

CHERYL NOHEALANI OLIVIERI

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Abstract

In -/+peace = @.edu, an ongoing work of images and poems that will include multiple series, artist Cheryl Nohealani Olivieri explores home in Hawai'i as a place of fragmentation—where natives, islanders, residents, and visitors become entangled and call into question the production of identities amidst postwar shifts in geo-political relations.

Keywords: *postwar Pacific, Hawai'i, contemporary art, poetry*

-/+peace = @.edu, an ongoing work of images and poems that will include multiple series, focuses on how juxtapositions of native, islander, resident, visitor overlap, conflict, merge, and call into question the production of identity. I explore home as a place of fragmentation: a state of temporal malleability conveyed by how references to self, family, land, government, and society fail to interconnect and provide correspondence. Grappling with the concepts of spectacle and disjuncture, as they pertain to when a reference seeks for and fails to find its referent, I use language as my primary medium to thread together formally typed, spaced, and punctuated words and phrases. Beginning with a visual series made from paper, coffee, pencil, and ink entitled *placemats 1-2-3*, I explore the American construction of Pacific (“peaceful”) existence as requiring the consumption of other people and places, e.g., Hawai'i's emblematic “symbol of aloha,” the plumeria lei, are threaded with a nonnative flower.

placemat 1: Ready to Order? sets the table for my first three poetic entries—“prurient,” “sclerotic,” and “jeremiad”—which refer to ways sustainable, collaborative, and supportive relationships (positive peace) remain unattainable even in the absence of war (negative peace), given how the postwar Pacific fosters dependency on the mediated other—in part by upholding proficiency in English as the epitome of intelligence, civility, and progress. The second course, set by *placemat 2: For the Want of Asking*, seeks out this state of living in mediation, a living-in-place-of immediacy and presence. “new, new world” introduces the experience of living within Pax Americana and “once removed, twice over” exposes myself as Keiki O Ka 'Āina (Child of the Land) growing up Hawaiian in the fiftieth state, a Hawai'i created as a place of respite from “this, the old hatreds.” The final

course, set by the densely concatenated *placemat 3: Taking Up Space*, offers “David’s birthday poem” and “boardwalk in summer” as my initial foray towards coherence, integrity, and intersubjectivity.

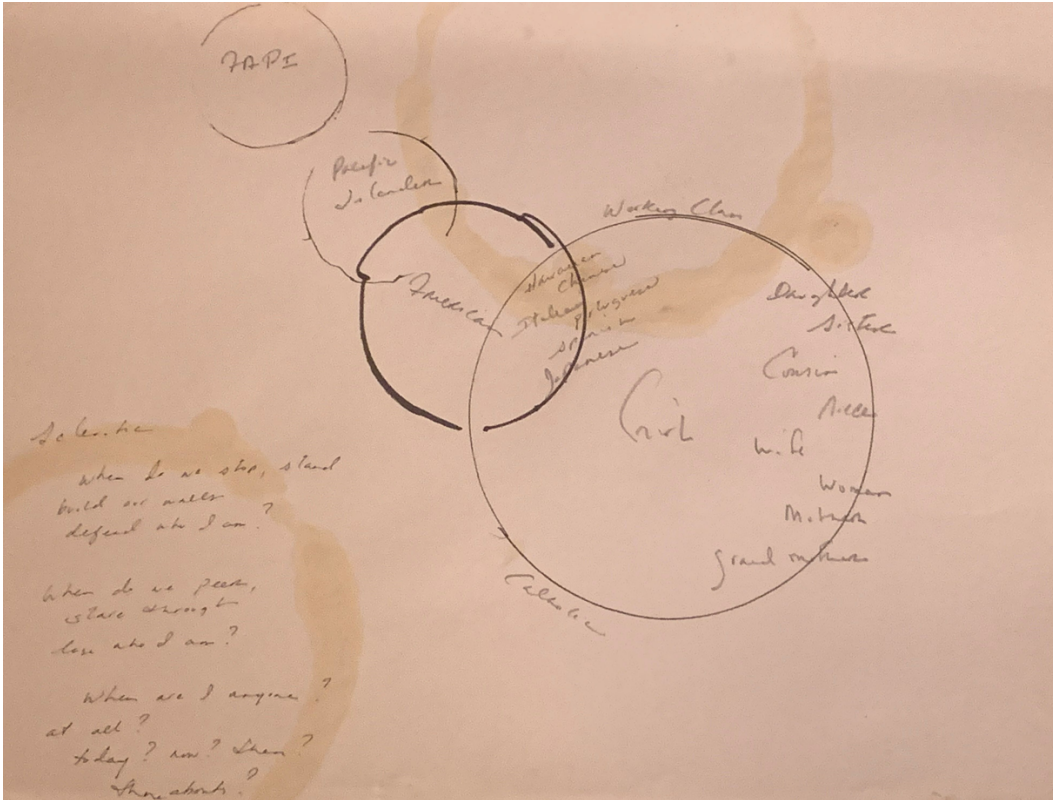


Figure 1. Cheryl Nohealani Olivieri, *placemat 1: Ready to Order?*, 2020. Paper, pencil, ink, and coffee, 9 x 12 inches. Transcription of text on circles (clockwise from the top of the largest circle): Working Class - Daughter - Sister - Cousin - Niece - Wife - Women - Mother - Grandmother – Catholic - Girl - Hawaiian - Chinese - Italian - Portuguese - Spanish - Japanese - American - Pacific Islander – AAPI. Narrative Overlay: “sclerotic.” Courtesy of the artist

placemat 1 evokes an abridged depiction of the Hawaiian Islands chain and the generative momentum emerging from the “spokes on a wheel” architecture put into place by U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles (1953–59), who reconfigured the Pacific as units of social analysis created to connect, stabilize, and control alliances between the United States, East Asia, and the Pacific. What types of roles are required to avoid enmeshing the U.S. into nuclear war with China or Russia? What impact does serving as a “host community” to America’s foreign policy reach have on Hawai’i’s local and native populations?¹

prurient

we, are, the built in sacrifice,
the price, paid, for a beating heart
the, twitch, of conscience,
the sigh, of content.

we are
the exchange, for
rejection, a, climb, to, the, top,
the skinned, knee, the, hunger,
the, segues, blind, resplendence,
full, catastrophe.

we
are the price, paid.
the soul, sold.
the deliverance, bought.
the trigger, pulled.
the body, felled.
our
outlined chalk.

sclerotic

when do we stop, stand,
build our walls,
defend who I am?

when do we peer,
stare through,
lose who I am?

when are I anyone?
at all? today? now?
then? thereabouts?

jeremiad

does the Sun consent
to rise or the Moon
to glow?

does a Mountain
consent to be climbed?

Rain to fall?
Lightning to strike?
Thunder to sound?

when the Clouds clear
who, then, stands atop
the Summit?
who is found wandering
astray?

who simply remains as
a makeshift keeper,
marking our
beginnings,
middles and ends?

and, Consent, do we
know what became
of her?

among the peaks,
vales, pebble
strewn paths, a solitary
Hawk cries aloft, looking
for a place to land.
a Deer scampers by
so quickly, its
motion almost a blur
(you can just make it
out from the corner of
your mind's eye.)

the Butterflies dance
amidst the parched
sunlight
while the Bees and Flies
and Crickets and Ants
buzz, chirp, hum and build
along.

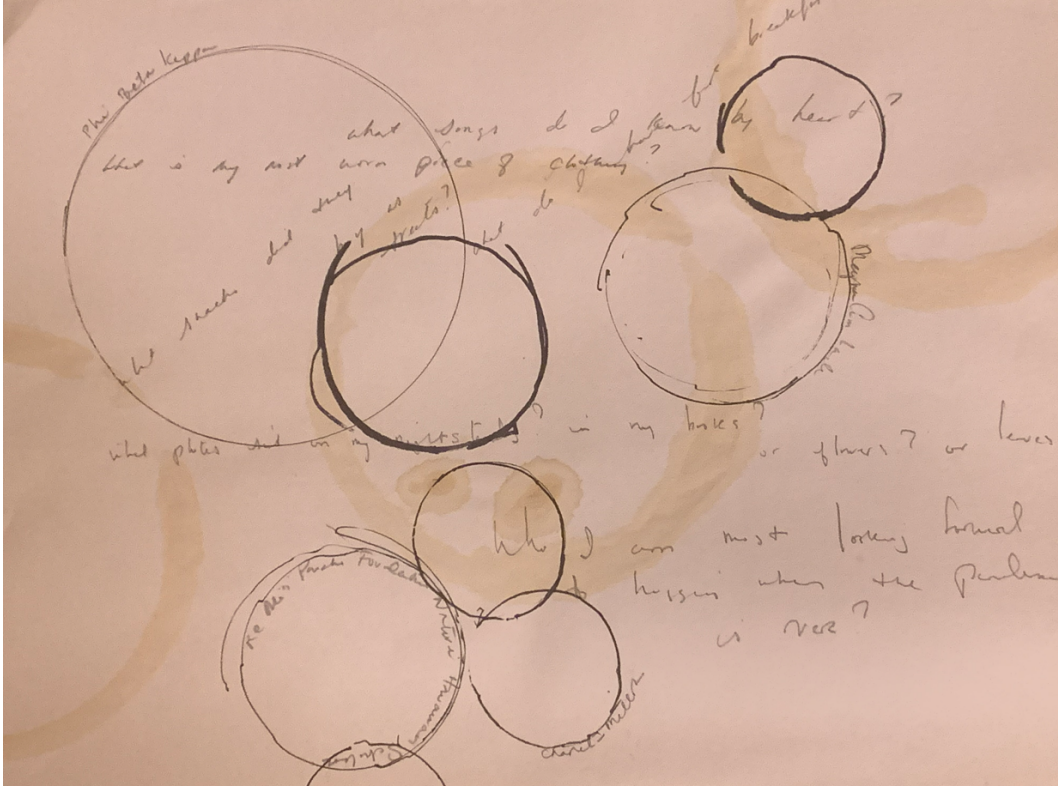


Figure 2. Cheryl Nohealani Olivieri, *placemat 2: For the Want of Asking*, 2020. Paper, pencil, ink, and coffee, 9 x 12 inches. Texts on circles (left to right and clockwise): Phi Beta Kappa - Magna Cum Laude - Ke Ali'i Pauahi Foundation Native Hawaiian Scholar - Chanel Miller. Narrative Overlays: What songs do I know by heart? What is my most worn piece of clothing? What snacks did they buy as treats? What do I have for breakfast? What photos sit on my nightstand? In my books? Or flowers? Or leaves? Who I am [sic] most looking forward to hugging when the pandemic is over? Courtesy of the artist

President Eisenhower's endorsement of the Mutual Security Act of 1960 gave rise to the federal creation of the East-West Center in 1961, built atop land managed by what had become the state of Hawai'i in 1959. Positioning Hawai'i as a nexus of self-people-state-nation effectively maintained postwar stability in the Asia-Pacific region for more than sixty years. By juxtaposing Hawai'i's interracial demographic against the American South's racial segregation and violence, the United States was able to market, demonstrate, and enact the American democratic system to students at the University of Hawai'i arriving from underdeveloped regions in African and Asian countries. How does the impulse to exist through an Other become normalized? How does one begin to distinguish the framework of a state apparatus from the motivations, desires, interests, and choices of individual people? When does one inhabit predefined social roles and when does one supersede it?²

new, new world

Navigating through
where I won't be consumed as
a product, a purpose, intent,
like a commodity
designed to create a market
through help or need or
dissonance,

Like a Bukowski, I matter most
If I walk through associations,
remain numbed by referencing,
And stay oh so thoughtfully
disengaged—on neutral, as
it were, to let the “good life”
Go along, well, “like that,”

As

A Promise and a Curse,
A Possibility and A Sin,
To Pray, how, maybe,
I shouldn't require Resurrection
to Exist,

As

A Sign, An Omen or Signal
To a Something Else,

Beyond,

/Sing it!/

Better,

/Preach!/

Best,

hallelujah~

God Almighty

“once removed, twice over,”

that’s what they said when
_____ arrived.

“Uncle’s wife’s sister’s cousin,”
I think it was.

“Once over” is what I began
to call my younger sibling,
one remove from me, of course.

Tutu & Papa were “fifth over,”
living six houses away, and
“once removed” or across the
street, to keep them at
“arm’s length” as it
were,

mostly from, to be honest,
Papa’s drinking which
could yield to knife-wielding,
if we were talking “whiskey,”
or wife-beating, that is, if we were
(in whispers) alluding to cousin’s
decorated police officer husband
(now on his third wife).

if we spoke about “hānai,”
it was “matter of fact,” much
like we would about “the weather,”
which was “quite frankly” either
“rainy” or “sunny.”

when we began saying “ānai,”
it was as though the /hā/ carried too
much effort, too much reach,
from the diaphragm to carry
our words, too much
/breath/ or /life/.

if we were farmers in some
midwest somewhere, I imagine
we would have gnawed a stalk
of wheat between our teeth

as we parsed what seeds to
plant, and in what lots.

we would debate the
quality of soil, rub it between our fingers,
for good measure,
spit for affect, and tilt
that cowboy hat.

as if we could wish
this "big sky" away, enclose
our sense of control, wait
for what we patiently
prepared, much like our
well-placed sounds, phrase or
birth.

this, the old hatreds

summon the courts,
ring the bell, lay the path,
and hold it to your hearts, this,
your past pains.

lay it upon the foreheads
of the future, so they
too will know the bitterness,
the exile, the wanton and the
shame.

Carve monuments to
bravery, to forgiveness,
to sacrifice, to remembrance, honor,
justice, truth,

so we will once again
understand our divisions,
mistrust, testaments,
our calling, these Destinies,
without uttering one
word, telling one lie,
generating one thought,
living this, our, one life.



Figure 3. *placemat 3: Taking Up Space*, 2020. Paper, pencil, ink, and coffee, 9 x 12 inches. Transcriptions of ink (left to right and clockwise): Tokyo - Flatbush - Bay Area - Costa Rica - Thailand - California - Oahu - Jharuwarashi - Guangzhou - New York - Langfang - Oakland - Cobble Hill - Bangkok - Kathmandu - Hawaii - China - Escazu - Nepal - Honolulu - Brooklyn - San Jose - Pharping - Gramercy - Japan - Kaneohe. Transcriptions of pencil (left to right and clockwise): Designer - Waitperson - Visitor Services Representative - Advisor - Counter Person - Merchandiser - Adjunct Lecturer - Dishwasher - Student - Newspaper Carrier - History Teacher - Clerk. Courtesy of the artist

The impact of a world systems order and the integration of Pacific Islanders with international markets redefined the concept of “home” through MIRAB (migration [MI], remittance [R], foreign aid [A], and public bureaucracy [B]) economic model, SITE (Small Island Tourist Economy), and profit economies. Enabled by its SITE, which effectively rents out a landscape and climate to visitors, and nontradable economic activities such as government, education, and scientific research, Hawai’i maintains its marketability as a destination of escape from both place and self. How are Islanders beginning to reconfigure our relationship to the past and to each other? What becomes the role of government in these enterprises?³

David’s birthday poem

go to the beach,
sing out loud to the waves

who cares if people will think you're
crazy? call the police on you? film
you with their phones to then post
on social media, shaming you to
silence?

who cares if only the Pigeons and
Mynah birds keep you company
while the tour buses arrive and the
scent of coconut oil fills
the air?

when a Sea Turtle brushes by,
you can look back and think:
why did I let you fill me with despair?
as you give that one last kick
and turn towards the becoming sun.

the boardwalk in summer

the heart needs
to beat poetry too
apart from the symbol, the icon,
the scape,
the day, a reason or way

the heart breathes & pulsates &
skips
quick & slow
awake & asleep
alone & joined
hiding & free
from & to
joyful & bleak

insouciance,
catharsis

the heart beats
with, in

Cheryl Nohealani Olivieri has worked in higher education since 1999, most recently as a graduate advisor at Parsons School of Design, The New School (New York). Cheryl received her BA in history from Brooklyn College, City University of New York, and her MA in Pacific Islands histories from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. She received a Ke Ali'i Pauahi Foundation Native Hawaiian Fellowship through The East-West Center (Honolulu).

Notes

¹ Victor D. Cha, "Powerplay: Origins of the U.S. Alliance System in Asia," *International Security* 34, no. 3 (Winter 2009/2010): 158–96, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40389236>; Mark L. Gillem, *America Town: Building the Outposts of Empire* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 17, 21–23; Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States*, (New York: Picador, 2019), 4–22, 317–35.

² "About EWC: Origins," East-West Center, accessed June 24, 2023; <https://www.eastwestcenter.org/about-ewc/origins>; see also Cha, "Powerplay," 160–61; Giles Scott-Smith, "From Symbol of Division to Cold War Asset: Lyndon Johnson and the Achievement of Hawaiian Statehood in 1959," *History* 89, no. 2 (April 2004): 256–73, <https://jstor.org/stable/24427281>; Paula Henderson, Talking Story on the Quad Stonewall of UHM, 1999–2023; John Lachs, "Mediation," *The Cost of Comfort* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019), 17–21; Chanel Miller (@chanel_miller), "My heart feels sick, like a dark, bloated & bleeding fish," Instagram, May 2, 2021, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CMIUbRngsfu/>.

³ Geoff Bertram, "Pacific Island Economies," in *The Pacific Islands: Environment & Society*, ed. Moshe Rapaport (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013), 325–40, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt6wqh08.31>; Clem Tisdell, "The MIRAB Model of Small Island Economies in the Pacific and their Security Issues: A Draft," *Social Economics, Policy and Development* 57 (January 2021), 1–20, <https://ageconsearch.umn.edu/record/163698/?ln=en>; John Connell, "Migration, Dependency and Inequality in the Pacific: Old Wine in Bigger Bottles? (Part 2)," in *Globalization and Government in the Pacific Islands: State, Society and Governance in Melanesia*, ed. Steward Firth (Canberra: ANU Press, 2006), 81–106, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt2jbj6w.9>; Tiara R. Na'Puti and Judy Rohrer, "The Pacific Moves Beyond Colonialism: A Conversation from Hawai'i and Guåhan," *Feminist Studies* 43, no. 3 (2017), 537–47, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.15767/feministstudies.43.3.0537>.