ART FROM THE INSIDE

February 22-April 5, 2017
Diane Kidd Gallery, Tiffin University, Tiffin OH

Co-curated by Professor Lee Fearnside and Dr. Steven Hurwitz
Funded in part by the Ohio Arts Council
One in four Americans has a criminal record, which has a huge social and economic impact (Chettiar, Eisen, Fortier, & Ross, 2013). Perhaps as a result, public attitudes about the criminal justice system have shifted; the public favors more support of rehabilitation programs, including counseling, job and educational training. In general the public is still uncertain about how to reintegrate the formerly incarcerated. While a majority of the public believes it to be a good idea to support former inmates, they don’t want their communities to be adversely affected by the process, either by living near reformed criminals or having to pay more taxes (Opportunity Agenda, 2014). While public perceptions suggest Americans do not favor extreme punishment, they do not generally regard incarcerated people as potentially full and equal citizens. Prisoners need to be humanized in public perception.

This is especially important for organizations like Tiffin University. Tiffin University has a large school of Criminal Justice and Social Sciences, with about 80 alumni who majored in Corrections, and over 600 alumni who majored in Forensic Psychology. The exhibition “Art from the Inside,” presented by the Diane Kidd Gallery, gives a glimpse into inmates’ experiences, and may help to humanize prisoners — both for those who may work with them directly and for the community at large. This exhibition includes artwork by prisoners from Grafton Correctional Institution, Grafton Reintegration Center, Ohio Reformatory for Women, Marion Correctional Institution, and by Dean Gillispie, an exonerated citizen. This project aims to connect art appreciation, contemporary art and the criminal justice system, and to provide a professional exhibition opportunity for an under-represented population of artists. Some of these artists made art before prison, some of them discovered art while incarcerated. Their work is neither outsider art nor prison art — simply art. It is sometimes raw, sometimes polished, but all good.

When Dr. Hurwitz and I started discussing this project two years ago, I had no idea what I was getting into (although he did try to warn me). Through this process I’ve met some dedicated people, seen some powerful work, and heard important stories about the power of art to directly affect lives.

Lee Fearnside
Associate Professor of Art
Director of the Diane Kidd Gallery
Tiffin University
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Community of Artists</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio Innocence Project</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grafton Reintegration Center &amp; Correctional Institution</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marion Correctional Institution</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio Reformatory for Women</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank You</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
They are a community of artists. They come from cities and towns all across Ohio. Some are professionally trained and some are self-taught. Some have been creating art for many years or even decades, and some are new to this. They draw their inspiration from many different places, and their work reflects very different mediums. From paintings to charcoal sketches and complex three-dimensional dioramas, to a four and a half foot Eiffel tower created from popsicle sticks. But they are all bound together by one shared and unique feature of their art — it was created while they were serving time as an inmate in a state prison.

Prisons can be foreboding structures. Typically found in rural settings, their most prominent physical features are the high stone walls or stainless steel fences topped with coils of razor wire with sharp, stainless or galvanized steel blades surrounding the property. Whether the institution has buildings spread about giving it a campus-like feel, or whether it looms like a monolith with guard towers, evoking images of a medieval castle, their unmistakable purpose of keeping those inside separate from the rest of the world is blatantly apparent. Whatever their differences or similarities, all of these institutions remain the most unlikely of locations to discover a community of artists.

Because of the physical and social barriers created by incarceration, prisons are one of the prime examples that Erving Goffman (1961), one of America’s most influential sociologists, describes as a ‘total institution.’ In our society, most people sleep, work and play in different places. Because of this, we also interact with different people in those spaces. As a total institution, all aspects of life in prison are carried out in the same place, in the presence of a large group of other people, all of whom are required to do the same thing. As an inmate, your activities follow a tight, pre-arranged schedule imposed upon you by authority figures in a formal set of rules purposefully designed for a single overriding purpose.

Dr. Steven Hurwitz
Professor of Psychology and Criminal Justice
As Goffman (1961) describes, when you live in a totalistic system it encompasses your whole being. When you go through your day with large groups of identically dressed people eating the same food and doing the same things, how do you maintain your individuality? When there is no physical escape from a regimented schedule designed with no regard for your wishes, how can you find a mental escape? The people you are about to meet in this catalog found solutions that were similar, but which provided means for individual expression. In a word, they found art.

When faced with the tedium of every day looking like the last one, these artists found their inspirations in different places. Ricky was thinking of walks in the woods near where he grew up when he painted a forest scene with wildlife. Ties to home are a common theme. Several artists talked about how their art helps them maintain a connection to family, even when relations are strained. Dean would send the three dimensional models he created home and arrange to give them to friends as a thank you for their continued support of him and his parents. Thoughts of family can produce poignant works. Dean’s mind was on the lost opportunity of having a family when his sister sent him a post card depicting a child and a horse. He held on to it for a while before deciding to attempt to paint it. Dean was in the midst of serving a 20-year sentence for crimes he would eventually be exonerated for, and this imagery was a perfect metaphor for his circumstance. As Dean painted the image, he purposely placed the child to the side of the horse’s front, so you cannot tell if it is a boy or a girl. Dean titled the work What Would Have Been as he reflected on how his life might have been different were he not in prison. Would he have a child? Would it be a boy or a girl? What would have been?

When Carey saw the snapshot of a little boy dressed up like a soldier, it brought back memories of when she and her brother would ask their father if they could dress up in his Navy uniforms. Their dad would proceed to tell them all about the significance of the different uniforms and all of the symbols and decorations adorning them. Mom would take photos to commemorate these special family moments, but Carey aimed to convey more than just memories with her charcoal drawing. To her the child represents the fact that everyone who ever served in the military is someone’s child, and she wanted to honor the sacrifice all families make when their child is serving our country.

While some artists create images spurred by thoughts of home and family, others chose to create works reflecting their life in prison and what brought
Willie has been creating art since he was young. As a teen in high school he liked to draw Indians and airplanes. These days he paints, and for a long time now, the subjects of his paintings have been the cells from the different prisons in Ohio he has been in. His entry for this show is rich in detail, even including the calendar sent to him from Willie’s Mid-America Cars Club. He titled the painting *A 10,950 Day View*. That’s an even 30 years. The amount of time he’s lived in a cell he shared with another inmate. When asked why he paints prison cells when others create art that takes them beyond the walls, Willie’s simple answer embodies art imitating life. He has been in prison a long time, so when he sleeps, he dreams about prison. Likewise, when he paints, he paints prison.

When you look at the mouth of the woman in Amber’s mixed media drawing made with charcoal and pastels, you are immediately drawn to the full lips that may remind some of a Rolling Stones poster. She hopes you find them alluring and that they will draw you in to see the pill firmly clenched in the teeth surrounded by those lips. Then you might notice the words she painted around the face from the Serenity Prayer, the mantra recited in twelve step groups since the 1940s, imploring divine help for those seeking to break free from drug addiction. When she looks at the painting, Amber says she sees pain and drugs as the ‘seductive siren’ that pulled her into its grasp. Art has been part of her life from as young as four, when she would make drawings of dresses and clothes and then create them for her Barbie dolls. She continued right through college where she studied art education and graphic design. Drug addiction robbed her of the passion she always had for art. Prison helped her rediscover it.

LaKiesha grew up as a fight fan, so it was no big surprise when she wanted to draw a photo of Muhammad Ali from a recent issue of Ebony Magazine. She was drawn to this particular image, which would be his last public photo, because he had his fists raised. To her it captured the boxer in the ring, the fighter for many social and civil rights causes, and the challenger in an unyielding final battle against Parkinson’s disease. As much as she wanted to capture the image in a charcoal drawing, LaKiesha was unsure of her ability to do so until a fellow artist gave her the encouragement she needed.

Not all of the stories behind the art in this exhibition are dramatic or pointed. Fans of the national pastime will be disappointed to learn Kerry’s depiction of a batter taking a pitch high and tight had nothing to do with baseball. She wanted practice creating movement, and set out to capture the ripples in his
clothing. Marvin used his #2 pencil to draw President Obama from a photo he saw that struck him because of the President’s grey hair. Having once made a drawing of the President eight years ago, Marvin set out to capture the physical toll the presidency had taken on Obama’s appearance. And then there is Kelli’s lion which she chose as her subject simply because she likes lions.

Art serves many different functions for this community of artists. It transforms time, and inmates have nothing but time on their hands. The monotonous daily routine does not offer much relief to the specter of seemingly endless time. But for the artist inside the walls, time is an ally. Some of the more complex creations can take as long as six months to bring to life. Ironically, if that same person were not in prison, the demands and vagaries of daily life would not afford them the amount of time necessary to concentrate on their art. More importantly, it occupies time constructively. It provides them with the motivation to create and to strive for excellence. Pride comes when someone looks at their work and says it is ‘good’ art — and not just ‘good for prison’ art.

Inmates do not have access to a lot of the supplies available to the rest of us. They are forced to be creative. Nail clippers are used to cut wood rather than a saw. And once the piece is assembled, coffee and tea are used as stain. Toilet paper becomes part of the process in making charcoal drawings. It is creativity that is channeled into things that make them happy and that they would not be arrested for doing.

Art can be transformative. It provides prisoners who have harmed others, and been a drain on their local communities, with ways to give back. Some donate their art work or sell it and give the proceeds to charity. At the Ohio Reformatory for Women, groups of women take plastic shopping bags brought in by staff and weave them into mattresses sent out to local area churches, who distribute them to the homeless to have something to sleep on besides the cold ground.
As total institutions, prisons serve their function well. It’s outside walls and fences, in combination with electronically controlled steel doors and interior gates locked with formidable looking keys, that in the words of one vendor are “built to last a life sentence,” provide efficient and effective perimeter barriers insulating those inside from the outside world. The men and women who enter these institutions as prisoners undergo a process whereby their individual identities are stripped and replaced with a collective inmate identity, that is expected to adapt to a highly regimented existence in which they surrender control to a ruling authority (Goffman, 1961).

Let there be no mistake that most of the individuals entering this world earned their way in by committing crimes. Most is a necessary qualifier as an acknowledgment to the reality that innocent people do sometimes end up in prison. That in fact was the fate of one of the featured artists in this exhibit, whose work was created while he was incarcerated, but who is participating in this show now under the auspices of the Ohio Innocence Project. Those whose guilt is genuine in some instances leave behind victims, and, in all cases, have somehow harmed society through their actions. They do not make sympathetic figures. Nelson Mandela, in his autobiography Long Walk to Freedom said, “A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens, but its lowest ones.”

Perhaps art’s greatest power is how it allows prisoners, whom many would judge to be amongst these lowest of citizens, to overcome their circumstances as residents of a total institution and develop a modicum of dignity. The 17th century poet Richard Lovelace penned this famous poem, To Althea from Prison, in 1642 (Shmoop Editorial Team, 2008). This gallery exhibit shows how true those words still resonate 375 years later.

Stone walls do not a prison make,  
Nor iron bars a cage;  
Minds innocent and quiet take  
That for an hermitage;  
If I have freedom in my love  
And in my soul am free,  
Angels alone, that soar above,  
Enjoy such liberty

Dean Gillispie

The art kept my sanity. With art work, you can create your own world all day long every day. I would go in and put my headphones on, sit down and do my art 1, 2 and 3 o’clock in the morning. The doors lock down at 9 and I’d sit up and just do art work. Luckily most of my cellies were into art or whatever, and they didn’t care about the lights being on or about all the crap I was doing in there. But it got you out, got you out of the prison, got you out of your cell. I wasn’t in the prison when I was doing art.

The diner was an idea I had to go back into the 50s, diners were popular back then. Let me tell you, when you’re in prison and you’re looking for some references, diners are hard to find references for. So I took bits and pieces of the ones I had seen, and that was just completely out of my head. The silver part is made out of pop cans turned inside out. The rest is made out of tablet backs glued together and popsicle sticks, paint and glue. Aluminum foil from cigarette packs, and the gumball machine is a light bulb with the bottom broken off and filled with seed beads. Its got a cigarette machine and a juke box. I probably had 6-7 months of working on it. It takes so long to get the parts and pieces together.
It’s one of my favorite pieces and most people who look at my stuff really like the diner the most.

The speedway garage was one of my later buildings, where I was really getting into making things look aged and older, just exactly the way they would be. The diner was more of a new look, everything is clean, crisp and refined on it. Then I got into doing realism type dioramas, and the speedway garage probably has the most detail in anything I’ve done. There’s little leaves laying around, beer cans, the lights over the thing are pop bottles tops. They look like the old style top lights. If you look at the door handles, they are dirty where they would be pushed opening and closing the doors. There’s bird crap on top of the lights. Just little details like that are what I really started putting into my dioramas, just to put you right there in that moment at that time. The way that stuff would probably look if you were digging around with those right now. I wanted to give things a look like you were right there in them. Like I said, the earlier stuff was more clean and real sharp, crisp lines and everything like that, but how long does that last in life? You know stuff starts breaking down and deteriorating. I would sit for hours just making a spot look old with this stuff that I called “bug juice,” which was just mixtures of real watered down paint, anything I could throw in it, coffee, tea, things like that to give it an aged look. I think my stuff started looking a lot better.

I started painting because I transferred from the closed max prison I was at, where I was doing the dioramas in a medium security prison, and we were absolutely not allowed to do that type of stuff. It was crazy cause your security level goes down, but the restrictions come up on your art. I went to the medium security prison, and basically it was artwork with acrylics, colored pencils, and chalk. That was about all you could do there. I had to start painting with acrylic cause that was all I was able to do at that time. I had a friend there that was at one of the other prisons with me, and he painted and he started teaching me how to do shading and things like that, cause I had never painted anything in my life. It was a lot easier, cause you could go into your cell at night,
and you’re not chasing stuff around all day. You’re not looking for stuff to put into your art, you just got it there and you create it yourself on the canvas. So when I left prison that’s what I was doing, painting acrylic paintings.

My sister sent me a postcard and on it was this kid holding a horse, and I looked at the picture and I actually had it long before I started painting. I always said, “man I’d really like to paint that, I’d really like to paint that.” As I’m painting it, you know it put me in the mind of what was going on in my life if I would have been in the free world. If I had a kid what would it have been, a boy or a girl, and what would’ve been the outcome of that? I actually titled it What Would Have Been. As I started painting it I took the identity out of the kid, of whether it was a boy or a girl, to just make it kind of a neutral kid. And I felt when I was painting about what would it have been like if I had a kid, what it would’ve turned out to be.
Every piece of work we did had to be sent out when it was completed. Everything got sent out on a visit, but it had to leave the institution. I’ve described it as if each one of these pieces of art were my children, and you like to look at them and show them off and things like that. I got a lot of joy out of my art being sent out, because you know my friends would come over to the house and visit my parents all the time. Then you know when I’m calling the guys and everything, everybody is like “holy crap man, that last piece you sent home man, that is unbelievable.” In the diorama stuff the detail is there, and just to hear them talk about it, they seen this or they seen that. And you know I always got these little things hidden in these dioramas. So to me, to get it out of there to the people I loved and cared for, for them to really enjoy it was gratifying to me, instead of having it sitting in there in prison in that environment.

Most people don’t have the opportunity to spend that kind of time on their art because they have to make a living at it. But here you’re using it to kill time and get out of prison, to seek a way out of prison and live in a different environment in your head.

Dean Gillispie spent 20 years in prison for crimes he didn’t commit. Convicted in 1991, Dean always maintained his innocence. Thanks to the efforts of Mark Godsey and other members of the Ohio Innocence Project (including former Ohio Attorney General Jim Petro), a federal judge overturned his conviction in December 2011. Dean is one of more than 20 Ohio prisoners who have been exonerated through the work of The Ohio Innocence Project since it was founded in 2003.
Ronald

What gave me the idea was I was looking through some magazines and I happened to see a ferris wheel, and I thought it would be kinda interesting to make one that would work without a motor, but where you could crank it by hand. So I made the wheels, I made little seats for the wheel, and once I put it on its stand on the axis, I put a wheel on it and rigged up a rubber band to like a little pulley system with another wheel. This way when you crank the wheel the rubber band would turn on both wheels and turn the wheel. I made it so all the seats would pivot just like it would on a regular Ferris wheel, so when you got to the top the seat would still be sitting level like it’s supposed to sit.

It’s good to find a hobby or find something that you feel you’re good at. And even if you’re not good at it when you first start, as long as you stick with it and persevere it gets easier. It’s a trial and error basis, but if you got nothing but time on your hands like we usually do in here, it takes up your time and gives you something to do. You know it has taught me business skills, as far as marketing my projects out there on the street and selling them. You know it helps keep me out of trouble.
I sat down to draw up a little scale model house and decided to build it and add some things to it. And inspiration was probably from my dad teaching me carpenter work.

There’s a long material list. Aluminum cans, aspen, wood, I got some cedar in there, black willow, cardboard, pea gravel, and sand. It’s quite a long list of materials I used to put all of that together. All in all it’s just a project that gave me self-accomplishment when I got done; you know, something I enjoyed doing.
1. Of Fate and Flawed Gods, cardboard, acrylic
2. Ex Nihilo, cardboard, acrylic
3. Dream 13, Super Position, cardboard, acrylic
4. Omnivoiciferous, cardboard, acrylic
5. (next page) The Birth of Venus, cardboard, acrylic
Fred

The work was inspired by the fact I think artists are supposed to be cultural watchmen in touch with the contemporary human condition. As a person who observes things that are going on around me I like to create artwork in this kind of aim.

When I was a really little kid I used to draw my own little stick figure scenes, I started drawing comic books every year. I’ve been making some type of artwork ever since I can remember.

These works are acrylic on five layers of cardboard. I like working with cardboard because it’s a material that is readily available for me. I can cut it into smaller pieces and reassemble it to make bigger paintings and still work it within the small confines of a cell.
Elwood

Various things inspire me to do my artwork. It might be emotion, a feeling, something I just see. I wish to just convey, communicate that idea to everybody. Most of my artwork is done in pen and ink. When I was a young kid I just picked up a pencil one day and started drawing. I graduated to pens, and then pastels. So I’d like to explore painting more, so I just started. I would like the viewer to take whatever message they can. Hopefully it’s something positive. I try to connect with people through something positive, something in nature, natural, flowing.
John

I used 36 gauge copper-tooling foil, sulfur for antiquing, and I used wooden tools to tool them out. I worked at the front and the back. I used glue and a hard-board art board. I’ve been making art for about 50 years. I just would like the viewer to see something different. That’s why I work with the copper-tooling, not a lot of people do it. And just show a different side of art work than drawing or painting.
Frank

I was drawing the picture for my child, my daughter, and you came by and told me about the art contest. I hope the whole world can see it.

I like to use pen or pencil the most. You know it’s a more personal self-expression to me. And I find I can do my best work with that.

I’ve been making art for as long as I can remember. I think I was around about five, five or six years old, and my mom, my mom had a boyfriend that was an artist. One day I came in the room and I seen someone’s artwork on the bed, and I couldn’t understand how you actually got a live person inside that paper, and that inspired me to be an artist.

Art is pretty much self-expression, anyone has artistic skills, you know, and it’s just them tuning in to find out just what the artistic skill is. Many have good and some have bad. Art is relaxing, it motivates you, it drives you, especially with me, it helps with stress, it helps with anger, it makes you happy if you really find yourself into it, and you can do it if you really sit down and try. A lot of people say, “Oh, I can’t draw that, I can’t draw stick people,” but what will you know until you try. It might be bad, it might be good; I’ve seen elephants that make pictures that’s worth millions. You know, so hey, it happens.
We made a lot of stuff for the churches and toy animals that we send to unfortunate kids around the world. But in the spare time I do more personal projects, and this time I made an Eiffel Tower. I did a small one for a guy, and I got a lot of compliments on it. It was only about a foot tall, and this one’s four and a half feet tall. It was a challenge I had, to try and make something pretty big with the least amount of materials possible. It’s four and a half foot tall and weighs less than a pound. It was a pretty interesting job.

I used mostly popsicle sticks and match sticks, and there’s some scrap wood around the wood shop. Most of it is glue, probably fifty percent of it is glue. The wood doesn’t weigh much but the dots of glue to hold it together probably weighs as much as the wood did. We’re not allowed to have any sharp saws or anything, so we use toenail clippers and sand paper. We cut them roughly to length with the toenail clippers and just hand-sand them to shape.

Really it’s to help pass the time. Some of the guys like sports, some guys do this; there are different cliques. I ran into a group of guys who like working with their hands, working with projects. We help each other out and that really helps pass the time. I’ve been incarcerated for three years, and before that I did flooring and carpet work. I’m used to using measuring tools and cutting, making things fit around obstacles, so I had a talent for putting things together before I got here. I just used that experience to help work on these projects. We take a lot of time and pride in making it. I know I’ve got over 200 hours into it. It’s not much material but it’s a lot of labor.
Jerome, Vic's Place, mixed media
So something happened while in prison that caused me to need an escape. I needed to do something. So I started doing art. A guy that slept next to me, I used to see him doing it all the time, so I told him I wanted to start doing it. So he showed me how to do it, and gave me a few materials, and I started creating things. For the first few years the things I made were copies of things I saw people making. After a few years, I wanted to create something different.

And I went on a journey with this poolroom, and a pool table. And I think the creation of this little piece I made, it came from my desire really just to be somewhere else. And I think what I captured in doing this, in making this piece, what I achieved was like a place of solitude. It was like my sanctuary. Because I would get in to it, first I just said I was gonna make a pool table you know. And then I would start thinking about when I was at home, that was one of my favorite places to be at, the pool hall. I wanted something elegant, I wanted something nice you know, and I just started going on this journey, it was an escape. Before I knew it, I think this is like my tenth pool table pool room I built, and every time I would make one it would morph into something else. I would get another idea to use a different type of wood and it just manifested into this, into a nice little pool table pool room that everybody so far can enjoy.

Art to me is an expression. An expression of things you can’t say in words. Art is a desire that you would like to convey. Art to me is a way that you connect with people without words. I think it’s beautiful when you can touch somebody or make somebody feel a certain way by something you make.

It’s a journey when you start making something, when you have a concept to make a piece. And then you start making it, once you get into it and you just block out everything else, you’re not even here anymore. Then the wood starts talking to you after a while, once you get to a certain point of the development of it, once you get the basic foundations of it, it’s like the wood tells you what it wants you to do. And it just comes out, that’s what art is to me.

We used toenail clippers, that’s the main part of any “much faker” is his toenail clippers, you gotta keep a good pair of toenail clippers. We also used sand paper, we’re allowed to buy different grades of sand paper through different companies through the institution. 80 grit is your basic sand paper you use. When we want to cut something and make grooves in it, or different circulars or whatever kind of shape
that you want to get out of it, we have to use the things that are allowed in any institution. Like paper clips, you know you got the small paper clips, you got the butterfly paper clips, they’re usually the best ones if you can find them. You straighten them out and you take the toenail clippers and you notch them, and you notch them, and then they turn it into something like a saw. And it’s just enough for you to saw the wood to get the desired shapes you wanna get.

Well I think the main message, if I wanted to convey anything to the people that are looking at it, that are viewing it, I would like them to appreciate the art, and then it’s the level of difficulty that’s different from anything else. I think I would just want people to understand, you know, that it took a lot. It’s a journey we go through to do what we do.

I think when you do these projects in here, most of the guys I know that have the time or the discipline to sit down and really create something like this with their hands, they’re not the same people they were when they came to prison. They’ve changed in ways that allows them to do things that can be appreciated, and that one day may be a financial benefit to them, you know. So I would just want people to enjoy my piece.
Alex

I’ve been making art since I got arrested; I got arrested in 2008. I did a lot of drugs when I was younger, so I see things differently than a lot of people do. You can make something different and unique out of everyday objects that a lot of people just walk right past and don’t even look at. I used raw earth I dug up out of the ground at the rec yard. And I picked all the rocks and roots and sunflower seeds out of it. The message in my art is if you’re crazy, be crazy. Don’t let what other people say inhibit you from being who you are.
That’s Barack Obama, President of the United States. This picture showed how much older he looked from the stress and strain of the job. It’s almost like they caught him at a time when he was involved in something; he just looked tired so I just decided to draw it.

Art is just something I do, of what I see, you know, when I see something I try to interpret it the way I see it.
I’m doing a life sentence. When I go to sleep at night and I dream, I dream about prison. So is a lot of stuff I paint, and I paint prison. But it’s from being locked up for awhile, I been locked up for awhile.

That was the cell that I was in for twenty years. That’s actually the top of my locker box, this was the blue towel that was on it. This is actually the color blue that they had on the wall. That’s where I put my wash cloth all the time, because they didn’t have a rack for me to put wash cloths and towels on, so I left it on the sink. That was like a rubber sticker, it stuck on the sink, I kept papers back there. This was a Kool-Aid dipper. You dip the dipper out of the Kool-Aid. I left that up there. This is a mirror, that’s actually a picture of a conduit on the wall in the background. That was part of the toilet and that was the chair we had in the room. The cell was about, uh, maybe 12 to 14 feet long, and it was two people in there. The bed is right by the side of this chair, it’s the bottom of the top bunk. I was on the bottom bed.

I’ve been able to draw my whole life. And I think the first thing I drew was Indians and airplanes. I painted on the streets. But this is the thing, if I probably wouldn’t have came to prison I would not be painting the way I am now. I didn’t have time to do it. I mainly worked on cars with my father, and then being in here I got more time now so I’m a better artist.
Art has meant everything to me. I made a living doing artwork my whole life and I really struggled and strived to get what I wanted and to be where I am. The artwork I did for this show is basically a reflection of where I grew up and things that I did. I was raised in the country, so those things reflect on it a lot. Just most of the paintings that pop out of my head are from times when I was out and fishing or hunting or something like that. It takes me back home to where I grew up and where I lived, and it was generally what I’d seen on different occasions, you know, walking through the woods. It’s probably more therapeutic than anything.
I’ve drawn my whole life but I’ve never considered myself as an artist. I just drew anything I could get my hands on. It gives me an opportunity to step out of my current environment and kind of take a vacation.

That is the statue, Lady Justice, or Blind Justice. And I guess for me she represents duality of statements, perhaps that justice is blind, and of course the weight of the scales, guilt or innocence. I felt like for me she represented a fundamental flaw in the justice system. I feel like the blindfold is a little outdated and that the scales of justice tip predominantly in the favor of those who judge us, while the innocent and wrongly convicted sit back and wait for justice and truth to be upheld. I want people to look at it and maybe start thinking about what it could mean to an inmate.
Rhonda

My artwork is a cry. It’s a cry no one hears but they can only see in the pain of the eyes. My artwork has nothing to do with anything but the eyes. Not the mouth, not the nose, not the hair. It’s just a deep thing people don’t see or hear because no one is there listening.

Art allows me to speak. It allows me to cry without crying with literal tears. It allows me to scream without making a sound. It allows me to ball up without giving up. It allows me to fight without physically putting my hands on anyone. It’s a release.

Before prison I wrote a lot of poetry in my pain. My family wanted me to draw and sell it when I was free. But I didn’t believe in myself enough. The pain wasn’t deep enough. I had to deal with people wanting to fight me because I was a gay black woman. But it wasn’t deep enough cause I had a whole world to escape in.

I had to find an outlet in myself to explain what I’m going through, to explain what I feel, and it was someone else’s pain that I could put down on paper to show that I feel it as well.
In this world, no one is perfect. But we all deserve a second chance. And in this world, we only see what we see at the time and the moment that things happen, but we never see behind the closed doors. Although we live in glass houses, no one is knocking on everybody’s door or breaking down the windows to look in and see what’s happening behind those windows, those glass windows. And there’s a lot of people hurt and broken who just want to be heard.
I am here to represent the Kind Wear polymer clay jewelry, and this is a group of women, there are approximately ten of us, who create beads, crosses, and earrings from polymer clay. All of that goes as a fundraiser for an organization called Kind Way.

Kind Way is a nonprofit organization that was formed by a former warden of the Ohio Reformatory for Women. In her career she saw many individuals leave the institution, and she thought they were going to be successful in the community, but they would return to prison. Upon discussing with them why or what happened, she began to see a need for an intensive reintegration program. She created the program called Embark, it’s an intensive reintegration program that’s two-fold. It does a lot of cognitive restructuring through a program called Getting It Right, and then it has a recovery element called Celebrate Recovery, and the Kind Wear jewelry is a product that is available to the public for donations that help support this nonprofit organization. The really wonderful thing about the Kind Wear jewelry is as incarcerated individuals we get to have a direct link to the women and the men who have gone through the program, graduated, and are in the community because the proceeds of the jewelry helps support them in their successful reentry back into the community. We have part of that lifeline between here and there.

It’s sort of a metaphor, the package of polymer clay is really a block of clay, it has no form, no shape, no beauty, and the end product is in the hand of the artist, and that’s really true of our lives while we’re incarcerated. We have the opportunity by the good choices we make to improve our thinking and our life skills; we get to turn our lives into a thing of beauty. So just as they sit there and create those beads into something that’s magnificent, we get to create our lives into something magnificent, in the process of being able to pay it forward. We make each bead individually, as each life is individual that we create for ourselves, but it’s joined together in almost the circle of life. The process is we get to join again the circle of life in the community. That’s what the bracelet is symbolic to me about.
The Underground Railroad quilt was created by fifteen women who wanted to make a meaningful contribution to the Black History Month celebration here in the Ohio Reformatory for Women. Our Chaplain was sort of the co-creator of this project. She purchased the fabrics and gathered together a group of women, many of whom had never quilted before, and the quilt we created is a sampler of quilts that would have been used during the Underground Railroad. Each block in the quilt is representative of an entire quilt that would’ve been used during the time the Underground Railroad was functioning in Ohio. Often times quilts were used as signal flags to the conductors on the Underground Railroad. Those quilts would be hung on a clothesline or they would be hung on a fence, and they were out in plain sight for people who had eyes to see what was really the signal they were trying to get across. For example, if the quilt called the Bear Paw was hanging that was a signal to the conductor that we were to follow the trail in the woods, the animal trails would lead us to food and water. Another quilt block you might’ve seen would be one with a sailboat. Cleveland was the area most escaped slaves were taken to so they could cross Lake Erie and get to Canada to be safe. When the quilt with the sailboats was hanging outside of a building, that would tell you that those were free Black sailors that were going to put you in a boat and take you across the lake.
Each of us sat down with all of the fabric that was available. We sat down with the available patterns of each block and each person decided to do a block. Whatever block spoke to them, that was the block they decided to do. The center panel of the quilt is painted by one of the quilt makers, and she did that using a sponge and a paintbrush creating the center panel. We all worked together assembling our blocks and then we assembled the entire quilt together. We met every Friday for two and a half hours, and it took us over six months to make that quilt, because most of the women who worked on this quilt had never quilted before. Not only was it a great experience of learning to quilt, but it was an even greater experience of building community with all the women who worked on this. Often we would share different stories from our childhood, or different stories we knew from the Underground Railroad, stories about each one of those quilt blocks.

I think the thing that is most important, particularly at this time in our political environment, is that the rhetoric throughout this past six months has been very vitriolic and very unkind. When I think about the Underground Railroad and what that quilt represents, it represents a number of people who literally risked their lives to save the lives of others, and to me it’s symbolic of the angels of our better nature. I hope when people look at that quilt they think about what it means to be community, what it means to do for those who have less and who desire to have personal freedom, and I hope that they will be inspired to do what they need to do in their own communities to create an environment that fosters freedom and justice.
Vicki, Vannie Mat, plastic bags
I moved into a cottage called Reintegration. Reintegration is about pre-release and it’s about preparing yourself to go out to the real world again. We work 8 hours, 8-10 hours a day. The one thing we do there is the Vannie mats, and that really touched my heart because there’s so many homeless people in the world, and they’re out in the winter and the rain. They brought the Vannie mats into us and we just started doing them. And it just saves lives if you think about it. The homeless men and women are off the ground and they can use it for warmth, they can use it to lay down. We even make pillowcases out of the plastic too, so they can put like something in there to make themselves a pillow.

The process is you start with a garbage bag and you fold the garbage bag in fours, then you cut off the ends, and then you take and cut that in fours. And then you just start creating, putting them together and hooking what we call plarn together, and then we form a ball. And then once we get a ball that’s probably 10 inches wide, then we start crocheting. And they are all made with a single stitch. You start with the chain and just do single stitches to create the Vannie mat. It takes about 720 bags and about two months of continuous work to make one.

The group that does the Vannie mats, they talk and make plans about the future while they work. They say “I think I’ll make this one for a gentleman,” so they add like blue bags to it, or “this one, we’re going to make this one for a female,” and we’ll just add pink to it. It brings teamwork and it brings togetherness and you get to learn something about each other as you’re sitting in a circle working on the Vannie mats.

For me it’s about giving back. It’s about putting a little bit of me into something that’s going to help somebody else. And to me that’s such an awesome feeling, to know that I’m helping somebody out there instead of always being a taker, like I was before I came here. It’s about actually helping people today. I never thought a grocery bag could create something that was so helpful to people.
Art to me is the cultivation of everything I see, everything I feel, everything I understand or don’t understand. I feel satisfied when these elements converge to become a unified and cohesive work of art that will both convey a message or an idea, any message or idea. When it is also aesthetically pleasing to the viewer, then I feel like I’ve succeeded in expressing my inner self in the drawing, and it’s just meant to provoke thought.

This drawing represents the allure and seduction that drugs have over some people. I myself am a recovering addict, and when I look at this piece I see myself. I see pain, I see a seductive siren pulling me into her grasp. What you see is a mouth and a pill between the teeth around it. I’ve written the serenity prayer, which is a prayer said as a mantra by many recovering addicts, in hopes by saying this prayer it will take away some of the intensity the drug has, and the pull the drug has on us.

I feel like drug addiction is a disease of the spirit, and it’s only through God we can escape it. This drawing illustrates on several dimensions what drug addiction is. To a drug addict, they could look at this most beautiful woman, with full lips, a pretty mouth, and the pill in between the teeth.

I have been creating art since I can remember. When I was four years old I would make drawings of dresses and clothes, and then I would create clothes for my dolls. Around the age of twelve or thirteen I started with oil paint and created some paintings that way. When I was eighteen I went to university and studied art education and graphic design. That’s always been my passion, not only to create art but to inspire that in others, so others can create art that provokes thought and emotion and change in society. I became addicted to drugs and the biggest thing I lost in my addiction was my passion. It’s only in coming to prison that I’ve rediscovered that passion.
This baseball player, I chose it for the simple reason that the flow of the movement I was trying to learn how to do creases a little bit better and things like that. I chose her because she was one of the first black women to enter a library. To me she spoke of someone who has come out of oppression, and the fact you can’t really keep people oppressed. She signified a very powerful woman to me, so that is why I chose her.

My mom was an artist, so it was for me a way to kind of be closer to her, a kind of a connection with her. The first things she taught me to draw was the Star of David. She would give me a picture and say ‘Here draw this.’ I’ve always been able to duplicate anything. But to actually work with shade and texture and things like that, this is a new experience for me.
I just started drawing in July of this year, so I would like to say that my main motivation for drawing is just to express myself. I feel like sometimes, like in this world we are so pushed to be perfect. In art there is no standard, you know it’s ok to mess up, it’s okay to go outside of the lines, but yet still create a masterpiece. I first start an art piece and I have this clear white paper right in front of me, and sometimes I’m afraid to mess it up with the drawing. Before I start each piece I mess the paper completely up and then just sculpt from there. I eliminate that fear of messing up right from the beginning.

One is a picture of a family. It expresses what I feel is unconditional love from her being married and welcoming their newborn son. The picture was striking to me because she had just lost her mother to cancer, and I can relate to that because my mother passed away, and I could see the hurt in her eyes, but also the joy for, you know, her new marriage and her newborn son.

The other picture is of an Afghan girl who has completely captured my attention. It is the story in her eyes without even saying anything that drew me to her, and it shows one of terror and fear and one of, you know, being exposed to so much at a young age. And an older version of her tells the exact same thing.
I had never taken any art classes before. My dad would bring me papers, like reams of paper, and I would sit for hours. I had a whole drawer of markers, and watercolors, pencils, crayons, anything that I wanted. I would draw for hours. When I came to prison I started using it as a coping skill; it’s an outlet for me. It helps me to not really worry about things that are going on around me, it helps me focus and it’s kind of meditative. They started an art class where the teacher was teaching us charcoal drawing. He would show us things that we would normally learn in art classes, and we just started working with charcoal and I really liked it. I could make my own like tools, and I learned how to layer it and take things away to get different effects.

We worked with him for over a year and I was just thinking I wanted to do something on my own, and I saw this picture in a magazine, just a little snapshot, and it spoke to me a lot. I just really liked it. It made me think about when I was younger my dad used to let us dress up in his Navy uniforms, and it was something my brother and I really liked to do. He would let us try the stuff on, and would tell us about it like “this is when we would wear this, and that’s what this piece is” and my mom would take pictures because it was just fun. We got to share that stuff with my dad and we got to learn about the Navy. And when I saw the picture it just reminded me of that, and as I was drawing it I started thinking about how anybody in the Navy is somebody’s child. And it’s kind of like a sacrifice for that family just to have their own child risk themselves for this country. So I just thought of it as like any, anybody in the Army or Navy, military, they are still a child of somebody, and it shows the sacrifice they are giving, that their family is giving for this country. I really enjoyed it as the first piece that I did with charcoal all by myself, and I was very proud of it. It’s the only one that I actually kept.

Carey

Carey, Untitled, charcoal
Art for me is almost spiritual. It takes me away. I like to be able to produce things and help people see things the way that I see them. It feels really good, almost like meditation. It’s like a state of being suspended, and the minutes and the hours pass by. It doesn’t feel like the day to day experiences; it almost feels as if I am going to the piece of paper to see what can come out of the piece of paper, not what I put on it.

The boys, I was drawn to them because of the stories behind them. You can obviously see that they’re young, yet it depicts something that is cruel and evil. Their eyes are almost weary and they’ve seen and done things that no child should have seen or done.
The lion symbolizes justice. They are courageous, strong, and quick. These are all good qualities to have when it comes to doing the right thing. I like drawing because it puts me in the here and now. Once I get into the zone, I’m not thinking about yesterday or what I’m going to be doing tomorrow, it’s all about living in the moment and being my authentic self.

I draw as often as I can. Anybody can learn to draw, you just have to have the desire.

Kelli

Kelli, Untitled, charcoal
I love art in all forms and fashions. I dance. I sing. I choreograph. I crochet. I knit. I quilt. So those were things that I was taught as a young child. I started dancing at four. I went to Cleveland School of Performing Arts. I’ve always been around art and I’ve always been intrigued by it – all kinds of art. And just seeing people create, I just like to do anything with my hands. I just realized this year that this is a talent that I had. I just saw others doing it and I wanted to try it, and it’s like when one of the fellow artists, she said, “Come down and try it with me” and I did it. I just started this. I’m 41 and I just started drawing.

This is Muhammad Ali. This was one of the last photos he had taken before he passed away. When I was younger my uncles were fight fans, so I’d see those posters and I was really small and I didn’t really know what it was, but I was always just entranced by his face. But just knowing how he was an advocate for people as well as the sport was awesome to me. When I saw this picture I was like, “I’d like to draw that. That’d be a nice picture to draw.” I was a little intimidated, but I loved that his fists were up and I loved that even to the last days he was fighting – he was fighting for his health, people’s freedom, life itself – you know through everything, and he didn’t complain. So I thought that was very strong, and I just thought that everything about him showed through here in this picture, so that’s why I chose that.

I just would like viewers to just feel Ali’s strength and his power, his knowledge. And that he wanted to pass those things on. It was, uh, a funny story was that when I was choosing this piece, he had some pictures of him from his younger days. And him and my 18-year-old son are almost identical. And it was like the eeriest thing because when I called my oldest son and told him I was doing the picture, he said you should do one of your son and him side by side, ‘cause he looks like him when he was younger. And I said “I just said that.” That is weird. But he’s been, he’s a fighter too. I’ve been gone for a long time in his life. And he’s an artist – a self-taught artist. So this is something that we connect on. This is our own personal unique thing that we share together. That’s the biggest blessing for me, to have something to connect with my son on in that way.
The curators would like to thank the following for their assistance and support:

Ohio Innocence Project
Dean Gillispie and his family

Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections:
Eric Gardenhire
Jennifer Gillece
Ronette Burkes
Teri Baldauf
Pamela Shaw
Marti Jerew
Mohammad Mansoor
Cara Willoughby

Tiffin University:
Reggie Wilkinson
Lillian Schumacher
Joyce Hall-Yates
Andrea Alaniz
Beata Krembuszewski
Caitlyn Largent
Claire McKenna
Christina Sharkin
Taylor Stewart
Liberty Campbell

Additional assistance:
The Media Studio at Grafton Reintegration Center
Nikka Geiermann
A. Dale Triplett
Marcus Jordan
Luke Tremaine

Funded in part by the Ohio Arts Council
### Ohio Innocence Project

Dean Gillispie ........................................ 9–14
  Spiz’s Bait Shop ........................................ 13, 14
  Spiz’s Dinette ........................................... 10
  Spiz’s Diner .................................................. 9
  Spiz’s Speedway Garage ............................... 11
  What Could Have Been ................................ 12

### Grafton Reintegration Center & Correctional Institution

Alex .......................................................... 29
  Untitled ..................................................... 29

Elwood ..................................................... 21
  Untitled ..................................................... 21

Frank ........................................................ 23
  Untitled ..................................................... 23

Fred .......................................................... 18–20
  Dream 13, Super Position ............................. 19
  Ex Nihilo ..................................................... 18
  Of Fate and Flawed Gods ............................... 18
  Omnivociferous ........................................... 19
  The Birth of Venus ........................................ 20

Jeff ............................................................ 24, 25
  Eiffel Tower ................................................ 24, 25

Jerome .................................................... 26–28
  Vic’s Place .................................................. 26–28

Joe ............................................................ 16, 17
  The Fishing Hole ......................................... 16, 17

John .......................................................... 22
  Green Man ................................................... 22
  Untitled ...................................................... 22

Ronald ....................................................... 15
  Untitled ...................................................... 15

### Marion Correctional Institution

Marvin ....................................................... 30
  Obama ....................................................... 30

Ricky ........................................................ 32
  Country Bucks ............................................ 32

Willie ........................................................ 31
  A 10,950 Day View ..................................... 31

### Ohio Reformatory for Women

Amber ...................................................... 42
  Us and We ................................................ 42

Carey ....................................................... 46
  Untitled .................................................... 46

Kara .......................................................... 33
  Untitled ..................................................... 33

Kelli .......................................................... 48
  Untitled ..................................................... 48

Kerry ........................................................ 43
  Untitled ..................................................... 43

### Kind Wear: Alice

Kind Wear Jewelery ....................................... 37

### LaKiesha

Muhammad Ali ............................................ 49

Laura .......................................................... 47
  Untitled ..................................................... 47
  Untitled ..................................................... 47

Rhonda ..................................................... 34–36
  Untitled ..................................................... 34
  Untitled ..................................................... 35
  Untitled ..................................................... 35
  Untitled ..................................................... 36
  Untitled ..................................................... 36

Twyana ..................................................... 44, 45
  Untitled ..................................................... 44
  Untitled ..................................................... 44
  Untitled ..................................................... 45

Underground Railroad: Alice ....................... 38, 39
  Underground Railroad ................................ 38, 39

Vicki ........................................................ 40, 41
  Vannie Mat ............................................... 40, 41