

GUESTS: JASPER WONG AND KAMEA HADAR

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WONG: Yeah; there's definitely a lot of convincing.

HADAR: I think it's Hawaii in general. They're very supportive.

Oh, the supportive part?

HADAR: Yeah. I mean, there's that conservative kind of aspect to Hawaii, but I think for the most part people are really supportive.

When you drive through Kakaako in Honolulu, you can almost see the change happening before your eyes. Quaint mom & pop stores are being priced out of the area, huge condos are in the process of being built or planned. But there's also a visual liveliness; pop-up stores and restaurants are attracting an energetic night crowd and a thriving arts community has staked out Kakaako as a blank canvas where they can express themselves. Two of these artists are Jasper Wong and Kamea Hadar, next on Long Story Short.

Long Story Short with Leslie Wilcox is Hawaii's first weekly television program produced and broadcast in high definition.

***Aloha mai kakou.* I'm Leslie Wilcox. Jasper Wong and Kamea Hadar are two up and coming Hawaii artists who have transformed the landscape of Honolulu through community art. As organizers of Pow Wow Hawaii, a nonprofit annual artist collective and street art festival, Jasper Wong and Kamea Hadar have been bringing together local and international artists to create large collaborative murals which have added color and culture to the Kakaako district. Both graduated from Kalani High School in Honolulu, and from an early age, they both found themselves gravitating toward the arts.**

WONG: I was raised by a single mother who raised three kids. There's three of us; I'm the oldest, and my dad left when I was about twelve.

Have you seen him since?

WONG: I have here and there, but I haven't seen him for years for a while. Yeah. So, I don't really know what he does. But yeah, just my mom. And then, my mom owned a bunch of bakeries. Actually, in the beginning, she owned a butcher shop in Kalihi next to the KFC by Farrington. And then later on, she had different bakeries in Chinatown on Hotel Street, and in Market City and stuff like that.

Did you end up working in those businesses?

WONG: Yeah, I grew up packing bread and cleaning up, and going on the register and selling baked goods. And after a while, you just hate pastries so much.

[CHUCKLE] So, back when you were the butcher's son, did you know you wanted to be an artist? Did you tell people, I want to be an artist?

WONG: Yeah. I had to spend so much time there growing up at the shop. And I just would just draw all day long. It was always something that I did growing up. In my composition books, there would always be just drawings of comic book characters, or on the side of the page, I would do a flipbook cartoon of like, Dragon Boy characters fighting each other and stuff. It was just always something that I wanted to do. And my mom was always very supportive. She wasn't that typical Asian mom who was like, I had to be a doctor or an accountant or a lawyer, or something. I was into art, and she found ways to sort of help me. She would buy me books, or she would try to enroll me in classes.

Oh, that's wonderful.

WONG: Or something like that. Yeah.

Kamea, were you always drawing and painting at a young age, too?

HADAR: Yeah; definitely. I mean, ever since I can remember.

I think that's where you have something in common, too. Because I think you both credit parental figures with hard work, and your work ethic, and your achievement.

WONG: Yeah.

Talk about that; what are your parents like?

HADAR: My parents are definitely dreamers. Definitely. They're the ones who house all the Pow Wow artists every year up at their estate. It's called Utopium Estate in Pupukea Heights. And that's a similar size project to Pow Wow. I mean, it was this crazy dream to have a property and a big house that could house artists and creative types, and have retreats and foster creativity. And it was this crazy, crazy idea, and my parents are like us. They're talkers and dreamers, and they're doers. And so, they built the place with their own two hands. And yeah, I think my parents definitely instilled the work ethic that I have and then, the reach for the stars kinda attitude that is necessary to be an artist and to do big things like this.

Jasper Wong and Kamea Hadar often find themselves traveling the world and participating in other art festivals and gallery exhibitions. The pair are no strangers to this bohemian lifestyle.

WONG: I've been lucky where you do art shows and stuff, and then people fly you out to all over the world to sort of like paint and do different things and do design work. This year alone, I have to fly to Germany and Montreal, and

Bali and Hong Kong, and just for different things that I gotta do out there. And own a small gallery in Hong Kong too. So, it kind of has led us to a lot of amazing places and to do a lot of amazing things.

How much do you think the travel that both of you have done, even before you became professional artists; you both had experience living abroad. How did that help you? I'm sure it helped in some way.

HADAR: Yeah. I mean, I think that's a huge thing that was instilled into me from a baby, was my parents were always traveling and always taking my brother and I all over the world. And I just grew up constantly experiencing new places and new people, and seeing new things. And I think that to me, you know, just gives you that kinda open-mindedness that is really good for a creative person. Because it just proves to you that there are so many different types of people, and so many different types of point of views in the world, and to never just have tunnel vision with anything. And that the world is huge and the possibilities are endless.

WONG: Yeah; yeah, definitely.

You had experience in Japan before you became a working adult. It's interesting, 'cause one parent is from Macao, one is from Hong Kong.

WONG: Yeah.

But you chose Japan as the place you'd travel to a lot.

WONG: Yeah, I've definitely traveled to Japan a lot. [CHUCKLE] I think that's probably 'cause I was so interested in the culture growing up. I went there to study *Manga* at Kyoto Seika Daigaku.

Ah ...

WONG: And I couldn't speak any Japanese, and even when I was there, I couldn't speak anything. So, I just would show up to class and just guess as to what I was supposed to do. [CHUCKLE] But it was fun, though.

You have to be brave to go do that, go to another part of the world you haven't been to, and show up and not speak the language, and take classes.

WONG: Yeah; it was fun. I kind of enjoy those kind of experiences, sort of picking up and leaving, and then going to a city where you know nobody and trying to start over and meet people. It kinda opens up your horizons. 'Cause I think growing up in Hawaii, going to school here I didn't even know that art colleges existed, even, and that there was even art high schools too. I had no idea about that kinda stuff. And I thought that if you wanted to be in the arts industry, that you had to either do graphic design or something similar to that. And so, I lived in Portland first for a little while, and I went to Lewis and Clark College. And then, while I was there, I discovered that there was art colleges. So, I transferred myself over to the California College of the Arts in San Francisco, and that's when I got involved more with galleries and doing shows, and learning all that kind of stuff. And I was really into that; I was doing six shows or six to nine shows a year, just because it was just such a new world to me. 'Cause I never experienced that before.

After Jasper Wong studied art in California and Japan, a move to Hong Kong reshaped his career path. It was a move that would eventually impact the art scene in Hawaii.

WONG: I moved to Hong Kong because I wanted to learn about manufacturing.

Manufacturing ...

WONG: Like, anything. I know that when I went to art college, they teach you concepts and ideas. But then, what is that process to get your idea to the physical form? A shoe, a chair, or anything for that matter. What is that, how do you get that to sort of become an actual product?

Was that related to your art career?

WONG: Yeah; yeah. And so then, I wanted to sort of learn how to do that kinda stuff. Because if not, then I'm always just sort of like, I could never really start my own thing without learning the process of sort of getting from Point A to Point B. But then, when I was there, I wanted to keep doing art shows. And then, so I started taking my portfolio, just taking my stuff around to all the galleries. And in Hong Kong, the gallery scene is more finance-based, 'cause it's a city of trade. And so, all the galleries were more like, painting inventory stores. They weren't really trying to push younger artists or doing shows. I mean, it's a lot different now, 'cause now they have the art base over there. But then, when I was living there, it was totally different. And at that time, mainland Chinese art was sort of the hot commodity. If you weren't mainland Chinese, then they wouldn't care. So, I took my art around, and they didn't want to show my work because it wasn't a good investment. There was no potential. So, my choice was to either just give up, or start my own gallery. So, I just ended up starting my own little gallery and just to push my own art, and then push friends' art. And so, we just did that. And the first show in that little gallery was the first Pow Wow.

You came up with the name, Pow Wow?

WONG: Yeah, yeah; Pow Wow. Yeah; 'cause the Pow was sort of the reaction that art has on the viewer; it's like a punch in the face. It came from comic books. And the Wow is sort of your reaction to that work. So it's like Pow and Wow.

So, this is not the Narragansett term for gathering. This is completely not that.

WONG: Oh, yeah. No; yeah. But then, when it's together, then it's a gathering. So it felt like, well then, the roots came from comic books originally. So, we have the exclamation marks behind each word as sort of like Pow, and then Wow, and then Pow Wow together, it's like a gathering to celebrate art, culture, music. It felt like it was the perfect term for what we were pushing and what we were doing. And so, it became that, and afterwards, it was like we want to keep doing it, and so, where could we do it. Either we could do it in Berlin, Singapore, Shanghai, Beijing, wherever there was friends that had spaces. And then Hawaii was a choice too. But growing up in Hawaii, we were always

like, was it the best spot to do it? Do you think people would really care about it? And we felt like we should try.

Well, what is it? I mean, what is the essence of Pow Wow?

WONG: It is a gathering to sort of bring -- just like, if we got that many people together of just all these creative people into one place, then something amazing is gonna happen. And also, we felt like galleries or museums, there's always that sort of barrier. Like, as an everyday person, sometimes you're kind of afraid to sort of pass that threshold and go into a gallery, because you feel like maybe it's not for you, or maybe it's for like high society or something. So then, if we paint on walls in public, you have no choice. It's right in front of you. The artwork that you draw, it's right there.

HADAR: And also, the murals bring other positive things. Not only does it bring attention to their businesses and to their land and buildings. But I think a common misconception is that this is gonna attract vandalism, but it actually does quite the opposite. Once the walls are painted, it becomes not completely untouchable, but let's say people don't mess with the artwork. I mean, it's a big deal to vandalize somebody's artwork. So, the caretakers of the land have actually told us that they buff out probably a quarter the amount of graffiti that they used to, or illegal vandalism that they used to.

Is that respect paid by graffiti artists to other artists?

WONG: We're also very inclusive of the whole graffiti community. Like, we try to include them into the project as well, and we try to give them a voice through those walls. And I think by doing that, to a lot of them, it make the place to them more sacred.

Kamea Hadar grew up with the multicultural backgrounds of a Hawaii-born mother of Japanese and Korean ancestry and a father from Israel. His art studies led him to faraway places like the University of Saint Louis in Madrid, Israel's University of Tel Aviv, and the Sorbonne in Paris.

HADAR: I had time at the Sorbonne in Paris, and studied in Europe. And so, yeah, I mean, I came from that very classical kind of base. And a lot of the artists in Pow Wow came from the other way around, where they came from the street and they came as graffiti artists that a lot of the stuff they do -- actually, almost all of the stuff they started off doing is just completely illegally painting.

Is that an odd mix of artists?

HADAR: Yeah. I mean, I think that's the beauty of it, is that we have all these different artists, and everyone gets along so well.

They respect each other?

HADAR: Yeah. The process of creation and collaboration are two of the biggest things that we stress at Pow Wow. So, collaboration not only makes for better, more interesting art many times, but also, it's a beautiful thing to see artists share their cultures through art.

WONG: We all stay at the Utopium, Kamea's family's home up in North Shore, and we make it a point to sort of put them all in one big house together. And that way, you're sort of forced to sort of --

Sounds like a future reality show to me.

WONG: Yeah; it is. There's always sometimes --

HADAR: Definitely had a whole big campus in that house.

WONG: Yeah.

[CHUCKLE]

WONG: And so then, they're forced to hang out with each other. You know, you have no choice but to make a connection with the person that you're sleeping next to. And then by the time you're painting, then everyone's sort of more relaxed and cool, there's less egos going around. It's more like, hey, we're all painting together, we're all having fun in Hawaii together, let's just have a good time and let's just make it happen.

HADAR: Hawaii is a very, very mixed place. I'm *hapa*, so I have parents from very different cultures. So, I mean, to see that in physical form on the wall painted you can see like an artist from Australia and a Cambodian artist painting together, and you get all these different mixes. And you literally see the art twisting together. I think it's one of the most beautiful things. There's a wall near the new Starbucks off of Ala Moana Boulevard, and it was one of the walls that was created by five artists. One was from Australia, one was from Hawaii, one was from London, and one was from Cambodia. The Cambodian artist was the one who I think you're speaking of, who did the *Naga* snake, which is that mythical Cambodian snake that kind of weaves throughout the piece and kind of, to me, tied it all together.

WONG: And so, you learn a lot being around a lot of artists, and you sort of pick up different things that they do, and try to apply it to yourself, and it kinda opens your mind as to like what's possible. 'Cause I would never have thought, like Rone, when you started using the weed sprayer to paint with.

HADAR: Yeah.

A weed sprayer?

HADAR: Yeah. Yeah; I mean, the artist that I painted with this year, one of them, his name is Rone. He's from Australia, and I mean, he taught me some amazing things. And a lot of the techniques, he developed himself. And he really didn't have to share his secrets with me, and he did. And I mean, it completely changed the way that I look at a lot of my art. And I even told him that I'm gonna tell people that it's called Roneing, because I'm naming it after you, or you have to name it after yourself 'cause these are your techniques. But I mean, I think the best way to get better is to be around people that are on different levels, and it's amazing how much you can learn. And that's part of, sharing cultures. You learn about each other's cultures, and you also learn about art itself and how to create art. How different people create art, and how they have different paints in different parts of the country and different parts of the world, and the tools that they use, and what they have available

and what they don't, and how they find creative ways to get around lack of tools or lack of paint, or lack of places to paint. And it just really broadens your horizons as an artist.

And what was the most successful? I don't know if there is one, 'cause you've had so many really beautiful pieces. What would you say would be the one that people remember the most, so far?

WONG: The one he did, with Rone. Kamea did one on Cooke and Pohukaina, of Shana, of his girlfriend's face.

HADAR: Yeah; it's like a whole side of the building and, it's just a close-up of her face looking up into the sky.

WONG: People love that one.

HADAR: I've gotten a lot of amazing feedback on that one.

WONG: The one at 123 [INDISTINCT] that was [INDISTINCT] Slick. And the one on Kaimana Street.

HADAR: Kamani.

WONG: Kamani Street; that's Ann Namba's shop.

And Ann Namba is?

WONG: Is Kamea's auntie.

HADAR: My auntie. [CHUCKLE]

Yeah; Ann Namba, the fashion designer. And you've done work for her, even as a teenager.

HADAR: Yeah; I've been doing graphic design for her, you know, designing her textiles since I was fifteen.

So, art runs in the family, obviously.

HADAR: It definitely runs in the family. Yeah. And she's also one of Pow Wow's biggest supporters. She helps run our fundraiser, and she really is a believer in what we're doing.

Are there other women artists who participate?

WONG: There's a ton; yeah. There's a bunch; yeah. We make it a point to find a balance. I mean, granted, within the street art community it's definitely male dominant, for sure. But we make it a point to sort of bring in as many females. And we actually have our art school, and our school has about thirty-five students, and the majority or the most talented kids is all girls, all females.

How do people find your art school?

HADAR: Right now, it's been very word of mouth, just 'cause it's small as we develop and grow --

WONG: It's also free, too.

HADAR: Yeah. We fund it, so we just simply can't afford to teach the amount of students that we want to. I mean, we're gonna try our best to keep growing.

Let me ask you; as former public school students in Honolulu, did you see your art or music classes cut, or did you have them?

WONG: Yeah. No; yeah, yeah, yeah. We were there. I took classes, but we knew that the resources were so limited. And I stay in touch with my art teacher,

and then she tells me it's tough being an art teacher in Hawaii, 'cause then sometimes you don't even have the right kinda paint to teach with. Like, they'll have like a lot of Tempera. You can't really teach people how to paint with Tempera paint. 'Cause they can't afford acrylics or oils, or something.

HADAR: I mean, we're hoping to create an art school that, when we were that age, we would have loved to be part of. And that's what we want to create for the next generation, is giving them all their classes are being cut in school, but then they have this outlet over here, and it's free to them and they can come. And if I had a million dollars to start a school with thousands of kids, I would do it now. Because that's something that my auntie said she would have loved, that we would have loved. I mean, everyone who's a creative now said that they could have always used more when they were younger.

And sometimes, it's a lifesaver for kids who don't have a passion or another outlet that they can access.

WONG: Oh, yeah; some of the students there, it's like, we also do portfolio reviews and even college counseling to sort of show them that there is way to get into art colleges and stuff. 'Cause then, I wish I had that. I didn't even know about art colleges. And so, we'll do all that kinda work, and we've actually helped to get some students into art colleges.

The developing arts movement in Kakaako inspired by Jasper Wong and Kamea Hadar is not limited to their annual Pow Wow Hawaii event. Other community events such as Eat the Street and Honolulu Night Market have sprung up, perhaps in part because of the popularity of Pow Wow Hawaii. The pair has also established a headquarters in the neighborhood.

WONG: Lana Lane is this five thousand square foot warehouse that Kamehameha Schools sort of helped us acquire, that we turned into a creative studio. So basically, it's just a bunch of artist studios that we rent out for really, really cheap just to give artists a space to work out of, and to sort of collaborate together with, and we provide the facilities. And we have a variety of people from painters, screen printers, to fabric dyers, to people that work on motorbikes, to video editors, to musicians, and everything. And so, it's really, to be honest, like an artist *favela*, 'cause then everyone just sort of creates their own space in there. And it was a super loft space that we sort of just all worked on, and it's mostly managed by Jeffrey Gress, who also helps out with Pow Wow as well. So, it's one of our projects that we sort of created to sort of create more of an arts --

So, it was an abandoned property that you rehabbed?

WONG: Yeah; before, it was a concrete company. Before, it was like a tire company; they sort of fixed cars and did tires in there. And so, it's one of these sort of empty spaces that no one really knew what to do with. And as artists, we sort of see it as an opportunity. And so, we sort of used the space to create something that we wanted for the artist community in Hawaii. And so, it's become sort of our headquarters and a gathering place.

And where is it?

WONG: It's on Lana Lane. It's called Lana Lane Studios, but it's on this private road called Lana Lane. And it's right on Auahi Street between Cooke and Coral.

Jasper Wong and Kamea Hadar consider themselves a good duo, because they see themselves as both dreamers and doers with good creative and business sense. They acknowledge that organizing Pow Wow Hawaii is an enormous undertaking, but a task they look forward to taking on again.

It's such a remarkable phenomenon, and yet, you can't rest on your laurels 'cause it's just as hard the next year. Right? And you're not paying your own money for it, but you're --

WONG: Well, we make it harder for ourselves by making it bigger.

Right. You're always upping the learning curve for yourselves.

HADAR: Yeah. Yeah; I mean, I guess that's the dreamer part, is you're never completely satisfied, you're always hungry for more, you're always motivated to do bigger and better. I mean, one of my favorite things that we've been doing the last couple years is blacking out and destroying the pieces. Some of them. And people are always shocked when we do that, and that's one of my favorite things in the world to do.

Why is that? 'Cause you love creativity, and now you're destroying.

HADAR: Because it just proves that it's really not about the finished product, that's something that you're gonna sell. I mean, every artist needs to make a living, and we have gallery shows and the pieces are for sale. But that's not the only thing that drives us. It's also the power of creativity and collaboration. All the artists working together and the process of all of us working together, and to see that happen and to be a part of it as an artist, it's a beautiful thing. And whatever we create it's not that important.

WONG: Yeah.

HADAR: It's not as important sometimes as that whole process.

WONG: It brings it back to sort of how we were when we were drawing or doodling, and painting when we were little kids. None of us were thinking at that age that we were painting or drawing to sort of make a living or to sell this particular canvas. But then, we just did it 'cause we loved it and it was fun. And I think when you do it that way, when you sort of create it just for the fun of creation, and then destroy it afterwards, it kind of reminds us that it's really just about having fun and painting, and creating.

Artists Jasper Wong and Kamea Hadar say they'll continue to do their part to grow this new art movement in Hawaii. They hope to bring in new groups of artists for collaboration and future murals in urban Honolulu. Jasper and Kamea are also considering expanding Pow Wow into several other countries as well. Mahalo to Jasper Wong and Kamea Hadar for sharing their story with us. And

mahalo to you for joining us. For PBS Hawaii and Long Story Short, I'm Leslie Wilcox. A hui hou.

For audio and written transcripts of this program, and all episodes of Long Story Short with Leslie Wilcox, visit PBSHawaii.org.

HADAR: You should never be completely comfortable. I think any artist can tell you that if you look at your work from a year ago or two years ago, or three years ago, I mean, you instantly see how you've progressed. And if you don't, I mean, you should; you should be constantly looking at how you can move.