

A HONOLULU SENSE OF PLACE

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Any place is multiple places at once. Honolulu's contradictory selves are most evident in the divergence between the tourist version and the city experienced by a workday commuter. And yet the tourist trolley and the city bus stop at the same places. So what might be a Honolulu sense of place? Or to start earlier, what do we mean by sense of place?

Sense of place is often used as a marketing ploy that promises the "artificial flavor" of a place, a postcard version with only the glamour and none of the grit. Trying to manufacture and maintain a Hawaiian sense of place leads to Honolulu City Council's attempts to legislate poverty out of view through sit-lie ordinances, lest tourists be shocked by homelessness that is way off-brand for a tropical paradise. Honolulu residents are not immune to this story of paradise; we repeat hashtags like #luckywelivehawaii as if they were incantations to dispel the reality of traffic jams and unaffordable rents.

If we are to revise what urban Honolulu is and can be, to rupture financial logics that prioritize investment value over housing, we must tell other stories, stranger ones than tourist promotional reels and real estate brochures. In their work, Maya Portner and Sean Connelly present versions of Honolulu that complicate this notion of sense of place. They suggest that sense of place could also be read as how we sense place - the modes of seeing, feeling, hearing, touching -- and the emotional and collective experience of being in a place.

How (else) might we know Honolulu?

Connelly's *Waterway* builds upon his ongoing work on island urbanism. In overlaying the different ways of knowing the Ala Wai watershed, the work conjures up a sense of place that demands we act differently. His sense of the watershed fuses us to the land, with the streams, sewers and storm drains like nerve endings and capillaries threaded through our skin. Connection to the 'āina can then be a daily constant rather than a monthly community clean-up. In demanding that nature belongs in Honolulu, Connelly is also making space for a human politics.

Portner's *A City in Pieces* pokes apart the assumed all-encompassing all-seeing aerial photo by remaking satellite data into narrative shapes. Google Maps has trained our eyes to navigate traffic as we toggle between satellite imagery and abstracted street grids. Zillow makes neighborhoods into real estate zones. In contrast, Portner's work insists on a personal and partial Honolulu that is far from immutable.

A city is not a single story but multiple stories. We are always making, remaking, refusing, repurposing, and otherwise engaged in a collective but far from coherent project of city-making. The phrase "the right to the city" bubbled up within activist circles as a way to emphasize the importance of this collective process. How we sense the city shapes the sense of its possibilities. Tropical Disturbance artists Maya Portner and Sean Connelly challenge the dominant definition of urbanism as a technological ordering that has triumphed over anarchic nature.

