

PCAP NEWS

November 2020

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 Interim Director

by **Nora Krinitsky**

Greetings, Prison Creative Arts Project participants, writers, artists, and community! It is hard to believe that we have been living with the COVID-19 pandemic for more than six months now. I remember the early days of this crisis when we thought we might be able to visit prison again this fall. But alas, the restrictions on visitation continue, as do the restrictions on travel from the University. We may not be able to resume our normal programs until next year. In the meantime, I have worked very closely with the PCAP staff and Executive Board to create a new program that we can do remotely—the correspondence workshop program.

The PCAP correspondence workshops are structured similarly to our in-person workshops; facilitators correspond with a group of workshop participants at one facility for twelve to fifteen weeks. Over the course of the workshop, the group reads a pre-selected book to provide a shared basis for discussion of themes such as social justice, community, and the power of arts. Each week, facilitators will mail an interactive arts activity packet to all 20 participants in the workshop. They work together to create the activity packets that include prompts for reflection, discussion, and creation along with guidance about reading the workshop book. Those prompts are based in theatre, creative writing, or visual art. Participants are invited to send PCAP their responses to these prompts.

At the end of the workshop, the facilitators and participants will assemble a collection of their works as a final project, such as an anthology, a zine, a script, or a catalogue. Every member of the workshop will receive a copy of the final project; participants will also receive a PCAP certificate. This new program requires a lot of collaboration and coordination and I'm so grateful to all of our facilitators and the PCAP staff for their hard work and patience as we figure out how to do this well. We are certainly learning as we go! One benefit of the new program is that we are able to offer programming at facilities that we normally cannot travel to on a weekly basis. If correspondence workshops are not offered at your facility this semester, they may be next semester. So please do keep an eye out for an announcement about new programs in the new year.

We have all been finding ways to bring normalcy and comfort to our chaotic lives right now and I've been finding comfort in reading lots of fiction—new books, recommendations from friends, and old favorites. Lately I have been reading *East of Eden*, by John Steinbeck, a favorite novel of mine since I was a teenager. It is a beautiful family saga with vivid descriptions of the American landscape and a captivating story about the families we are born with and the ones we build. As I was reading, this passage struck me and made me think of PCAP and all of you:

"And this I believe: that the free, exploring mind of the individual human is the most valuable thing in the world. And this I would fight for: the freedom of the mind to take any direction it wishes, undirected...This is what I am and what I am about."

Even as we continue to face unprecedented challenges, I hope that you all find freedom of the mind to take any direction you wish. I do believe that it is the most valuable thing in the world and that is what PCAP is also all about.

Message from PCAP Curators

Dear artists,

Here is an update on where things are at with our *Annual Exhibition*. As you know, we had to cancel last year's exhibition because of the COVID-19 pandemic. All of your work that we collected last fall is stored in our dedicated PCAP studio on the University of Michigan campus. This space is locked and environmentally safe for your work, which is covered by university insurance. We intend to exhibit this work next March as long as things go according to plan. As you know, conditions due to the pandemic are in flux and the university is developing their regulations and policies accordingly. We are also developing alternate ideas for an exhibition that would be for small work submitted to us by mail. We will let you know about this opportunity soon.

In the meantime, we would like to tell you a bit about ourselves, the curators. The curator group is currently made up of nine people who are artists, designers, or people involved in art. It takes a lot of us to do the work! We work with the PCAP staff but are not full-time employees of PCAP. We do this work because we love your work, we love visiting with you and we love the exhibit. It enlivens our own work and our world. As you know, you see various

combinations of us at the selection visits. Only Graham actually visits all facilities. The rest of us have full-time jobs, other projects, or are students, so we don't have that capacity. Each fall we make up a plan for visiting each prison and then figure out which of us can go on each visit. After the visits are over, in January, we have a two-day session in our studio where we all look at all of the work together. Then, we mount the exhibit, with help from volunteers, in March. In addition to this, we work on other PCAP projects such as choosing art for the publicity image, doing tours for the public at the exhibition, and working on an archive of work by all of you.

Here are some short messages for you from some of our curators. The others will contribute for the next newsletter. We miss you and can't wait to see your next works!

Jeff Clark

I make my living as a book designer, and this week I'm wrapping up an art catalogue that features stills from a documentary film about 6-man high school football in remote Colorado. I'm also working on a book of essays by a Suquamish poet. I'm really mourning the fact that we won't be able to spend time inside with the artists this year; I've grown deeply fond of these encounters, both for the utter delight of getting to see so much thought-provoking artwork and to have so many brief but meaningful conversations. I value the solidarity that our community, inside and out, encourages.

Graham Hamilton

I was first introduced to PCAP about 15 years ago while working as a Director of Exhibitions at the University of Michigan School of Art & Design. During that time part of my job was supporting art faculty, graduate students and advanced undergraduate students exhibit their art publically. Initially I began to assist PCAP with the installation of the annual exhibit and eventually redesigned the gallery space to better exhibit the many original pieces brought in through this show. Not long after I began to attend curatorial trips to facilities and immediately was taken by the remarkable interactions with the artists responsible for this amazing show. I currently work for PCAP as an Arts Programmer and curator and work creatively to manage our visual art programming. During my time with PCAP one thing I have always focused upon is expanding opportunities for artists to participate and to help generate potential funds to support their lives. My current role reaches into many interesting spaces through many fascinating people and I feel tremendously fortunate for all the success and challenges that come with such a job. Seriously missing making the trips this fall and hope to see everyone soon.

Charlie Michaels

I work as a staff member and part-time faculty at the University of Michigan where I teach socially engaged design, a process that engineers and designers working on big problems (like sustainability) use to understand what people need. I studied photography and drawing, but my artwork now is mostly drawing. I've been working on a series of black and white pen and graphite drawings that are inspired by a short story about a city that is constantly under construction because it falls apart as it is being built. I have been a curator with PCAP since 2012 and every year I look forward to driving all over the state to see all of you and your work—there is always so much to see and so much to talk about! I love these visits and conversations and showing your work off to visitors in the gallery. It won't feel the same this year, but I'm looking forward to when we can safely visit again.

Janie Paul

I am a visual artist—mostly drawing and painting—and a teacher, retired in 2017 from the University of Michigan. I love working in black and white with charcoal and I also love color and texture. Right now, I am making a series of drawings that combine sections of greys to black in charcoal with layered oil pastel colors. Mostly though, I am working on getting my book about the art of our *Annual Exhibitions* published and hope it happens soon. I know you do too! I have been curating this exhibit for twenty-five years and this year I will miss our lively conversations and being inspired by your art. I treasure seeing how deeply committed you are to your art. This has always helped me.

Martin Vargas

I am a 2-dimensional artist and am exhibiting at various places around Michigan including The Whitney Building in Detroit, Om of Medicine in Ann Arbor, Ledge Craft Lane in Grand Ledge, and Clinton County Arts, in St. John. COVID has forced us to be creative this year and, as a PCAP curator, I encourage artists to continue creating as much art as you can NOW. PCAP will be back inside again and people really do want your work out here! Know too that there will be so many distractions when you get out that you won't be able to create art like you're doing in there. So, keep that in mind, and keep creating art! Stay healthy too, there's many places for you to show and sell your work, and we'll help!

Faculty Press

PCAP faculty member Isaac Wingfield published an op-ed in Bridge Michigan, a non-partisan news website, entitled "Public conversations on justice should include the incarcerated." He writes:

... an important voice is missing from our public conversation on race and criminal justice: people who are currently incarcerated. Men and women who are incarcerated have valuable stories to share, and until we hear their stories we cannot understand the full impact of the criminal justice system. Meaningful reform can only come when we consider the voices of people in prison.

Linkage Project

Would you like to stay connected with PCAP when you return from prison? The Linkage Project offers a community to join and the opportunity to build a network with other artists, writers, and performers. Members receive invitations to workshops, PCAP volunteer opportunities, and cultural field trips. Though in-person activities are suspended for now, our members stay in touch by text and video chat. If you would like to participate, please write to Vanessa Mayesky when you have a release date or email pcaplinkage@umich.edu after you come home.

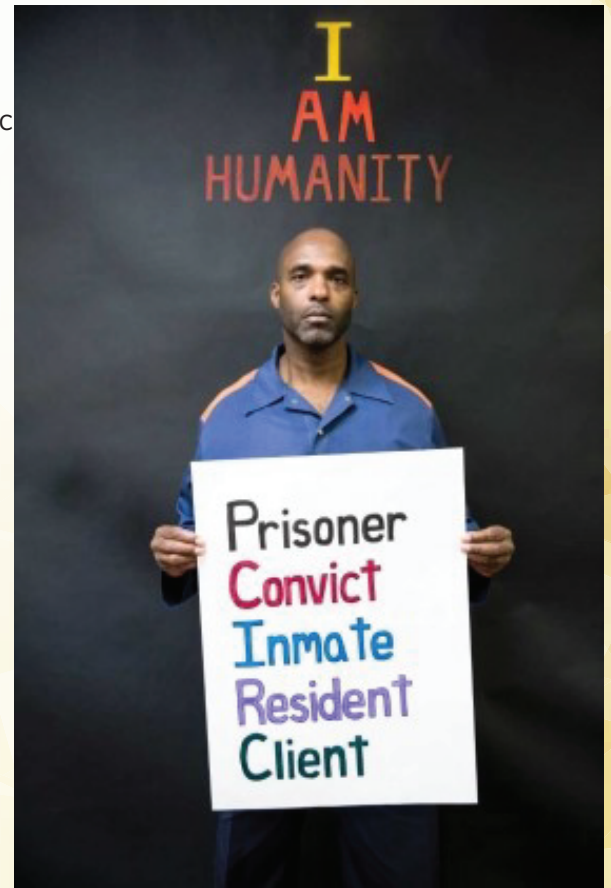


Photo created by members of Isaac Wingfield's Humanize the Numbers photography workshop

Literary Review: Call for Submissions

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 13, appearing in 2021. Writers are notified with individual responses.

Send submissions to the PCAP office ATTN: Phil Christman.

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 or BOP ID number;
- Your current address;
- A short paragraph about yourself/your writing that will be published alongside any accepted piece.

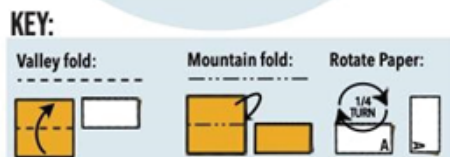
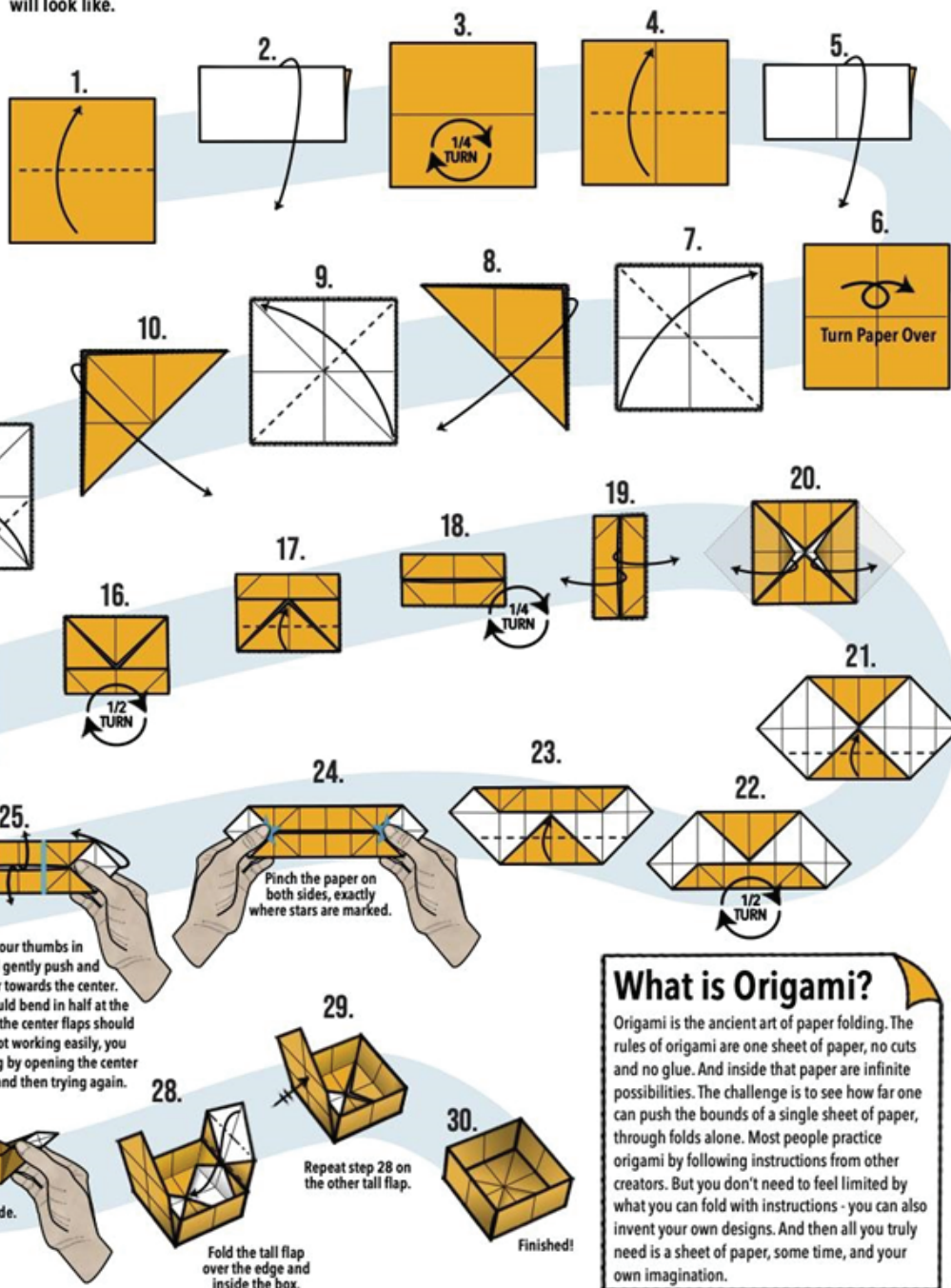
Thank you for your outstanding pieces of writing that you have submitted thus far. We strongly encourage you to continue in this creative process and send us any and all of your work. We will continue to read and respond to all submissions, though the process has been slowed due to COVID-19. Thanks for your understanding.

Art Activity

PCAP's community workshop for people who have returned from prison meets weekly by video chat. Members explore different artistic practices and offer each other support. Lately they have been learning origami. We invite you to give it a try!

Origami Masu Box

GETTING STARTED: You will need a square sheet of paper (see instructions below). Start with the side of the paper that you want to show on the outside of the box facing up, and the side you want hidden facing down. For example, if you are using recycled paper and one side is white and the other side is printed, start with the plain white side facing up to make a plain white box. Also, if any step is confusing, it can help to look at the next step to see what the finished fold will look like.

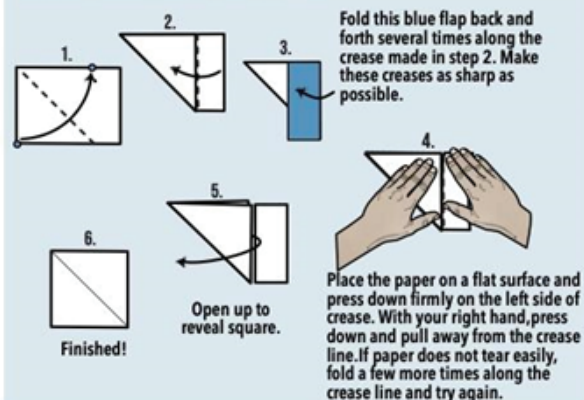


What is Origami?

Origami is the ancient art of paper folding. The rules of origami are one sheet of paper, no cuts and no glue. And inside that paper are infinite possibilities. The challenge is to see how far one can push the bounds of a single sheet of paper, through folds alone. Most people practice origami by following instructions from other creators. But you don't need to feel limited by what you can fold with instructions - you can also invent your own designs. And then all you truly need is a sheet of paper, some time, and your own imagination.

How to Make a Square

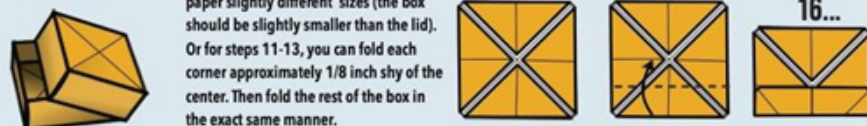
Start with a regular sheet of paper (like a call sheet) and follow these instructions to make a square sheet of paper:



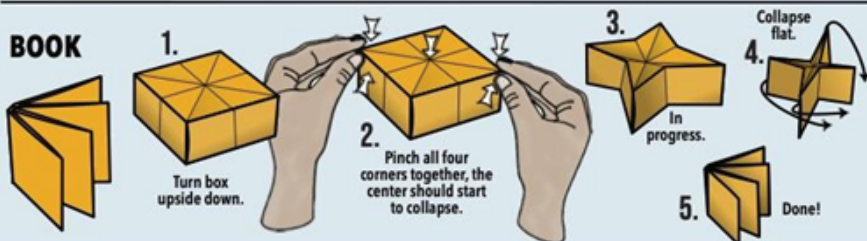
Variations

BOX and LID:

You can either make the two sheets of paper slightly different sizes (the box should be slightly smaller than the lid). Or for steps 11-13, you can fold each corner approximately 1/8 inch shy of the center. Then fold the rest of the box in the exact same manner.



BOOK



Finding growth and joy through social distancing

by **Fernanda Pires**

Editor's note: This story was originally published on PCAP's website.

ANN ARBOR—Artist and entrepreneur José Rivera spent 10 years in prison. Being isolated gave him the ability to learn more about himself, reflect on his past actions, read lots of books, become a critical thinker and be stronger mentally. It was when he became "a do-er" instead of "a say-er."

From behind bars, he designed the first Detroit Forever 313 logo, which after his release in 2018, would become an important mark of his clothing business. Today he has his own store in Detroit, with dozens of designs and logos that are printed on hoodies, tees, hats, tank tops and more.

"During my time, to try to escape, to try to feel like I was outside of the fences, art was what actually helped me," Rivera said. "I had to look inside myself, find my desire, and actually take the initial step to make it happen. It became a passion [and a business]."

Rivera is only one of the narrators who share insights about how to navigate physical separation and avoid letting isolation be a hazard during this COVID pandemic, in a new video series called *Living on LOP: What We Learned in Prison*.

Loss of Privileges, or LOP, is when an incarcerated person is forced to be confined and restricted in a way that is more severe than the ordinary prison restrictions. Typically, this looks like a 24 hour lockdown with the exception of food and showers, and no access to other prison "privileges" such as commissary, recreation time, the attendance of "special" events—including religious events.

Created by formerly incarcerated artists Patrick Bates and Cozine Welch, the video series features stories of formerly incarcerated people who will share the lessons they have learned through their time in isolation that can now help us all adjust to this unfamiliar territory after being hit by the coronavirus.

"While incarcerated you learn a method of survival that, in its way, is deeply rooted in human ingenuity. You are forced into subhuman conditions where your ability to express as a living being is severely curtailed and contained," said Welch.

The *Living on LOP* series hopes to highlight that ingenuity by offering to society as a whole the lessons and coping strategies formerly incarcerated folks learned while serving time inside, according to Welch.

For Bates, the goal of this series is to teach people during these times of confinement that you can utilize the same lessons and skills that incarcerated people use to cope with their isolation.

"In prison, we are deprived of our humanity as well as the privileges freedom gives. People are getting their small dose of something being isolated! In prison we suffer from something that is far beyond any social distance," he said. "We are trying to serve as consultants to those who are being affected as well as give a voice to those that have been completely deprived of their freedom and humanity."

Welch and Bates are working closely with a group of scholars and students from the University of Michigan. Each video is about 4 minutes long and features a different theme that is topical to the lockdown experience such as exercise, mental health, rationing food, making the most of small spaces, dealing with uncertainty and creating daily structure.

Associate professor Ashley Lucas, who is also the former Director of the Prison Creative Arts Project and the current Co-Primary Investigator for the Carceral State Project, said she had no doubt about the strength of the project when Bates shared his first thoughts with her.

Instead of the angry reactions that have been explored in some YouTube videos—you don't know prison, you don't know what we've survived—this project shows the world that the formerly incarcerated population has something positive, beautiful and wise to give to the world, Lucas explained.

Finding growth and joy through social distancing cont.

"I've been really touched by all the prison work I've ever done, but especially in moments of crisis like this. People in prison and people who've come home feel very disempowered, they want to contribute," she said. "Isolation is a very new reality for most of us, and unfortunately, super familiar to people inside."

For Welch, it is important to find ways to fulfill the human need to exist beyond just basic living, but also the need to survive mentally and emotionally. "This is where the ingenuity of human beings forced to live as prisoners finds both its expression and its desperately needed purpose," he said.

This project is a partnership of the University of Michigan's Prison Creative Arts Project, The Carceral State Project, A Brighter Way and formerly incarcerated participants. All the videos are up on the Carceral State site (sites.lsa.umich.edu/dcc-project/living-on-lop/).

Stages "tear down" razor fences in prisons across the globe, empower incarcerated artists

The new book—*Prison Theatre and the Global Crisis of Incarceration*—explains why people make theatre behind bars and how the arts transform their lives

by **Fernanda Pires**

Editor's note: This article was originally published on PCAP's website.

ANN ARBOR—Ten years of travels visiting and researching prisons around the world. University of Michigan associate professor Ashley Lucas spent the last decade immersed in learning and understanding the work and impact of prison theatre companies in Australia, Brazil, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, Uruguay, Ireland, the United Kingdom, and many in the United States.

All this travel to try to comprehend what theatre can accomplish beyond entertainment in non-traditional settings and why people engage in performance practices in these challenging contexts.

"Why do people in prison make theatre?," Lucas asked. "Why does it become such a big deal for all people involved?"

Lucas answers these and many other questions through case studies and testimonials from incarcerated artists in her new book *Prison Theatre and the Global Crisis of Incarceration*, coming out September 3rd. Her writing offers a distinctive blend of storytelling, performance analysis, travelogue, and personal experience as the child of an incarcerated father.

"This book is one of the only books with a global scope talking about any form of prison artwork," Lucas said. "I have been uniquely privileged to visit so many different countries, so many different theatre companies, and to see the full range of what people can do with theatre inside these facilities and why it matters to them."

I spoke with Lucas about her journey to put together this ten-chapter book, which deeply discusses a range of performance practices tied to incarceration. Lucas's work looks at the ways in which arts practitioners and imprisoned people use theatre as a means to build communities, attain professional skills, create social change, and maintain hope.

What is different about this book from the previous books about theatre in prison?

The biggest difference is that most of the people who write these books are people like me, people who run prison theatre companies, people who have studied this work as scholars. And most of those books are written from the perspective of people like me saying, "This is why we thought it was a good idea to go inside prisons and make theatre available to incarcerated people." What I was really trying to find out as a researcher was, "Why do people in prison do theatre?" I have been meeting a lot of people who were in prisons and saw theatre as a vital part of their lives, as something that they really needed to get through the week, make a better life for themselves and the people around them in that prison, and connect with their families. All of these things were central to the core of who they saw themselves to be.

Stages "tear down" razor fences in prisons across the globe, empower incarcerated artists cont.

And did you get the answers you were looking for after this 10-year research journey?

Yes! Most of the time if you offer anything that sounds even vaguely fun in a prison, everybody wants to show up. If there are nice people, particularly people from the outside world, who don't work for the prison, it is really exciting to get to see them. It is great to get to see people of the opposite gender. So if you're in a women's prison, and you haven't seen men in a long time, that's really exciting. If you're in a men's prison, and you haven't seen women in a long time, that's exciting. And then when you actually get to the theatre, it is so unlike anything else that happens in a prison.

Usually, [a program volunteer] comes inside a prison and says, "I know how you should be. I know how to make your life better. You need to quit drinking, quit using substances, learn how to manage your time, your life and your emotions." In theatre we come in and we say the opposite. We ask, "What matters to you?" "Here is a text that somebody else wrote," "This character is a super flawed human being and that's why they're interesting," "Is this person who's interesting to you?" "What would you bring to interpret this really famous character differently than anybody else in the world has ever interpreted?" That's the magic of theatre, that it's always personal to the people who are making it and to the audiences receiving it.

So meeting new people can be a hook, but there is much more to it, correct?

Indeed. In prison, we're not supposed to give people personal things. We're supposed to flatten everybody out and make them wear the same thing. Make them eat the same thing, make them go through the same routine, tell them that they are not special. We also teach people to keep to themselves and not open their hearts, not open their minds, not share about who they are, and what they believe in the world.

The theatre totally messes with you. Theatre says, "Give me your soul and learn that it is safe to give of yourself emotionally, learn that it is safe to connect with other people, learn that it is safe to show us who you really are, we might fall in love with that person." I'm not talking about romance. I'm just talking about life, we might see the beauty of your humanity if you let us in.

In theatre, we open up in remarkable ways, and then it's not used against people for the most part. There were some times when things went wrong, but overwhelmingly the experiences that incarcerated people recounted to me were about being allowed to be something other than the worst thing they ever did. The world tends to presume that all that matters about an incarcerated person is why they're in prison, and the theatre gives people a new way to introduce themselves to others.

Once incarcerated people are hooked by theatre, what is their involvement like?

It's different for different people. For a lot of people, it gives them a discipline that also teaches a bunch of other things. The way we [usually] discipline bodies in prison is to say you have no choice. You will wake up at this time, you will go to this job. You will do this thing that we have made you do. In theatre, you have to make a commitment. You have to be very self-motivated to show up to the rehearsals and memorize your lines, and give of yourself emotionally and open up and take risks. Your level of commitment profoundly affects all the people around you.

Whereas in everything else in prison, we say "You're on your own." Whatever you're doing, you're doing it just for you. And when you're in a play, the entire cast depends on you. If something happens to one of those cast members—they get shipped to a different prison, they get released, they have a medical problem, if they're punished and not allowed to be a part of the play—the entire cast gets reoriented. They have to restructure to continue to take care of each other and the work of art they are creating.

So you're asking people who've been told to shut themselves off from everything, to all of a sudden make a commitment to it. An artistic community cannot function without the full participation of all of its members. And it makes people realize that their actions have an impact on others. That they have something to contribute, they matter in a good way and not just a punitive way. They're capable. And they can have a real impact on shaping something that belongs to them, but also equally belongs to the other members of the theatre troupe, and to some extent to the audience, because the audience becomes an invested player in this whole exchange as well. All of those things become really high stakes. And it also gives them a way to connect with the people that they love and the outside world even if those people never get to see the play.

Prison Theatre and the Global Crisis of Incarceration is published by Bloomsbury.

July - December

November - December

Video of *25th Annual Exhibition* sent to MDOC facilities

Artist packet mailed to artists in *25th Annual Exhibition*

Rolling submissions for *Michigan Review of Prisoner Creative Writing*

Online preview of *25th Annual Exhibition of Art by Michigan Prisoners* (<http://myumi.ch/MEIIE>)

Correspondence workshops in select facilities.

January - February

New correspondence workshops begin in select facilities

Acceptance letters mailed for *Michigan Review of Prisoner Creative Writing*, vol.13

Rolling submissions for *Michigan Review of Prisoner Creative Writing*

Online preview of *25th Annual Exhibition of Art by Michigan Prisoners* (<http://myumi.ch/MEIIE>)

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

Nora Krinitsky, Interim Director
Jose Casas, Phil Christman,
Ashley Lucas, Sarah Messer, Becca Pickus,
Eugene Rogers, Katie Rohwer,
Cozine Welch, Jr., Isaac Wingfield

PCAP Staff

Graham Hamilton, Mary Heinen,
Vanessa Mayesky, Fernanda Pires

Annual Exhibition Curators

Janie Paul, Senior Curator
Curators: Alyssa Baginski, Jessy Butts,
Jeff Clark, Graham Hamilton, Charlie Michaels,
Vince Mountain, Jason Wright, Martin Vargas
Trainees: Caleb Foerg, Bryan Picken, Kimiko Uyeda