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SPF: Apply Liberally



Is Kaka'ako ready for Drew Broderick?

Jaimey Hamilton Faris • I'm not going to change your life by saying that Kaka'ako is booming. New galleries and restaurants have been popping up on Auahi Street between Cooke and Keawe for the past few years. New wall murals by Pow Wow Hawai'i and 808 Urban advertise (yes, advertise) the radical changes coming soon. The leases for the light industry and mom and pop businesses in the area will end, the buildings will get razed, and condo high rises will pop up in their place.

Right now, Kaka'ako is what I would call a "Temporary Creative Zone," or TCZ, a brilliant, but highly planned, artistic gentrification process sponsored by landowner Kamehameha Schools as it makes the transition to its vision of Honolulu urban living. (This TCZ is very different from the Temporary Autonomous Zones, or TAZs, advocated by philosopher Hakim Bey. More on this in a bit.)

SPF Projects is the newest gallery yet, and I'll bet it will be one of the most interesting and self-aware of the creative spaces that have taken advantage of Kaka'ako's retrofit. It's run by Drew Broderick, who negotiated a three-year lease on 729 Auahi St. Most leases in the mauka section of Kaka'ako's master plan are evaluated every six months, but Broderick's gallery is on a block (shared with Lana Lane Studios) that won't get restructured for a few years out. Still, nothing here is certain.

The space was most recently a taxi dispatch (you can't miss the kitschy "taxi parking" mural on the side of its roll-up door, something Broderick says he won't remove) between Pearl Harbor Divers and AGA Design. Broderick has put all of his paychecks into paying the rent, materials for minimal remodeling, and hosting a series of exhibitions that will feature smart, irreverent, and challenging artists of local, national, and international recognition.

I anticipate that more than a few of the shows will challenge the slick veneer of Kamehameha Schools's community development ambitions. In this respect, as much as SPF will knowingly play a part in the TCZ of Kaka'ako's redevelopment, its spirit could be more closely aligned with a TAZ. (Bey's 1991 manifesto advocated for spaces of critical thought lodged in, yet "refusing," the logic of dominant cultural structures, especially commerce. Whatever form they take—brick and mortar, sites on the interweb, or imaginary scenarios in the mind—TAZs are critical, poetic zones where one can find more than "alternative" images, sounds, and food to purchase.)

Broderick is refitting the space to be just flexible enough to showcase art, but raw enough to keep the history of the place visible and present. Recently visiting the space while under construction, I asked him whether he would take out the fluorescents and replace them with track lighting. He gave a firm no, saying if the art wasn't strong enough to be viewed under fluorescents, then it wasn't strong enough, period. The philosophy of this space seems to be that art should toughen up and face the real world—to not be quite so precious about its artiness (or its pure commodity status, either).

The name of the gallery says it in so many letters: SPF plays on the ubiquity of sunscreen products in our tourist culture. Broderick says, "To me, sunscreen is about mediating an experience. In Hawai'i's case, more often than not, this experience is one of recreation, of leisure. Converting dangerous sun to the desirable sun of the tourist industry."

Broderick also means the term to subtly reference how art, artists, and art spaces can play a mediating role in increasing our relative tolerance to the diverse and sometimes brutal political and cultural issues in Hawai'i (which often plays out according to skin tone, whether implicitly and explicitly).

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It's time to be exposed. The premise of SPF is that art can mediate the realities of Hawai'i, which are sometimes too hard—and honestly sometimes counterproductive—to face in the litigious arena of politics and public policy. Different perspectives and the comparative rightness of those perspectives can seep in through the space of pause and reflection that art allows (when we let it).

The upcoming line-up of artists promises to infuse the Kaka'ako area with some serious, off-the-cuff, high-stakes art. The first show features Keith Tallett, a second-generation surfboard shaper, Polynesian tattoo practitioner, and artist. He's known for his epoxy resin paintings and photos of bananas and anthuriums with their tender skins inked with pidgin phrases. Tallett offers a uniquely Hawaiian perspective on homegrown, local boy aggression.

At the end of the summer, SPF will feature paintings by Paris-based artist Kosta Kulundzic. Later in the year, look for Alex Chaves from Los Angeles, Willa Nasatir from New York, and Nicolas Sassoon from Vancouver.

To showcase local talent, Broderick will make some unusual pairings: For instance, he's putting photographer Eric Yanagi with the exuberantly flamboyant fibers of performance artist Robert Reed (I can't wait to see that!).

I'm impressed: Broderick's energy and intelligence, and the way he expresses both in his local kine talk, indicates a total openness to the paradoxes of Kaka'ako and the incubating art scene. After witnessing the ongoing exodus of young artists and creatives who leave for school and don't come back, Broderick decided that he didn't want to be part of that trend. This moment of extreme retrofitting of Kaka'ako seems a perfect time and place for a young artist like Broderick to hone his art practice and participate in a historic moment that will soon be gone.

SPF Projects's inaugural art exhibition, Keith Tallett: Militia, opens with a reception on Thu., 6/13, 6–8pm. Militia runs through 7/14. SPF Projects is open Tue.–Thu., 7–11pm, Sun., 1–5pm, and by appointment, 729 Auahi St., [facebook.com/SPFprojects](https://www.facebook.com/SPFprojects)

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