

PCAP NEWS

March 2023

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.



Update from the Director

by **Nora Krinitsky**

Hello, Prison Creative Arts Project artists, writers, performers, and community members! As I write to you, I see snow falling out my window when it felt like a warm spring day just last week. Here's hoping that spring truly is around the corner—the endless Michigan winter can't end soon enough!

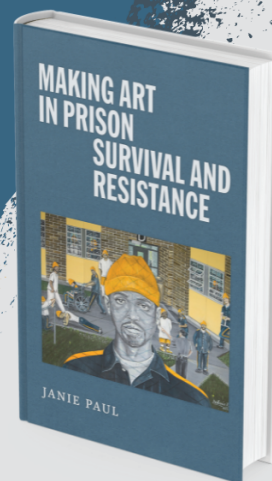
What is certainly around the corner is the *27th Annual Exhibition of Artists in Michigan Prisons*!! PCAP staff and curators are busy preparing the artwork, planning public programs, arranging exhibition tours, and recruiting volunteers. In just a few weeks we will all gather in the gallery to install the show, a process that can feel overwhelming and endless! This year we will exhibit more than 600 pieces of art including works on paper, paintings, collages, sculptures, three-dimensional works, fiber arts, and more. Without fail, I am impressed every year with the ingenuity of PCAP artists as you devise new artistic practices and find innovative uses for a range of materials.

This March we will also celebrate the publication of *Making Art in Prison: Survival and Resistance* by exhibition co-founder Janie Paul. Janie's book tells the history of the PCAP *Annual Exhibition* and provides readers with a glimpse inside the world of making art in prison. She writes about some of the most important themes and subjects that emerge among PCAP artists and features many images of PCAP artists' work in her book. Delving deeply into the ways in which incarcerated artists create meaning through their artistic practice, Janie explains how the making, sharing, and formation of artistic friendships within prisons can constitute acts of resistance against the banality of prison life. She explains that most artists who exhibit in the *Annual Exhibition* did not make art before coming to prison. Their accomplishments show that art-making need not be a privilege of the few, but is rather a basic human need, and in these circumstances, a necessary means of survival.

This publication is a monumental achievement for Janie—she often describes the exhibition as her life's work. *Making Art in Prison* will make that work visible to those who have not encountered the exhibition before and those who have not had the opportunity to travel to Ann Arbor to view it themselves. It will also help all of us—whether we live in the free world or in prison—better understand the urgency and necessity of creating art in order to live a full and fulfilling life. I send her all my hearty congratulations!!

"...a beautiful and poetic reflection on the transformative power of art behind prison walls."

SHAKA SENGHOR,
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR



Message from the Arts Programming Coordinator

by **Emily Chase**

My first season of art selection trips this year was quite a whirlwind—we saw art from over 360 of you, for a total of 2,374 submitted pieces. Of these, 27.4% were chosen to move on to the next level of curation.

As I write this, I am looking at an art piece I made a while back and told some of you about on selection trips—it is a small sort of book that opens like an accordion to reveal a stretch of I-96 between Detroit and Livonia, my favorite highway to drive on at just the right time of night. Every decision I made when creating this—the concept behind it, the cuts and folds I made, the mistakes I worked through, and the parts I still feel unsure about—contributes to the personal and creative meaning it holds. Each of my creative choices demonstrates a thought or feeling that communicates about me and my relationship to this subject matter. Each step was away of intuiting, realizing, and discovering.

I'm sharing this because I want you to know that each of the 2,374 pieces is significant. Does that mean each piece is beautiful? No. Does it mean each piece is original, or interesting? No. Each piece is significant because it represents a series of thoughts, emotions, and creative choices you made. Each piece says something about you, has grown from something personal to you, and has presented you with a self-defined opportunity to grow.

All this to say, I sincerely thank you for bringing your artwork to our selection visits. So often I was struck by the significance of the personal investment you put into your work. Thank you for sharing it with PCAP.

All the best,
Emily

27TH ANNUAL EXHIBITION OF ARTISTS IN MICHIGAN PRISONS

[March 21 – April 4, 2023]

DUDERSTADT GALLERY

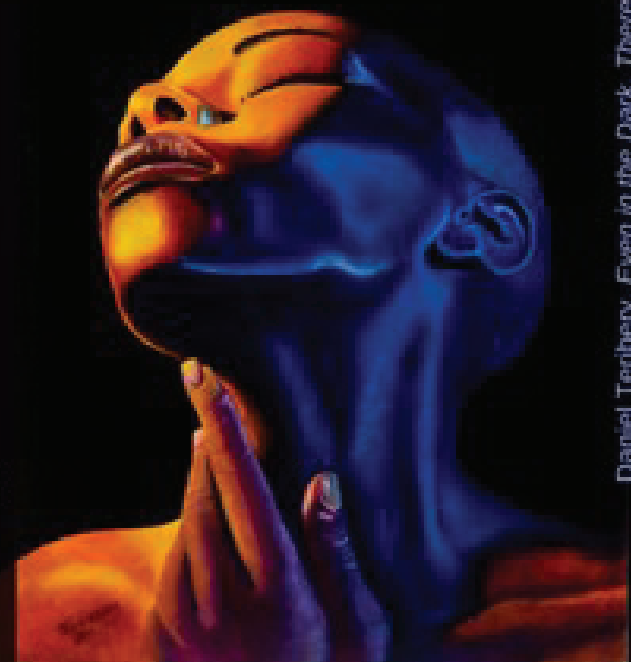
2281 Bonisteel Blvd.
Ann Arbor, Mi 48109

Visit <https://myumi.ch/2mm3R> for more details
& to add to calendar



MICHIGAN
ARTS &
CULTURE
COUNCIL

M | LSA PRISON CREATIVE ARTS PROJECT
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN



Daniel Terriberry. Even in the Dark, There's Beauty

My Linkage Experience With The Peculiar Patriot

by **Johnny Van Patten**, Artist and Linkage Community member

Article made possible by the Linkage Community Journalism Initiative

Thursday, February 2, 2023: I was invited to the preview event for *The Peculiar Patriot* at the Keene Theater in Ann Arbor. As we started the program, there was a warning of the effect of the content we were about to see, letting us know to take care of ourselves if there was anything that was going to trigger us. I found this beneficial. Some of the sites, sounds, and situations of actual prison film coverage can trigger PTSD for us ex-prisoners.

The film, *Angola Do You Hear Us? Voices from a Plantation Prison*, began explaining the who and the what of the play, *The Peculiar Patriot*, and how it came about. It was written and performed by Liza Jessie Peterson. She spoke about her experience with teaching in the system and her experience with Rikers Island. It went into a scene of Angola prison where she was going to perform the play and showed how it was shut down because it was so real that the prisoners responded and made the corrections officers feel unsafe. It was a powerful message of truth.

Linkage members performed some songs, spoken word, poems, and even a skit inspired by the work of Liza Jessie Peterson. I sang a song I wrote about quarantine coming into prison titled "*Time Is Stuck Somewhere*." All the pieces performed that evening were very powerful and emotional. There was an emphasis on the humanity of the prisoners and it resonated with all those who came out to experience it.

Saturday, February 11, 2023: Linkage members were invited to dinner before the showing of *The Peculiar Patriot* at the Detroit Public Theatre that evening. This was by far the largest gathering of Linkage members to date. We had about 17 people from the PCAP/Linkage community. We socialized with people who have lived in our shoes and experienced the transition into both living in the free-world and the art-world as a free person.

For most of us ex-prisoners, these kinds of things can be very awkward as we struggle with being social after being locked up for so long. I found it rather comforting to be around creative people who have been through the same situations I have. All along Sarah Unrath and Sarah Hebert-Johnson were awesome hosts and made everybody feel comfortable. This is second nature to them as they are part of PCAP and that is one of the biggest things that they do both inside and outside the prison; making prisoners feel like human beings is kind of their thing! We had an awesome time at dinner and then headed over to the show.

Upon walking into *The Peculiar Patriot* at the Detroit Public Theatre, we were welcomed with smiling faces by Frannie Shepherd-Bates, representing Shakespeare in Prison, and Asia Johnson, who was the host for the evening. Looking behind those smiling faces, there was a giant wall displaying artwork from Linkage members professionally exhibited with information on how to purchase some of this beautiful art.

My Linkage Experience With The Peculiar Patriot cont.

The play itself, I found to be funny, real, truthful, painful, heartbreaking and very eye-opening for both people who have experienced incarceration, and people who have not. Some of the standouts for me as an ex-prisoner were the gun towers that were displayed in pictures, the sounds of buzzers, and doors letting people in and out of lockup situations. There was some film of some actual prison fights that will wake up your senses and show you how dangerous it really is on the yard. It reminded me of where I once was and it opened the door for people who never have been there to see what it's like. The show itself was awesome and well-executed as a series of skits. With one person speaking to another and only one person on stage, you felt as if there was somebody else there or at times if you were that other person yourself. The visuals in the background gave it the perfect effect.

I was asked to sit on the panel after the show for some post-show Q&A. Myself with 10 years behind bars and another female who had 20 years behind bars. There were some very honest questions from people who just didn't know about prison. They wanted to know more because the play had struck a chord with them and I think they honestly wanted to help in some way. For the most part, the questions seem to lean towards answers that were very negative. The majority of prison experience is very negative.

The thing that stood out to me was one man asked a question directly to me. He asked me if I could name one positive that I took from the prison experience. I got to be real honest with you, I had to pause and think about that. As a model prisoner who was very active in recovery and facilitating self-help programs for nine and a half years on the inside, helping men to make better decisions thus making the world a safer place, I struggled with the question and I probably shouldn't have. Then the answer came to me; my faith and belief in God taught me a valuable



lesson. The deepest, darkest, and worst moments of my life are now the greatest gift I have as a survivor. I am able to reach out to people who normally would not be able to relate with others, but because of my experience, I was able to share how I got through it. My answer, in the end, would be that God has used my worst moments to glorify His name; that it was never about me but it was about that next person who needs help.

From beginning to end, I believe my Linkage experience with *The Peculiar Patriot* was just mind-blowing and thought-provoking.

Linkage Community

by **Sarah Unrath**

Planning on paroling soon? Stay connected with PCAP through the Linkage Community! The Linkage Community is an alliance of system-impacted artists interested in deepening their craft in spaces of radical acceptance and authentic connections. Through professional development and artistic workshops, a creative peer-support network, and opportunities to exhibit and perform, Linkage connects with community partners to maximize the impact of the arts.

Please contact PCAP as soon as you have a parole date. We will send you more information and a registration form. Upon release, you can also register by mail, online, or over the phone.

Updates for Writers

by **Phil Christman**, Editor

Call for Writing

The *Michigan Review of Prisoner Creative Writing* is accepting your submissions of poetry, fiction, plays, and short essays year-round. We tend to do most of the reading during the school year, and acceptance/rejection letters go out at the end of the semesters (so if you send something during the summer, you may not hear back about it till December). Please do not send novel- or novella-length works or other whole books, as we cannot publish them. Please accompany your submission with a note that includes any pen names you want us to use, your MDOC or BOP ID number, and your current address. The place to send them is, as always:

Attn: Phil Christman
Prison Creative Arts Project
1801 East Quad
701 E. University
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1245

Free Books From PEN America

PEN America has produced an anthology that every reader of this newsletter should know about. *The Sentences That Create Us: Crafting a Writer's Life in Prison*, edited by Caitis Messner, is an invaluable book. It is a good general guide to getting started in writing — it would work for any creative-writing workshop, inside or out — but it is specifically geared to writers who are practicing their trade in prison. It is free to anyone reading this in prison. You can fill out a form (or have someone complete it for you) or have it mailed directly to you here:

<https://myumi.ch/V7zkN> (that is a case-sensitive address).

Or you can just write to Vanessa Mayesky at PCAP (above address, but swap in “Attn: Vanessa Mayesky”) and she’ll include you in PCAP’s next bulk book order to PEN.

March–May 2023

Ongoing: Rolling submissions for *Michigan Review of Prisoner Creative Writing*

Weekly workshops at select facilities

Out of the Blue Choir performances at select facilities

27th Annual Exhibition of Artists in Michigan Prisons Exhibit and Events

March 21–April 4 Exhibition at Duderstadt Gallery, 2281 Bonisteel Blvd., Ann Arbor

March 21 Gallery Opening & Reception 5:00 PM

Opening Celebration 6:30 PM

March 23 Keynote Presentation with Kate Rubin, 7:00 PM

March 25 Public Tour, 2:00 PM

People of Action Coalition Town Hall, 3:00 PM

March 26 Painting the Scene Inside: Artist Talk, 11:00 AM

Family Pizza Party, 12:30 PM

Launch Party for *I Walk Through Land Mines: Michigan Review of Prisoner Creative Writing*, Volume 15, 1:30 PM

March 30 Penny Stamps Speaker Series with Amanda Alexander, 5:30 PM

April 2 Family Digital Exhibit Tour, 3:00–4:00 PM

Zoom Link: <https://umich.zoom.us/j/91499746478>

About PCAP

Mission Statement

The Prison Creative Arts Project brings those impacted by the justice system together with the University of Michigan community for artistic collaboration, 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

Director: Nora Krinitsky
Phil Christman, Ben Gaughran, Megan Holmes,
Ashley Lucas, Toby Millman, Eugene Rogers,
Isaac Wingfield

PCAP Staff

Emily Chase, Mary Heinen McPherson,
Vanessa Mayesky, Sarah Unrath

Annual Exhibition Curators

Emily Chase, Jeff Clark, Caleb Foerg,
Charlie Michaels, Sarah Unrath, Kimiko Uyeda,
Martín Vargas, Mae Wilson