

INVITED OR AVOIDED, TROPICS DISTURBED: AN INTERVIEW WITH EXHIBIT CURATOR TRISHA LAGASO GOLDBERG

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Opening January 19, 2018 in San Francisco, Tropical Disturbance will be featuring ten artists' work on Hawai'i with specific focus on the innumerable versions of relativity that locals and visitors have to this place. Beyond built and natural environments, these artists are responding to a sense of captivity, explosivity, and community that uniquely inhabits existence in Hawai'i.

After being asked to put together a panel discussion by the Global Asia/Pacific Artist Exchange group from NYU, called "Agree or Disagree: There Is Such a Thing as a Hawai'i Sense of Place," curator Trisha Lagaso Goldberg felt the urge to further examine ideas of place, realizing the invaluable discussion afoot.

Presenting these works outside of Hawai'i, Goldberg's public inquiry on place exposes a wellspring of provisional structure for some of the modern agreements that inhabitants must be engaging across the globe.

b. It seems like skepticism is how many of these artists start to explore their sense of Hawai'i—beyond sunsets, beaches, hula girls, the whole thing—but really there's a lot of affection for place. It's hopeful. And I would call many of these pieces a serious act of adoration, even if that requires calling attention to some major dysfunction. It's meaningful.

This is the first time that ten contemporary artists with a relationship to Hawai'i are being shown in a single exhibition in San Francisco. The artists live in Hawai'i, moved to Hawai'i, grew up here, live somewhere else now—they're doing work about Hawai'i. I think these artists represent some of the best work that's coming out of Hawai'i today.

The thing I love about Hawai'i people—I try to explain this to people like my husband who are not on social media—we will post up a beautiful sunset. I support the beauty of that sunset. I'll push the like button on that sunset. Full moons. Put it up. Let's do it. An idyllic

moment in Hawai'i? We love our place. We love the memory of our stuff. It's nostalgia. You can't apoliticize an icon like Diamond Head.

b. I like to think of San Franciscans being piqued, but definitely Pacific Islanders and islander expats of the Bay being really proud to see Hawai'i on the banner. I mean, "tropical" is one of those dog-whistle words—Pacific, Oceania, mai tai, aloha. It sends up a signal.

When I set out to explore this sense of place in Hawai'i with the panel, I didn't know the answer to that question then and I don't know it now. There can't only be one way.

I stand behind indigenous Native Hawaiian self-determination, whatever you want it to look like, you folks decide. I can be behind that, but also have to occupy this space in which we all live now. Do I identify as a settler? Not necessarily. Hawai'i is fraught with these kinds of complications. Hawai'i is indecisive and complex. We need to look at the big questions. How do I support both self-determination and a diversity of experience and place?

b. And why reckon? I think we're used to a different definition of diversity. A real one. It's not pulling an individual or concept into the mix to make it right and good—these artists are responding to permanent flux.

Some of the work is really violent. Light pollution is real. This is the space around us, off of the land, in the atmosphere. It's something you can't get around unless you pull the plug.

We're talking about grid theory, ordering chaos, formulating another plan for understanding—and protection. I think that we are deeply protective of this place.

We are looking at relationships to place for newcomers, for settlers, for natives—everywhere. We are looking at Hawai'i, which has a very specific history of migration, military occupation, tourism, an indigenous population, and a settler population. This is not a complete list.

b. People are looking for structures of thought for survival and that's really complex because modernization has drawn us away from those former, recognizable tools of survival. The path of least resistance is no longer the path of peace.

I still envision San Francisco as the home of resistance. It was born out of people's imaginations and the desire to move West to begin again and to do something different and to move away from tradition. I wanted to be and became a counterrevolutionary. I wanted to be a part of counterculture and be activated. I became that in San Francisco. I still believe that the Bay Area is a relevant place for an exhibition that questions relationships to place.

Globalization does not need to be a homogenizing force. It doesn't need to erase the uniqueness of a landscape or culture or people.

