Call to Prayer

Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio

About the Art

“Call to Prayer” is a poem that attempts to capture and portray the experience of standing in the malu (shade and protection) of the sacred. Whether that malu is cast by monument, an altar, or a mountain, the poem depicts the kuleana (responsibilities and privileges) of recognizing our pilina (intimacy and relationship) to that which is kapu (sacred). The poem travels through the knowledges of faith, courage, devotion, fear, and aloha via the perspective of a Kanaka Maoli wahine who lives in the malu of our kupuna (ancestors) while continuing to endure the ongoing wake of settler colonialism, displacement, and alienation.

Call to Prayer stands in the malu of the Mihrab, Shangri La’s most sacred stolen artifact. And in her magnificent shadow we come face to face with the violence that resulted in her displacement to Hawai‘i. We cannot look away, not from her outstanding beauty, and certainly not from the generations of brutality that has allowed us to be in her company. The Mihrab powerfully calls us back to our own sacred places, and in that moment we are invited into a mutual recognition, an unexpected intimacy between peoples, ʻāina (lands, or that which feeds), and moʻolelo (stories and histories).

While this original poem was written in 2021, the most recent genocidal attacks on our Palestinian ‘Ohana in Gaza by the State of Israel have further deepened and expanded its meaning. While our loved ones face genocidal extermination, we stand, around the world, insisting on a critical truth: all life is sacred, all ʻāina are sacred. We condemn any oppressive regimes that would attempt to exterminate our peoples (whether kanaka or Palestinian) and contaminate, bombard, and settle our lands. Any national project that requires wholesale extermination and displacement of Indigenous peoples is an affront not only to justice, but to life itself. Our commitment to each other will not allow us to be silent. Our duty to our shared histories, will not allow us to stand idly by. May all our akua (gods and elemental forces) and kūpuna (ancestors) gather around us, may they cast their malu of protection upon us, may they strengthen us in this lifelong pursuit of liberation, justice, and freedom for all occupied and oppressed peoples. Amamua noa.

About the Artist

Dr. Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio is a Kanaka Maoli wahine artist / activist / scholar / storyteller born and raised in Pālolo Valley to parents Jonathan and Mary Osorio. Jamaica earned her PhD in English (Hawaiian literature) in 2018 from the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. Currently, Jamaica is an Associate Professor of Indigenous and Native Hawaiian Politics at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. Jamaica is a three-time national poetry champion, poetry mentor and a published author of the award winning book Remembering our Intimacies: Moʻolelo, Aloha ʻĀina, and Ea which was published in 2021 by the University of Minnesota Press. For more information, visit https://jamaicaosorio.wordpress.com/
Call to Prayer

If I have Faith
It is only because
I know what it means
to stand at the foot of a mountain
my whole body a prayer
the whole island a monument
and to see
the piko
shining through the mist
I still feel her before me
Even from hundreds of miles away
Anytime I have the strength to look to the horizon

If I have courage
It is only because
I have watched our moʻolelo remake themselves in my generation
I have seen an island born from pō
From a whisper in the quietest parts of ourselves,
Here
A promise that we refuse to forget or forsake
That this place is ours
Only so much as this place is us
And I have held it in my hands,
The birthing of our worlds
Pō, turned light, turned pūkoʻa, turned slime turned gods in a time of mere men
I have watched the call of the intrepid summon Manaekalani
every morning
in the hands of our kuaʻana
Maui, fishing us each
One by one from the dark sea of this forgetting

If I have devotion
it is only because
I have traveled into the poli of our akua
I have crossed the piko
from wākea to wākea
and sailed upon the dark and shining road of kāne
deep into the realm of our ancestors
and I have returned,
with the knowledge that to lay in the bosom of our kūpuna
is to commit yourself to the prayer of memory
to cast your eyes upon Kuehuelani
and to pull her shimmering body from the skin of the sea
If I have anger
It is only because
I know the stories of our loss
Ki‘i burnt to ash
Stones and ko‘a removed
Now the foundations of Billionaire estates
I am aware
That nearly anywhere we walk
We are trampling upon the ‘iwi of our kūpuna

I know the mo‘olelo of the hundreds of thousands dead and dying
I have seen the signs of the separating sicknesses
Born again, like Haumea, in every Hawaiian generation
I know the names of the thieves
The crooks in finely sewn suits
Praying to their capital
As they pillage
And loot our holy cities
Leaving us with nothing
But a whisper of what we once believed

And yet I still have aloha
But only because
I am still here
With all my kūpuna beside me
And when I stand in your malu
You
Tower over me, like a recollection
Like a mountain
With so many stories I will never know
In languages I will never speak
Thousands of miles away from your home
And the ‘āina and alchemy that made you
The hands that formed you
Like an island, consecrated
You are here
Pointed even in the wrong direction
A desecration
And still your kaumaha
Is not foreign to me
You feel more family
Than stranger
And in your magnificent shadow
I hear our calls to prayer