copy shops in the Philippines.

The curators centered dissemination as a foundational concept for *Unfaithful Kami*. Hardworking Goodlooking's stated mission includes "disseminating cultural publications" out of the Philippines to celebrate the "value of what has been invisible" in their country. The title of the show references digital guerilla activism and brings attention to Filipino political issues that are largely ignored outside of the Philippines. In Tagalog, "kami" is an exclusive plural to refer to a "we that doesn't include you." The title *Unfaithful Kami* hints at the possibilities of being unfaithful to this type of exclusionary othering: seeking out ways to share and spread information, increase political awareness, and build community.

Adhering to their core concept of information dissemination, Kim and her group wanted to prominently display Hardworking Goodlooking's project *Kulambo Bulleting* in the exhibition. *Kulambo Bulleting* is a publication produced as part of a 2018 residency wherein Hardworking Goodlooking ran a "mosquito press"—a term coined in the Philippines to describe small, tenacious underground activist publications during the country's Martial Law period (1972-1986) under dictator Ferdinand Marcos. *Kulambo Bulleting* features work from academics and students of the Filipino diaspora critiquing the Philippines' current authoritarian president, Rodrigo Duterte. To display *Kulambo Bulleting* in *Unfaithful Kami*, Kim and her group created a rectangular grid of collaged material from the publication, printed in black and white on 8.5x11 copy paper mounted on the wall. The grid (made with methods and materials representative of Hardworking Goodlooking's DIY production practices) displays ideas, information, and perspectives about Filipino history and politics that are not widely paid attention outside of the Philippines and Filipino diaspora. Using Hardworking Goodlooking's source files, Kim and her group took this content from the form of a bound publication and placed it on the wall to signify visibility and urgency. As a component of the exhibition, this work provides a layer of cultural context framing other examples of Hardworking Goodlooking's work.

Installed at IF/THEN gallery in Berkeley, *Unfaithful Kami* also consists of a slideshow and a wheat-pasted board that similarly strive to embody the values expressed in Hardworking Goodlooking's practice. A projector at the center of the exhibition features a slideshow of readings and resources collected and shared as part of Hardworking Goodlooking's Temporary Academy for Un/Re/Learning (Temporary URL). Temporary URL is an experimental school that seeks to make educational resources more widely accessible and to promote collaborative autonomous learning. Using the projector as a nod to Hardworking Goodlooking's pedagogical methods, Kim and her group hoped that showing a selection of shared

resources from the Temporary URL Archive would spark viewers' curiosities, inspire them to seek out some of the referenced readings, and perhaps contribute to the Temporary URL Archive themselves.[1]

The third component of *Unfaithful Kami* is a decorated board wheat-pasted with Hardworking Goodlooking's designs. A live-stream of the wheat-pasting process that aired during gallery hours showed the accumulation of three layers of flyers while also referencing a method of distribution associated with political activism. While Kim and her group had hoped to utilize wheat-pasted flyers to advertise *Unfaithful Kami* in their respective cities, the limitations of working remotely made this logistically tricky. The group compromised by using wheat-paste as a method to display work in the gallery. It was interesting to hear about how Kim and her teammates adjusted and negotiated their ideas while working under pandemic conditions.

Photo credit: Rachel Poonsiriwong

Wheat-pasting progress shown during *Unfaithful Kami* gallery hours.

Adapting expectations to fit the possibilities of work that can be made while collaborating in a remote and decentralized fashion is something that most people can likely relate to right now. How we currently encounter other people's work or interface with collaborators is alternately frustrating and generative. Kim and her group were unable to fully realize all of their ideas for the *Unfaithful Kami* exhibition because of the practical limitations of working remotely; at the same time, remote communication tools have been reinvigorated through a boom in use, making it possible for Kim and her classmates to work with practicing designers around the globe and present the exhibition to new audiences. The simultaneous limitation and expansion of possibilities born from collaboration, exhibition, and distribution being pushed increasingly online is a conundrum for us to ponder as we untangle the digital landscape's challenges and opportunities.

Kim and I closed our discussion of *Unfaithful Kami* by talking about her personal takeaways from the Exhibition Design course. She stressed the importance of collaboration, both in delegating the many tasks involved with exhibition planning and in finding ways for exhibition strategies to be in dialog with displayed work without being overpowering. Inspired by Hardworking Goodlooking's activism, the value of collaboration is certainly a takeaway that encourages *Unfaithful Kami*'s viewers to think about communally driven approaches to planning an exhibition, charting new paths in our increasingly digitally mediated landscape, or tackling political inequities.

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[1] While the Temporary URL Archive is typically an open-source and collaboratively generated repository, a web search shows that it is currently on hiatus as of January of this year.

The *Alt Knowledges* exhibition series was organized **christopher hamamoto**, Assistant Professor, Graphic Design Program.

Sarah Chieko Bonnickson is currently an MFA student, studying Design. She also holds a BA in Rhetoric from UC Berkeley, with a concentration in Narrative and Image and a Minor in Art History.

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