KQED Arts



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People's Kitchen Collective Serves Up a Recipe for Resilience

You can't fight for justice, equity and freedom on an empty stomach. The co-founders of People's Kitchen Collective (PKC), Sita Kuratomi Bhaumik, Jocelyn Jackson and Saqib Keval, believe in the power of conversation and community over shared meals—and the necessity of bridging racial, religious and generational divides to build solidarity.

Over the course of a year, PKC organized a four-meal series called "From the FARM, to the KITCHEN, to the TABLE, to the STREETS," nourishing people with courses sourced from their own family recipes, community members and historical references. As PKC says, "In our kitchen, food has flavor."

"TABLE" brought together communities affected by xenophobic immigration policies, including Flora Ninomiya, a survivor of the internment camps of Japanese Americans established under Executive Order 9066, and Misha Abbas, a Muslim textile artist from Pakistan.

"The Muslim travel ban and the idea that we don't belong here, that's how the Japanese were seen," says Abbas, who created and naturally died furoshiki, traditional Japanese wrapping cloths, using flowers from Ninomiya's land. "We're part of the same struggle."

For the culminating meal, PKC fed 500 guests, with dishes inspired by the Black Panthers' Free Breakfast Program—at a single long table that spanned an entire West Oakland city block.

"We're Black and brown people at a table together in a Black and brown neighborhood, claiming space, and that's political," says Keval. This is especially true in West Oakland, where rapid gentrification is pushing longtime residents and artists out of the neighborhood. One need only a look at the Alena Museum, the community arts space out of which PKC has operated the last two years, and its likely displacement, as an example of looming cultural erasure in the neighborhood.

PKC's mission to "nourish the revolution" is both radical and completely in earnest. "At every meal," Keval says, "we want you to be moved, moved out into a place where you're publicly advocating for the issues that matter." -- *Text by Sarah Hotchkiss*