

Bridging mural-making and indigenous traditions

Mele Murals

Directed by Tadashi Nakamura
Airing May 2 at 11:00pm
on Oregon Public Broadcasting

By Maileen Hamto
The Asian Reporter

What happens when graffiti artists — steeped in street knowledge and hip-hop culture — come to paradise to make art with an indigenous community? The documentary, *Mele Murals*, follows the journey of two renowned street artists and their collaboration with youth from a rural Hawai'i town to catalyze the community's vision of their identity as a people.

The film conjoins the narratives of Estria Miyashiro and John "Prime" Hina, artists who have taken different paths to become masters of street art. Estria, who left Hawai'i to study art in San Francisco, established himself as a street artist on the mainland. He returned to Hawai'i to reconnect with his Japanese and Native Hawai'i roots. A native of Honolulu, Prime was well known in the Big Island's underground graffiti scene before starting a family. He returned to "writing" (the art of graffiti) years later, by starting to work with young people who want to develop their skills.

Estria and Prime were invited to lead a public art project by indigenous charter school teacher Kanoa Castro in the rural community of Waimea. Amid a resurgence of interest in Native Hawai'i culture, language, and traditions, the charter schools connect young people with pre-colonial stories, songs, chants, and



GRAFFITI & CULTURE. *Mele Murals*, a documentary about the transformative power of art through the unlikely union of graffiti and ancient Hawai'i culture, follows two renowned street artists — Estria Miyashiro (a.k.a. Estria) and John Hina (a.k.a. Prime) — a group of Native Hawai'i youth, and the rural community of Waimea. Through their stories, the film shows how public art and Native Hawai'i traditions affect the artists, students, and community. (Photo courtesy of Pacific Islanders in Communications)

customs. The town of fewer than 10,000 people is home to Mauna Kea, a volcano that rises almost 14,000 feet. It is the highest peak in Hawai'i and is known as the realm of the "Snow Goddess."

As the artists delve deeper and listen intently to the narratives of the youth and elders, the two discover the contrasts between their own understanding, experiences, and interpretations of Hawai'i and indigenous beliefs and the traditions practiced by the Waimea community.

The transformative process instructs Estria and Prime about their duty and

responsibility to preserve Native Hawai'i traditions, as they reflect upon and rediscover their own identities.

"When I lived in California, it was me by myself. If I messed up, it was my mistake. If I had success, it was my success," Estria said. "But coming here and learning about our culture ... I don't want to let these people down."

Reconciling the mores of contemporary street art with indigenous traditions was challenging for both men, especially for Estria. Collating the community's ideas in

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Pacific Heartbeat
airs Tuesdays in May at 11:00pm
on Oregon Public Broadcasting.

Mele Murals is the first episode of season six of *Pacific Heartbeat*, an anthology series that provides viewers with a glimpse of the real Pacific — its people, cultures, and contemporary issues. The series features a diverse array of programs that will draw viewers into the heart and soul of Pacific Island culture.

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Mele Murals
May 2, 11:00pm

**Visions in the Dark:
The Life of Pinky Thompson**
May 9, 11:00pm

Visions in the Dark tells a story of pain and promise, of challenge and triumph, and a story of leadership.

Ever the Land
May 16, 11:00pm
Ever the Land explores the sublime bond between the people of New Zealand and their land.

Next Goal Wins
May 23, 11:00pm
Next Goal Wins is a hilarious and moving exploration of what it really means to be a winner in life, after suffering a world record 0-31 defeat and being dubbed the worst football (soccer) team on the planet.



"As a woman engineer, I appreciate that the Port is looking at equity. And, as a multi-racial immigrant, addressing diversity and equality is something I find personally important."

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**We're more than a Port,
we're your partner.**

Isabella Bejarano Engineering Project Manager

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