

# *PCAP NEWS*

*July 2017*

The PCAP newsletter aims to keep incarcerated artists, writers, and performers informed of what the Prison Creative Arts Project (PCAP) is doing and how to be involved. If you know someone who would like to receive this newsletter, please have them write to us.

# *Prison Arts Programming in Uruguay, Brazil, and South Africa: A Summer 2017 Travelogue*

by **Ashley Lucas**

Since 2013, I have been conducting research for a book about theatre in prisons around the world, and this work has enabled me to travel to nine different countries (including many parts of the United States) to see theatre workshops, rehearsals, and performances inside prisons. Since I teach courses at the University of Michigan from September through April, most of my research travels happen in the summer. I recently returned from a five-week trip that took me to investigate prison theatre programs in Uruguay, Brazil, and South Africa.

In Uruguay, I was invited to do something that I have never before done, which was to help start prison theatre programming in another country. Some theatre professionals who had worked in the capital of Montevideo and other places decided that they wanted to mount a production of a play in a Uruguayan prison in a small town called Maldonado. This prison, named Las Rosas (or “The Roses” in English) is what they call a mixed prison, with men on one side and women on another. The men and women live and eat separately, but they come together for any cultural or educational programming offered in the prison. The theatre professionals who invited me to Uruguay took me to Las Rosas and asked me to lead a workshop for several hours as a way of introducing the idea of theatre programming to the folks who live there. I was led into a cement room in a building that had no electricity. It was daytime, but I’d arrived in Uruguay in a cold and rainy season. (It’s winter in the southern hemisphere when we’re having summer in the United States.) The room was rather dark, and as I stood there pondering the best way to lead a theatre workshop in a place with no light, some of the incarcerated men appeared with the kinds of bright spotlights that are used on road crews and at construction sites. They attached one to the bars on a window and stood two others on tripods around the room with extension cords running to other buildings.

Some workshop participants started to arrive, including a woman in her early twenties with a double stroller. She had twin babies with her in the prison. At Las Rosas, women who enter the prison pregnant are allowed to keep their children with them until the children reach the age of six years. These babies were just about to be three months old. Shortly after the mother and babies arrived, a young man about the same age as the mother came into the room, hugged and kissed the woman, and scooped up the babies. It turns out that this couple and their children all live in the same prison, but the father has to live separately on the men’s side and only gets to see his wife and children once every fifteen days. Our theatre workshop counted as one of the only two visits they would get that month. Judging by how old the children were, this father had only seen his babies four or five times in their lives. No one told me about their limited visiting schedule until after our workshop had ended. I started the workshop by telling the participants about my own theatre work in prisons and about PCAP, and then we played a few improvisation games together, much as we do in our workshops in Michigan. Despite the pouring rain and the construction spotlights that shown in our faces, we laughed a lot and connected well with one another. At the end of the workshop, the participants asked my friends to please make sure that theatre programming would continue there.



*Ashley giving a talk in Uruguay*

From Uruguay I flew to Brazil where I met seventeen of the University of Michigan students who volunteer with PCAP. We spent three weeks together there, participating in a study abroad exchange program that we have had for the last five years. We spent a week in Florianópolis—a city on an island along the southern coast of Brazil—and from there went on to spend two more weeks in Rio de Janeiro. There's a university that partners with us in each of those cities. They also do theatre work in various social justice contexts and invite us to participate in their university classes as well as theatre workshops in prisons, hospitals, and *favelas* (struggling neighborhoods). This year we also got to participate in a theatre festival where we learned various different types of theatre for social change methodologies and where we also led workshops on how we do our theatre work at PCAP. We are looking forward to a visit from our Brazilian counterparts who will come to Michigan for a week during the 2017-2018 school year to learn about what we do here. Hopefully some of you will get to meet them in PCAP workshops!



*Ashley and PCAP students in Brazil*

From Rio de Janeiro, I flew to Johannesburg, South Africa. I'd been invited to participate in an academic symposium about performance in Africa. Because my Brazil trip ended a few days before the symposium in Johannesburg was set to begin, I had a few days there to do some follow up interviews with prison theatre practitioners I'd met on my first trip to South Africa in 2014. I talked to a woman named Sne Makanya who works for an organization called Themba Interactive. They are a public health organization that uses theatre to make interventions in the HIV/AIDS crisis. South Africa has the highest per capita rates of HIV infection in the entire world, and the disease has so devastated their nation that the South African government makes medications for the treatment of HIV/AIDS available for free to all people in the country who need them. This includes people in prisons. However, the strong stigma attached to the disease often prevents infected people from taking their medications. Folks often don't want to be seen entering the clinics where one would receive the drugs or standing in med lines in prisons. Themba Interactive uses theatre as a way to try to combat the stigma against the disease and help convince people to take the medications when needed. Themba offers performances and workshops in schools and community centers throughout the greater Johannesburg area, and they used to do this work in prisons as well until their funding for the prison programming ran out. In all my travels, I'd never seen or heard of other theatre work in prisons having such a specific focus on a public health crisis, and it saddens me to know that this intervention is no longer taking place in the South African prisons where so many people still need support in coping with HIV/AIDS.

Later that week, at the symposium I was attending, I presented a paper about Themba Interactive's work as well as the theatre workshops being offered in a women's prison outside of Durban—another large city in South Africa that is further south than Johannesburg. Members of the theatre faculty and students from the University of KwaZulu-Natal go into the women's section of the Westville Correctional Centre to offer theatre workshops. The prison was built in an area of the country that has many people of Zulu descent, and much of the theatre work that happens in this program takes place in the isiZulu language. (South Africa is a highly multilingual country with eleven official languages, including isiZulu, English, Afrikaans, and Xhosa.) I visited the prison in 2014 and learned a good deal about the theatre that has been happening there. The women inside the prison have created performances that deal with gender-based violence, HIV/AIDS, and medical care within the prison. They reported forging a deeper sense of their individual and community identities through their work in the theatre program, and I found it very moving to learn of the ways in which they have supported one another through difficult times in their lives.

All of the prison theatre work that I've seen throughout the world has made me even more keenly aware of the inner strength and creativity that incarcerated people must have in order to survive. Now I am back home again in Michigan, and I am thinking of all of you—the people who give so much to PCAP and our programming. I feel grateful and humbled to bear witness in some small way to your lives and art, and I look forward to seeing many of you this year on art selection trips, in workshops, and in reentry programming.

# Literary Review

The Prison Creative Arts Project (PCAP) is accepting submissions of creative writing—fiction, poetry, essays, or memoir) of up to 4,500 words (ten typed pages) for *The Michigan Review of Prisoner Creative Writing*. The next pieces selected will appear in Volume 11, appearing in 2019. Writers are notified 8-10 weeks after submissions are received. Submissions will be received at this address throughout the year.

Again, the staff would like to thank you for your outstanding pieces of writing that you have submitted thus far. We strongly encourage you to continue in this creative process and send us any and all of your work.

PCAP at LSA Residential College  
ATTN: Phil Christman  
701 E. University Ave.  
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1245

Please submit the following information with your written work:

- Your legal name (so we can communicate with you by mail);
- Your name or pen name as you'd like it to appear in the journal, if that's different than your legal name;
- Your MDOC ID number;
- Your current address;
- A short paragraph about yourself/your writing that will be published alongside any accepted piece.

## Exhibitions

Gallery attendants counted 4,149 individual visits to the *22nd Annual Exhibition of Art by Michigan Prisoners* at the Duderstadt Center Gallery during its two-week run in Ann Arbor in 2017! The 40 pieces chosen for the *Selected Work* exhibit were displayed in the UM-Detroit Center gallery in May.

Here are two comments from the dozens left by gallery visitors:

To All Artists: The art in this show is very moving - I can see the joy and the suffering, the regret and the hope of each of you. I know that the beautiful spirit of each of you will lead you to an inner freedom. I hope to meet you on the outside - where you will find work and a life of acceptance. - Anonymous

To everyone: Thank you for your artwork. Truly, it reminds us that those who are behind bars are creative, thoughtful, expressive, pensive, imaginative, skilled, dynamic, fully human brothers and sisters. Thank you for your work. It was encouraging, thought provoking, beautiful and challenging. May you continue to hone your craft and spread your message for many years to come. - Maria



Art sales totaled \$20,440. Payment for sales made during the exhibition will be sent to the MDOC in late July or early August for deposit into artists' accounts. Once approved, a video of the opening reception and artwork in the exhibition will be sent to all MDOC facilities for broadcast.

Artists in MDOC facilities are invited to submit work for the *23rd Annual Exhibition of Art by Michigan Prisoners*, March 21-April 4, 2018. The Call for Art is included with this newsletter. Selection visits are being scheduled for October-December 2017 to all MDOC facilities. Ask your special activities director for the date at your facility.

# Linkage Project

Would you like to stay connected with PCAP after you come home? The Linkage Project offers workshops, cultural field trips, connections to PCAP's campus community, and the opportunity to build a network with other artists, writers, and performers. If you would like to participate, please write to Vanessa Mayesky when you have a release date.

## Calendar

### July—August, 2017

Call for art for *23rd Annual Exhibition of Art by Michigan Prisoners sent to MDOC facilities*

Rolling submissions for *Michigan Review of Prisoner Creative Writing*

### September—December, 2017

Art selection visits for *23rd Annual Exhibition of Art by Michigan Prisoners*

Weekly creative arts workshops in SE Michigan facilities.  
Rolling submissions for *Michigan Review of Prisoner Creative Writing*

Linkage Project visit to ArtPrize (*Grand Rapids*)

*September—December, 2017 cont.*

"Careers in Social Justice" panel and "Sisters Within: Past, Present, and Future" event (*Ann Arbor*)

PCAP art auction fundraiser (*December 8, 2017, Michigan League, Ann Arbor*)

### January—April, 2018

*23rd Annual Exhibition of Art by Michigan Prisoners (March 21-April 4, 2018, Duderstadt Center Gallery, Ann Arbor)*

*Michigan Review of Prisoner Creative Writing* publication and readings

Rolling submissions for *Michigan Review of Prisoner Creative Writing*

Weekly creative arts workshops in SE Michigan

## About PCAP

### Mission Statement

*The Prison Creative Arts Project brings those impacted by the justice system and the University of Michigan community into artistic collaboration for mutual learning and growth.*

### Contact Us

PCAP at University of Michigan  
1801 East Quadrangle  
701 E. University Ave.  
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1245  
pcapinfo@umich.edu  
www.prisonarts.org

### PCAP Faculty

Ashley Lucas, Director  
Phil Christman, Kathleen Kelly, Sarah Messer,  
Isaac Wingfield

### PCAP Staff

El Chen, Graham Hamilton, Mary Heinen,  
Vanessa Mayesky

### Annual Exhibition Curators

Reuben Kenyatta, Charlie Michaels, Janie Paul,  
Ariana Wescott, Isaac Wingfield, Jason Wright