

PCAP NEWS

March 2024

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 community! It is our busiest season here at PCAP as we prepare for the *28th Annual Exhibition of Artists in Michigan Prisons*. We are busy organizing the nearly 750 pieces that will be exhibited in this year's show, planning the installation of the art, recruiting tours and training tour guides, and preparing to welcome families, loved ones, and the public to the gallery. There is never a dull moment!

I like to use these updates to give you a window into different aspects of PCAP and this edition will give you an overview of the many classes that University of Michigan students can take to be a part of PCAP. Some of these classes have been taught for many years and others are brand new. I'm particularly proud that our curriculum features courses that focus on every kind of artistic practice we do at PCAP—theatre, visual art, creative writing, and music. That means that students have a lot of choice when it comes to enrolling in a PCAP class and they can find the class that most resonates for them. Here is a brief description of the courses that we regularly offer at PCAP:

The Atonement Project (taught by Ashley Lucas and Mary Heinen McPherson)—This class teaches students about restorative justice, reconciliation, and atonement. Students in the class facilitate weekly arts workshops in prison that produce original performances, creative writing, music, and visual art. Ultimately this course seeks to identify the best strategies for using the arts to address the carceral system and those most affected by it.

Theatre and Incarceration (taught by Ashley Lucas and Mary Heinen McPherson)—This class surveys the history of performance in prisons through the study of plays written about prisoners as well as narratives that chronicle the process of creating theatre in prisons. Students use some of those strategies in practice as they facilitate weekly theatre workshops in prison.

Visual Art and Incarceration (taught by Megan Holmes)—This course examines art made under the conditions of confinement and imprisonment. Students explore the relationship between the restrictive conditions of incarceration and the expression of creative and a visual imaginary. Students also facilitate weekly visual arts workshops for participants in two Michigan state prisons.

Humanize the Numbers (taught by Isaac Wingfield)—This course is a community-based photography lab built around collaboration between students and prisoners. Students will visit the prison to collaborate in workshops with prisoners, making photographs as one of the products of the workshops. Students will develop skills in photographic tools, including cameras, digital editing, and printing.



PCAP director Nora Krinitsky and curator/formerly exhibiting artist Martín Vargas discuss a triptych.

Update from the Director cont.

Printmaking in Prison (taught by Toby Millman)—This course is a collaborative printmaking course based on weekly workshops at Women’s Huron Valley. Students visit the prison to facilitate workshops with prisoners, making prints both independently and in collaboration. Students develop skills in relief printing including drawing images conducive to the medium, carving or gouging blocks, and printing one-of-a-kind or editioned prints.

Curation in Context (taught by Emily Chase)—This course introduces students to the *Annual Exhibition of Artists in Michigan Prisons*. Students join PCAP staff, curators, and faculty on art selection trips to Michigan prisons to meet artists, provide feedback on their artwork, and select art for the exhibition.

Out of the Blue Prison Outreach Choir (taught by Sydney Mukasa)—This vocal ensemble is a partnership with the School of Music, Theatre, and Dance. Students perform at several prisons each semester.

Literature and Writing Outside the Classroom (taught by Phil Christman)—This course helps students appreciate the different functions of writing and writers outside the college classroom. Students participate in the editing of the *Michigan Review of Prisoner Creative Writing* and offer concrete individualized feedback to each of the incarcerated writers who submit to the journal.

As you can see, the PCAP curriculum and vast and diverse! I hope this gives you a better understanding of what students learn when they become a part of PCAP and the many ways that our program teaches about social justice and the arts.

Exhibition Planning Meeting - Socks Not Shoes

by **Martin Vargas**, Artist, PCAP Curator

Many things must take place to ensure that the *Annual Exhibition of Artists in Michigan Prisons* goes well. Once the art is collected from each prison, curators get together at what we used to call the “Second Pass.” It has now been transformed into the “Exhibition Planning Meeting.” Since not every curator and volunteer goes into every prison during art selection trips, this space gives curators a chance to see all the work we’ve selected as a group. During this time we discuss identifying themes that emerge and hit us as we view the hundreds of pieces laid on paper on the floor below us. We brainstorm over categories and subcategories that we should consider, then individually go out among the artwork to select pieces that best fit these themes. We respect the artists and walk through the paths gingerly, socks not shoes, so as not to damage any of their work. There are other reasons for the Exhibition Planning Meeting as well. We choose and discuss pieces that could be used for publicity purposes, identify artists who may be good speakers for the audio tours available in the gallery/digital exhibit, and decide which ones will go into racks or on top of tables too. Plus there’s always food and lots of laughter there! :)



A Message from Janie Paul

Since 1996 when Buzz Alexander and I organized the first *Annual Exhibition of Artists in Prisons*, I have been profoundly influenced by the art made by artists living in our Michigan prisons. I am a painter with a particular love for drawing, which I find very personal and direct. The time and care that artists in prison take to make detailed pencil, pen, and charcoal drawings brought me back to a kind of detailed drawing that I used to do when I was young. Seeing these works and absorbing them in my mind influenced me to have a different attitude toward making art and exhibiting it: not to be in a hurry to finish or to care how long it took, but to relish the process and the kind of repetitive mark making that is so meditative. I am including here an image of one of these drawings done with warm and cool gray colored pencils and graphite.



I work very intuitively. I keep a sketchbook, but sometimes make very quick drawings when they occur to me on an old envelope or other paper that is within reach. This one started out with a line drawing that just came to me and that took a few minutes. Months later, I decided to make a more finished tonal drawing inspired by this quick sketch. While doing it, I realized that it felt both like strength and resilience, and also like aloneness and solemnity. It made me think of my husband Buzz who had died from dementia a few years previously but was strong and inventive in his illness; and of my friends in prison who suffer from being displaced but are also strong and resilient.

I have also always made landscape paintings and drawings because I grew up in the countryside and for me Nature was a solace. I think of a landscape painting as a place for the soul to dwell. Here is one of my recent charcoal landscape drawings that I made from a photograph I took in a place near to where I grew up. Right now, I am enjoying working in black and white, but the careful gradations I'm working with will provide a rich reservoir of light and texture when I start painting in color.

I also want to mention that people all over the country have been so moved by the artists' stories in my book, *Making Art in Prison: Survival and Resistance* and are in awe of the artwork in it. I have been doing readings and discussions of the book in Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Detroit, and Ann Arbor so far and will be doing more. It is making a big impact on people who are now thinking about the millions of creative and intelligent people in our country who are in prison. This is my effort in our movement for change and in clarifying how very profound art making can be for keeping the soul alive.

Note: If you or friends and family want the book, it can be ordered it from the publisher, Hat and Beard Press.



2023 PCAP Art Auction

Adapted from an article by **Marjani Abdur-Rahman**

On December 2, 2023, The University of Michigan Prison Creative Arts Project (PCAP) put on a beautiful event in the Michigan Union titled the 2023 Art Auction which raises funds to support the *28th Annual Exhibition of Artists in Michigan Prisons*. The auction consists of beautiful acrylic paintings, sculptures, watercolors, oils, and paper mache awaiting to be admired and bought.

It was held at the Michigan Union with a 50 percent increase in attendance from 2022, totaling 153 people!



PCAP Linkage Community members, Tore and Shelly, were the wonderful hosts and auctioneers who kept the event uplifting and light. They introduced the start of the silent auction at 6:30pm. There were so many tables covered with art created and donated by artists who are currently incarcerated, in the Linkage Community, and from across Michigan. At 7:30pm I had the privilege and honor of performing a cover of Colbie Caillat's song "Try", changing the lyrics to resonate with all the guests in attendance and letting them know that you don't have to try so hard to be amazing or feel like you have to prove yourself to others because you are already great. Many were touched by the heartfelt and encouraging song.



Once the silent auction was over, the live auction began. It was so exciting to see people bid on the art being displayed all thanks to the lovely donating artists. There was a lot of friendly competition with people really wanting to purchase different works of art. Thirteen more pieces were sold this year compared to last year and PCAP made record history by selling a piece by artist Oliger Merko for \$1260! There were a lot of guests in attendance at this auction who got to experience what this event was all about for the first time: activism, visual art, community engagement, awareness, criminal justice, diversity, inclusion, mass incarceration, and other prison issues/concerns.

I had the honor of doing multiple interviews with guests asking them what they thought of the art auction, the food, and purpose of the event. Cassie & Derek said, "This event was awesome! Really great cause. Very interesting messages from the speakers that I needed to hear. They spoke about how hard it was to get art supplies and that was very touching." Sabrina thought it was such a great opportunity for people to understand incarcerated people at a different level.

I hope that this event encourages people to donate, advocate, and help bring awareness to the talented and gifted artists who are part of our community. I also hope that this event encourages PCAP/Linkage Community members to continue to keep creating and not stop believing that you are more than enough; your voice deserves to be heard. I highly encourage people to attend this event next year and to bring a friend.

Adapted from an article by Marjani Abdur-Rahman written for the *Linkage Community Journalism Initiative*. Photography by uptown24 studio llc.





Bad Prose

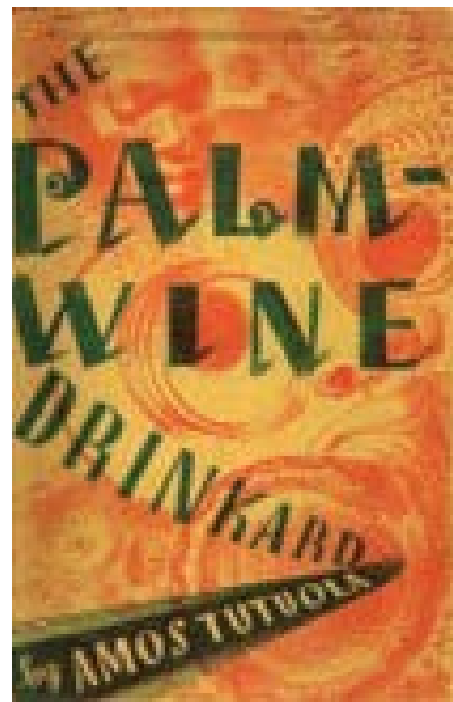
by Phil Christman

What makes prose bad? I use them when I teach, I use them when I grade, I use them in the bookstore and the library when I'm deciding (usually very quickly) whether to give someone my attention and money or not. I believe, at least some of the time, that they have

political and even moral significance. But I couldn't tell you offhand what they are.

When I say Renata Adler's prose is "good" —"A hideous family pledged itself to margarine"; "Self-pity is just sadness, I think, in the pejorative"—I am saying something different than when I say William H. Gass's prose, with its elaborate poetic effects, its euphony and musicality, is good. I am saying something different again when I say that I admire the orderliness and clarity and dry humor of Mary Midgley's prose as well as the content of her ideas, or that I love the nonsense nonce prose style that Fran Ross creates in *Oreo*, or the lushness and intimacy and occasional dry understatement of Toni Morrison's novels. In some cases, what I love is special effects, extravagance and formality. In other cases what I love is personality—I'll put up with some locutions that seem inefficient or careless because even their carelessness vividly conjures a sense of a person behind the sentences. (I love *Palm-Wine Drinkard*, by Amos Tutuola, because I love the way the narrator talks.) Carelessness almost never does do this, of course. What carelessness usually does is to grab at the first clichés it can think of and slap them together with no regard for coherence, so as to obscure any sense of a person behind the words whatsoever. I once graded a paper that began more or less like this: "Since the dawn of man, Americans have struggled with the unique blend of people and cultures that exists in our complex world today." (Since the *dawn of time*, Americans?? In our complex world *today*? What year is this sentence in?) I can't discern a meaning, let alone a sensibility, behind that sentence. But my experience is that most of us comport ourselves verbally more or less this way in daily life: an ongoing Jackson Pollock drip-painting of dead phrases and self-contradictions. "It is what it is." "Live your truth." "I'm spiritual but not religious." "Kids today are lazy." Perhaps this is why I love reading and writing so much: Alone with someone's writing—that medium in which all have a chance to say things over and over again until we actually say what we mean, or even to compose a more considered version of ourselves and say what that person means—I feel like I'm really hearing what other people say for once?

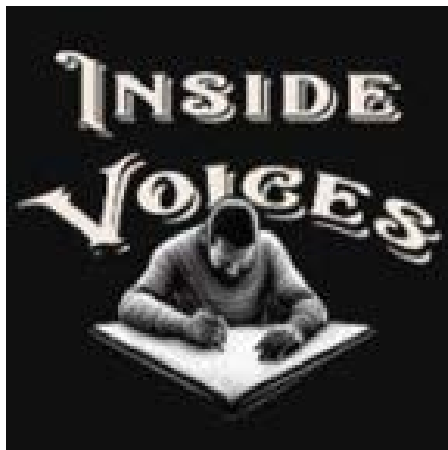
The more I think about it, the more the assumed situation *behind* a piece of writing seems central to my judgment of its quality. Consider my hapless student's sentence, quoted in the last paragraph: If I had any reason to think it a parody, I'd immediately have gone to work finding the student a publisher, because as parody, it's really funny. It would be a masterpiece if she or he or they had done it on purpose. Part of my admiration for *Palm-Wine Drinkard* is based in the assumption that Tutuola's half-broken English, eccentric pacing, and weird way with detail is the product of artistry and choice on Tutuola's part.



Partners & Allies

The Last Prisoner Project

Last Prisoner Project is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to releasing cannabis prisoners and helping them rebuild their lives. They offer legal support, commissary funding, advocacy, reentry grants, and financial support for the children of those incarcerated. Eligibility requirements for their programs are as follows: the overlaying charge must be cannabis with no other current drug charges (previous drug charges are allowed), no violent priors, and no sexual offenses. If you are interested in learning if you are eligible for their services, please have a loved one contact them via info@lastprisonerproject.org or send a letter to: Last Prisoner Project 1312 17th Street, Suite #640 Denver, CO 80202



Listen to these 'Inside Voices'

If you know someone who is currently incarcerated in Michigan who would like to share their views on criminal justice reform or Michigan's legal system, Inside Voices is a forum created for them. Inside Voices is a part of Safe & Just Michigan's printed newsletter, which is sent to their members who are currently incarcerated in Michigan Prisons. To contribute, send a letter of 150-300 words to: Inside Voices at Safe & Just Michigan, 119 Pere Marquette Ave., Suite 2B, Lansing, MI 48933. Make it clear in your letter whether you would like Inside Voices to publish your name or if you wish to remain anonymous.

The Mass Incarceration Lab @ CSREA

Archiving the Social Life of Mass Incarceration

The Mass Incarceration Lab @ CSREA seeks to curate a comprehensive archive of mass incarceration in the United States—centering and preserving the narratives and writings of those individuals (including family and community members) who have been impacted by the criminal justice system. The humanities lab project is an important act of historical preservation, capturing the first-person accounts of mass incarceration for generations to come and centering the voices of those who have been impacted.



BROWN

Call for Submissions

If you are incarcerated in the United States or have previously experienced incarceration, we ask you to write a letter sharing your story that addresses one or all of the following questions:

- What do you need the world to know about U.S. prisons, jails, probation, and/or parole?
- What about your experience has been left out of the news and narrative of mass incarceration?

Acknowledgment of Consent

*I understand that, by sharing my story, I am consenting to have the story placed in the website repository for Brown University's Mass Incarceration Lab @ CSREA and made available to the public. **My story will be anonymous unless I clearly state in my story: "I want my name shared with my story."** Anyone will be able to read, watch, or listen to my story and to use what they read, see, or hear for any purpose. Personally identifying information about other people, the prison, or anyone else will be removed from my story by Brown University staff. I will never be able to ask Brown University to remove my story from the website repository. I am also waiving and releasing Brown University from any claims or lawsuits of any kind for any reason related to my story. I confirm that I am at least 18 years old and I am freely and knowingly submitting my story.*

I understand and agree to the terms explained above and want to participate.

How to Contribute to the Archive

- Please send your story to the following email address: massincarceration@brown.edu
- OR send a letter to the following address:

**The Mass Incarceration Lab
Box #362
11 S Angell St
Providence, RI 02906**

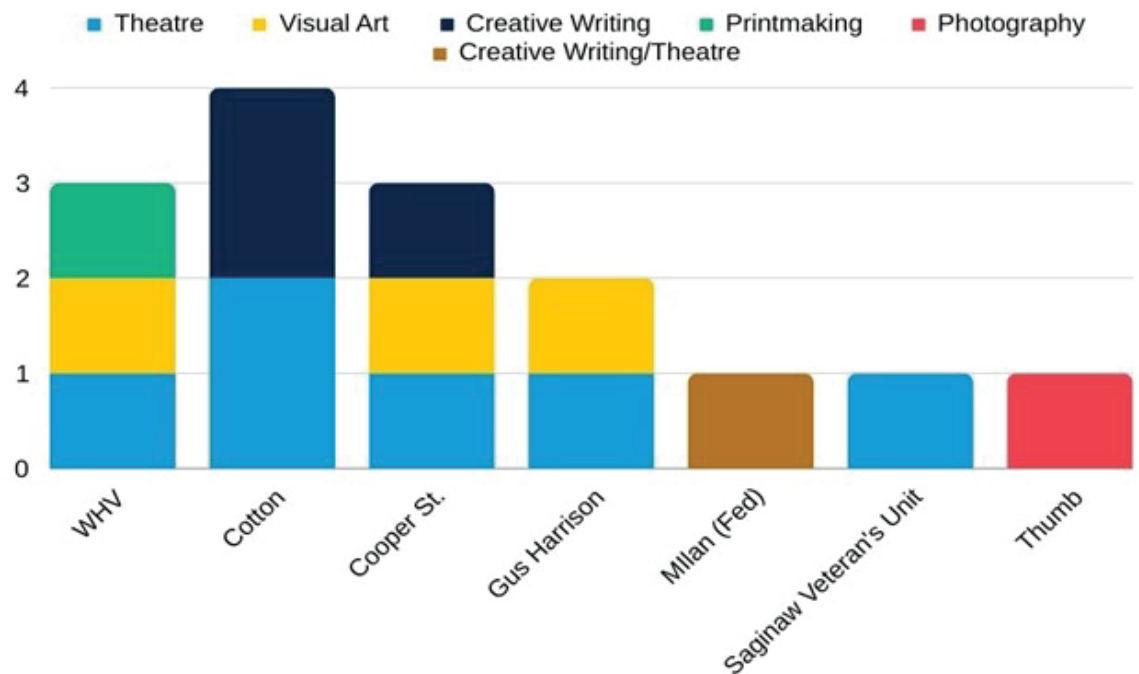
Your submission will be archived in the Special Collections of the John Hay Library at Brown University as well as digitized by the Center for Digital Scholarship. Brown University students taking SOC 1116 Criminal Courts and the Law in an Era of Mass Incarceration will help to curate the content of this archive. All submissions will be part of a publicly accessible repository of primary materials about the punitive consequences of mass incarceration as told by currently and formerly incarcerated people, their loved ones, and those living and working in communities most impacted by mass incarceration.

Winter '24 PCAP Stats

by **Mary Heinen McPherson**

This winter PCAP is offering 15 workshops facilitated by students in six PCAP classes and members of the PCAP volunteer organization.

7 prison workshop sites:



March – May 2024

Ongoing

Rolling submissions for *Michigan Review of Prisoner Creative Writing*

Weekly workshops at select facilities

Out of the blue Choir performances at select facilities

28th Annual Exhibition of Artists in Michigan Prisons Exhibit and Events

March 19–April 4 Exhibition at Duderstadt Gallery, 2281 Bonisteel Blvd, Ann Arbor

March 19 Sales, Reception, and Program 5:30–7:30pm

March 22 The Art of Relational Advocacy Community Conference & Networking Fair 10:00am–3:00pm

March 23 Public Exhibit Tour 2:00–3:00pm

March 24 Artists' Talk 11:00am

Family Pizza Party 12:30pm

Launch Party for *I Read the Dictionary for Fun: Michigan Review of Prisoner Creative Writing, Volume 16* 1:30pm

With Love, From Inside Theatre Performance 3:00pm

What would you like to read more about?

Let us know what you'd like to see in future newsletters!
Write to us at the address below.

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

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www.prisonarts.org

PCAP Faculty

Director: Nora Krinitsky
Emily Chase, Phil Christman, Mary Heinen McPherson, Megan Holmes, Ashley Lucas, Sydney Mukasa, Toby Millman, Eugene Rogers, Isaac Wingfield

PCAP Staff

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

Annual Exhibition Curators

Emily Chase, Suzy Moffat, Janie Paul, Sarah Unrath, Kimiko Uyeda, Martín Vargas, Mae Wilson