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Celebrating the Arts and Education in Prison as Practices of Survival, Resistance, Healing, and Transformation

Stephen J. Hartnett and Meghan R. Cosgrove, in conversation with David Carillo, Jacob Carlock, Keean Davis, Kenji Jones, Sean Mueller, Manuel Sisneros, Taveuan Williams, and Warren Worthington

On December 14, 2022, we participated in a joyous event. That afternoon, the Colorado Department of Corrections' (CDOC) leadership team, educators from around the state, and roughly 30 incarcerated learners gathered in the visiting room of the Colorado Territorial Correctional Facility (CTCF) to celebrate students who had completed their AA degrees, BA degrees, or certificate programs.[1] Colorado's oldest prison, nestled up against the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, felt for a few hours like a college quad on graduation day: family members cried tears of joy, students gave rousing speeches, degree or certificate earners beamed with pride, and teachers and administrators circled the room, shaking hands, feeling a deep sense of accomplishment. The event captured all the promise and joy of education as a route toward excellence, perhaps redemption, and lives rich with opportunity. That same night, working under the direction of Ashley Hamilton and her colleagues in the University of Denver's Performing Arts Initiative (DU PAI), a collective of incarcerated actors staged *Godspell* in the CTCF's gymnasium.[2] A secular/pop culture retelling of the parables of Jesus and his acolytes, the performers erupted into song, dance, and laughter, all while pondering ancient narratives of forgiveness and rebirth from their own imprisoned setting.[3] A day of educational achievement segueing into an evening musical sounds like a good day on a typical college campus—but all this happening in a prison? That's a mind-

Stephen J. Hartnett is a professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Colorado Denver and the Director of the University of Colorado's Prison Education Program. **Meghan Cosgrove** is a PhD candidate in the Department of Communication at Colorado State University and a lecturer in the University of Colorado's Prison Education Program. **Jacob Carlock**, **Keean Dav**is, **Kenji Jones**, **Taveuan Williams**, and **Warren Worthington** are incarcerated college students and artists; **David Carillo**, **Manuel Sisneros**, and **Sean Mueller** are formerly incarcerated students and artists; we share details about their participation in our methods section.

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blowing tribute to how the CDOC, its inhabitants, and a wide range of community partners are collectively reimagining incarceration.

As college teachers who cherish the opportunity to serve this community of learners and artists, we wanted to know more about what this confluence of education and arts felt like to our students, and we wanted to share these findings with a larger audience, hence this article. We began our work with a sense of hope, but also trepidation, for scholars and activists have found it difficult to talk about the positive effects of art and education within prisons without resorting to claims that can, at times, feel aspirational rather than proven. The mechanics of transformation can elude explanation. For example, Kenji Jones was both a performer in the show and a student who earned his 21-credit Certificate in Strategic Communication. When we asked Kenji about that day in December, he flashed a big smile. When we pushed for details, he laughed and said he loved it all. It was his first college triumph and his first musical. His joy was palpable, but he was also at a loss for words: "I felt transformed when I was in those spaces, but how can I explain it?"[4] We all know that art and education are transformative mediums laced with potential, yet the magic of the transformative process is hard to put into words. In the case of Kenji and his fellow students, the graduation ceremony offered a glimpse into new lives full of possibility; for Kenji and his fellow performers, the play transformed the prison's gymnasium into a stage full of song, dance, and laughter. Yet as Kenji's answer reveals, it can be confusing to try to explain how the arts and education transform lives.

We have opened with this story about a rousing day at the CTCF to illustrate how arts and education in prison create transformative spaces for incarcerated people, their families and allies, and those of us lucky enough to have the opportunity to learn alongside them. If prisons embody the norms of punishment and confinement, then we believe education and the arts in prison push back, creating spaces for self-reflection, healing, and social transformation. Kenji's question above indicates, however, why we need to try to nail down the details of these processes, for we hope to move beyond feeling good to offering teachers and activists tips on best practices so that more programs can strive for positive impacts. As we demonstrate herein, education and arts in prison permeate imposed boundaries to forge connections among incarcerated students and artists, among carceral staff and administrators, with educators and activists, and out into the communities we serve.

To flesh out this thesis with more details and examples, we open with a review of some of the key literature regarding incarceration and the arts and education in prison. Having established that context, we then segue into a series of thematically organized meditations on the arts and education in prison, with our comments circulating around the words and images of incarcerated artists. In an effort to try to make sense of how and why the arts and education are so transformative in these carceral spaces, we offer comments on the seven key themes we have

found in this work. As indicated in the byline of this article, the latter part of the essay is driven by conversations with incarcerated and recently released students and artists. Touching upon themes of processing trauma, balancing beauty and barbarism, taking responsibility, using the arts and education as escape and engagement, negotiating gender, sharing the gifts of learning, and healing family dynamics, we celebrate how pursuing education and the arts in prison enable us to engage in the hard work of building new lives by, in part, committing to learning and creating together.

Trauma, Incarceration, and the Arts and Education as Forms of Hope and Connection

Buzz Alexander, the founder of the Prison Creative Arts Project, once described the national tone toward incarceration as "punitive [and] full of stereotypes: Prisoners are rapists, killers, child-molesters—dangerous, scruffy, isolated people behind bars who have no love of family, no creativity, no commitments other than crime."[5] Conceptualizing incarcerated folks as committed only to crime makes it easy to believe they are solely perpetrators of trauma who deserve to be incarcerated. Based on these beliefs, U.S. society has seemingly agreed that the best course of action for addressing the harm caused by justice-impacted people is to lock them away—out of sight, out of mind. If the success of our criminal justice system was determined by the number of people involved in it, then the United States would stand among the best in the world, with nearly 2 million participants.[6] This process of justice-as-punishment is justified as enforcing three of the four commonly espoused goals of corrections: retribution, deterrence, and incapacitation.[7] The system fails, however, at preparing justice-impacted people for life after incarceration. In fact, while 95% of all incarcerated people eventually return to their communities,[8] nearly 80% of them end up back in prison within five years.[9] Hence, the prison-industrial complex has evolved into a giant revolving door, shuffling "offenders" around while not addressing the underlying causes of crime, including systemic poverty, institutionalized injustice, centuries of racism, and more.[10]

Within the list of social harms contributing to crime, a growing body of literature suggests that childhood trauma lies at the heart of many of our most complicated social problems. Traumatic experiences are disruptive and their impacts linger, informing an individual's ability to think, cope, and act. Junot Díaz describes the legacy of childhood trauma as "a time traveler, an ouroboros that reaches back and devours everything that came before."[11] Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) include "exposure to physical, emotional, or sexual abuse; physical and emotional neglect; and witnessing violence, serious mental illness, or substance misuse in the home."[12] While 64% of the U.S. population reports experiencing one ACE, among incarcerated people that number rises to 98%. [13] Exposure to a single ACE increases "the risk for using illicit drugs, abusing alcohol, or

attempting suicide," with men who experienced six or more ACEs being "46 times more likely to inject drugs."[14] In addition to the many health implications of ACEs, "research suggests a significant relationship between adolescent maltreatment and increased risk for arrest, general and violent offending, and illicit drug use."[15] The data is evolving and conclusions are contested, but we read this evidence as confirming what our long years of working in prisons and justice-impacted communities have always suggested: that the people society calls "offenders" are most often already victims of childhood traumas, their crimes but the manifestation of previous damage.[16]

As Michelle Alexander shows in *The New Jim Crow*, the people society calls "the worst of the worst" are reflections of our collective disregard for the ways racism, poverty, gendered discrimination, lack of health care, convoluted drug laws, and violence percolate through our daily lives.[17] These arguments jell with Ruth Wilson Gilmore's observation from *Golden Gulag* that our incarcerated neighbors are not monsters but damning indications of "the organized abandonment" of marginalized communities.[18] Such "organized abandonment" is driven, in part, by what Beth Richie calls the "heteronormative imperatives of the US prison system," which are "intersectionally structured by gender, sexuality, and race."[19] We know that incarceration disproportionately impacts people from marginalized communities, discursively constructing them as deviant to justify their subjugation. This criminalization is even more pronounced in relation to gender.[20] Suzanne Enck and Blake McDaniel echo Richie's argument, noting that incarcerated women face harrowing challenges that are exacerbated by multiple intersecting cultural expectations of "gender, race, and class."[21]

Within the literature tackling the root causes of systemic injustice, scholars are beginning to understand how trauma imprints the mind, creating habits of thought and response that reproduce harm. However, as Shirley Hayes argues in "Trauma and Memory," these patterns can be unlearned. By engaging in artistic and educational practices wherein trauma is processed in a healthy manner, "learned truths are challenged" and "doubt turns to self-agency," leading to a "change experience" that enables "self-awareness and consciousness."[22] In an essay in *Higher Education and the Carceral State*, Linda Small, formerly incarcerated in Maine and now the Program Coordinator for the Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition, refers to this trauma-addressing process as learning how to "flush the psychological sewage of the carceral state from my mind."[23] This flushing is not a eureka moment or a flash of insight but the result of arduous effort, long-term commitment, and gritty persistence. Once incarcerated but now a PhD candidate at UC Irvine, Ginny Emiko Oshiro thus speaks not of transformation but of her "transformative practice," indicating all the habits of self-care, study, and relationship-building that led to her authoring a new life.[24]

Trying to make sense of these trauma-transcending and transformative practices, I (SJH) have referred to the arts and education in prisons as striving to

achieve "the artistry of agency."[25] The phrase points to *a process of becoming* wherein incarcerated people envision different lives for themselves by creating supportive educational and art-making communities that help them, and those around them, to become empowered agents. Creating and participating in such transformative spaces are foundational practices for incarcerated people seeking to identify and process their traumas. As Spoma Jovanovic and her colleagues observe from their work in and with marginalized communities, by learning how to engage in political arguments with facts, strategies, and confidence—hence flagging past harms, revealing unspoken traumas, addressing institutionalized presents, and imagining longed-for futures—neighbors who have long been silenced and ostracized achieve a new sense of personal and communal significance.[26] This is why Kimberly McLarin and Wendy W. Walters, writing in *Education Behind the Wall*, argue that arts and education programs in prisons can serve as "a source of illumination, as a tool that rebuilds resilience, and as a space for envisioning change at the individual, societal, and human level."[27] Summarizing such arguments, the notion of the "artistry of agency" suggests that using the arts and education to pursue agency entails both transformative and joyous capacities. As Kenji Jones' thrill at performing in *Godspell* indicates, such artistic agency opens up transformative practices for building a new self that is cooperative and community oriented.[28]

In her magnum opus, *Making Art in Prison: Survival and Resistance*, long-time activist, artist, and educator Janie Paul chronicles her decades leading The Annual Exhibition of Artists in Michigan Prisons, organized through the Prison Creative Arts Project, out of Ann Arbor, Michigan.[29] Paul's gorgeous book includes color plates featuring work made by incarcerated artists and her observations on what this work has meant to her students and collaborators. While we celebrated above the joyous spirit evident at the CTCF on our graduation day and performance night, Paul has spent her life working with artists confined in Michigan prisons that were often less-than welcoming to the concepts of using the arts and education to seek transformation. Her perspective on how the arts and education work in prison is therefore steeped in a sense of resistance: "The artists' resistance is their refusal to succumb to the control and domination of incarceration by carrying on a life-affirming art practice."[30] As these incarcerated artists affirm that a world outside of prison still exists—testifying to the fact that life is more than concrete walls, metal bunks, and communal bathrooms—they weather the storm of incarceration by seizing their own means of production. This work of survival and resistance entails salvaging materials from every imaginable source. As Paul puts it, the artists she works with "make use of all available material resources, using discarded soap in the shower for sculptures, coffee for pigments, and floor wax for glazes. They don't waste time or resources. Art is their survival."[31] Prison art therefore crackles with a sense of urgency, for the stakes are no less than creating a self beyond shame and stigmatization, yet it can also include a sense of playful repurposing, of turning trash and trauma into triumph (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Incarcerated in Michigan, Arthur Keigney sculpted this self-representation out of a bar of soap, using shoe polish and ink from pens for his coloring, amounting to a testament to the tenacious need to create, even with limited materials in confined spaces. The image is copyrighted by the artist and appears here as it was first published as the cover of *Working for Justice: A Handbook of Prison Education and Activism*, ed. Stephen J. Hartnett, Eleanor Novek, & Jennifer K. Wood (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013).

Across education and arts efforts in prisons, activists often think in terms of scripts, narratives, or canvases, which are open to leaps of imagination. As longtime prison instructor David Coogan argues, creating art in such conditions points to students and artists trying "to learn hard lessons about the characters [they've] been and trying to imagine [their] characters in new plots."[32] This forward-looking work of imagining new "characters" also entails looking through the wreckage of the past to name and analyze histories of trauma. As Paul puts it, this process of self-evaluation and self-fashioning means digging "deep into themselves to explore and commit to what feels true and real; it leads them outward into the world

as their work connects with others, affirming what they have revealed to themselves."[33] Canvases and pages are blank—what we do with them embodies the challenge of envisioning anew, especially when that imagining process takes place in spaces of hardship and confinement. Recognizing the complexity of that challenge, Coogan frames his writing workshops as occasions for "writing your way to freedom."[34]

Figure 2. Incarcerated in Michigan, Samantha Bachynski suspects she will never get married. As part of her processing her incarceration, Bachynski crocheted this wedding dress for someone outside of prison to wear. Here we see the transformative process of making art merging into gift-giving. The image is copyrighted by the artist and appears here as seen in Janie Paul, *Making Art in Prison: Survival and Resistance* (Los Angeles, CA: Hat and Beard Press, 2023).

To address what this self-imagining can look like, consider Samantha Bachynski, who is serving a life-sentence in Michigan. In order to break down her sense of isolation, Bachynski crocheted a wedding dress for someone else to wear (see Figure 2), her only ask being "that many blessings fall upon the one who wears it."[35] The dress took nearly three months to complete but years to develop, as Bachynski learned how to crochet from her "prison aunties and sisters," and discovered herself saying, "No matter how much trauma there is, you have to make a life."[36] In this example, an incarcerated artist chose to refashion her sense of self by using art to make a gift for someone else. This story of gift-giving in Michigan reminds us of an observation from Eleanor Novek, the long-time prison activist and educator working in New Jersey. She writes that anger fails to transform lives; instead, "the antidote to the prison crisis is not only radical justice, but love."[37] Novek accordingly argues that the first step to dismantling the prison-industrial complex is recognizing that incarcerated folks are "people like us," each with their own intrinsic human value, histories, and potentials.[38] For Bachnyski, living this ethic of shared humanity meant giving the gift of art, sending love from prison to a stranger, and, in the process, teaching herself new artistic skills and relational habits.

These stories from Michigan and New Jersey echo the narratives we have heard in our recent prison work in Colorado: That incarcerated people desire to be closer to their community, to know one another, to become friends, and to advance their educational and artistic selves. Like most of us on the outside, incarcerated students and artists long for connection, indicating how building new self-narratives is always relational and cooperative. Still, the question remains, what are the specific mechanisms of these transformative practices? How do they work? Do they blossom by addressing specific themes, confusions, or opportunities?

A Note on Methods, Vulnerable Populations, and Safe Practices

Before we dive into our thematic analysis of the transformative practices of art and education in carceral settings, it is important to note that incarcerated people are a vulnerable population subject to retribution by prison authorities, exploitation by unscrupulous allies, and dashed hopes when collaborative projects with community groups crash and burn. As such, both lead authors brought the ideas behind this essay to our respective Institutional Review Boards (IRBs), Hartnett at the University of Colorado and Cosgrove at the Colorado State University, to seek guidance on best practices for collaborating with a vulnerable population. Because we are listing David Carillo, Jacob Carlock, Keean Davis, Kenji Jones, Sean Mueller, Manuel Sisneros, Taveuan Williams, and Warren Worthington as collaborators with us on this work—and as the following pages are full of their words and art—these incarcerated and recently released authors do not meet the

criteria of what the IRB calls "human subjects research." Because this essay serves the purposes of advocacy and celebration, and because we list our collaborators as co-authors, not the subjects of technical, medical, or social science model-building, the UC and CSU IRBs concluded this work did not need formal IRB sanction.[39] To confirm this finding, we brought our ideas to the CDOC and received approval for our working with these students and artists on this project. Additionally, each contributor gave recorded verbal assent to their being named and quoted herein. We share these notes with readers to make sure they recognize that we have followed best practices in assembling the following observations.

We should note as well that the colleagues consulted herein have shared our University of Colorado classrooms for the past four years. We therefore approached our conversations with a sense of trust built up over years of teaching and learning together, collaborating on various projects, and intentionally framing our hopes for building mutual respect. In fact, the students we quote below are regular contributors to our annual magazine, *Captured Words/Free Thoughts*, and they are members of our Prison Education Program Advisory Board, so they are not only high-achieving students and successful artists but leaders among our shared community of learners, artists, and advocates (see Figure 3). In *Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration*, Nicole R. Fleetwood argues that such collaborations, in their ideal form, aspire to build "a provisional public that collaborates and forges exchanges between people dispersed across carceral geographies."[40] This is our goal.

With that context in place, we turn below to our conversations and the seven key themes that emerged from them. The range of topics we discuss below is by no means exhaustive, meaning our notes serve not so much as a definitive review as a suggestive list of possibilities, each one meriting additional scholarship, political action, and artistic consideration. To support the comments from our conversations, we also draw upon our reading of additional prison arts and education sources, focusing in particular on our annual magazine of art and poetry made by justice-impacted collaborators, *Captured Words/Free Thoughts*.[41] Finally, we should note that after we started to sort our conversation notes into thematic clusters, and after we shared those notes with our collaborators, we then engaged in multiple rounds of editing, sometimes in-person, sometimes via snail-mail, sometimes via email, and sometimes over the phone. The arguments shared below reflect this organic, iterative process whereby we collectively shaped our conversations into themes.

Figure 3. Manuel Sisneros and Jacob Carlock after a conversation at the Skyline Correctional Facility in Colorado; photograph by Erik Alvarenga, with thanks to Josette Fustini. The image is copyrighted by and appears with the permission of the photographer. The prison portrait has a long and complicated history, as chronicled in Fleetwood, *Marking Time*, chapter 7.

Theme #1: Processing Trauma on the Way to New Connections

Across the wide terrain of prison arts and letters, perhaps no topic is as ubiquitous as processing trauma.[42] In this genre of work, authors and artists strive to chronicle past injuries, name them, put them into perspective, and, through the "artistry of agency," transform horror into understanding. No one embodies this process better than Antonio Sanchez-Day. Incarcerated in Kansas for more than a decade, when he got out of prison he promptly returned as a writing teacher, helping other imprisoned artists find their voices. He passed away in 2021, at the age of 46. In "My Life Story," he used a string of numbers to try to make sense of a lifetime of trauma:

> I was born on the 21st day of the 7th month of '74
> That makes me 2 years shy of 40
>
> I lost my brother when I was 7 years old
> And lost my sister when I was 8
>
> In the 3rd grade, at the age of 9
> I smoked marijuana for the 1st time

> I was placed in Alcoholics Anonymous at 10
>
> When I was 12, in the 6th grade
> I watched my father die
> 2 days after meeting him for the 1st time
>
> At 13 years old, I began therapy
> When I was 16, I got kicked out of high school
> And ran away from home
>
> I caught my 1st felony at 18
> 4 years later at 21, I received my 2nd strike
> And was sentenced to 10 years[43]

Sanchez-Day's poem maps harrowing traumas—the lived experiences we discussed earlier as ACEs—winding their way through his family history and, by extension, through the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation that he called home. The danger is when these traumas become unshakable, cast like fate into one's narrative, so that heartbreak and injury become expected parts of a community's daily life. To circumvent that inheritance of pain, Sanchez-Day names a string of traumas, creating what feels like a roadmap to his incarceration. Yet in mastering this roll call of trauma, he begins what we saw Oshiro call her "transformative practice," the slow, deliberative, structured habit of reclaiming agency.

In one of our conversations with Jacob Carlock, we asked him to reflect on the notion of using the artistry of agency to address trauma and he shared how the combination of education and the arts in prison enabled him to step outside the negative inheritance of trauma, to name it, and seek healing instead. He argued that traditional prison spaces—isolated and lonely, shame and guilt-ridden, severed from community—tend to "institutionalize trauma," turning it into an expectation, almost a curse. But making art and pursuing higher learning enabled him to break through that institutionalization and, for the first time in his life, "get past the pain so that you can have honest, loving connections."[44]

This notion of moving past the pain is common among our conversational partners, as Manuel Sisneros noted that when he was first incarcerated he "stuffed everything." It was not until he began to write with the support of Wayne Gilbert, a prison volunteer, that Sisneros began to process his trauma and discover what he had to say:

> It felt like he [Gilbert] gave me a voice. He said, "Well, you don't have to keep that inside, you can write it out of you." I was emotional when other individuals were reading in front of me. I remember feeling, "Man, I'm afraid to get up there now." But Wayne was strict, he said "You can't just sit in here, you have to share." So I gave it my best, and started to write. After the first time I read in front of the class, I was like, "Wow, that was empowering." Not only did I do it in front of a bunch of individuals, I did it in a prison where we're supposed to be tough, where we're not supposed to show emotions. I soon became more

> comfortable with that process of writing, sharing, getting feedback, and it gave me more faith in my writing. Instead of "stuffing," I could write it out.

In this case, processing trauma meant working past the habit of "stuffing" emotions, instead turning what was once silent suffering into the raw material of self-expression. As Sisneros tells the story, the process was also collective, as a teacher, student, and classmates learned together to write out their pain, turning trauma into transformation.

As indicated in Sanchez-Day's poem, Carlock's comments, many of the images featured in Paul's *Making Art in Prison*, and Sisneros' empowering discovery, the educational and artistic "transformative practices" of addressing trauma means tackling personal harm and institutionalized injustice as steps in the process of healing.

Theme #2: Balancing Beauty & Barbarism

In prior work on the roles of arts and education in prisons, I (SJH) have discussed how:

> prisons are places of mass-produced misery and ugliness, but then so is much of our culture as a whole, and so we, the free and the imprisoned, can sometimes let ourselves slip into states of sanctioned blindness. In contrast to becoming comfortably numb, writing poetry can be a way to look and listen more carefully, hence becoming a witness to each day's small miracles. For example, when asked about his goals regarding writing poems in prison, Big Ern, incarcerated in California, said "My task is to transform the world, to make the gross and the shameful into things of beauty and ascension. I spy divinity."[45]

This notion of "spying divinity" asks us to not fall into the hole of cynicism and despair, instead actively seeking wonder, for this too is a human right, a key component of maintaining our happiness and renewing our ability to connect with others.[46]

Consider "From this Window," wherein Vaughn Wright (see Figure 4), incarcerated in Pennsylvania, peers out of his prison cell to marvel at the sunrise:

> Razor wire sparkles in the daylight
> Glistening like jewels when the sun hits the fence just right
> Row upon row, miles of it
> Hell of a contract from a bid that was likely rigged[47]

Watching the morning light fracture, barbed wire becoming beauty, Wright spies the divine. But then, afraid of letting us slip into political apathy, he wrenches the reader from reverie to horror with that last line. You can feel his thoughts snapping as the morning's wonder gives way to a nagging suspicion: That the prison-industrial complex is riven with graft, rigged bids, guards-on-the-take, politicians growing fat on the pain of others.[48] Part of what makes Wright such a challenging

author is this whiplash jump-cutting from beauty to barbarism; he's daring us as readers to mimic his zigzagging consciousness, holding joy, wonder, gratitude, and horror all at the same time. For Big Ern and Wright, spying divinity overlaps with political critique, wrapping the moment's wonder in a sense of skepticism, hence practicing a multi-perspectival consciousness that strives to balance beauty and barbarism.

Figure 4. Vaughn Wright, author of "From this Window."

To think more deeply about this question of balancing beauty and barbarism, we spoke to Sean Mueller, now released, who in addition to taking college classes while incarcerated also turned to painting as a process of reflection and gift-giving. Sean told us that like most of his peers, he had no spending money while incarcerated so holidays left him feeling bereft as he could not show his loved ones how much he cared by buying them gifts or sending them cards. He wanted to celebrate the beauty of supporting relationships yet felt trapped in the barbarism of lacking funds and access to communication. In response to these feelings, he started painting (see Figure 5), thinking the artistry of agency might help him

process his emotions while strengthening bonds with others. The remarkable part of the story is that not only was Sean not a painter, he is visually impaired, so his plan depended on him both learning a new form of expression and persevering through his visual limitations. As he put it, "Sometimes, life is about picking up the brush, dipping it in a color, and spreading it around trying to make something empty into something beautiful. If a person chooses barbarism as the outlet for their emotions, it will be a reactionary sledgehammer that smashes themselves and their relationships. Paintbrushes are easier on the hands, futures, and loved ones."[49] Like Bachynski's wedding dress, Sean's paintings helped him address past damage while building a new self, all while gifting others the results of his efforts.

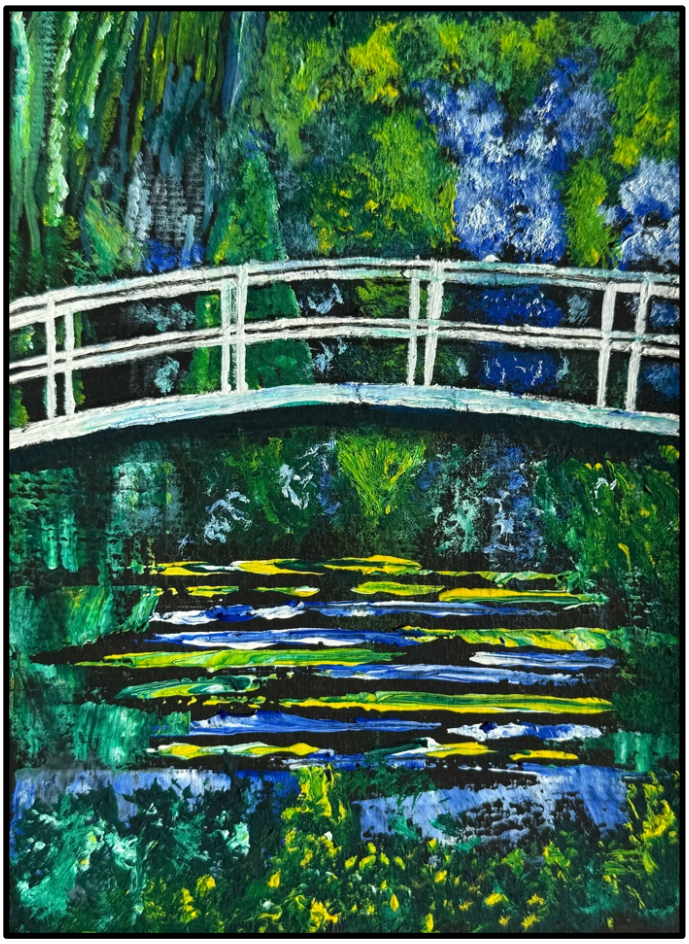

Figure 5. Painting by Sean Mueller.

Theme #3: Writing and the Honor of Taking Responsibility

In "Reflections on Prison Writing," Jacob Carlock admits "the state of Colorado did not just plop me down in this institution." Carlock earned his incarceration, he worked for it. Like all of the artists, writers, actors, and poets discussed herein, he was once a Holy Terror, a wrecker of lives, a fireball of damage fueled by drugs, alcohol, and the inarticulate anger of lost youth. Like everyone discussed herein, Carlock has seen more than his share of the "organized abandonment" of select communities, yet now, many years after his incarceration, a grown man with a cultivated sense of self, he can look back on that destruction to acknowledge, "we are all accountable for where we are and how we ended up in these places. We are equally responsible for recognizing the harm we have caused, repairing our faults, and embracing our imperfections." He's taking stock and responsibility, honoring those he harmed by apologizing. During our conversation, he pivoted from the past to the hard-work of the present: "We cannot change," he says, by swimming in "mediocrity . . . we have to lean into the discomfort of change . . . by taking step after step in the right direction."[50] As Carlock performs this coming-to-recognition, his rising to the honor of taking responsibility points to the obligation to change, to struggle to be better, with, in his case, *writing and painting as the processes for working through it all*.

From this perspective, prison arts are not about reporting finished facts, or making empty promises, but about the transformative practices of seeking redemption, learning new skills and values, venturing onto the road to saving yourself and healing your community. Manuel Sisneros echoed this same argument, noting how when he was younger, "I justified my actions as a response to what I went through as a juvenile, thinking 'Oh, yeah, I had it bad, that's why I drink, that's why I do drugs.'" Sisneros had seen more than his share of ACEs but through his writing he realized, "I knew right from wrong, it wasn't the justice system's fault I ended up here. So I stopped blaming the corrections system and looked inside myself. I realized I had to correct myself."[51] In this remarkable moment we watch as Sisneros chronicles how he learned to stop blaming others and look himself in the mirror—by taking responsibility, he is creating a new sense of agency, as demonstrated in his essay entitled "From Gutter to Glory": "I have come now to the conclusion that my life is worth living and my story is worth sharing. There is always hope. I am living proof of it. From gutter to glory, I now live in grace."[52]

Carlock and Sisneros' comments echo observations by Jeffrey Stein. Formerly incarcerated in California, he earned his BA through the California State LA program run by Kamran Afary and his colleagues.[53] Upon his release, Stein earned his MA and then began serving the campus community as a liaison for other at-risk, incarcerated, and formerly incarcerated students. Like Carlock and

Sisneros, Stein notes how his transformative practices, his artistry of agency, entailed both a sense of recovery and then a series of outward-facing expectations. First, "little by little, I began to feel more like a human being again. . . I no longer had to exist in a diminished and woeful state of fear and anger." But then, through participating in the program, Stein began to evolve "a sense of duty and purpose." His new self was committed to "reconstructing a positive social identity," wherein Stein hoped to be "part of the solution rather than being a part of the problem."[54] For Carlock, Sisneros, Stein, and their colleagues, the artistry of agency leads through an initial stage of processing trauma toward a sense of community obligation. We watch as these students and artists move from personal healing to community engagement.

Theme #4: Prison Arts as Escape & Engagement

Across our conversations and our reading of prison-made arts and letters, one of the constant themes is using art and education to escape from confinement. While incarcerated artists are physically confined by penal institutions, they regularly speak of the process of making art as escaping from drudgery and entering a higher plane of freedom. An LGBTQIA+ poet in Colorado, Keean Davis put it this way: "I always try to remember that just because I'm physically incarcerated, my mind is not. I still have the free will to do my own thinking, write what I want, and say what I need to."[55] Kenji Jones, the actor we featured earlier, concurred, adding "the rehearsals, all the practicing, it allowed us to escape prison . . . when I was in that space, it just felt like I wasn't in prison."[56] Long-time prison educator Cormac Behan found similar sentiments among incarcerated students he interviewed at a prison in Dublin, Ireland. When asked about why he chose to pursue college classes in prison, Archie said "it's a way of escaping from the prison," and Hugh said he "wanted to escape the daily drudge of the regime."[57] Across U.S. and Irish prisons, then, we find evidence for engaging in arts and education as a means of escaping from boredom, surveillance, and imposed banality.

But we have also found a related theme: arts as an escape from meaningless, captive, wasted lives. In "Finally," Manuel Sisneros writes:

> When asked what I find in writing
> My response is complicated
> Sometimes I find an out, an escape
> Into another world, where creativity is endless
> Finally a place where my hurts, pains, fears
> And worries can be put to rest
> A place where I am in control[58]

This is not the escape of forgetting you are in prison for a while, but a deeper escape, an intentional flight from chaos to control, from fear to agency. This ver-

sion of escaping from disempowerment to a sense of self-becoming receives stunning treatment in "Voices from History Debate the Pitfalls and Promises of American Democracy," wherein Taveuan Williams writes a letter from the imagined life of a Revolutionary-era American slave. Based on his reading of the era's key texts, Williams wants to celebrate the promises that drive the American dream. But he's adopted the persona of a slave on a southern plantation, so the dream leaves him tortured, another man's property longing for freedom. "As I look around," he writes, "it is clear that most of us remain bound to horrific circumstances. . . I have seen enough. I am done believing in unsubstantiated claims. I remain excluded from 'We the People.'"[59] An incarcerated writer gaining perspective by inhabiting the memory of an enslaved writer, Williams and his character both imagine freedom; the slave plots his escape from the plantation, the prisoner uses writing to escape his incarceration, and in that imagining, Williams shows us that arts-as-escape can segue into arts-as-engagement.

Consider the case of Warren Worthington, an incarcerated artist who merges tattoo styles, air-brush techniques, and the fluid lines of the Harlem Renaissance to celebrate African American achievement (see Figure 6, next page). Worthington told us diving into his art offers "an escape from this place."[60] But that escape is not just a fleeing from incarceration, rather, it entails building commitments to working for social justice. An Air Force veteran, Worthington knows how the trauma of battle can segue into drugs, alcohol, and other damaging behaviors, which is why he volunteers his art-making skills for the Colorado Springs-based Veteran Justice League (VJL).[61] Led by veterans like Worthington, the VJL offers counseling, housing services, and other support for former and current soldiers on the edge of trouble. When you go to their website, Worthington's art graces the landing page. He's incarcerated, yet he's making art for social justice, not just escaping prison but working for the community good. As the efforts from Davis, Jones, Williams, and Worthington indicate, the artistry of agency means not only escaping the drudgery of prison routines but running head-on toward community engagement.

Theme #5: Negotiating Gender and Building Belonging

For as long as anyone can remember, questions of crime, violence, and incarceration have been wrapped up in narratives about race and gender. In fact, the dawning of the age of print capitalism in America was fueled by an explosion of chapbooks, pamphlets, and novels depicting hypersexualized and monstrous men, usually Native Americans or African Americans, preying upon innocent white virgins.[62] Since then, as Ben Boyce argues in *The Spectacle of Punishment*, American popular culture has rotated around a fascination/repulsion paradigm centered on stereotypes of toxic masculinity and forbidden sexuality.[63] From *Cool Hand Luke* up through *OZ* and *Orange is the New Black*, visual representations of prisons and

prisoners have stoked the worst, most demeaning versions of toxic masculinity and victimized femininity. This legacy, observed by scholars, activists, and incarcerated students and artists has created crippling expectations and fears that shackle our collective imagination and the lives of those who are imprisoned. Even while recognizing the range of gender roles and possibilities available to us, to be an incarcerated student or artist, no less a teacher or advocate who works in prisons, means confronting these stereotypes.[64]

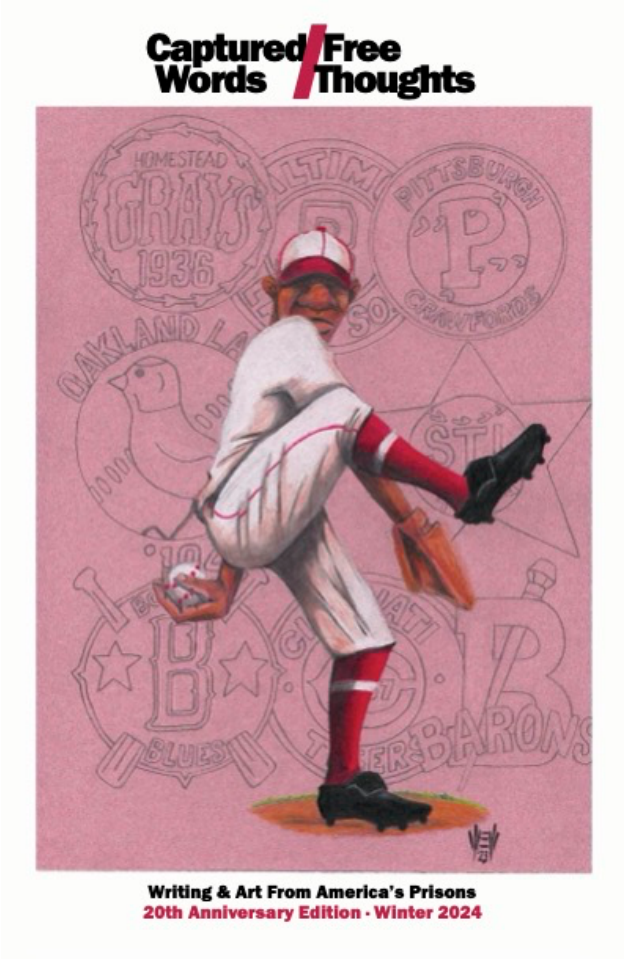

Figure 6. Warren Worthington making art for the common good; escaping prison by diving into a celebration of the African American tradition, in this case in the form of the legendary pitcher, Satchel Paige. The image is copyrighted by Worthington and appears with the permission of *Captured Words/Free Thoughts*.

Moreover, many of the incarcerated students and artists we have worked with have approached gender issues through the prism of violation, for they have been the victims of stereotyping, sexual violence, and/or enforced silences around such issues. This means their discussions of gender often lean toward questions of acknowledgement and building a sense of belonging for themselves and those who have hurt them. Consider Keean Davis's "You May Ask," where he wonders:

> Who am I? You may ask
> A person who tried to fit society's standards
> By staying in the closet about my sexuality
>
> Why did I stay in the closet so long? You may ask
> Society teaches us that if we are "abnormal"
> Then we will never be accepted
> But now I live in the truth of acceptance
> And wish I had come out sooner
>
> Why do you follow a religion that condemns your sexuality?
> You may ask
> Because I believe God has made me in his image
> And will accept me for who I am[65]

Having lived a life shadowed by gendered expectations and silences, and now dealing with the range of stereotypes about masculinity in prison, Davis finds agency in accepting himself as he is, wishing only that he had embraced his truth earlier in life. As an imprisoned LGBTQIA+ African American, Davis could dwell on how his agency has been constrained by gendered expectations, racial injustices, and more, yet he chooses to focus on his sense of agency: "I always try to remember that just because I'm physically incarcerated, my mind is not. I still have the free will to do my own thinking, write what I want, and say what I have to say, regardless of if anyone likes what I have to say."[66] Keean shared that part of what drives him is the hope of spreading awareness—he worries that not enough is known about the LGBTQIA+ community, "especially in the prison system, because we're pushed to the back and seen as different from everyone else." When we asked if he feels a sense of pride in playing a leading role in spreading that knowledge through his published writings, Keean said "You bet, it's important to have a platform to voice our opinion, our thoughts, our artwork, it just makes me feel better to know that our voices are not always falling on deaf ears. Someone is willing to listen and hear what we have to say."[67] Thus, "You May Ask" offers insight into how Keean is mending his relationship with himself, in part by becoming a leader in the LGBTQIA+ community, using his voice to raise awareness about the struggles faced by incarcerated LGBTQIA+ folks.[68] See figure *7* for evidence of how Jamie Diaz, a trans artist incarcerated in Texas, offers a visual version of this argument, bravely portraying alternative gender roles while celebrating a sense of community.

Incarcerated women artists practice this same advocacy work, though their search for justice is often related to reclaiming agency from the abuse that plagued their daily lives. In "Taking My Life Back," Tammy Englerth declares:

> Now, even from the grave
> You haunt me
> I still wonder when
> You are going to take
> My last breath away
>
> News flash!
> No more! I am taking my life back
> You have no more control over me
> I am a survivor
> I am free
> I am taking my life back![69]

In the same way that Wright's morning beauty is compromised by the suspicion of rigged prison deals, so Englerth's bold declaration of freedom is haunted by her confession that even now she fears a dead abuser coming back to threaten her. When Davis and Englerth negotiate gender roles and possibilities, then, the work is both empowering and harrowing, moving from fear to hope and back again, from shame to self-actualization.

Throughout this work addressing gender stereotypes, imprisoned artists often speak about the power of silence to lock trauma into negative patterns. Breaking the silence can be a powerful first step toward transformation. In a remarkable poem called "Secrets," Lizard chronicles how she lived her life in the shadows, collecting secrets about herself, her abusers, complicit authority figures, and so on. Each blow then became a hardened pain, a secret locked in silence, a forever-accumulating weight to carry around. To break that spell, Lizard begins to take responsibility for her life, in part by breaking through the silences and secrets by making public declarations:

> I'm no longer an idle puppet
> Waiting for someone to control my strings
> And cause me to go backwards
> To be ashamed of all these things
> Now that I've told you my secrets
> They're not my secrets anymore
> I don't think they were mine to begin with
> They belong to those walls and closed doors[70]

Lizard's poem includes painful recollections of harm including rape, suicide attempts, and eating disorders, yet by pulling these traumas out of silence and nam-

ing them, she concludes with a promise that she "never again will fold."[71] In reclaiming control of her life, she accepts responsibility for burying her emotions in secrets, acknowledging that while she was abused, she is ultimately responsible for making peace with her past and writing a new future. For Davis, Diaz, Englerth, and Lizard, negotiating gender amounts to a daily struggle but also a terrain of opportunity for shedding the expectations and pains of the past by looking toward a future in which they author new narratives.

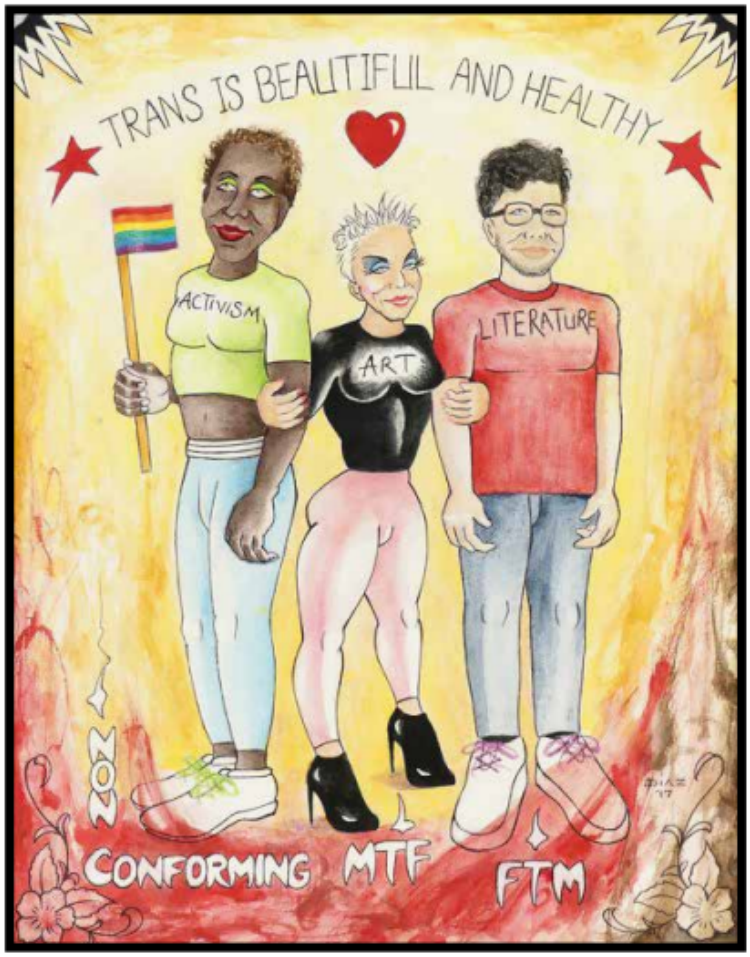

Figure 7. "Trans is Beautiful and Healthy," by Jaime Diaz, a trans artist incarcerated in Texas; the image is copyrighted by the artist and reproduced from *Captured Words/Free Thoughts* 19 (2023): 60; to see more of their work, go to www.jaimediazart.com.

Theme #6: Passing It On and the Legacies of Teachers

One of the themes that kept popping up in our conversations was how teachers function as community leaders within prisons. Jacob Carlock is an incarcerated painter; Figure 8, the cover of Volume 19 of *Captured Words/Free Thoughts*, features one of his abstract paintings. A field of colors beyond representation, his paintings work as thought experiments, inviting viewers to intuit meanings. When we asked Carlock how he learned to paint like that, he told us the story of how when he was first incarcerated, he met an older painter who offered to show him the ropes. Carlock remembered how "he didn't really coach me up so much as he provided an encouraging space to experiment." Now that he's the older painter teaching younger artists, Carlock says how, mimicking what he learned from his mentor, "I just try to be encouraging, to empower them, to stand next to them and walk beside them through the process."[72] Carlock's experience of passing on the gift of teaching echoes the story we discussed earlier of Antonio Sanchez-Day, who after leaving prison chose to return as a creative writing instructor.

We heard a similar story from Taveuan Williams. When we asked about his inspirations and how he finds the discipline and motivation to write while incarcerated, he told us how "Mr. Schumann, my Junior-year teacher," returned an essay to Taveuan with a comment that read: "you're a beautiful writer." Taveuan is 31 years old, but he remembered the kind words of a teacher from 15 years ago and uses them as a source of inspiration. Now that he leads writing workshops for incarcerated students, Taveuan tries to model that form of teaching-as-encouragement.[73] Like Carlock's painting or Sanchez-Day's poetry, Williams' writing evolves with a sense of thanks for those who took the time to help him grow. Carlock, Williams, and Sanchez-Day all embody the gift of teaching as a generational legacy, an inheritance that passes from mentors to students and out into the public. Part of what makes working in arts and education so rewarding is swimming in tandem with such legacies, watching as students become teachers (see figure 9), generations of learners and leaders accumulating into the foundation of a movement committed to social justice.

Another fascinating example of how teaching functions as a generational gift passed down to new students and communities involves David Carillo. Sentenced to life in prison as an angry 19-year-old, Carillo eventually fought through waves of hardships and impediments to earn both his BA and MBA degrees while incarcerated.[74] Then, working with his mentors at the Adams State University Prison Education Program,[75] something amazing happened:

> I was offered the opportunity to become the first currently incarcerated individual to teach undergraduate courses to other currently incarcerated individuals. As a "lifer," I never imagined such an opportunity. But with the full support of Adams State, the CDOC, and the general population, I began teaching my first class—Introduction to Business. It was amazing to know that I was

> providing many incarcerated learners with what I did not have for so long—a college classroom experience. What was even more amazing was the energy and excitement from the students, who were thrilled not only to be taking college courses, but to receive those courses from someone they could relate to, someone they'd seen walking the yard with them. Becoming a teacher who could give back to my community, wow, that gave me a new sense of purpose. My fellow incarcerated individuals were also given a newfound sense of hope that they too could walk this path of education and transformation. Shortly after my second semester of teaching college courses in prison, I was given the greatest gift of all: Governor Polis granted me clemency. Now that I am out, I continue to teach college courses to the currently incarcerated, maintaining my purpose and meaning while providing hope to my fellow incarcerated individuals.[76]

As these stories from Carlock, Sanchez-Day, Williams, and Carillo indicate, one of the joys of doing prison arts and education work is watching as students become teachers, as teachers become activists, and as new generations of students fall in love with learning. That process of passing on the gifts of arts and education is even sweeter when incarcerated or formerly incarcerated colleagues become leaders, driving the process from their experiences to serve their communities.

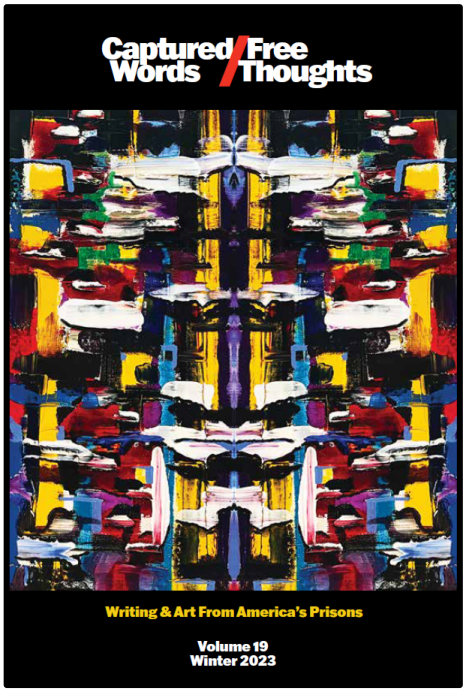

Figure 8. Jacob Carlock's abstract art on the cover of *Captured Words/Free Thoughts*.

Figure 9. Meghan Cosgrove and Taveuan Williams at the Sterling Correctional Facility, January 2024.

Theme #7: Prison Arts & Education Opening Doors to Family Healing

By the time most folks get to prison, their families are exhausted. The endless court cases, financial drain, and missed parenting time can all add up to family bitterness and trauma. Sometimes the first step in addressing these family issues is simply acknowledging this process and apologizing for it. In "Invisible Father," Louis Mamo writes about how his incarceration has punished his son: "I've never tucked him in. I've never read him a story before bed, or kissed him goodnight. I'm sure some nights he thinks I've forsaken him, or feels abandoned by the Father he tells people he has, but never sees when it counts." That agonizing self-reflection fuels Mamo's resolution to be a better father, as he vows, "I will come home to him one day. His belief in me and my goodness will not be in vain."[77] Across prison arts and letters, this sense of the family as a locus of missed opportunities that can still be fulfilled stands as a core theme, a universal source of both pain and hope.

Throughout conversations with our collaborators, they added a twist to this theme, noting how the transformative practices they were learning as college students and artists enhanced their abilities to function as family members. Sean Mueller, formerly incarcerated at the CTCF, was grateful for how pursuing college courses enabled him to reach higher levels of self-understanding and self-expression as these skills opened doors for repairing family damage. Instead of repeating patterns of anger and silence, he said "my family could hear the difference in my communication, in my thought process, and that opened doors for us."[78] Manuel Sisneros echoed Mueller's point. Speaking of his writing and poetry, he noted how the skills he was practicing in his art were transferrable as family knowledge. When asked about the artistry of agency and how he thinks of making art as a process of self-discovery and political engagement, he said, "I can teach that to my children, we can share those skills as a family."[79] These skills were hard earned for Sisneros, as he said:

> I speak the truth when I say that I have failed them [his children] on more than one occasion and through it all I still continue to receive their support. Their unconditional love and unwavering strength has given me a new breath on life. They express continued interest in my growth and believe that my best years are ahead of me. Their ability to ask the tough questions while also receiving a tough response gives me the inspiration to believe they are not willing to allow the generational trauma I've endured to encroach upon their lives, nor my grandchildren's lives.

As we see in the examples from Mamo, Mueller, and Sisneros, by pursuing the artistry of agency, these incarcerated students and artists no longer see themselves solely as sources of pain, instead coming to see themselves as engaged fathers and caregivers, as parents whose communicative skills become part of what they can pass down to their children.

Conclusion: Performing Gratitude in A World Short on Love

Building upon the work of scholars, teachers, artists, and students who have addressed the roles of the arts and education in prison, we have argued that the "artistry of agency" involves building positive, self- and other-affirming habits of thought and action. These artistic and educational habits amount to embodied "transformative practices" that enable us to break the spell of silence, name past traumas, and build collaborative relationships based on respect and trust. To explore these claims, we have focused on seven areas of work: processing trauma and building new connections, balancing beauty and barbarism, using art and writing to take responsibility for the past, addressing the movement from art-as-escape to art-as-engagement, negotiating gender and building belonging, honoring the legacies of teachers, and working toward family healing. Space prohibits our extending the list, so future work will want to focus on such issues as racial

bias, the role of drugs and alcohol, experiences with police and the courts, the complications of transitioning from prisons back to home, and many, many more. Across this work, we have focused on stories, testimonies, and images that address elements of survival, resistance, transformation, and healing.

We opened this essay with a snapshot from a joyous day of education and the arts in Colorado and we now close with a similar eruption of hope and accomplishment in California. In October 2021, the California State LA Prison Program hosted its first graduation ceremony for students finishing their BA degree at California's Lancaster Prison. To commemorate the occasion, students performed their wonder and gratitude in a thrilling string of statements. Wearing traditional graduation robes and commanding the outdoor stage with confidence, the piece ended with this tag-team exchange about values, hopes, and the power of the arts and education to transform lives:

> Terry Bell: I want my legacy to be: Persistence is key. Larry Torres, what do you want your legacy to be?
>
> Larry L. Torres: I want my legacy to be: Higher learning. Dion Whitmore, what do you want your legacy to be?
>
> Leon Whitmore: I want my legacy to be: My past will not define the person that I strive to be. Gustavo Tamayo, what do you want your legacy to be?
>
> Gustavo Tamayo: I want my legacy to be: Calling love and camaraderie. Jimmie Gilmer, what do you want your legacy to be?
>
> Jimmie L. Gilmer: I want my legacy to be: Change for all. And with that, we would like to thank God, our families, professors, the administration, and all of you who played a part in making this dream come true. I have one more thing I'd like to ask (turning to the audience): What do you want your legacy to be?[80]

Persistence, higher learning, redemption, love and camaraderie, change for all—what a perfect list of the reasons why we teach, why we practice our crafts, why we work and study and create art in prisons, and why we believe the arts and education transform our lives.

Notes

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49. Quotations from conversation with the artist, November 5, 2024; on his painting strategies, see Sean Mueller, "How to Paint When You are Nearly Blind," *Captured Words/Free Thoughts* 19 (2023): 30-32.
50. Jacob Carlock, "Reflections on Prison Writing," *Captured Words/Free Thoughts* 19 (2023), 64.
51. Conversation with the authors, Skyline Correctional Facility, January 18, 2024.
52. Manuel Sisneros, "From Gutter to Glory," *Captured Words/Free Thoughts* 20 (2024): 84.
53. Cal State LA Prison Program: https://www.calstatela.edu/al/communication-studies/lancaster-prison-program.
54. Jeffrey Stein, "Transforming Lives through Prison Higher Education," in *Higher Education and the Carceral State*, 21-30, quotations at 25 and 27.
55. Conversation with the authors, CTCF, January 18, 2024.
56. Conversation with the authors, CTCF, January 18, 2024.
57. Cormac Behan "Learning to Escape: Prison Education, Rehabilitation, and the Potential for Transformation," *Journal of Prison Education and Reentry* 1 (2014): 20-31, quotations at 23.
58. Manuel Sisneros, "Finally," *Captured Words/Free Thoughts* 20 (2024), 56.
59. "Voices from History Debate the Pitfalls and Promises of American Democracy," with contributions by Taveuan Williams, David Torrez, Louis Mamo, and Manuel Sisneros, *Captured Words/Free Thoughts* 19 (2023), 14-23, quotations at 16.
60. Conversation with the authors, Sterling Correctional Facility, January 3, 2024.
61. Veterans Justice League: https://www.veteransjusticeleague.com.
62. See the stories in *Liberty's Captives: Narratives of Confinement in the Print Culture of the Early Republic*, ed. Daniel Williams (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006); for analysis, see Stephen J. Hartnett, *Executing Democracy, Volume 1: Capital Punishment & the Making of America, 1683-1807* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2012).
63. Benjamin Boyce, *The Spectacle of Punishment: Lessons from a Century of Prison Films* (Apprentice House, 2023); also see Carol Stabile, *White Victims, Black Villains: Gender, Race, and Crime News in U.S. Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2006).
64. While toxic masculinity dominates mass media fantasies of life in prison, the reality is more complicated, as argued in the essays in *New Perspectives on Prison Masculinities*, ed. Matthew Maycock and Kate Hunt (London: Palgrave, 2020). Also see Benjamin Boyce, "I Did 340 Pushups a Day to Prepare for the TV Version of Prison. Then I Got There," *Marshall Project*, January 28, 2021.
65. Keean Davis, "You May Ask," *Captured Words/Free Thoughts* 19 (2023), 61.
66. Conversation with the authors, CTCF, January 18, 2024.
67. Conversation with the authors, CTCF, January 18, 2024.

68. On gender as performance within prisons, where we adopt roles and archetypes as needed, see Jonathan Shailor, "Kings, Warriors, Magicians, and Lovers: Alternative Performances of Masculinity in Prison," in *Working for Justice*, 13-38; Enck and McDaniel, "'I Want Something Better for My Life'"; and the essays in *Captive Genders*.
69. Tammy Englerth, "Taking My Life Back," *Captured Words/Free Thoughts* 19 (2023), 8.
70. Lizard, "Secrets," *Captured Words/Free Thoughts* 15 (2018), 9-11.
71. Lizard, "Secrets," 11.
72. Conversation with the authors, Skyline Correctional Facility, January 18, 2024. And see his "X Out," a layered oil painting in *Captured Words/Free Thoughts* 20 (2024), 46-47.
73. Conversation with the authors, Sterling Correctional Facility, January 3, 2024.
74. Jason Gonzales and Charlotte West, "Colorado Becomes One of the First to Employ an Incarcerated Professor," *Chalkbeat Colorado,* January 4, 2024, https://www.chalkbeat.org/colorado/2024/01/04/incarcerated-professor-teaches-college-classes-in-prison/. To hear Carillo's story in his own words, listen to "Life in Prison, College Degrees, and 16 Grams of Coke," podcast #151 of Benjamin Boyce's *Dr. Junkie Show,* https://open.spotify.com/episode/6n5PgPfbxJ2Jx5fKo0Cs2Q?si=oGB3plyF-SeS49pbHTXTVhw.
75. Adams State University PEP, https://www.adams.edu/academics/pep/print-based.
76. Conversation with the authors, at CU Denver, November 5, 2024. To read more about Carillo's clemency, see Rachel Estabrook, "Gov. Jared Polis Grants Clemency to 28 people, Including a Former Teen Sentenced for Murder," *Colorado Public Radio,* December 22, 2023, https://www.cpr.org/2023/12/22/gov-jared-polis-grants-clemency-to-28-people-including-a-former-teen-sentenced-for-murder/.
77. Louis Mamo, "Invisible Father," *Captured Words/Free Thoughts* 19 (2023), 6.
78. Conversation with the authors, CTCF, January 18, 2024.
79. Conversation with the authors, Skyline Correctional Facility, January 18, 2024.
80. For a transcript of the event, plus photographs, see "When I Becomes We (Ubuntu)," preface by Kamran Afary, *Captured Words/Free Thoughts* 18 (2022): 54-59, quotations at 58-59.