Between the Bars
An exhibition featuring artists from California Men’s Colony
Between the Bars
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Foreword

BETWEEN THE BARS is an exhibit that brings to light the hidden and often forgotten lives and talents of incarcerated individuals. It utilizes the power of art to foster dialogue surrounding what it means to inhabit the margins of society and struggle to redeem humanity. This exhibit challenges our indifference to the dehumanization of people convicted of committing various types of crime, violent or not, by demonstrating their ability to create and or offer penitence to the world around them.

In a country where we spend 80 billion dollars a year to incarcerate 2.3 million people on any given day, we have grown accustomed to justifying the criminalization and subsequent removal of men, women, and children who break the law, often non-violently. Our reliance on the media’s depiction of who these “criminals” are has made it easy to disregard or defend the plight of incarcerated people across the nation, most of whom will be released back into society and the social exclusion of whom holds stark social implications that extend beyond the offender to their families and communities.

In a criminal justice system where incarceration has been proven ineffective, our best attempt to foster successful rehabilitation and reduce recidivism lies in our willingness to see through the stereotypes and labels that society has perpetuated about this population. In order to do so, we must find common ground. We have repeatedly ascribed a single narrative to a group of people, which has prevented us from seeing them as the individuals they are. As people, much like ourselves, in need of hope, of mercy, and of forgiveness.

We have all broken the law at one time or another, whether minor or not. Instead of vilifying each other, we should acknowledge the humanity in our mistakes. This does not mean that we have to accept or agree with those mistakes, but we also do not have to allow them to define us. We are all human and when we attempt to strip one another of the very bind that ties us together we will never be able to move toward a safer society.

This exhibit is grounded in the belief that we must be the change we wish to see in the world. It seeks to encourage others to exercise empathy and compassion in a world that is far too often cold and indifferent. It provides an opportunity to validate the work of people who may have never received a kind word. It celebrates doing what we can with what we have. The incarcerated artists showcased here have produced beauty from remnants of nothing. They have used art as a medium to rehabilitate themselves. Let us see them.

UNIQUE SHAW-SMITH, PH.D.
Assistant Professor, Sociology
Social Sciences Department
Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo
I BELIEVE THAT art has a multitude of positive effects and influences on an individual. These effects are beneficial to everyone, whether they be a young child or an incarcerated individual. The arts help an individual better understand themselves and the world around them. My hope is that *Between the Bars*, helps bring awareness to this fact. *Between the Bars* demonstrates the benefits and positive implications that the arts have on incarcerated individuals. This influenced my research paper to further discuss how participation in the arts can lead to positive character development and that this growth could improve prison safety and reentry to society.

Throughout the process of organizing the exhibit, I enjoyed interacting with the incarcerated artists and fell in love with their artwork. Seeing their talent has inspired me to improve my own artistic skills; I have learned that talent resides in every person and they should have the opportunity to showcase it. I am incredibly thankful for having the opportunity to collaborate on an exhibit that provided a platform for individuals to be proudful of their creations and to share their stories, thoughts, and identities.

ELIESE MAXWELL  
*Sociology Major*

I AM A Sociology student with a concentration in Criminal Justice. I have always wanted to understand why people go to prison and it was through the study of sociology that I was able to understand the societal factors that can and do contribute to incarceration. Growing up, my own brother was in prison for a couple of years but I was able to see beyond his crime and continue to support him—this is what sparked my interest in really wanting to help incarcerated people and contribute to this project. It is through my understanding of society that I am able to walk into the prison and personally interact with the incarcerated people because I believe in rehumanizing them and giving them the power to have some say in their art exhibit. My research paper is based on art therapy and the impact it has on the incarcerated individual. This project has furthered my understanding of incarcerated people but most importantly it has motivated me to continue to work for those who don't feel they have a voice. To help the marginalized community who is invisible to the rest of the population. This project was much more than a senior project, it gave me the ability to empower those incarcerated people who usually get no say in their day to day life and that was much more than I ever expected.

VICTORIA OTERO  
*Sociology Major, concentration in Criminal Justice*
Art and Incarceration

Art provides economic independence for incarcerated individuals. In many cases, art provides an opportunity to earn wages to purchase items in prison. By creating and selling art, incarcerated individuals can obtain more income and have control of their financial situation.

Art is a hobby that helps distract from the routines of prison/overall situation. For some incarcerated individuals, it can help curb depressing or suicidal thoughts.

Art reconnects incarcerated individuals with family. Artwork provides an opportunity for healthy dialog with family members. Family, especially children, can feel proud that the incarcerated person is engaging in a positive activity. Their creativity provides a tangible medium that others enjoy and helps incarcerated individuals feel proud of their accomplishments.

Public exhibitions of incarcerated individuals’ art creates understanding within society and reinforces empathy for the incarcerated individuals’ life histories. The incarcerated person becomes more real and humanized.

Art and arts programs can create a safer prison environment. To participate in arts programs, men have to behave appropriately and stay out of trouble, which creates eligibility for prison diversion programs and leads to less problematic and hostile behavior. (This is also important for incarcerated people without the possibility of parole)

Prison art programs offer multi-dimensional value, facilitating opportunities, not only for further learning, but also for recreation and vocation. Enjoyment and achievement in prison art programs have been shown to result in a re-introduction to education for many incarcerated people; stimulating them into pursuing further education both inside prison and upon release.

Having the label of ‘artist’ gains respect from correctional staff/officers and non-artist incarcerated people.

Art can help with reentry into society; through publicly displaying art, incarcerated artists have formed healthy bonds with the community and feel that the community is invested in them and accepts them.

Being an artist puts them in the artist subgroup, giving them an identity and place of belonging. When going to a new prison facility, making friends and meeting others is facilitated through engaging with the artist community.
Art helps ‘rehumanize’ incarcerated people because of the structure and discipline involved with everyday life in prison. Recidivism rates have decreased for incarcerated people who have participated in art therapy programs.

Art permits the incarcerated person to express himself in a manner acceptable to the inside and outside culture. It is important for incarcerated people to find something that is acceptable to the outside world so when they are released, they know they are capable of being accepted by society.

Art can create positive changes in an incarcerated person’s character/behavior. Incarcerated people learn self-discipline, cooperation, and teamwork in arts program environments.

For those who won’t be released, being involved in art therapy programs receive less disciplinary reports.

Prison art programs may give many incarcerated people their first experience of a positive, absorbing activity and participation in such programs offers a non-threatening way for incarcerated people to demonstrate that they are engaging in educative or therapeutic programs. This allows them the possibility of obtaining privileges or accessing parole.

Art helps incarcerated people regulate their emotions. Giving them some degree of self-control makes them comfortable. Art gives them control of how they feel, in a place where they don’t have much control. Art gives them a chance to portray their feelings onto something tangible; they can discover how they truly feel and discover subconscious thoughts.

Developing an artist identity can help incarcerated people stray from criminal behaviors and activities. By having an alternative, pro-social identity, incarcerated people will have stronger desires to act according to the artist identity in order to conform to the group and maintain their status/identity.

Art is nonverbal and helps those incarcerated people who are not ready to talk about their problems or their personal issues. Prison life can cause psychological stress and aggravate and intensify conditions that were present before prison. Art therapy helps with these problems that are faced and help build status and respect by other inmates.

*All above statements cited on page 82*
**California Men’s Colony (CMC)**

**California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation**

California Men’s Colony is a male-only state prison in San Luis Obispo neighboring Cal Poly and is located on the grounds of Camp San Luis Obispo, a National Guard training site. It is a 356-acre complex divided into two facilities, West and East. Both facilities have an emphasis on providing programs for incarcerated individuals self-improvement. These programs include full libraries, academic education, vocational education, and self-help groups. Other programs allow the incarcerated people to provide community service and donate to the community.

Some of the various programs include a library sponsored art program, helping men rehabilitate through learning about and creating art; Central Coast Adult School and Cuesta College education programming, which aim to reduce recidivism rates by teaching men skills to rejoin the workforce; Prison Industry Authority—a self-supporting business that provides training to prepare incarcerated people for jobs after release; and Prisoners Against Child Abuse, which donates to local children’s organizations annually. Incarcerated people can also partake in a hospice training program, giving them the ability to visit terminally ill incarcerated people in the institution hospital while also helping other incarcerated people grieve family members who have passed during their time in prison.

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**Cuesta College’s Second Chance Pell Pilot Program**

The U.S. Department of Education selected Cuesta College as one of five California colleges to participate in a pilot program with a goal of reducing recidivism for incarcerated people through education. As part of the Second Chance Pell Pilot Program, selected California Men’s Colony (CMC) incarcerated people receive Pell Grant funds to cover the costs of Cuesta College courses and books. Cuesta College expects to have 250 students at the CMC enrolled in a program that leads to a transferable degree in sociology with classes taught on-site at CMC by Cuesta College instructors. Many of the incarcerated artists featured in the “Between the Bars” exhibit are Cuesta College students. The goal is to provide educational programs to selected incarcerated individuals that will greatly enhance their employability upon release.
Committee Members

BETWEEN THE BARS is a collaborative effort. The Cal Poly students worked with a committee of six incarcerated artists to design the entire exhibit. This project provided an opportunity for their voices and talents to transcend their confinement and it enabled them to have a sense of agency in an environment where they are constantly being told what to do and when. Their gratitude for this project is immeasurable. It has been encouraging for them to know that people will advocate on their behalf.
To the Cal Poly Team,

I am writing this to express my thanks for all the effort you have put into the Between the Bars art exhibit. I don't think there are adequate words to express my gratitude, but I will try my best.

In prison, we are stripped of the everyday things that people on the outside take for granted. Instant access to information, daily face-to-face interactions with friends and loved ones, good food, and freedom in general are just some of those things. In here, receiving a simple greeting card or a letter in the mail can brighten up an otherwise dreary day/week/month/year. It wouldn't be a stretch to say that a piece of mail has saved a prisoner from taking his own life. So you can imagine how much impact your efforts are having in our lives.

For the Cal Poly team to dedicate so much time and effort into this project is nothing short of amazing. I know that some people in society look at prisoners as monsters and animals; subhuman creatures. To be honest, prison can be a very scary place. Given all the negative stigmas of prison, you guys are still willing to enter an actual prison and interact with us. This is the ultimate depiction of your courage and compassion for humanity. Despite our mistakes, you guys talk to us like human beings, without pretense or disdain. We never once felt belittled or looked down upon. We were never identified by our errors or addressed by a state issued ID number.

The Cal Poly team owes us absolutely nothing. There are no ties binding us together. There is no obligation on your part to assist us in our mission. You may even experience backlash from others in the community as a result your efforts. Yet you are voluntarily working with us. You are spending time and effort in representing our art. This can only be explained one way: you are true humanitarians. You are genuinely good people. It is the kindness in your hearts that bring you back here week after week. In a world of indifference, selfishness, and ignorance, you stand out as embodiments of hope, inspiration, and compassion.

There are an approximated 2.3 million people incarcerated in the United States. Your efforts are helping to bring awareness to all of us. I can't overemphasize this: you guys are helping out 2.3 million men and women! While this may be humbling, it needs to be applauded. Not only are you elevating and educating us, you're also helping to bridge the gap between prisoners and society. You are helping us to become better people. You are helping to eliminate stereotypes and bring about new viewpoints. You're changing the world, one person and one perception at a time.

To Catherine, Victoria, Eliese, Habib, and Unique, Patrick, all the other people working behind the scenes. I don't know what the future holds for me, but I know that you will always have a place in my mind and my heart. On behalf of all the incarcerated people and members of society that are affected by this endeavor, I thank you.

Forever Grateful Humans,
Between the Bars
Artists’ Statements and Bios

THERE IS A STRONG correlation between arts education and practice, and the pursuit of knowledge through other educational and vocational programs. Arts and the creative process helps to develop the “right brain” and build confidence and self-esteem—all of which prepares and encourages individuals to expand their learning into other disciplines. Studies have shown this relationship is particularly powerful for those who are alienated from the formal education system.

To this end, the incarcerated artists featured in the exhibit were encouraged to follow real-world processes, including completing artist applications to submit artwork to the exhibition, and participating in self-directed workshops to develop their bios and artist statements. This real-world application resulted in incarcerated artists learning self-discipline; learning to self-reflect and the gaining of self-respect; learning commitment to self, others and a project; experiencing group success; learning to deal with frustrations and obstacles; and learning alternative ways of dealing with conflict. The process complimented the instruction that many of the artists receive from Cuesta College’s educational program.
Artist Stanley Anaya works mostly with graphite pencils, charcoal, colored pencils, and colored pens. His art is mostly about African and African-American culture and style. It is his hope that through his art all Africans and African-Americans will learn something about their history.

As a kid I was what they called a “graffiti artist,” but local police called it “vandalism.” I grew up mostly drawing cartoon characters. As I grew older I started running with the wrong crowd and lost most of the years I could have been drawing. When I came to prison, older gang members and officers got me back into drawing because of boredom.

Every time I got in trouble I was given a book to read (mostly African literature) by older black men on my yard. But the police would lock me up in administrative segregation, so I started drawing again.

Art is a sense of release for me. Art allows me to leave these prison walls for as long as I want to stay on my paper. Art brings joy and smiles to my family’s heart and face and this also gives me a sense of humanity, where others only see the monster I used to be.

Artist Reymundo S. Cox is very expressive, a person that doesn’t hold back or bite his tongue; however he is careful not to disrespect or intimidate. With his art, Reymundo looks for pictures to draw with emotion that reflects that expression. So when the time comes to express passionately with no holds barred, it’s done with elegance, grace, and a voracious hunger for attention, yet directed only to his artwork, though without caution.

“To the optimist, the pessimist, and the realist; while you all were arguing about the glass of water… I drank it.”

Sincerely… The Opportunist
Artistic Ben Ballard has painted in acrylic for more than 30 years. He divides his time and schedule to accommodate art, “self-help” groups, church, family, and music, and of course, work. He donates art to various charity organizations as a way to be pro-active, pro-social, and achieve as a small form of indirect amends. He has participated in many shows/exhibits in his 32 years of captivity, mostly through the Art Program at San Quentin, sponsored by the William James Association. He looks forward to the “normal life” and hopes to someday be able to put the “ZEN” into being a CITIZEN.

My 3rd grade teacher gave me overwhelming praise for a drawing I did from the story she read. There was something profound about that event and art became like magic to me. I grew up with a tragic childhood and a broken home in northern California. Poor, uneducated, failed relationships, PTSD from extensive abuse/abandonment and prison bound.

I started out with acrylics and watercolors. I bought the “How To…” books from Walter Foster, until I got better than the books. I had a few inmate teachers along the way. One guy (Walter) told me, “Kid, paint every day and everything.” I found my escape in painting landscapes.

Art has helped me build a bridge back to society, get accolades from my peers and professionals, and develop an awareness and identity that isn’t connected to prison culture. Barriers and money, outside connections, prison constrictions, technology (lack of), being marginalized.

To truly learn about art you also learn: history, science, chemistry, physics, culture, even some philosophy and religion. Art has let me develop my character, become a professional, reinforce my family/community connections, progressively acquire an expanded world view and love of all cultures. This is better than watching football, gambling, or working out.
Artist Cuong Tran works in a variety of mediums, including, graphite pencils, colored pencils, charcoal, watercolor, acrylic paint, and re-purposed objects for his sculptures. He discovered his artistic abilities in prison and has no formal art training whatsoever. He is most influenced by the desire to help others discover their hidden talents, artistic or otherwise. It is through art that Cuong hopes to bring awareness to the prison system and help break down the negative stigmas associated with prisoners.

I’ve always dabbled in drawing most of my life. As a kid, I could look at a picture and draw what I saw. As I got older, school and work took priority; art was placed on the back burner. Forward some years and I find myself in prison. With lots of time to sit and reflect, I picked up drawing again. As it turns out, drawing pictures and cards for other incarcerated individuals can earn me more than my monthly pay here in prison.

After a few years however, I felt like drawing became a chore. Besides, there are a good number of artists in prison already doing the same thing I was. I wanted to push the envelope, so I started to build and sculpt figurines out of whatever materials I could find. I fell back onto my mechanical background, constructing skeletal frames using our cardboard lunch boxes. I would paint over the dried soap with some hand-me-down acrylic paints. Digging around, I was able to find scrap materials such as old t-shirts, burrito wrappers, beads, and pen barrels (just to name a few things) and turn them into accessories for my figurines. Things have snowballed from there. I’ve become more proficient at using the materials available to me (translation: junk) to make artwork. Over the last two and a half years of sculpting/building, I’ve made over 80 pieces here in prison, the major ones being a functioning carousel, a remote control go-kart with a racetrack, and a scale sized Chevrolet Impala.
Always up to a challenge, I’ve recently taken up painting with watercolor and acrylcs. I’m still far away from the level I want to be at, but it was the same when I starting drawing and sculpting. I’m confident that after a few year’s time, I’ll be good enough to compare with any formally trained artist. Art has been very therapeutic for me. It allows me to free myself despite being physically restricted. In an environment where my every move is monitored and controlled, my ideas, creativity, and imagination are the only things that are limitless. Art is freedom. It allows me to put a part of myself onto paper or in a sculpture.

Art also allows me to show society that I am still a human being, and that I am not defined by my mistakes. Prison is a segregated environment. Prison administration classifies us by race, ethnicity, and affiliation. We then segregate ourselves further according to unwritten prison rules and ‘politics.’ What this equates to is a lot of people who have similar backgrounds and interests, but may never interact because of the segregation. One of the most important lessons I’ve learned about prison is that art has the ability to transcend all race, religion, creed, affiliation, and orientation. It is through art that I have been able to meet and collaborate with artists from every conceivable background.
Stanley Anaya  
*Mandela’s Africa*

Benjamin Ballard  
*Lounging Leopard*

Reymundo S. Cox  
*Girl in Thought*
Artist Joshua Shane works with water-based media to paint in a somewhat realistic fashion. He also uses the language that he loves to express his thoughts, emotions, and ideations of entertainment through words. His aspirations are to achieve both a meditative state and to be understood. With both forms of art it is Joshua’s hope to help facilitate awareness to his true artist passion, writing children’s literature.

When I arrived within the confines of C.D.C.R., I was a mess. I was hampered with a mental health diagnosis of Bipolar Disorder that I neither understood, or, for that matter, was willing to embrace. My level of education was pretty much halted after the eighth grade. The amount of methamphetamines that I had been using impaired my ability to function on any normal level, emotionally, intellectually, or pro-socially.

After a couple of years I somewhat started to develop a sense of direction. I was privileged to be befriended by a phenomenal painter who attempted to encourage me to take up the craft of painting. His name was Randy. He was successful with his paintings, and they were so beautiful, I could not avoid to be inspired. Finding my way through my racing thoughts, I imagined being able to be a productive member and provider for my family, all this while still being confined by the chains that bound my hands, feet, and heart, but my hopes were only bound by either positive or negative thoughts. Eventually, the grief and shame that I bore as a result of my committed offence soon became too much to bear, especially without the medications that I didn't realize were vital to my sanity. I hinged so much of my hopes and dreams on my ability to paint, I had actually made a serious suicide attempt. The symbolic straw that broke the camel’s back was the factor that I ran out of yellow paint, and couldn't figure out how to get any more at that time in my life. That was sixteen years ago, and the trip to a mental institution resulted in my further development of my painting skills as well as my ability to write poetry. I was blessed when a nurse, whose anonymity I shall protect, treated me like a son. She is a hero, who deserves credit for saving my life. She encouraged me to be good, very good.

Over the years I recalled how much the ability to read a children's book meant to me as a child, and how excited my sister's children would be to see me, because they knew that I would be reading to them. I had brought so much pain into the world that I want to be partially responsible for some good.
Artist Steve Starr works in oils, acrylics, watercolor, graphite pencils, charcoal, and colored pencils. He favors his oils but uses the medium that best suits the needs of the piece and the desired effect. Drawing on a broad spectrum of life experience, he is able to produce just about anything imaginable, from life-like portraits and rural scene of Americana to complex illustrations. Upon his release from prison he hopes to finance his art habit by working in the tattoo industry. Steve is currently working on a series of paintings of rusty relics of America’s past and is available for commissioned projects.

I was raised by a single mother that supported us with art (she was a basket weaver and ceramic artist). I have worked as a horse trainer, commercial diver and contractor. I am Native American and Irish. I have lived in California most of my life. I would consider my mom to be my favorite artist and greatest inspiration.

I work primarily in 2-D mediums while incarcerated because it allows me to create art that is easy to ship and valuable enough to earn enough money to support myself without asking my family for help (i.e. money for soap, toothpaste, etc.). Art has been helpful in my rehabilitative process in many ways. It allows one to express feelings that would otherwise be repressed. Also, by giving me a source of income, it helps me to maintain some self-esteem.

The benefits of art in prison are in some ways obvious and direct. I can easily say that my rehabilitation and path back to society has been paved by art, one drawing at a time. But less obvious is the deep psychological significance that art has had on this rehabilitative process. Art has allowed me to do my time in a more constructive way. I will walk out of prison a better person, not because of prison, but rather because I used all this time to become a better artist. More importantly, I will not be bitter but instead grateful for the opportunity to spend more than a decade locked in a tiny space, at times with only a pencil and a scrap of paper.

Now at the end of that decade, not only am I skilled in mechanical and technical aspects of most 2-D mediums, more importantly, my mind has been forged in the crucible that is prison. A mind forged for the sole purpose of art. In short, I now think like an artist and therefore I am truly capable of creating anything I can imagine.
"Art has taught me that I am much more than my crime. It has allowed me to look deep inside my soul and realize that I still have 'good' inside of me that manifests itself in my artwork."
impossible to worry when you are fishing.”

K. Casner
CDCR #G-38453

Artist K. Casner works with acrylic paints, graphite pencils, colored pencils, and soap. He also works with clay, which he produces on his own from the ground. He has a background in wood carving with chainsaws and taxidermy. He started drawing with pencils and taught himself to paint and sculpt. Casner’s art is inspired by the outdoors. He uses art as a means to keep occupied.

I come from a family where my grandparents were ranchers. We lived around Yosemite Park in California. I was always interested in anything outdoors: hunting, fishing, rodeos, and packing rodeos. This is a big inspiration for my artwork.

I work with all types of paint, soap, and clay. We can’t buy clay here in prison, so I make my own. I start with two empty plastic coffee jars. I’ll put a bit of the dirt from the prison yard into one of the jars and fill it with water. Then I’ll shake that up to make the water cloudy and let it sit for about 15 minutes. Once the heavier iron particles settle to the bottom, I’ll dump the upper solution into the other coffee jar and repeat the process. Eventually, I’ll end up with clay, which I’ll mix with a little bit of the iron particles and add soap as a binder.

When doing art, I get lost in what I’m doing. I’ll spend that time reflecting on what was going on in my life before prison. Art keeps me connected to my past. The outdoors theme of my art reflects my history.

Art has benefited me more than words can describe. Art has kept me from taking my own life many times. It serves as an escape for me from the prison life.

End of Trail
Monte Lee Bridges does not profess to being an artist. He has dabbled a few times, making custom greeting cards for other incarcerated individuals. He has only used graphite pencils and colored pencils. Monte’s art typically reflects the prison environment. He copies these pictures and lets incarcerated individuals leaving prison take a copy with them. He hopes that this memento will remind the incarcerated individuals leaving what awaits them should they return to prison.

I grew up in a rural farming community in Southern Illinois, near the Mississippi River. I spent most of my adult life in some form of management or administrative positions. I had five children in nine years. They are all in their 50’s now. I am now the oldest surviving member of the Bridges clan!

The only mediums I’ve used are #2 pencils and colored pencils. I use these because often they are the only things available. I’ve been able to learn a lot about making corrections.

Art hasn't helped me to rehabilitate because I feel I have no reason to.

Drawing takes so much concentration because I’m learning as I go. I’m self-taught. While drawing, I don’t think of anything else. It’s a lot like fishing: “It's
Awakening and The Golden Earring
Artist Steven Chandler started his art career at a young age, using color pencils, pens, and charcoal. He has no formal art training. Since coming to prison he has learned from other inmates how to do bead-work. Art has been therapeutic for Steven in that it has allowed him unrestricted freedom to imagine an idea, form the idea on paper, then create the project in the desired medium of beads. He has been able to gain self-worth and improve his self-esteem with the finished projects.

I was born in Pico, California and was raised in the San Bernardino/ Riverside area. I drove Class I semis and heavy equipment. I also have a heavy construction background and became a licensed building inspector in 1993. I’ve worked for CalTrans, FEMA, and the Corps of Engineers at Fort Irwin, California just prior to incarceration.

I used to draw when I was younger. As I got older, marriage, children, and work became a priority in my life. Then I began drinking and self-medicating, so artwork and hobbies no longer interested me. I picked art back up after coming to prison.

I’ve chosen beading and drawing as my mediums of choice because with painting, incarcerated artists are limited on the amount and type of art supplies we are allowed to possess. Beading supplies and tools take up little space in our confined living areas. I attribute artist Margie Deeb as the primary source of my beading skills and ideas.

I’ve only been beading for about two years. Beading allows me to constructively occupy my time in prison instead of continuing to drink, to self-medicate, or to be a problem. For many years, I was trapped in self-loathing, shame, anger, and stress. This led me to turn to drugs and alcohol to feel ‘normal.’ Or so I thought. Since abstaining I’ve found extra time available to me to once again pursue my hobbies and artwork and begin working on positive character attributes.

Art has been very therapeutic in my recovery in that I have gained valuable self-worth and self-esteem in a once broken shell of my former self. I am excited about the positive recognition that I’ve recently gained through the beading projects that I’ve completed and other works in progress. I am no longer defined by my past poor choices.
Artist Tony Chisom draws using graphite pencils, *Prismacolor* color pencils (with a technique combining baby oil), watercolors, and acrylic paints. He draws portraits, greeting cards, roses, landscapes, and intimate cards. Tony’s specialty is cultural and therapeutic art.

I am 53 years of age. I came to prison as a juvenile at the age of 17. I’ve been in prison for 36 years and now I am an ex-gang member.

I had no interest in drawing when I was on the streets. I found my gift (talent) in prison in 1988. I was inspired by a friend in my education class who used to draw images within his own mind. I started drawing flowers and roses. I remember sending my mother a blue rose I drew for her birthday. She was so proud of my talent and very appreciative. She said my art was beautiful and if I continue I could become famous one day. I smiled! From then on I always pushed to do my best work, but I’m always my worst critic.

I then began to draw portraits, which inspired me to learn how to draw the human anatomy. In 1996 I bought my first anatomy book and never looked back! I’ve learned and studied figure drawing and began drawing images from my own conscious thoughts.

My art became my peace of mind, my therapy. Art is where I could lose myself in my own thoughts and where I draw strength within myself. Art helps create positive thoughts that would manifest beauty within my artistic world.

In 2012, I started drawing therapeutic art when I wrote an apology letter to myself at a substance abuse treatment program at Chuckawalla Valley State Prison. I drew a picture titled “The Man in the Mirror” in relation to this letter. I’ve gotten so many positive responses from inmates of all races. I was overwhelmed. The therapeutic art became a part of my life. I continue to draw in this therapeutic art form.

I also use poetry to express insight into the images that I draw. I hope to relate to other inmates about feelings, behaviors, self-awareness and how to reconcile emotional conflicts. I also try to make us inmates better men for our families, communities, and society.
We are the Future
Artist Matthew Cook started drawing four months ago. In that short space of time he has worked with graphite pencils, ink pens, and markers. He started learning to draw in prison with minimal assistance. His biggest inspiration in art, and in life, is to make a change and leave behind a powerful legacy. One way Matthew Cook wishes to express his ideas and start the proverbial snowball is by conveying influential messages through his art.

I've never cared much for art more than to say, ‘wow that is really cool’ when looking at someone else’s art. All my life I’ve had to focus on other things like being the sole provider for my family, and keeping them together and out of the system. So like so much else in life, art was never a luxury in which I could afford to indulge in. Skip a whole childhood (if you want to call it that) to a time when I find myself in prison, having trouble finding ‘respectable’ ways to express who I am. Then I discovered, to my astonishment, that I have a talent for drawing and articulating beautiful, yet controversial messages.

Prison is designed to dictate every aspect of your life. To cut you off from the world, and destroy any vestige of a life that you did have. To control what you think, how you act, and who you talk to. To conform you to a life of complacency, by destroying your ambitions and dreams. Art, to me, is a unique and powerful tool for freedom, hope, and a path that you can drive down to help you reach your full potential as a human being.

My art started small—drawing a potted plant on a gridded paper—and since then, I have hurdled over and broken many barriers that have held me back my whole life. Every time I start a new project, I try something new that I haven’t tried before. Art has helped me grow so much in a short time, because now I found a healthy avenue to express the hurt and pain that I feel, but also the hope and strength that I possess, and want to focus into resisting perceived wrongs and truly making a difference in the world.

I have only finished a few pieces of art, but each one of those pieces has so much meaning and time invested into them. I’ve come far in my art, and have even further to go. And to me the best feature of art is the never-ending journey of expression, and limitless ability to always be better than you were yesterday.
Bruce Davis
CDCR #B-41079

Artist Bruce Davis works in acrylics. His works usually begin as a doodle. Then when something objective is observed, the theme is developed. Bruce’s art is a form of entertainment for himself and observers.

I came from a working class family. I worked in the 60’s as a welder and surveyor for the Department of Comm. I have traveled across the United States and to North Africa and Europe.

I work primarily in acrylic paints. They are cheap to buy and easy to use. I’ve benefited from art while in prison. Art has also helped me to rehabilitate. It has revealed to me aspects of creativity, my own included.
Terry Frymire was born on Nellis Air Force Base on December 1st, 1977. He is an artist and inventor who was told by his mother that anyone can accomplish anything if he or she puts their mind to it. He is now serving time in the CMC where he is designing a space drone nicknamed “The Space Bumper Tug” to push asteroids around that may hit Earth in the future, and to keep the world safe.

In the early 80’s my father served in the Air Force and moved with my brother and mother to Bitburg, Germany. As a child I first began designing aerospace materials at a very young age, some of which are still used today. Living on base there were constant air raid warnings in the day and the middle of the night. I wrote letters asking for peace and shook hands with Gorbachev during a peace summit with Russian kids, introducing them to American candies, bubblegum, etc.

I use cardboard for my 3-D models. I also use colored pencils, pens, water colors and paint, depending on what I’m doing.

Art has helped me to rehabilitate in that it brought me back to the values I had as a child. These values are why I love America so much.

I’m going to be honest. The reason I do art isn’t just to benefit me so much as others. Since the first time I started drawing, I did it for others.
The Struggle
Artist Christopher P. Davis has always loved to draw. He works with pencils and color pencils. At a young age, Christopher started drawing to help him get away from the chaos in his home. Art has been one of the best ways for him to gain peace of mind.

Since I’ve been incarcerated, I have been able to realize that drawing helps me get through some tough times. When everything else was wrong, drawing always made me feel better.

I really love the smiles and the joy I bring to people when they look at my art. For the first time in my life, I felt proud because I brought joy and happiness to people instead of pain and suffering.

Today I know I will always be a work in progress. Art allows me to learn how to work with other artists in hopes of becoming a better artist myself. This will also allow me to become a better person in all aspects.

Art lets me show society that I am still a human being. I am not defined by the mistakes I made in the past. I hope people will enjoy looking at my art. Thank you for welcoming me into your world.
Artist Kinson Her works with many mediums, including graphite pencils, colored pencils, watercolors, and ball point pens. Whereas many artists use canvas or paper as their drawing surface, Kinson prefers to use cloth handkerchiefs. This creates unique artwork not found on paper. He donates most of his artwork to charitable organizations.

As an artist, I have no formal training. I learned through years of practice. I’ve been drawing for over 15 years, 14 of which while being incarcerated.

I mainly use colored pencils, graphite pencils, and ink pens as my mediums. Most of my highest quality works are done with ink pens on handkerchiefs and t-shirts. Cloth handkerchiefs are excellent alternatives to standard drawing paper. Its porous surface catches and holds the ink very well and creates a unique look that doesn’t show up on paper.

As an artist, who is to some degree colorblind, I’ve always been intrigued by artists who use color. This inspires me to use color as well. One of my idols is the famous ‘Painter of Light,’ Thomas Kinkade. I do all different kinds of artwork, but mainly landscapes and portraits. Just about anything I see I can duplicate or imitate with uncanny accuracy.

Art has helped get me through some of the toughest times in my life. Prison is not the easiest place to be. There is lots of isolation, loneliness, and pain to be found here. Art gives me an escape from the everyday. Art sets me ‘free.’

I have a saying: ‘Life is Art’ Everything in my life is art. I see the world as art, from the vocabulary we speak to the stop signs on the street corners.
Collin Davis
CDCR #G-14778

Artist Collin Davis has been incarcerated since the age of 18 and is now 30. Prior to being arrested, he has never drawn or desired to. While incarcerated in L.A. County Jail he had a cellmate who was a tattoo artist and showed him how to draw little things. From there, Collin’s interest was sparked and he has been drawing ever since. He works primarily in ink.

I was raised in Long Beach with many different cultures. That helped to open my horizons to things that influence and inspire me.

I work in ink mainly because it’s cheap and easy to acquire. Art has helped me to rehabilitate. It has built my patience. Art has also made me look at things in different perspectives and it gave me something to be proud of. I’ve benefited through art in that it’s given me something productive to do with my life and something to look forward to doing in the future.
David German
CDCR #G-38666

Artist David German works with a variety of mediums. Basically anything available, due to his present circumstances. He prefers art that will make a person stop and contemplate its meaning rather than saying, “look, it’s a still life of a vase and an orange.

I was raised in three very different types of households. I bounced from my dad’s place, living in his martial arts studio, to my mom’s farm, to my grandparent’s elderly apartment complex.

I like to use beads, making jewelry and animals. I also like using acrylic paints, but I’ll use anything I can find.

Art has helped me to rehabilitate because it takes me to a different place. It helps me to think of things other than prison life.
The Maze II
Artist David Dinh prefers pencils and pens, and has an inexplicable infatuation with the analog quality of carbon transfer paper. He is adamant in declaring that pen and paper are rarely utilized mediums. He proclaims that “Math Rock” is his true calling and supersedes “paper stuff” as well as “that stuff with paints and numbers.” David waxes fanatical, mentioning “metrical dissonance” and “Salmagundi” as well as “finger-tapped phraseology,” before mentioning “synchronized percussive bombast as the result of ruthlessly calculated controlled chaos” and “definitely, KCPR changes lives.”

I grew up in the suburbs, near the beach. I’m French/ Vietnamese. My sister goes to Cal State, while I take Cuesta College courses. Like my friends, I have a love for music. I lack mentors, but I don't mind molders. Hobby = Math Rock. I love listening to Math Rock as well as playing along to it, trying to compose it, and talking about it!

I draw mazes as a challenge, using very densely grouped grid paper and carbon transfer paper. Mazes seem very abstract at first, filling empty space with what seems at once to be arbitrary lines. Then suddenly order seems imposed; simultaneous creation and discovery and genuine inspiration. Mainly, however, I spend the majority of time dedicated to music.

Art has definitely helped to rehabilitate me, insofar as the deeper effect that words can convey. On a surface level, rehabilitation seems to have become, unfortunately, politicized and sort of removed from the individual process itself. However, music and art have been tremendous forces in shaping my life for the better, and I owe them a lot. KCPR has definitely helped me a lot over the past few years.

Art creates a different space I can inhabit. Self-preservation can take the form of escapism, but sometimes it’s more than that. It isn’t about being lost in a feeling (à la ambient music), but it’s more about occupying a space that you’ve created. When it all comes together, it doesn't have to just be my space. At least that’s the idea.
Artist Jonathan Huynh has attended art school from a very young age. He held aspirations as an artist until coming to the realization art in today’s saturated field is a dying market. Artist Huynh continues to draw and paint because prison is mental and physical torture of which he has no reprieve. Art is an outlet for him that serves as an alternative to suicide.

Art using physical mediums is outdated, as any product could be replicated in fractions of the time needed to draw or paint using software.

I used to want to become a comic artist. But that field is also so elitist that it is impossible to get in or survive.

Since then I moved my goals to teaching and education. However circumstances put me in prison.

I’m looking for any way to make amends for my mistake and give back to the community. Art allows me to do this. I want to leave the earth in better condition than I entered.
“I’m a musician and performer that writes my own material and I have no access to play, record, or perform my art. Writing my lyrics and songs in poem form helps me express myself. Sometimes I feel like I’m stuck in a womb and I can’t move or breathe, art gives me relief.”

**Inside My Head**

Well, there’s no one to blame. Everything that has happened in my life is because of me. Alone in a cell, in the dark watching light rays cut through the shifting winter shadows. It takes energy to fight the fatigue and the sorrow. I never thought that I would find myself here.

The hurt is indisputable and I’m cool enough not to pretend. My debt is real, so I have no time for fear or anger.

Only if…, the most popular concept in of the history of man. Thoughts and reflections orbit my mind making hard to forget what I had lost.

In my youth I was fearful and sought protection from the pain of rejection. Running from opportunities and responsibilities, trading them for comfort and solitude as if the best relationships possible were those that played out in my mind.

Only if I could go back in time and talk to that kid that was me, to give him advice, some information. I would tell him this…

I know that you worry about the future and it’s hard to be among those who can’t see what you see, feel what you feel, and your life is so young.

It’s hard to see what’s to come, but worrying won’t make things better, it’ll just kill you slow. Take your peace, youth and happiness, believe me I know.

Time will keep moving and you’ll find yourself in the same places, stuck worrying about things that you can’t do nothing to change, life is strange but all things are revealed in due time.

The past is gone and the future isn’t here yet, the present is now so now is the time to live, to dream and make it happen, get it going never lacking the drive. Operate in respect and love, glad to be alive letting your heart be your guide.

Keep seeking and learning, keep the pages turning, keep hope high and desire burning. No one can stop you but you, it’s true.

Keep asking questions. What is the purpose of life? Why is the sky blue? How do I get there from here? How do I overcome fear? In this world of mental pollution how do I keep my mind clear and steer the boat in the direction I need? Educate yourself because it’s up to you to succeed.

That is what I would tell him. Now I’m telling myself this is the one life you got to live, it’s time to give it all you got and play the right part.

Straight, true, and sincere. Don’t dwell on past mistakes or let stress consume you. I refuse to give up the imagined sweetness of life, purpose, and choice.

-*Frank Daniels*
Growing up, Gregg Leauanae would always lose interest in school, but one thing that seduced his attention and commanded the tip of his pencil to stray from notes and multiple choice questions was the curiosity of art. Endless tests, quizzes, and homework assignments were tattooed with doodles, portraits and the cartooning of teachers in comedic comics. Woe to the victims that never fancied him! They sat at their desks blind to realize they were at the mercy of his imagination. It wasn’t until years had passed and felony convictions later that Leauanae finally discovered the rehabilitative power that art held. He found pleasure exercising the skill that eventually became more than art itself; a friend that would always be there when he had no one to express his feelings to and understand him as a misunderstood human, not a monster.

I’m Samoan and Chinese. I’ve been around the sun 24 times my whole life, four of those while being incarcerated. I’m originally from Hawaii and grew up with vast cultures, including: Samoans, Tongans, Chinese, Filipinos, Guamanians, Cambodians, just to name a few. It really influenced my outlook and perspective on different beliefs, religions, art, and especially FOOD!!!

I try and stay faithful to a good old fashioned #2 pencil. Every now and then I’d check out some hot colored pencils, but it never lasts. Colored pencils never make up their minds and they’re too emotional. At least with a #2 pencil, if we’re not agreeing there is always a way to erase our differences.

I looked up ‘rehabilitative’ in the dictionary recently and one of its definitions state: To teach (a criminal in prison) to live a normal and productive life. Art has helped me to live a more productive life. But a normal one? I can’t say it’s a normal life being incarcerated. But what I can say is that art, in its abnormality, taught me that living shouldn’t meet a standard such as normal; it should exceed it.

One way art has benefited me is financially. I’ve sold art in and outside of these prison walls while incarcerated, but I didn’t really do it for the money. I did it because I loved it and wanted to show people that I am somebody. It makes me happy and makes me feel free. Unlike prison, art has no fences, no walls, no boundaries, and (my favorite) no right answers.
Artist Chester Mahan works in a variety of mediums, colored pens, water colors, and acrylic paints. He uses paper clips and plastic toothpicks to carve his sculptures. He tattoos as well, but prefers to work with soap. Sculpting gives him the opportunity to deal with a variety of people. He enjoys showing his work and has talked about bringing his talent out to the streets.

I’ve always been into art in one form or another. Drawing envelopes and matching stationery to go with the envelopes was a hustle for me while in prison. Tattooing was as well. I’ve always been able to work with the medium that is available to me. In fire camps, I learned to work with wood, making tables and clocks. I also learned how to wood-burn. My mother is an Alaskan native, so I find myself sculpting things from Alaska. I want to learn how to work with other materials as well when I get out.

I sculpt with state soap because it is provided for me. The tools I use are provided for me as well: paper clips and plastic toothpicks. I also use floor wax to put a shine and a clear coat over my sculptures.

Art has been very therapeutic for me. I like the quiet time. Everything that I have made I’ve been able to share with everyone. These is no prison politics in the art I do. I have been able to share my work with all races in a good, positive way.

Art has allowed me to meet and deal with other artists and see the art they have created. It has opened my eyes to other kinds of art. I was able to enter one of my pieces in an art contest here at CMC where I won first place. How cool is that?
Unicorn

“I sculpt with cake soap because it is provided for me. The foods I use are provided for me as well: paper clips and plastic toothpicks. I also like those was to put a shine and a clear coat over my sculptures.”
Sarah's Gift
Artist Michael John Rea was born in Iron County, Michigan. He enjoys being outdoors. He has dabbled in various types of arts throughout his life; painting and acrylics are new to him. He learns how to paint from books and the advice of others. Michael has lived here, locally, in San Luis Obispo County for 32 years. He has five adult sons and another son who is in his teens. He expects to continue to pursue being an artist and may even take some classes. He is thankful for this opportunity to display his works and he hopes you enjoy them.

I was born in Upper Michigan. There are lots of lakes, streams, and wooded areas. As I pursue creating my own art I expect the culture of the Midwest and the outdoors to flavor it. I like all things outdoors. My hobbies include hiking, fishing, rock collecting, and traveling. I also enjoy listening to music, watching movies, and reading books.

My current focus is on getting my A.A. degree. I meditate daily and consider myself a Siddha Yoga devotee.

I use acrylics, color pencils, and occasionally pastels. I use acrylics because they dry fast, are easy to use, and they’re fairly inexpensive.

Art has helped me to rehabilitate because producing a work that is enjoyed and will carry on has become important to me. The sense of accomplishment truly bolsters one’s self-image. That reinforcement encourages me to pursue other goals; spiritual, educational, and physical.

Art provides an avenue for my creativity. It gives me something to give. A lot of my art is displayed proudly by my family and knowing that gives me a sense of having made use of my time in a tangible manner. Being creative is a great way to use one’s spare time. While being incarcerated has many banes one of the boons is spare time. I am thankful to have art to fill it.
“I say it all the time: my generation lacks provocation. I believe it to be the foremost duty of any artists, to provoke. I must challenge perceived ‘norms’ of society, raise doubts to established ideals. Provocation begets change. Many interpret a single thing in vastly different ways, subject to their own capabilities and or prejudices—whether good or bad...Art is universal, the great unspoken compatibility factor through which I can get someone’s attention—who might otherwise disagree with me as a book cover. In turn, we help each other.”

Gerjuan Harmon
CDCR # T-21388
Artist Ricky Kingsley has been drawing since the age of three. He was encouraged by his mom and grandmothers to draw scenery and animals. He has always been very constructive, fixing and making things run again. He was a mountain man and a biker that used to tattoo for a living. He loves the feeling he gets from creativity.

I was born in Vermont and lived in a lot of states, including those with mountains and deserts. I’ve seen a lot of different scenery and animals that influenced me to draw and paint what I saw. I love animals (especially dogs). It must be the Indian in me (I’m French, Dutch, and Winnebago Indian). In my spare time, I used to snorkel, dredge for gold, tattoo, and ride Harleys.

I use graphite pencils, colored pencils, charcoal, pastels, oil paints, acrylic paints, and watercolors. I also sculpt, carve, engrave, and etch. I like to switch between mediums. Otherwise I get burnt out on doing the same thing all the time, since I do art every day.

Art has really helped me to rehabilitate a lot. It helps me express my inner feelings and get bad, pent-up feelings out. It just kind of flows, I guess.

Art keeps me busy all the time and keeps my mind focused on positive things. It really gives me a tranquil feeling and helps me to make money in the process. Also, I get to make some really cool gifts through my art!
Albert Mufid Michail  
CDCR #J-98895

“For many years I was a total menace/criminal to society as a whole. My humble life has changed from ex-gangbanger/criminal/menace to a born-again Christian; John 3:16 says it all and in part.”

Jamaal Duncan  
CDCR # T-65252

“Art started for me as an escape. I used art as a child to free my mind from the “hardships” I endured in foster care. I was extremely shy and felt inferior to other kids in school and art played a big part in helping overcome those feelings as I was blessed with a talent that most did not share and kids were nice to me because of it.”
Ike Ortiz
CDCR #F-57595

Artist Ike Ortiz likes to work in a variety of mediums, including graphite pencils, color pencils, watercolor pencils, watercolor paint, markers, clay, and whatever else he finds interesting. His father and older brother were an artistic influence on him before he became a “ward of the court” as a child. He developed his artistic abilities as a youth growing up in the system. He has no formal schooling in art, but is optimistic that one day he can make a living bringing attention to real issues of child development in the system through his artwork.

Renato Fabilo
CDCR #H-54330

“[Art has helped me by] thinking about others in a positive way that would appreciate that I [care] about them. By giving back it gives me self worth if I focus on the things I like.”
Artist Eric Hare is a professional tattoo artist with 5 years experience. He prefers black and white art but will also work in color. Eric spends his free time drawing abstract/Sacred Geometry in graphite pencil. He wishes to perfect his craft while in prison so he can continue his professional career when he is released.

I am inspired by everything around me, from the books I read to the people I have conversations with. I began doing art in elementary school. My father studied art at Oklahoma State University, so naturally I was attracted to art. I began doing graffiti in 1996 at the age of 12. At first I only wrote my name in markers on the sides of trash cans around town. Slowly I became consumed by graffiti and “graduated” to painting freight trains and highway signs across the United States and Canada. In 2008 I came to prison. When I got out on that prison term I knew I had to stop doing graffiti.

I moved to San Diego and began apprenticing at a tattoo shop. After about a year I became licensed and I began tattooing. I specialize in Sacred Geometry/Dot Work, but I enjoy a variety of tattoo styles.

While in prison this time I began doing abstract art due to it being so similar to graffiti. I also make handmade greeting cards for other inmates as well as for my family and friends. I recently did my first realistic portrait and was amazed at how well it turned out. I hope to eventually fuse realistic portraits with abstract/Sacred Geometry.

I am inspired by Hieronymus Bosch, Alex Grey, Salvador Dali, Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs, and Charles Bukowski.

I believe that art has the ability to transform someone’s life. I hope to spend my time in prison studying art and perfecting my craft.
Sham Wars
Benjamin R. Wood works primarily in pencil and ink but has painted in the past. His very first painting, *Moonscape* (acrylic on canvas), was quite popular and ignited a bidding war. Over the years, he has spent less time expressing himself graphically. Mainly it is the written word which carries his passion. However there is just something about image and form that compels his attention.

I’ve been ignored, lied to, coerced, oppressed, ordered, maltreated, dishonored, betrayed, abused, neglected, robbed, beaten, abandoned, poisoned, forgotten, threatened, mocked, lynched, harassed, taken advantage of, scorned, tormented, isolated…and yet…through it all, I stand. Here. Now. My past influences me to continue struggling against the darkness; to make the suffering worth something, add value to others’ lives and live in peace surrounded by beauty.

My materials include sea urchin quills dipped in unicorn tears. Only the best will do.

Governmental mismanagement, corruption, and an apathetic public are barriers to my release. As I am innocent, rehabilitation is not entirely relevant. Art certainly is therapeutic and art education is and has been valuable to me over the years.

Art is rebellion. As sunlight bursts through cold darkness, every artistic act is a challenge to ‘reality.’ My choice is acceptance of the monolithic soul-crushing chant of ‘this is the way it is’…OR, with each line, color, and brush stroke I say, ‘NO!’
Artist Saint James works in a variety of mediums, including graphite pencils and found objects. He has a love for poetry and often incorporates it with visual art. He hopes to brings smiles and laughs to others with his unique art style.

I was born in Indiana and moved all over the country, from Rhode Island to Hawaii. We moved often because my dad was in the Navy. I am Irish/Scottish/French. I played music with the band “Honolulu Doggs” all over the Pacific Rim before ending up in Los Angeles.

My inspirations include Zappa, Ono, Warhol, and every lunatic in all the arts. My preferred medium is graphite pencils, found objects, and chaos. Art has not helped me to rehabilitate. There have been too many barriers. Art has benefited me in that my writings have made me money. Use this money to support my kids. I feel that visual art is almost impossible to market from inside prison.
Artist Terry Miller likes to work with colored pencils and markers. He prefers markers because of the vibrant colors and the ease of use. Terry’s specialty is the Zentangle style of art. He is self-taught, having never taken an art class. He learns from other artists and loves to teach his skills as well. It is through his art that Terry hopes other people will/can realize their own potential. He wants people to know that if he can become an artist, anyone can!

I’m 62 years old. I’m originally from Saratoga, New York. I wasn’t always into art. In fact, I never much cared for it growing up.

Once I came to prison, I saw all the amazing art that people could create. There’s not much to use in prison, so I was even more amazed. I saw that others could do art, so it motivated me to try and draw.

I started drawing with colored pencils. I now prefer to use markers because of how vibrant the colors come out. I don’t have to put as much effort in with markers as I do colored pencils, and the colors still come out brighter. Recently, I embraced the Zentangle art style. I think that it’s fairly new (at least to me). It takes a lot of concentration to perfect the intricate designs.

Art has been very rehabilitative for me. With the noise and craziness of prison, art lets my mind escape the chaos. The Zentangle style takes extra effort to do, so I can really tune out the world around me. This helps the days to go by faster.

I hope that I can inspire others to find their skills. I didn’t know that I had artistic talent. I was motivated to find it. I want the people of the world to be able to see my work and know that if someone like me can do it, anyone can!
P. D. White is a very unique individual. He writes poetry and books with a passion that comes from deep within his soul. He has been writing poetry since the age of five. When P. D. White discovered that his work had the power to influence others, he decided to use his talents to inspire and influence others in a positive way. Through P. D. White’s talents, he has encouraged others in and out of prison to reach for the stars. His motto is “chin up, chest out,” and incarceration physically doesn’t mean one needs to allow themselves to be incarcerated mentally. P. D. White has written poetry for several venues prior to incarceration. He has published his first book Concrete Walls and Steel Bars which contains poetry he’s written.

‘Communication rules the nation.’ A wise old man told me this when I was younger. Since then I figured if I could communicate with others through my poetry, music and books, then I could help others not only understand me and my culture, but I could help others understand themselves and others.

Writing has always been a way for me to vent and express my true feelings. With my pen and any paper I could find, I would often drift off and create a stage in my mind which I was the performer and the audience—this is what allows me to connect with so many people through my work.

For many, writing poetry, creative writing, music and novels may be somewhat challenging, but for me it was easy, and was a rare gift that I was blessed with. There have been moments where I would write 20–25 full songs in one day, 10–15 poems in 12 hours, and still have the ambition to keep writing new ideas. This gift is what led producers of MSNBC’s ‘Lock-Up’ to do a field interview and segment on me. After many years of living an unhealthy lifestyle that eventually led up to my incarceration, I decided to choose a more productive positive lane to place myself in.

I am now proud to say that I am the author and publisher of my 1st book, “Concrete Walls and Steel Bars,” which is available on Amazon and Kindle. I am also the Founder and facilitator of Inner Strength Course, a self-help group for young men currently incarcerated. Through this group I help men embrace remorse for their crimes, understand their worth, and come to grips with substance abuse and anger management. The men are encouraged to do homework assignments in the form of poetry, creative writing, essay form or raps.

My writing is a form of art that I consider a masterpiece. My writing has opened many doors of opportunity for me.
"Incarcerated by my refusal to think outside of the chains that I’ve allowed life’s experiences to bind and shackle me in...
Suffocated by the pollution that I breathe in when I step into the air of what many call a community...
In fear of being a victim to my own paranoia—Life
Life to me is L-I-F-E
    Living In Fear Everyday...

Fear of being Micheal Brown,
Hands up shot down—
Fear of being the next Freddie Gray—
Paralyzed running from death “I can’t feel my legs”
Fear of being crucified by a racist atheist as I pray
In my hometown church 900 miles from Charleston, South Carolina—
Fear of looking in the mirror and not recognizing the image that appears.
I am not deaf... I hear the hunger in the stomach of children
That missed another meal because their mother chose to
Feed the monkey on her back — Life is so Bananas!
I’m tired of being persecuted, and although I believe Jesus
Walks with me — the burden I carry on my back has me asking
Him to please “Carry this cross with me.”
Help!... S.O.S. Save our Souls or Save our Selves. Or maybe
You can just save me from the embarrassment of failure.
Failing for me is lack of effort — See I’m encouraged by
The hate of a hater who hates themself so they could never
Love me — nor understand the love I possess for those close
To me."

- P.D. White
Life After Prison: Artist Profile

Guillermo Willie

Guillermo Willie began drawing with pencil and ball-point pen. He's learned to use pastels, pen and inks, oil and acrylic paints, and he's recently tried his hand at etching. His artwork chiefly depicts humans expressing feeling in one way or another. He is most influenced by situations involving people and struggle, or coming out of struggle. He believes that struggle births growth. It is through art that Guillermo expresses his own inner growth and hopes that others will see that art can be a doorway to transformation and freedom, be it from a prison made of steel and concrete, or from a self-imposed prison constructed by our own thoughts and way of being.

Untitled, 2010

"This is drawing of me playing with my nephew's dog, Roxie, after I was paroled. I was asked by the Alternatives To Violence Project to write a short article about my reintegration into "the free world" and to include a photograph, so I drew one instead. When I think about it, I feel Roxie had made it so much easier for me. That is, when I had difficult times communicating with those around me, or was needing solace, Roxie was there for me without any expectations whatsoever. Yeah, she was a calming presence when I got out. I did that drawing from a photo someone had taken of us enjoying life. I paroled in December, 2008. And I still see Roxie whenever I visit my dad."
This self portrait I drew with ballpoint pen and a yellow marker, while in Ad Seg at San Quentin. This was when I already knew I needed to make serious changes in my life and was doing a lot of self-reflection.
Completed after I was paroled, this is an etching of “Quetzalcoatl” (or “Feathered Serpent”) which I made in an etching class at Cuesta. It’s my interpretation of the Mesoamerican mythological figure. I based the image on several carvings on pyramids, and my creativity added. It’s my symbol of harmony or balance—the serpent crawls on the earth and the eagle flies high in the sky. It blends the two—my way of looking at it is spiritual and physical and the male and female, etc. We begin to become complete when we find the balance, so to speak.
I started this drawing while incarcerated in the California Youth Authority. I was struggling with this drawing when it dawned on me that I used to do these types of drawings years ago during elementary school, but stopped drawing when a high school teacher made a snickering comment. I overcame that old history and I kept at it till I finished it. It was from the days of Chicano Power, Chicano activism, Raza Unida days.
“I started drawing with pencil and pen during elementary school, but stopped drawing when a high school teacher made a snickering comment about my drawing of a “muscle man” posing. Sometime later, in the county jail, I tried drawing tattoo patterns and couldn’t. I’d literally forgotten I could draw. I kept trying and it started coming back to me. I remembered I could draw and also why I’d stopped. I’ve been at it ever since, inside and out. For me, art and life are inseparable. Art is a basic form of expression, just like everyday speech. Art makes my heart dance.

My early years in prison were rather dark and violent. I spent years in Ad Seg [segregation or solitary confinement], art materials being limited to pencil and sometimes ballpoint pen, pastels and color pencils. There came a point in my life when I knew I had to make drastic changes- disassociating myself from old friends, old ways, etc. Interestingly, that’s the same point in time when creativity started pouring out of me, expressing itself in my artwork and in my life changes. My desire to do art, to be an artist, played a major role in that decision. Later, now out of Ad Seg I had access to India ink and technical pens, spending a lot of my time with them. I also learned to use acrylic paints, thanks to the Arts In Corrections program.

Since being paroled I’ve taken several art classes through Hancock and Cuesta Community Colleges, and I continue to do art, including participation in our annual Open Studios Art Tour.

I mainly paint people. When you see them, you’ll feel that they have gone through struggle. To struggle, in art as in life, isn’t always easy, but it makes growth possible. I want to always grow, both as an artist and as a human being, and I know that art will always be my doorway for growth, for transformation.”

"Ink drawing of a pigeon sleeping on the window sill of my cell in CMC-East. The pigeon fell asleep on my window sill, so I left the cell light turned off because I didn't want to make it easier for an owl to see it and swoop on it. I drew it with the light off.”

Life On the Outside, 2003
I started this after I was paroled and remains unfinished. It is a small acrylic painting on canvas depicting the face of a person going through serious struggle. Yeah, I love struggle, even though it drives me nuts at times. As long as I don’t give up, it’s well worth the effort. I started this painting in September 2016, and there’s no telling what will become of that it. I try to work on many of my pieces without a preconceived idea of what it will become.
Closing Reflections

THIS EXHIBIT CREATES a space for the marginalized voices in our society. Of the 2.3 million people who are behind bars on any given day, over 600,000 will return to our communities every year. Their success will depend largely on our ability to assist them. After all, these men, women, and children who find themselves locked in cages aren’t there solely based on their own accord. A lot of them are there because we have failed them. Our family systems, educational systems, economic system, healthcare systems, juvenile and criminal justice systems, each one has failed in one way or another to provide assistance, guidance, or care.

In order to move forward as a society, we can no longer allow our misconceptions biases, and prejudices to condition our beliefs about people or their mistakes. We must challenge the stories we tell ourselves about people who are different from us. We must seek to learn with an open mind. We must endeavor to see people for who they are and not what they have done. We would all be in a better place if we start to focus on what we have in common with one another instead of emphasizing where we may differ.

It is my hope that this exhibit sheds a light on the hearts, minds, and talents of these artists; for some, Between the Bars may be the only contribution to society that they will have the chance to make. May we all be grateful for this opportunity.

UNIQUE SHAW-SMITH, PH.D.
A dream of a lifetime

There is a life I long to know.
Where flowers bloom,
And green grass grows.
A place where people say hello.
Where all my coins is in straight rows.
A modest house,
With a picket fence.
A welcome mail.
Out on the steps.
Clean clothes hanging on a line.
I'm home from work,
Right on time.
Kids to make that house a home,
A loving wife.
Who's wine to hold.
The bills are paid.
No mortgage due.
And, time to pray.
When my day is through.
All of these things,
Are important to me.
Even if this, is only a dream.

by Johnny Shaped
Works in Exhibit

Benjamin Ballard, *Four More Days Until Tomorrow*, mixed media, 24¼ × 20
Benjamin Ballard, *Mid Autumn's Light*, acrylic, 24 × 30
Benjamin Ballard, *Moonlight Cove*, acrylic, 20 × 16
Benjamin Ballard, *Lounging Leopard*, acrylic, 30 × 22
Monte Lee Bridges, *End of the Line*, pencil, 8 ¼ × 13 ¾
Monte Lee Bridges, *View from My Cell*, color pencil, pencil, 7 ¼ × 16 ½
K. Casner, *Eagle Dancer*, mixed media, 10 × 11 × 8
K. Casner, *End of Trail*, clay, 10 × 10 × 11
K. Casner, *Runaway*, mixed media, 10 × 5 ½ × 11
Steven Chandler, *Awakening*, beads, 7 ½ × 2
Steven Chandler, *The Golden Earring*, beads, 6 × 8
Tony Chisom, *My Peace*, color pencil, 12 × 15 ½
Tony Chisom, *The Man in the Mirror*, pencil, 14 × 17
Tony Chisom, *Whispers*, color pencil, 12 × 15 ½
CMC Committee, *Artist Cards*, mixed media, 11 × 17
Matthew Cook, *Belly of the Beast*, graphite, 14 × 10
Matthew Cook, *We Are the Future*, graphite, 18 × 22
Reymundo S. Cox, *Girl in Thought*, pencil, 9 ½ × 11
Reymundo S. Cox, *Tattooed Girl*, pencil, 9 ½ × 11
Frank Daniels, *Inside My Head*, poem, 11 × 14 ¼
Jamaal Duncan, *Simple and Plain*, color pencil, 12 × 9
Bruce Davis, *Did God Say?*, acrylic, 16 × 20
Christopher P. Davis, *The Struggle*, color pencil, ink, 17 ½ × 22 ½
Collin Davis, *Voices*, pen, 8 ¼ × 12
David Dinh, *The Maze II*, charcoal pencil through carbon paper, 8 ½ × 11
Renato Fabilo, *Family*, pencil, 8 ¼ × 9 ¾
Terry Frymire, *Rollin' on 80s*, charcoal and graphite, 8 ½ × 5
David German, *Unanswered Prayer*, pen, 4 ¼ × 9 ½
Eric Hare, *Fragments*, pen and pencil, 7 × 11
Eric Hare, *Natalie Portman*, pen on magazine paper, 8 × 11
Works in Exhibit Continued

Gerjuan Harmon, *Face It...U Ain't Have It*, mixed media, 7 diameter
Gerjuan Harmon, *The Rout Route*, mixed media, 11 × 9
Gerjuan Harmon, *Untitled Boy*, mixed media, 13 × 10
Kinson Her, *Authentic*, poem
Kinson Her, *Serenity*, ink, 15 × 15
Jonathan Huynh, *Fixing His Helmet*, graphite, 8 ½ × 11
Ricky Kingsley, *White Cloud*, ink pen and color pencil, 15 × 15
Kinson Her, *Phoenix v. Dragon*, color pencil, 8 × 12
Greg Leauanae, *Deadman's Limbo*, color pencil and pencil, 11½ × 9 ½
Chester Mahan, *Unicorn*, soap, 12 × 8
Albert Michail, *United We Stand*, pen and pencil, 8 × 12
Terry Miller, *Zen Tangled*, pen, 23 × 17
Ike Ortiz, *Mythical Love*, watercolor pencil, 8 ½ × 11
Michael John Rea, *Sarah's Gift*, mixed media, 12 × 8
Joshua Shane, *Dream of a Lifetime*, poem
Joshua Shane, *Mockingbird*, acrylic, 8 × 10
Joshua Shane, *Pain*, poem
Joshua Shane, *The Messenger*, acrylic paint, 12 × 18
Steve Starr, *Alan Kurdi*, graphite, 16 ½ × 18
Steve Starr, *American Cowboy*, watercolor, 10 × 8
Steve Starr, *The Bird Flew*, oil paint, 12 × 16
St. James Harris Wood, *In the Strangest Places*, poem
Cuong Tran, *Cruisin’*, mixed media, 24 × 8 ½ × 7
Cuong Tran, *Feed the Beast*, acrylic, 11 × 6 ½
Cuong Tran, *Immaculata*, mixed media, 11 × 14
Cuong Tran, *Scare-O-Cell*, mixed media, 23 × 17 × 17
Cuong Tran, *Self Portrait*, charcoal, 9 × 12
Benjamin R. Wood, *Sham Wars*, ink and pencil, 25 × 11
P.D. White, *Baby Bird*, poem
P.D. White, *Painted Shackles*, poem
P.D. White, *Tears*, poem
Project Collaborators

Dr. Unique Shaw-Smith
Dr. Unique Shaw-Smith is a life course criminologist who seeks to understand her lived experiences. As a product of east Oakland in the midst of the crack epidemic and the height of mass incarceration, her research centers on understanding the effects of incarceration on children, families, and communities. Her teaching seeks to empower others to challenge who gets to define what is criminal, how we decide who is criminal, how we study or measure crime, what causes it, and how our perceptions and responses to crime ultimately shape future crime. Dr. U is an opponent of incarceration as the solution to social problems and an advocate for equitable justice.

Eliese Maxwell
Eliese Maxwell has a deep interest in learning about individuals, groups, and cultures that are different from her. Growing up as biracial, she has always been navigating between two different cultural worlds. Her desire to seek, understand, and explore all these differences have greatly influenced her studies and perspective of others. Ms. Maxwell encourages striving towards cultural competency as it can enrich and enlighten one’s beliefs.

Victoria Otero
Victoria Otero is a sociologist with a concentration in criminal justice. She seeks to bridge the gap between incarcerated individuals and society. Ms. Otero believes that crime impacts more people than we realize and it’s through collaboration with all parties involved that we can help heal society and take a different approach to crime and those we label as “criminals.” Victoria’s unique interest in society came from her trying to understand her own family struggles and the impact incarceration had on her family dynamics.

Patrick Moloney, Senior Librarian - California Men’s Colony
In directing the CMC Libraries, Patrick Moloney’s goal has always been to provide an opportunity to change. That change can be an improvement in skills, an improvement in outlook, or an improvement in self-worth. Sometimes just knowing that there is an opportunity to change through the library can empowering. This exhibit exemplifies that transformative power. Each artist, each participant, each patron has been changed in some way big or small by this exhibit which started as an idea in the CMC Library and came to its final form in the Cal Poly Library.
Acknowledgments

Faculty scholar:
Unique Shaw-Smith, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Sociology, Social Sciences Department

Student scholars:
Victoria Otero, SOC ‘17 (Criminal Justice concentration)
Eliese Maxwell, SOC ‘17 (Psychology minor)

In collaboration with:
California Men’s Colony
Robert E. Kennedy Library
Cuesta College

Kennedy Library:
Exhibit Design:
Habib Placencia Adissi

Contributors:
Catherine J. Trujillo, Curator
Morgan M.

California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation,
California Men’s Colony

Cuesta College

Resource Acknowledgement

Many of the incarcerated artists featured in the exhibit used art supplies only available at-hand within the prison—such as found objects, trash, recycling, even scarce scrapings of soap. Many worked for very little pay under a CDCR prison labor program, receiving wages between $0.35 and $1.00 per hour. This money would often be saved for months to purchase limited art supplies. We acknowledge this labor and honor the sacrifices and ingenuity of the artists featured in this exhibit. We would like to also acknowledge the unpaid labor of incarcerated artist, Cuong Tran. Cuong mentored, encouraged, and instructed many of the incarcerated artists featured in this exhibit. He did so in unpaid labor out of the concern for their rehabilitation.
Works Cited


An exhibition featuring artists from the California Men's Colony
April 6 – June 9, 2017

Between the Bars
California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation
Robert E. Kennedy Library

Opening Reception: Robert E. Kennedy Library, 2nd Floor
Tuesday April 11th, 4 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.

Between the Bars is a senior project exhibition, in collaboration with Cal Poly Sociology professor Dr. Unique Shaw-Smith. Featuring artwork produced by incarcerated artists, the goal is to undo negative stereotypes and to empower the rehabilitation of incarcerated artists individually and collectively through art.

More Info: lib.calpoly.edu/exhibits/cmc | (805) 756-6395