

# *PCAP NEWS*

*November 2018*

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.

# A Note from the Director

by Ashley Lucas

Friday, October 19, 2018 marked a momentous occasion for us at PCAP. The University of Michigan Chamber Choir—a highly prestigious and longstanding group of the best student singers on our campus—sang a concert called “Pure Michigan.” The pieces of music that the thirty-seven singers and their conductor Professor Eugene Rogers performed that night all had something to do with our state. Either the composer was from Michigan or the text of the songs described our state. The concert took place at Hill Auditorium, which is a special place on our campus. It’s an enormous and beautiful old theatre which has stood for many decades. Across the years, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Archbishop Desmond Tutu, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, and a great many other luminaries have spoken on this extraordinary stage. In this hallowed place, the Chamber Choir sang the world premiere of an original composition by Professor Roshanne Etazedy. The piece had been commissioned by Eugene Rogers, who asked Etazedy to create a new choral composition inspired by and using text from PCAP’s *Michigan Review of Prisoner Creative Writing*. Etazedy called the piece *Lifsmithing*—a title borrowed from writer Marcellus Earl Phillips, whose essay by the same title was read in several excerpts throughout the performance. The music in this piece as four separate sections (or known as movements) each based on a different poem from our literary review. The piece begins with a setting of “Someday” by Michael Sullivan, then transitions into “And Thus Responded Man” by Chris Dankovich. Dankovich’s poem repeats the words “I am” in each line, as it leads the reader through a range of ideas and emotions. This text and the music to which it was set moved beautifully into the third poem “Where I am From” by Jill Miller, which begins, “I am from Nebraska,” at which point the music shifts to a soaring and joyous tone. The composition ends with an absolutely heart-wrenching performance of James Galt’s “Wish Upon,” the final lines of which say:

I made two wishes as I closed my eyes:  
For you, be happy;  
For me, survive.

The choir’s performance shattered me. They sang so beautifully, with such clear voices and harmonies, and they brought the words of these poets out of the prisons and into a room full of people who otherwise might never have known what talent, intellect, and heart lives behind the walls. I wept and could not stop when the music finished because it meant so much to me to hear the words of PCAP writers celebrated so well in this place where men and women who have changed world history have spoken. This concert honored the voices of Michigan writers and composers, and *Lifsmithing* was the pinnacle of the evening. To the best of my knowledge, this was the first time that a composer had ever been commissioned to set PCAP writings to music, and Etezady’s work uplifted these poems to new heights and different audiences. Our deepest gratitude goes out to Professors Rogers and Etezady for making this possible and to the members of the Chamber Choir for their glorious performance. Congratulations to all of the writers of the *Michigan Review*, especially Marcellus Earl Phillips, Michael Sullivan, Chris Dankovich, Jill Miller, and James Galt! We are trying to get the choir to perform again at the opening of this year’s *Annual Exhibition of Art by Michigan Prisoners* so that you all can hear at least part of this extraordinary composition.

Speaking of wonderful performances, the men at Macomb and Cotton hosted PCAP faculty, staff, and students at two fantastic events this September. The staff and men at Macomb hosted a wonderful Battle of the Bands where I and a few others from PCAP were invited to serve as judges. The performances covered a broad range of musical styles, from a country band to hip hop, from a Metallica cover to classical piano. We were blown away by the talent and originality that we saw there and had a terrible time choosing winners from that really extraordinary group of musicians. A few days later at Cotton, a larger group of PCAP faculty, students, and guests attended an awesome Talent Show. Six judges (all outside visitors though not all from PCAP) chose three winning performances from among the poetry and music performed that night. We had a wonderful time, and the men who sang, played, and recited their work impressed all of us deeply. I cannot thank the men and staff at Macomb and Cotton enough for these two glorious evenings, and I hope that we at PCAP will be invited again in future to participate in such events.

*A Note from the Director cont.*

There's a great restaurant in Ann Arbor called the Detroit St. Filling Station that has generously given PCAP some permanent exhibition space. El Chen on our staff curates and hangs a rotating series of exhibits there. This summer's exhibit displayed art from kids through the Youth Arts Alliance!—a program that does arts programming with young people in detention and treatment centers. The new exhibit that just opened on October 18 features paintings by Martin Vargas, who was released from the MDOC earlier this year. Martin's work was featured all twenty-three years that we have hosted our *Annual Exhibition of Art by Michigan Prisoners*, and he's the first formerly incarcerated artist to have an exhibition of his own at the Detroit St. Filling Station.

The opening reception for his beautiful work could not have been more packed with his fans and PCAP supporters. It was literally standing room only, and Martin was surrounded by members of his family, PCAP folks, and others from the community. His work will hang at the restaurant until January, at which time we'll hang a preview exhibition of prints made from things that we will show at the *24th Annual Exhibition of Art by Michigan Prisoners*.

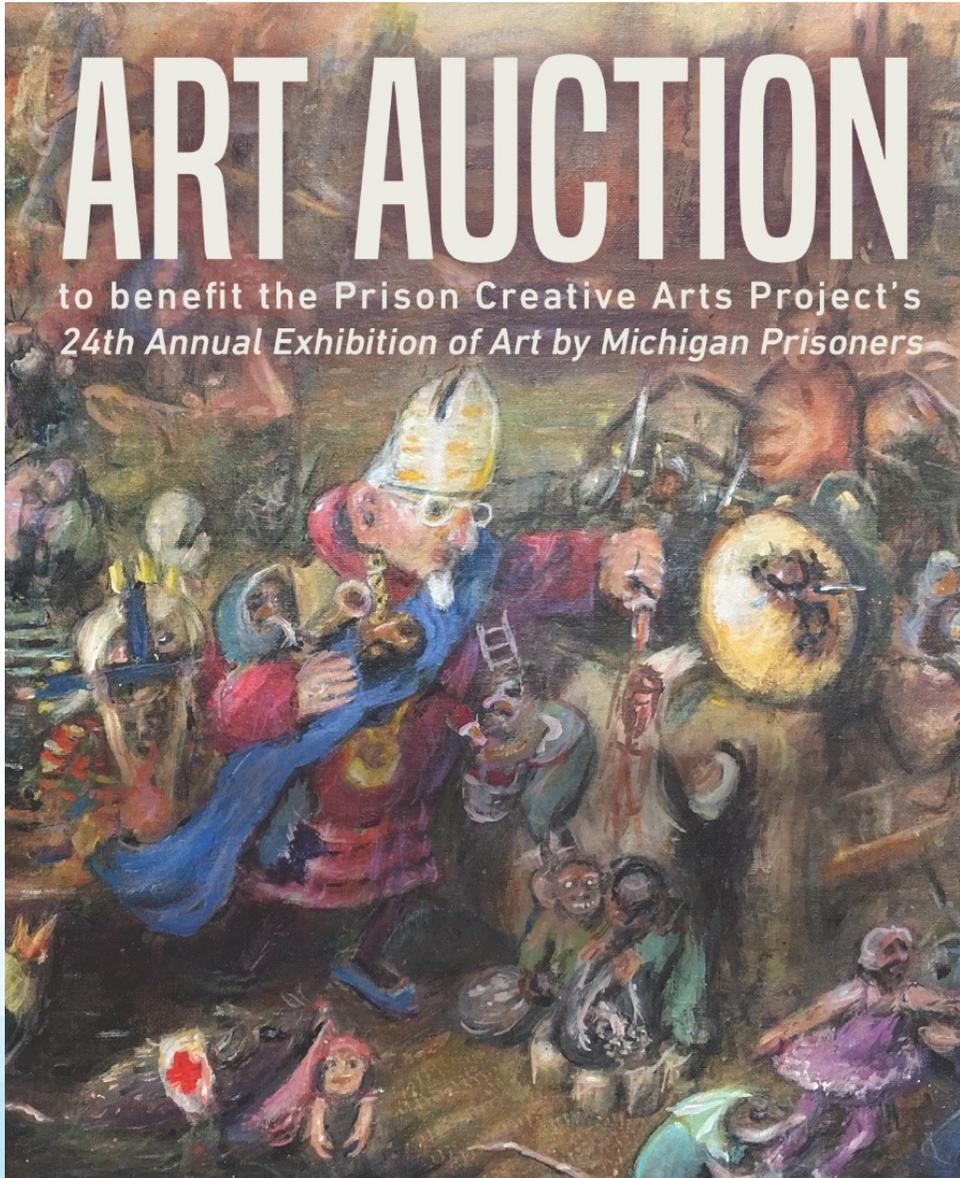
The Fall PCAP workshops have started, and groups of us are traveling to every MDOC facility in the state for art selection trips. We hope that each of you will get to see some of us PCAP folks in person at some point this semester, and for those of you whose hands we don't get to shake sometime soon, please know that we are thinking of you and wishing you well. You make our efforts worthwhile and our work meaningful. Thank you for all of the warmth, creativity, and intellect you share with us.



# Art Auction

Art selection for the *24th Annual Exhibition of Art by Michigan Prisoners* has started! Meaning...it's time for our annual fundraising auction! This is a separate event than the *Annual Exhibition* and includes some of the work donated to PCAP during selection trips. The art auction will be held Dec 8, 2018, on the University of Michigan Campus (Michigan League, Hussey Room, 911 N. University Avenue, Ann Arbor). All proceeds will support the upcoming exhibition.

This event is free and will feature artwork donated by incarcerated artists, PCAP curators, University of Michigan faculty, and Michigan artists. Please invite your family and friends to join us for an evening with wine, dessert, art, and connection with the PCAP community.



# ART AUCTION

to benefit the Prison Creative Arts Project's  
*24th Annual Exhibition of Art by Michigan Prisoners*

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2018  
6:30–9:00 pm

Michigan League,  
Hussey Room  
911 N. University Ave.  
Ann Arbor 48109

6:30 pm: Wine and Dessert Reception  
with Silent Auction  
7:30 pm: Live Auction Begins

*Untitled*, Andy Wynkoop, Acrylic on Board  
For questions, email [pcapinfo@umich.edu](mailto:pcapinfo@umich.edu)  
or call 734.647.6771

**M** LSA PRISON CREATIVE ARTS PROJECT  
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN  
**M** LSA RESIDENTIAL COLLEGE  
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

# *Letters to Buzz*

By **Vanessa Mayesky**

Many of you know Buzz Alexander, PCAP's founder and leader for over two decades. Buzz's health has declined in recent years and he is now in an advanced stage of dementia. He can remember people but is not able to talk. If you worked with Buzz, I'm sure you remember his vibrant conversation, quick humor, and insightful questions. Though we can't return to those times, we can support him with shared memories.

Janie Paul, Buzz's wife and the Senior Curator of the Annual Exhibition, has invited us to write Buzz short letters or cards. He responds well to receiving mail and would enjoy hearing from you. (Please don't expect a response.) Janie suggests a brief note with short sentences. (If you have a lot to say, and the postage available, you can send several short letters instead of one long one.) You might share a memory, a poem, or something nice about Buzz. Please mail your letters to the PCAP office, ATTN: Buzz Alexander. We will send batches of letters to Janie and Buzz. Thanks for your support.

## *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. Submissions will be received at this address throughout the year.

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.

## *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 or email [pcaplinkage@umich.edu](mailto:pcaplinkage@umich.edu) after you come home.

# One Thing More

by Kirk Firchett

We all have it. It's that one thing about ourselves that we can't fathom existing without. It's a definitive quality that nearly supersedes our absolute need to breathe. It is what drives us, inspires us, and gives us purpose and reason. For me, it is ART.

That's not to say that I place art above my Higher Power, for it is He who has gifted me with the talent and imagination which I hold so dear. My Creator created me to create.

For those of us whom have experienced any degree of incarceration, I believe you can concur that had we been formerly presented with the choice to commit our crime and to lose that one thing - many of us would not have. Yet, many of us did just that.

Fortunately, for me, my one thing went with me. It not only followed me behind bars - it grew, prospered, matured. It provided me a means of expression in an all-too-often expressionless world. My muse fueled my furnace with ideas of the incredible and wonders of the whimsical. The charismatic characters I coaxed to life on paper kept me from slipping into the insanity of the reality around me.

But alas, if an artist's pencil draws in the forest with no one to see it, does it really leave an impression? Sharing truly is caring when it comes to art, and though a picture says a thousand words - a thousand pictures could not adequately convey how grateful I am for the Prison Creative Arts Project.

The PCAP has given countless otherwise voiceless captives a blessed opportunity to present their work, and their hearts, to a community who is equally blessed because of it. This reciprocal symbiotic cycle, like seas to clouds to rain and back, nourishes each molecule involved in the exchange.

A desert monsoon, PCAP and the art-loving public continue to wash away doubt and despair and infuse the once hardened, now fertile, souls of prisoners with confidence and self-esteem.

As I am presented with this chance to describe how PCAP has furthered my growth as an artist, I reflect on hours spent on a lumpy bunk or in a noisy crowded dayroom, enmeshed in the development of something else - somewhere else. I didn't stray so far as to not share my creations with fans and fellow artists, repaying compliments with encouragement.

Countless proud moments followed, not only as the PCAP Selection Team chose from among my submissions, but as they also picked pieces from my contemporaries and those I'd mentored. Those annual visits were likened to a holiday celebration. PCAP's presence was a present, and yet they all so admiringly and attentively listened to each of us as we revealed our inspiration for our work - as though they were the more fortunate ones.

Anticipation lingered in the moments that followed as we and our families and friends eagerly awaited the *Annual Exhibition of Art by Michigan Prisoners*. Then - the coveted packet. Selling my artwork always came second to the patron's comments. Reading all of the powerfully positive feedback and overall amazement from those who attended the show - that was the true prize. The real reward. That one thing more.

Recently walking out of the confines of prison, and into the plethora of parole restrictions placed upon me, I have one thing that shall never be shackled. Many thanks to PCAP for recognizing that I am one thing more than I once was - better.



2018  
KIRK FITCHELL

# Calendar

## November - December, 2018

Art selection trips for *24th Annual Exhibition of Art by Michigan Prisoners*

Weekly creative arts workshops

Rolling submissions for *Michigan Review of Prisoner Creative Writing*, vol. 11

PCAP office closed, November 22-23

PCAP Art Auction, December 8, 6:30-9:00pm, Michigan League, Ann Arbor

PCAP office closed, December 24-31

## January - February, 2019

PCAP office closed, January 1

Final selection for *24th Annual Exhibition of Art by Michigan Prisoners*

Weekly creative arts workshops

Rolling submissions for *Michigan Review of Prisoner Creative Writing*, vol. 11

## March - April, 2019

*24th Annual Exhibition of Art by Michigan Prisoners*, March 20-April 3, Duderstadt Center Gallery

Weekly creative arts workshops

Book release and readings from *Michigan Review of Prisoner Creative Writing*, vol. 11

Rolling submissions for *Michigan Review of Prisoner Creative Writing*, vol. 12

Linkage Project Workshop Day, April 6, Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA)

## 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  
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pcapinfo@umich.edu  
www.prisonarts.org

### PCAP Faculty

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

### PCAP Staff

El Chen, Graham Hamilton, Mary Heinen,  
Vanessa Mayesky

### PCAP Special Projects Staff

Azhar Aboubaker, Caleb Foerg, Fernanda Pires,  
Jonathan Smith, Cozine Welch, Jr.

### Annual Exhibition Curators

Janie Paul, Senior Curator  
Alyssa Baginiski, El Chen, Nelly Emlaw, Graham  
Hamilton, Lenae Jefferson, Charlie Michaels,  
Jason Wright