

PCAP NEWS

June 2022

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**

Spring greetings Prison Creative Arts Project artists, writers, performers, and community members! I can hear bird calls and rustling trees outside my window, sure signs that winter is finally behind us. These days of early spring always make me appreciate our beautiful state and the myriad landscapes that Michigan has to offer.

Just two months ago we celebrated the opening of the *26th Annual Exhibition of Art by Michigan Prisoners*, welcoming family members, students, visitors, and artists to the gallery for the first time in three years! The exhibition was an incredible success and lifted our collective spirits in anticipation of the years to come. The quality of the art in this year's show was impeccable; after reviewing hundreds of artworks PCAP curators selected 714 works for inclusion in the show. We exhibited work from 443 artists from 25 prisons—quite a feat following a year without art selection visits!

The installation of the exhibition in the gallery was beautiful; I am so eager for you all to see it in the DVD. Again and again visitors remarked on the creativity, originality, and ingenuity of our exhibiting artists. Visitors purchased 376 artworks and 268 artists had sales in the exhibition. The *26th Annual Exhibition* also had a full calendar of public events including an opening reception, a keynote address by Dr. Reuben Miller, and an event for families and loved ones of exhibiting artists. Several returning artists spoke at the opening night reception and talked about the meaning of art making in their lives and the connection and community that PCAP has provided. As I spent time in the gallery, I was reminded of the incredible power of physically standing before a piece of art, carefully looking at it, taking it in and seeing new details, and appreciating the efforts, talents, and intentions of the artist who created it. While the option to have a digital show greatly improves our ability to reach new audiences, there is really no replacement for standing before a work of art.

Once again, we are cautiously optimistic that we will be able to offer in-person workshops inside prison this fall. It has been two years since PCAP offered in-person workshops and I can say emphatically that our students and volunteers are eager to facilitate workshops once again. Facilitators and participants in the PCAP correspondence workshops have demonstrated admirable resilience and managed to forge connections and engage in artistic collaboration across significant distances these past two years. But nothing can replace the community and collaboration that happens during an in-person workshop.

I know that facilitators and participants will all welcome the ability to improvise once again! Improvisation is one of the most playful and joyful parts of PCAP workshops and one that has been nearly impossible to replicate through correspondence. I also can't wait to attend the final performances of our workshops once again. They are always very meaningful, moving, and entertaining. It is one of the best perks of being the Director of PCAP!



Opening night at the *26th Annual Exhibition*

Frequently Asked Questions Answered

by **Phil Christman**

Hi, PCAP family,

My article for this month's newsletter includes some information from the November 2021 PCAP newsletter. If you read that piece, it'll seem familiar. I want to get this information out to folks on a semi-regular basis. However, there's some new material throughout, and some new writing prompts under Question 11.

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:

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

I'm going to take a moment to answer some frequently asked questions.

1. How do I get involved?

Write something and send it to the above address. Eventually, if nothing goes wrong with the mail on either end, I or a volunteer will get back to you, either to say, "This was cool; we're publishing it" or "We're not publishing it, but here are some suggestions and ideas you can use in your writing." You are then welcomed and encouraged to ask further questions, which I or a volunteer will answer to the best of our ability/capacity. That's not a very systematic program, but it's what I can offer at the moment, and it's a chance to grow and develop as a writer, and it's something to do!

2. Can you read/give me advice on/publish my novel or other book-length work? Can you ghostwrite my book?

No. We often get these sorts of requests but editing a person's book for them is a huge time commitment for which we don't have the volunteers; the *Review* itself is all the book we have time and resources to publish. We are happy to offer commentary on submissions to the *Review* that we don't publish, as commenting on dozens of small manuscripts is a manageable job that a large group of volunteers can accomplish. But that's all we're able to do.

However! A group that may be able to help you with this is:

Prisons Foundation
2512 Virginia Avenue NW
#58043
Washington, DC 20037

Disclaimer: I don't know these people. Their website says that they help "prisoners publish their books on Amazon.com." They give "information and advice" for free, and they offer "paid services for editing, typing, designing covers, and uploading manuscripts."

3. Is it worth trying to self-publish my book?

It just depends on what you want from the experience. Self-publishing successfully is hard in some of the same ways that getting published by a company is hard, and also in some different ways. It tends to work OK for people who have built a following already by some other means, or by people who have a book that fills a preexisting need. Otherwise, the book tends to just sit there selling a few copies every month or year. But that's the outcome for plenty of people who go through "traditional" publishing, too, so maybe it's not a bad idea. I would *not* pay a lot of money to self-publish a book.

4. Do I have to go to college to be a good writer?

Absolutely not. It helps—it means you can encounter a lot of skills and ideas very fast. But lots of great writers didn't go to college, or didn't study literature in college, and lots of people who've been to college become lousy novelists. Formal education is one path. Formal education also really helps with getting *published*, which is a whole different issue.

5. What do I have to do to get good at writing?

Read a lot; read critically (not in the sense that you are sitting there angrily criticizing everything you read, but in the sense that you're asking a lot of questions: why did the writer use this word rather than another one? Why is it structured the way it is, in the order it is? If I liked it, what are the things the writer did that I liked, and why did I like them?). Write and show it to people. That's the path. Every good writer is following that path, whether or not they're rich and famous. That includes lots of the people who write or have written for the *Michigan Review of Prisoner Creative Writing*. I want to name specific people here, but I'll inevitably forget someone and hurt the feelings of a writer I admire, so I'll just be vague instead.

6. How can I make money (or more money) writing?

I get this question a lot and, every time, I feel a stab of pure empathy for the person asking it, because it's one I ask myself regularly. The short answer in my case is "If I knew, I would quit my teaching job and just write all the time!" There isn't a lot of money in the writing game—or there is, but it's not distributed very efficiently. (A handful of writers who have big publishing behind them tend to monopolize most of it!) In my experience, people who write are just fascinated by the process, and they stick to it because they like it. As that happens, other opportunities, some of them paying, slowly roll in. But it takes forever, so you have to like writing itself and pursue that and hope it goes somewhere, rather than saying, "Ah, I shall become a poet and get rich that way."

7. Why do you use postal mail rather than JPay?

I generally avoid using JPay except in emergencies—largely because I'm infuriated by the existence of a private organization designed to provide expensively, and with no effective public oversight, what the postal service does cheaply *and as a public utility*, for everybody. We're worried about a potential world in which there is no postal mail because we all shifted to using services like JPay, which then jack up their prices, as private monopolies inevitably do. We know that this is a pain in the neck and we're sorry. We just can't do it.

Another reason PCAP doesn't use JPay is because we cannot set up an account for our organization. Many PCAP staff members and volunteers have volunteer status within MDOC facilities. This prohibits us from having personal correspondence with people inside. Using personal JPay accounts could put our volunteer status at risk. -Vanessa Mayesky, Associate Director

8. Can we be pen-pals, or can you provide me with a pen-pal? Especially a pen-pal of [whichever gender the person is romantically interested in]?

Sadly, no. For PCAP to continue to do the work it does, it has to be *all about that work*. In order to comply with MDOC restrictions on people writing to people in multiple prisons at once, we can't correspond with people about non-PCAP-related matters.

9. Can you recommend some books on writing?

Yes. For just getting started, I love *Writing Down the Bones* by Natalie Goldberg. There are a lot of copies of that one floating around. For learning how to read good (and bad) books in such a way that you can learn how to write from them—and for many other reasons—I like John Gardner's *The Art of Fiction* and *On Becoming a Novelist* and Stephen King's *On Writing*. For harder, technical stuff, Samuel Delany's *About Writing* is a masterpiece. *A Poet's Handbook* and *Rules for the Dance* by Mary Oliver are pretty good. PCAP has done its best to encourage organizations that collect books for Michigan prison libraries to grab up any copies of these books that they can, so look for them in the library.

10. Where else can I publish my work?

Two answers to this question. If you're a fairly experienced reader and writer, with a strong sense of what you like to read and what you like to write, *and you really don't want to be pigeonholed as a "prison writer,"* you should send your work to a journal/magazine that publishes that kind of work and see what happens. You should start with journals/magazines that have a lot of prestige and that you can't imagine getting published in, and then work down from there. (I don't do this, because I'm too silly to take my own advice. But it's good advice.) I know that's very general and vague, but this is the kind of thing I'd be *really* happy to talk further about in correspondence; this counts as a "PCAP business" question. "Dear Phil Christman: I read what you wrote in the PCAP newsletter. What I like writing is mysteries/essays about politics/memoirs. What are the magazines that still publish those"—or whatever. I would be very happy to do a little research for you if you can give me a little direction about what you're looking for.

That's the first answer. The second answer is for those of you who write mostly for self-expression, or to describe your experiences as people in prison. Here are some options:

- a.** The American Prison Writing Archive wants nonfiction writing about people's first-hand experiences with prison. If you write to them at:

American Prison Writing Archive
Hamilton College
198 College Hill Road
Clinton NY 13332-1218

... they will send you a brief explanation of their project and their paperwork.

- b.** Prison Legal News publishes a lot of work by prisoners, though this too is more nonfiction/journalism. Write to them at:

Prison Legal News
PO Box 1151
Lake Worth Beach, FL 33460

- c.** Lately we've been getting a lot of informational essays that read like class term papers. I'm guessing that this has something to do with the Calvin Prison Initiative and other efforts to bring college-level writing instruction to people in prison. (I'm a

huge fan of these efforts, and very proud that some of my own beloved undergrad mentors and professors have been involved in the Calvin Prison Initiative.) We don't tend to publish these sorts of pieces unless they're unusually stylistically interesting or eloquent (see next question), but I read them with admiration. A publication that does seek this work is the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons*. You can reach out to them at:

Journal of Prisoners on Prisons
c/o Justin Piché, Assistant Professor
Department of Criminology
University of Ottawa
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
K1N 6N5

- d.** The Marshall Project also publishes prison journalism by prisoners. One writer who I know and respect a lot had a bad experience there (they changed his title and some of his content without his permission), so bear that in mind. Still, they're out there. So is PEN America, which a lot of you know about; they give out an annual Prison Writing Award.
- e.** The PCAP office has a list of other publishing opportunities for writers in prison. Please write to them to request a printed copy. The list is also available online at <https://myumi.ch/d91Gx>.

11. What kind of writing are you looking for?

I'm going to write more about this in future PCAP newsletters—a kind of introduction-to-literature series for people who'd like one. But basically, we're looking for work that a person could read and enjoy reading without feeling a strong preexisting interest in either the author or the topic, because of the creativity, originality, and/or care with which the work is written. That's a good working definition of what literature is: A piece of writing that you can imagine people reading *for the writing itself*. (That definition doesn't cover the entirety of what we call "literature," but no definition really does; this one does it well enough to be going on with!) Here are a couple of prompts that I like because they force you to think about language carefully:

- a.** In the 1970s a guy named Georges Perec wrote a novel called *Life: A User's Manual*. If you had eight pages to give someone a user's manual for being alive, what would you say?
- b.** Suzan-Lori Parks is one of the greatest living writers in the English language, in my opinion. One thing she likes to do is take famous names from history and give them to people who are living in unglamorous circumstances. For example, her great play *Top Dog/Underdog* is about two brothers named Lincoln and Booth. Lincoln is a working-class Black man who dresses up as Abraham Lincoln (he has to wear whiteface makeup) so tourists can pay him to take pictures with them. Booth ekes out a living playing card games. Over the course of the play, though, they find themselves weirdly falling into the roles that their famous names impose on them—Booth must assassinate Lincoln. Take two or three of your favorite names from history, and apply them to regular people who are just doing stuff. How do the names seem to change their behavior? How do names influence us?

- c.** Write a love poem. Do not mention love, hearts, passion, or anything sexual. Do not talk about how beautiful the beloved person is. Try to make the reader feel love without mentioning love.
- d.** Write a review of a piece of art—a painting, a novel, a record or mixtape, a TV cartoon for kids, whatever—that doesn't exist, but you wish it did.

Till next time!

Phil Christman

Editor

Michigan Review of Prisoner Creative Writing

Introducing Emily Chase

Hi Artists!

I'm Emily, the new PCAP Arts Programming Coordinator. I am beyond excited to be working with all of you. My role will be to focus on PCAP's annual exhibition—from managing selection trips to hanging the art.

I'd like to tell you a bit about how I got here. After a life-changing class as a student at U-M taught by Janie Paul many years ago (thanks Janie!!), I decided to start my career as a public-school teacher in New York City, where I taught art to middle school kids that had basically been kicked out of regular schools. It was there I realized how vitally important creative expression is for every human. I decided to focus my career on creating opportunities in the arts for people who often get overlooked or forgotten. Eventually I moved back to Michigan, and I've come to PCAP after nine years working at a non-profit in Lansing where I managed arts programming for people with disabilities, mental health diagnoses, and court-involved youth. In this role, I facilitated art classes that mostly dealt with painting, watercolor, collage, and drawing; designed and managed community art projects for my youth artists; and planned, prepared, and installed all exhibitions.

I have a bachelor's in visual art and a bachelor's in psychology from University of Michigan, a master's degree in Urban Education from Mercy College in Bronx, NY; and I am a few credits away from completing a master's degree in art therapy and mental health counseling at Wayne State. The more I learn, the more I am reminded that all people, regardless of their circumstances, should have access to the benefits of art.

I have already spent hours with your artwork from the *26th Annual Exhibition*, and I am continually impressed by the creativity, skill, emotion, and concepts I see in the art. I can't tell you how excited I am to get on the road this fall and meet you, hear about your creative process, and see what you have been working on!



Announcing: *We Bear US*

by **Sarah Unrath**

This July marks the international debut of a unique UK and US prison art exhibit. In the depths of the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown, 31 people isolated in prisons in the UK and US produced extraordinary artworks exploring personal experiences of incarceration.

Artist Faye Claridge sent each participant a letter inviting creative responses to the Warwickshire symbol of the chained bear. She paired two folk art paintings from the two countries, showing different treatment captive bears. These, as metaphors, provided inspiration for the remarkable artworks presented in *We Bear*.



Parker Ayers, *We Bear Artwork*, Paint and Ink, 2021

The *We Bear* artworks were made in the most difficult of circumstances, in the middle of a global pandemic, and communicate sincerely a range of experiences of being incarcerated.

They were created for a one-off exhibition in the UK, with Coventry Biennial, and attracted a staggering 52,068 visitors. Engagement from audiences and everyone involved was astonishing. Participants said they grew from the professional feedback and personal development in the opportunity and the results they produced are breathtaking.

In response, Arts Council England (ACE) has extended project support, allowing *We Bear* to travel to the US and be showcased at the hugely popular Ann Arbor Art Fair on July 21–23, 2022. PCAP has been a partner in the project from the start and is now collaborating as co-curator for the Art Fair exhibit. Its team will run workshops and events for exhibit visitors, thanks to support from The Guild of Artists and Artisans.

Online events are also planned, to reach a global audience, and to connect with Novus, the prison education provider who partnered to support UK participants through lockdown.

In addition, an online StoryMap is being created by Faye Claridge so Art Fair visitors and audiences from elsewhere can experience the project in depth, with behind-the-scenes documentation, correspondence with participants and additional insights into each of the participants' artworks.

We want to thank ACE and Faye, and we congratulate all the brilliant artists involved.

“ I hope this can give a glimpse into the creative minds and talent that reside in prisons and impart some insight into the effects of mass incarceration on our populations.

~ Darryl Rattew (US Artist)

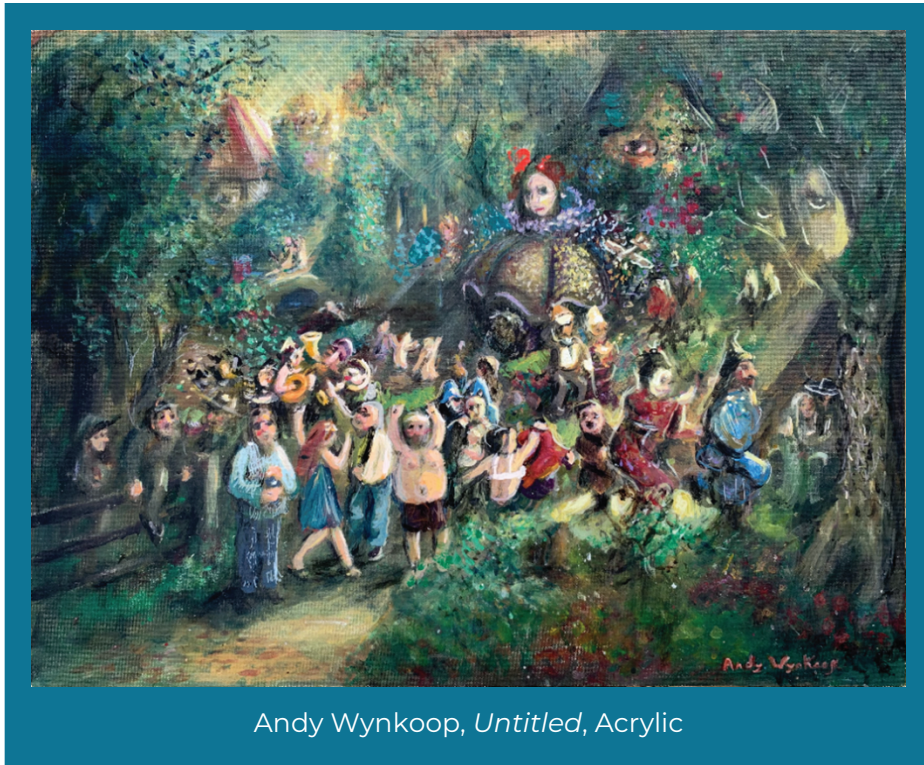
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Shared Humanity: New Rotating Traveling Exhibit

PCAP will be taking your donated artwork on the road and bringing it to venues across the state. The purpose of the exhibit is to create dialogue about the wide range of subjects that artists inside make art about and connect viewers to the artists through unifying human conditions.

Our first stop is Silver Maples Retirement Neighborhood in Chelsea, MI. Their spunky gallery curators have requested we make sure to bring artwork in that challenge the residents and shakes them up a bit. We're up for the challenge!

Sales of artwork in the traveling exhibit will be used to continue the development and impact of PCAP. Thank you to all the artists who have donated pieces. We greatly appreciate your support!



Andy Wynkoop, *Untitled*, Acrylic

Giving Back Opportunity: 2022 Art Auction

Has PCAP impacted you and your work? Interested in giving back? Consider making a significant contribution to PCAP by donating a piece of art to the 2022 Art Auction!

100% of the funds raised go back to supporting the *27th Annual Exhibition of Artists in Michigan Prisons* (Spring 2022). The auction will feature artwork by artists in prison, PCAP curators, University of Michigan faculty, and other local artists.

This event will be held on Saturday, December 3rd, BOTH in-person & virtual. Now friends near and far can join in on the fun!

Selection trips for the *27th Annual Exhibition* will begin in October, and you can designate pieces for the 2022 Art Auction when we come and visit. We can't wait to see you again and hear all about what you've been working on!

PCAP is going to ArtPrize!

PCAP is thrilled to sponsor three artists from the Linkage Community to compete at the 2022 ArtPrize.

ArtPrize is an independent international art competition in Grand Rapids, Michigan. It celebrates artists working in all mediums from anywhere in the world. For 18 days, in September & October, art will be exhibited throughout the city. Awards totaling \$450,000 will be given directly to artists through grants and prizes to support their ambitious work.

Linkage Workshop Day

What an event! On April 16th, we hosted our annual Linkage Community Workshop Day at the UM-Detroit Center. A day full of laughter, creating, community, and eating! We were honored to have Jennifer, Writing Coordinator at the U-M Stamps School of Art & Design, join in on the fun and support artistic career development! And a BIG thanks to the students and faculty at the Stamps School for all their donated art supplies to the artists! Finally, we at PCAP know good food and want to give an extra shout-out to local business ZZ Market & Grill in Detroit for catering the event.

If you or any of your friends are interested in joining our Linkage Community, contact us when you get home.

- call 734.647.6771
- write to us at 1801 East Quad, 701 E. University Ave., Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1245
- message us on social media @prisonarts
- email pcapinfo@umich.edu

We would love to continue to support your artistic practice upon release!

Update on PCAP's 27th Annual Exhibition of Artists in Michigan Prisons

by **Emily Chase**

Hi everyone! We have a few exciting announcements about our annual exhibition. First, you may notice a change in the title of the exhibition this year. Instead of the *Annual Exhibition of Art by Michigan Prisoners*, it will be called the *Annual Exhibition of Artists in Michigan Prisons*. This change was made after discussion with PCAP's curatorial and staff teams, where it was agreed that the new title emphasizes your practice and skill as artists.

Second, we plan to return to in-person selection visits this Fall starting in October. It is never too early to start preparing your work, and we look forward to seeing what you've been working on and talking face to face!

Using Source Images: Inspiration vs. Making Exact Copies

by **Martín Vargas**

I am Martín, curator, and workshop facilitator with PCAP. I exhibited work at PCAP's *Annual Exhibition* for 23 of the 45 years I was incarcerated and have been asked to write on: "The difference between using source images for inspiration versus...making exact copies." First, I believe there is absolutely nothing wrong with copying from sources like magazines, album covers, monthly periodicals and so on. Art students everywhere are often asked to go to museums to draw sketches of masterpieces painted by old masters. There's nothing wrong with doing this to hone your skills. However, PCAP does NOT encourage or condone reproductions for our exhibit. Regardless of how well you reproduce these works, you shouldn't do it for financial gain or personal recognition.

I ain't hating on you, and there are certain laws that allow you to copy work that is in the public domain. Check out these copywrite laws in the library. They're dry but informative and will tell you which works of old art can be copied without breaking the law. If for some reason you absolutely must copy someone's picture or work, give them their props just as you would expect everyone to give you yours. Copyright laws should be treated just like every other law, DON'T BREAK THE LAW, and expect to be regaled as a great artist. Many aspiring artists out here try to get accepted into famous art schools to be taught the skills that many of you have. You are gifted with self-taught technical abilities that so many wish they had.

I know that all you have been practicing your craft and coming up with new material for the *27th Annual Exhibition* at the University of Michigan. I have to say, first, that the *26th Annual Exhibition* went so well that I was proud of being so connected to PCAP. People LOVED your work!!! I had the privilege of giving five tours to guests, students, and professors and they were absolutely impressed with it! They asked a lot of questions about where we do the art and what the conditions are like. I was fortunate to have a piece done by Montney that had the hall with fellas gathered around a cube at one of the temporary facilities. People were blown away when I explained that the dark lighting and crowded scenario was exactly how our work was created inside. Things like this is what they don't know out here and they're searching for facts about the prison environment. Maybe you can keep this in mind for one of your next creations.

June – November

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

June – July

26th Annual Exhibition artist report and artwork shipping

26th Annual Exhibition artists receive sales report and revenue

We Bear US at Ann Arbor Art Fairs | July 21 – July 23

27th Annual Exhibition call for art

August

Exhibit videos sent to MDOC facilities

Shared Humanity at Silver Maples | July 30 – August 31

September

Weekly workshops begin at select facilities

October

27th Annual Exhibition art selection visits begin

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
Phil Christman, Ben Gaughran, Megan Holmes,
Ashley Lucas, Toby Millman, Eugene Rogers,
Cozine Welch Jr., Isaac Wingfield

PCAP Staff

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

Annual Exhibition Curators

Senior Curator: Janie Paul
Curators: Emily Chase, Jeff Clark, Caleb Foerg,
Charlie Michaels, Vince Mountain, Bryan Picken,
Sarah Unrath, Kimiko Uyeda, Martín Vargas,
Mae Wilson



PRISON CREATIVE ARTS PROJECT
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN