

Dates for the Gathering Project at 'Iolani Palace, Honolulu, O'ahu, Hawai'i

February 25 // morning session 9:00A to noon // afternoon session 1:00p – 4:00p

March 18 // // morning session 9:00A to noon // afternoon session 1:00p – 4:00p

April 15 // // morning session 9:00A to noon // afternoon session 1:00p – 4:00p

Overview // For one day a month, during the Hawai'i Triennial, 'Iolani Palace will serve as a gathering place for small conversations with a diverse group—gender, age, race, experiences—sharing a common goal, learning through listening, with mutual respect and unanticipated outcomes. The goal of this “arts and culture demonstration project” is to gather and practice the craft of meaningful, rigorous civil and civic conversation, in a place that will inspire dialogue at the deepest level.

This demonstration project intends to reactivate 'Iolani Palace's role as a gathering place for discussions of local and global concern as well as futuristic and innovative thinking. The upcoming Hawai'i Triennial, an internationally oriented contemporary art event rooted in place, provides an opportunity for a paradigm shift—the Palace as a convener.

Background // 'Iolani Palace once stood as the thriving heart of the Kingdom of Hawai'i, on the Island of O'ahu, known as “the gathering place,” the only official royal residence on U.S. soil today. In 1882, King David Kalakaua, was the first head of state of any country to circumnavigate the globe. He visited twenty-four nations, establishing treaties and consulates in these countries and many others, as well as longstanding relationships around the world. The King brought back to Hawai'i experiences, inspirations and inventions to share with his people.

Kalakaua was widely known as a successful diplomat and convener of lively debates and discussions. He was also a champion of preserving and perpetuating inherently Hawaiian customs and cultural expressions including hula, oli, oration and musical composition. Kalakaua's Palace served as the focal point for many international, multi-generational gatherings and celebrations.

Many today associate 'Iolani Palace with the painful overthrow and imprisonment of King Kalakaua's sister, Queen Liliu'okalani, and the dismantling of Hawaiian ways. After this turbulent point in time the Palace was used as government offices and storage space for close to 80 years. The Palace reclaimed its important history in 1969, thanks to the efforts of community groups that contributed to its restoration as an important historical and cultural site.

Timing // During the upcoming 2022 Hawai'i Triennial, a global arts and culture event, this is an ideal opportunity to re-establish the nature of how Hawaiians gathered in the past. Once commonplace—gathering to exchanges ideas, impassioned viewpoints and diverse opinions, as well as singing or the composing of music, riddles, odes and chants, was the order of the day. The dynamic of actively gathering for true discourse and learning in a Hawaiian way, needs muscle memory re-established through reconvening.

Details // The launch of the Gathering Project is in conjunction with the upcoming Hawai'i Triennial (February 18 – May 11). The Palace will host two sessions on each of the three dates of the Gathering Project. Five circles with up to eight individuals participating will be in conversation during each session. On each Gathering Project day there will be no more than 80 individuals in the Palace.

An online platform and website will encourage individuals to fill out registration information that matches them to a variety of conversation topics. Our hope is that as many different people get to experience the Gathering Project. Conversation topics will be selected by community thought and spiritual leaders. Each group can be in conversation in their respective circle, for up to three hours.

Diverse thinking, races and ethnicities, ages and professions will be encouraged. A “witness” will review “Palace Protocols” and listen outside the circle and ensure that a safe and shared space is held. Also present outside of the circle will be a “creative translator.” The role of this person will be to listen to the gathering and when ready, write/draw/compose/imagine some distillation from the discussion. These reflections will be gathered at the end of the project for some form of sharing.

Funds raised for the Gathering Project, will be used for direct expenses related to this project. Starting with the replacement of lost Palace tourist income, the creation of an appropriate website and scheduling platform, and honorariums to creative translators. Funds for a possible publication or sharing construct will be raised at a later date.

The fundraising goal to cover these expenses is approximately \$40,000. This is a project of the Pu‘uhonua Society, a community arts and culture 501c3 not for profit operating in Honolulu since the late 1970s.

Next Steps

- Work closely with Palace personnel to finalize operational details
- Secure sponsorships and donations (currently 30percent raised)
- Invite specific groups, leaders, etc. to prepare questions and topics for gatherings
- Introduce The Gathering Project to community
- Meet with Gathering Project Witnesses and Creative Translators
- Develop website for the project and create simple booking system, etc.
- Discuss possibility of simple publication and finalize plans based on available funding

For additional information

Questions, input, to offer kokua or to donate, please reach out to Maile Meyer // maile@nameahawaii.com, 808-783-2786. This Gathering Project is a project of the Pu‘uhonua Society, a community arts & culture not-for-profit founded in the 1970s.

*“Hawai‘i was the last place settled by humanity.
Hawaiians had the least amount of ancestral memory loss....
the evolution of our species is aloha.”*

Kanaka oiwi ali‘i descendant and community,
Kenneth Francis Kamuokalani Brown