**Artist:** Big Mox

**Title:**

Aww Synapse

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**Artwork Description**

In Shangri La's Introductory Gallery, hip hop artist and educator, Big Mox and his musical collaborator, Leslie "Bimwala" Ludiazo, use the hip hop ritual of cypher in an original composition that conjures the playfulness of Sufi mysticism to form connections between and across generations of cultures, genres, and timelines.

**Artist Statement**

How does one turn hewa to holy? By 2021, culture has been eviscerated and resuscitated a few times over. The latest generation is struggling to maintain a connection to its roots. I consider myself a classically trained hip hop practitioner with dual citizenship in the theatre community. One virtue I’ve uncovered through my participation, is that culture is created in the joys of the living.

I was able to connect to my local community in high school through an inclusive theatre culture created by my mentor George Kon. T-Shirt Theatre was a safe space for me to materialize my imagination and actuate my ideas. Creativity in Kalihi with the mission to help young people “win jobs, justice, and joy” has become my life’s work, as it was for George, and co-founder Walt Dulaney.

Hip hop is global and has become the culture of the impoverished. I watched my parents get lost in music, and they instilled the boom bap, skank, swing, and groove in me before birth. My first cypher set me on a course to connect to the wider world. I immediately felt akin to the plight of the people communing over the drums. “Big Mox” was bigger, faster, stronger, than my actual self. My early raps were braggadocios but were yearning to be seen as more. It wasn’t until I became an MC that I realized I was dispelling trauma that I identified as my being. My gratitude for the culture that helped me to re-invent and heal, is what transcended my role as simply a participant of the culture to an active teacher who gives back. As an MC I discovered a responsibility to speak truth and assist understanding to endure. To me, the goal of anyone participating in any culture deeply, is to uplift and perpetuate life.

In this piece I hope to use the hip hop ritual of cypher, to conjure and pay tribute in rhythm, voice, and sweat. I’m building on the understanding that safe people make safe spaces. Working in the public sector for over twenty years, I’ve seen a push to create safe spaces. That phrase never sat well with me because space was a constant. The variable was who was doing what in the space. I applaud Shangri La for bravely connecting with the local arts community. I’m honored and hope my contribution brings levity.

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