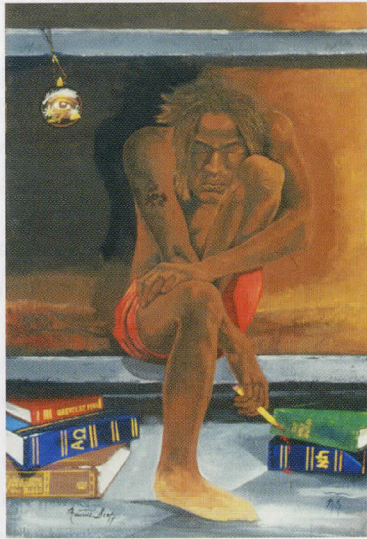


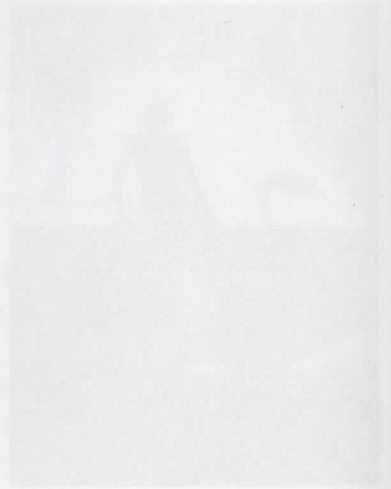
10 YEARS of the ANNUAL EXHIBITION OF ART BY MICHIGAN PRISONERS

Doing Time, Making Space





Maurice Scott, Waiting



IN PRISONS ACROSS THE UNITED STATES millions of people are confined in desolate cells, in large buildings that are invisible to most citizens. Our criminal justice system, fraught with unequal sentencing, disproportionate numbers of people of color, poor and mentally ill people, and growing numbers of women, provides little opportunity for change or growth. It is therefore up to the will power and ingenuity of each individual prisoner to create a path for themselves.

As Pedro Quesada says reflecting on prison, “there are only two ways to go — positive or negative. Some think that there is a gray area, but they are fooling themselves.” Perhaps because the choice is so definite and the consequences so evident, those of us in “the world” find this challenge a mirror that reminds us of our own important choices. Those of us who work with prisoners realize that we too have reasons to feel remorse, we too have done things we regret, and we must also choose every day whether to grow or to deteriorate.

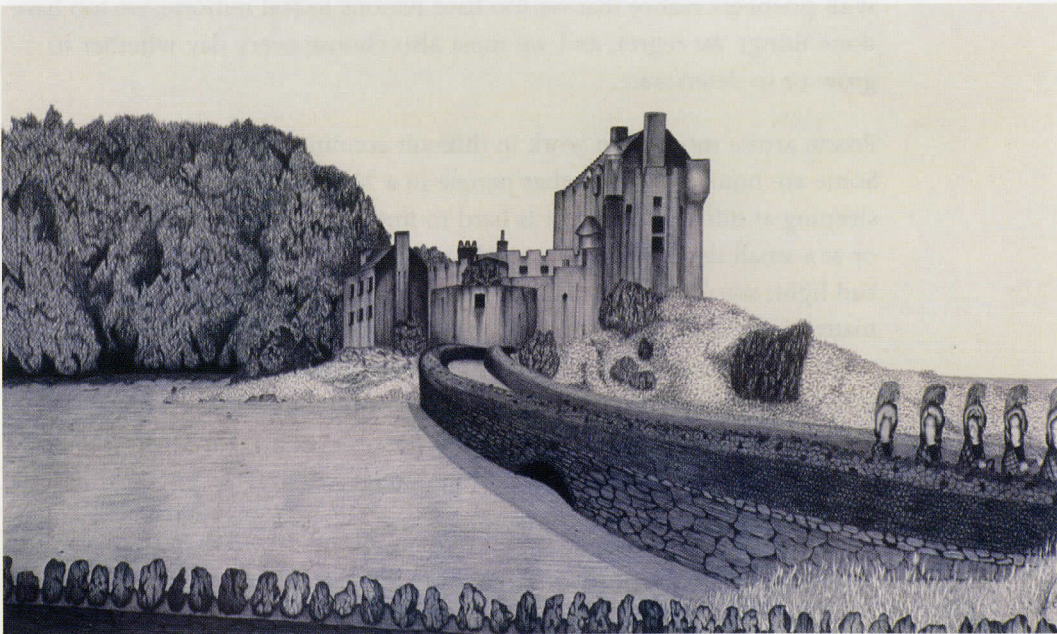
Prison artists most often work in difficult conditions with many challenges. Some are bunked with 5 other people in a 12' x 16' cubicle. With people sleeping at different times, it is hard to find space and light to work. Some or at a small desk. Some may work in the pool/gambling/tv room with bad light, smoke and people watching and asking questions. For most, materials are hard to come by either because the cost is prohibitive or the materials are not allowed in prison. While there is often support from other inmates and staff, art sometimes gets intentionally destroyed. There is hardly any storage space, so it is not possible, as it is for artists outside, to view the history and breadth of one's own work.

Many prison artists are new to art making. Some drew when they were young, and a few went to art school or practiced on their own. For most it wasn't until being locked up that art became an important resource. For some it starts as a way to keep busy and to earn income from making

greeting cards, drawing portraits of loved ones from photographs, or drawing on envelopes. In addition, prison artists often sell their work to inmates who can afford it and to prison staff. Some prisoners start making art, not so much for the money, but as a way to relax or as an escape from the tension of surviving in prison. They may start by copying, or trying out a technique that someone else has used, or just doodling, and find that this takes them into a state of peace that is otherwise unattainable in prison. While many artists learn and work alone, experienced artists often mentor beginners and give them support.

Just as for artists everywhere, mastering a skill, getting recognized for it and feeling a sense of accomplishment develops into a desire to create something unique and personal. For many of the artists who continue to make art and exhibit in our shows, initial commercial ventures lead to work that is artistically evolved and meaningful.

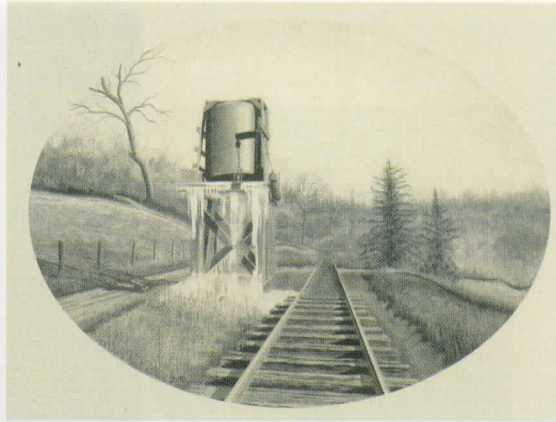
Many prison artists have carefully constructed a highly evolved process, worked out in hours of deep thought. Because reference materials, visual stimulation and supplies are limited, artists are forced to draw upon their own inner resources. In the repetition and refinement of their individualized process, artists can achieve a state of being that is sustaining and generative. Freely associating images, including things seen, heard or remembered, artists are able to connect back to childhood, people, and places, and to



Mike Routley, *The Long March*



Richard Dolinsek, *My Man*



Jack Boyd, *Water Tower in Winter*

visualize feelings, ideas and longings. The urgent need to escape the difficult conditions of prison and return to this state of being results in the intensity that is such a remarkable quality of the work that we see.

Because the stakes are high in prison, artistic choices are made deliberately. Artists spend hours on the various stages of their carefully honed processes. It isn't only that prisoners have a lot of time to fill. Time must be transformed from dead nothingness into something active and alive. For a prison artist, doing time means transforming time. And for the visual artist, this is a process of transforming time into space. The space that artists create in dialogue with their work is a world within prison, in which they can live and find sustenance. The discovery of their unique process, the practicing and refining of this process and the repetitive execution of it is an active resistance to the deadliness of prison. And the final artwork is imbued with the spirit of this transformation.

Artists arrive at their imagery in many ways, which all have one thing in common: the thoughtful, inventive and emotionally charged relationship between artist and materials. Store bought supplies and found materials are explored for all of their possibilities. The simplest of materials — pencil, charcoal or pen — can be used with extreme subtlety and attention to detail, exploring every nuance that the tool can give. The importance of this can not be overemphasized. Prison intentionally strips people not only of possessions, but also of the experience of cherishing objects. While friendships between individuals and camaraderie in workshops can be strong, the pervasive atmosphere in prison is distant and guarded. In this context, the artist's relationship to their materials is special because it provides endless transformational possibilities and a give and take that is absent from most human contact.

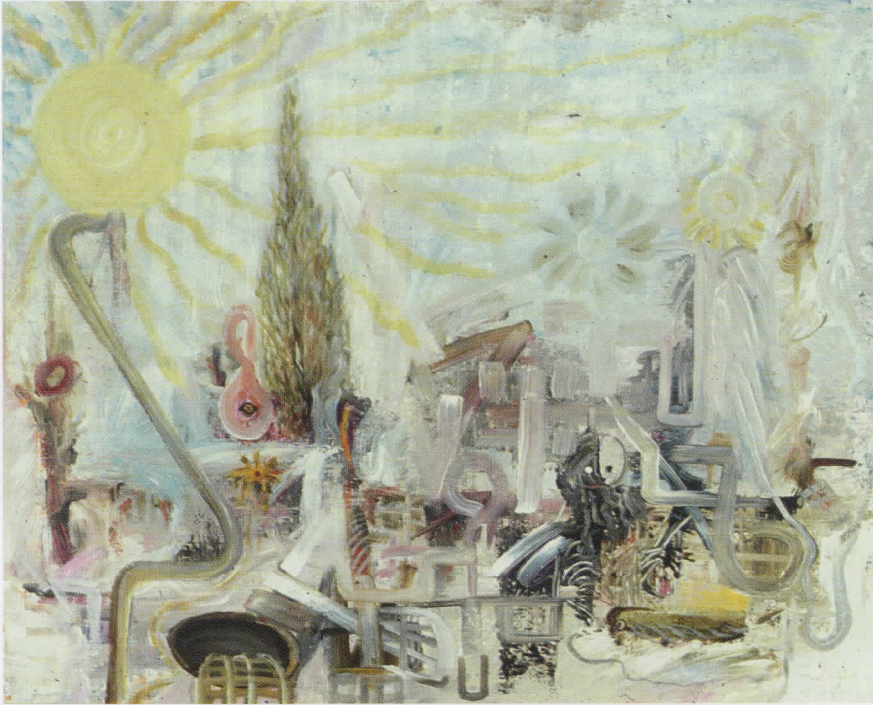


Andrew Wyncoop, March of the Apocalypse



Billy Brown, Dancing People

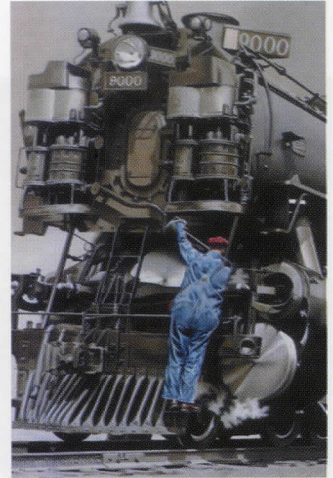
There is little in prison to inspire aesthetic contemplation. So each artist must invent a way to generate imagery. Some work directly from their imaginations, letting images emerge from the materials as they draw or paint. Others find images in photographs or artwork and integrate them into their own compositions. Many artists keep a file of reference materials gathered from magazines, books, newspapers, cd covers and other visual materials. Some copy very literally from photographs, finding creativity in the accomplishment of technical skill.



Mark Wolak, untitled



O. Dennis Glover, Pheasants on a Fence Rail



Scott MacKenzie, 9001

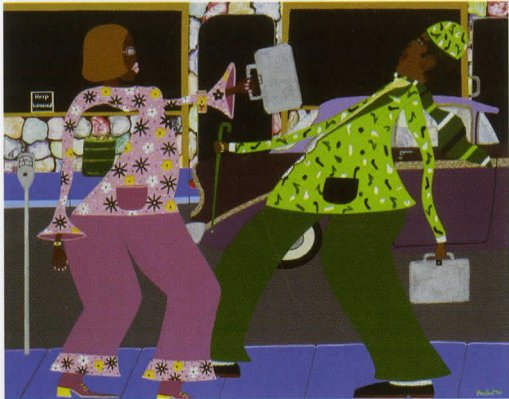
Andrew Wyncoop sees images emerge as he paints background colors onto the surface, and then develops and refines them.

After trying realistic drawing, **Billy Brown** sought assistance for his own personal vision through prayer and immediately began to do his "Billy Art."

Mark Wolak's work develops from his imagination with almost no use of external references.

Scott MacKenzie works from references, but transcends ordinary duplication by achieving technical virtuosity.

Dennis Glover evolved a way of layering colored pencil strokes to build up luminous surfaces on wildlife and landscape images.



Eric Pasha, Super Strut to Work



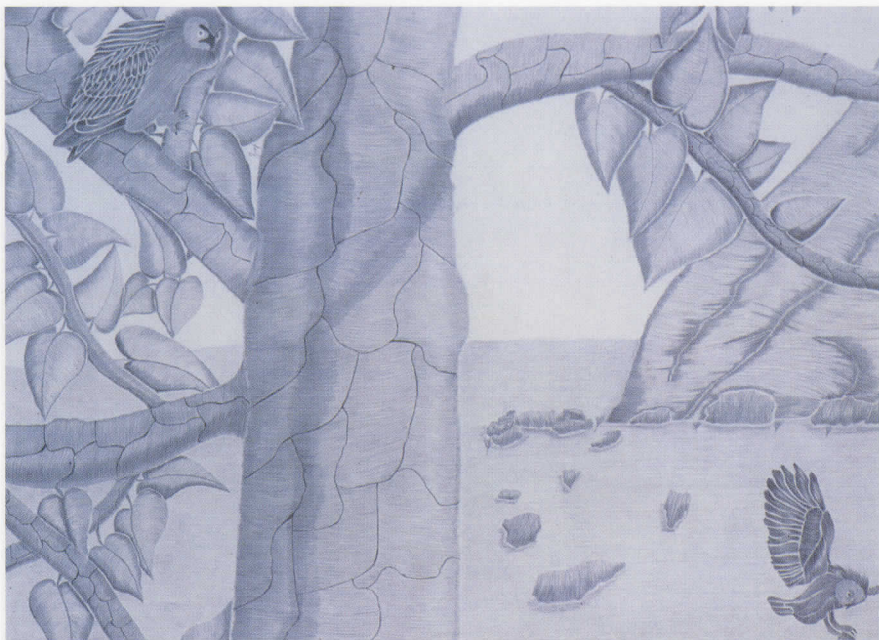
Marvin Cagle, Octoluminate



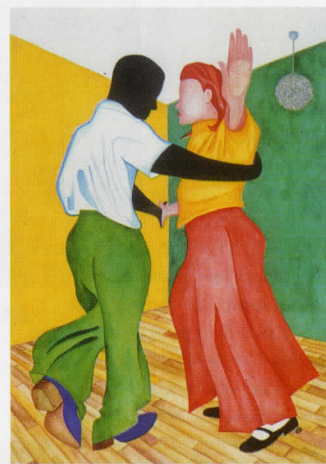
Sheila Bolden, Dance of Joy

Making art is a form of resistance to the oppressive conditions of prison life.

In resistance to the barrenness of prison, artists create images of beauty, joy and celebration.



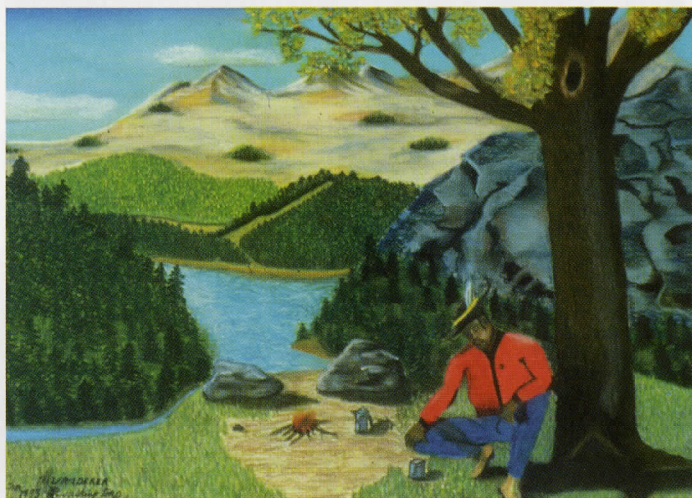
Pedro Quesada, *LakeView*



Richard Phillips, *Swing Partner*



Lionel Stewart, *Winking At You*



Leo Washington, *Wanderer*

Tracy Neal made a series of large collages out of materials collected from the yard and some personal belongings. To make *Nest Building*, she gathered stones and twigs and arranged them with her educational certificates and pictures of her children on a discarded piece of cardboard to represent her hopes for her family. With even fewer materials, she created *My Babies*. In this collage, she embedded letters from her children into dead leaves gathered from the yard.



Tracy Neal, *Nest Builder*



Tracy Neal, *My Babies*

In resistance to poverty of resources,
there is inventiveness with materials.



Rick Ward, Basement Apartment

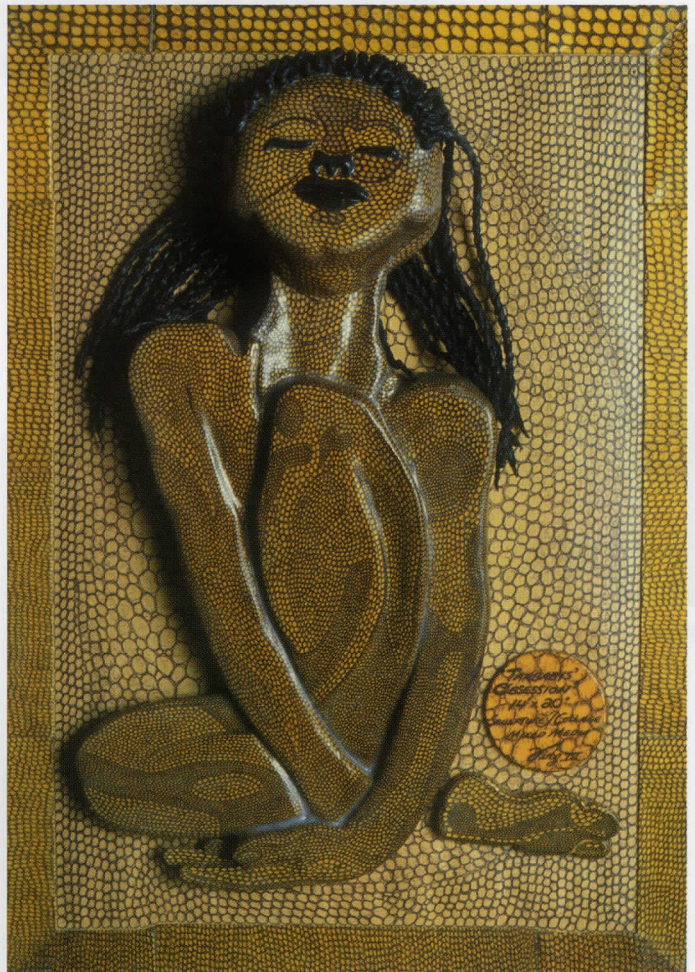
Rick Ward made a series of paintings with instant coffee, glue and water.

Calvin Sawyer paints on found paper wrapped around pieces of cardboard.

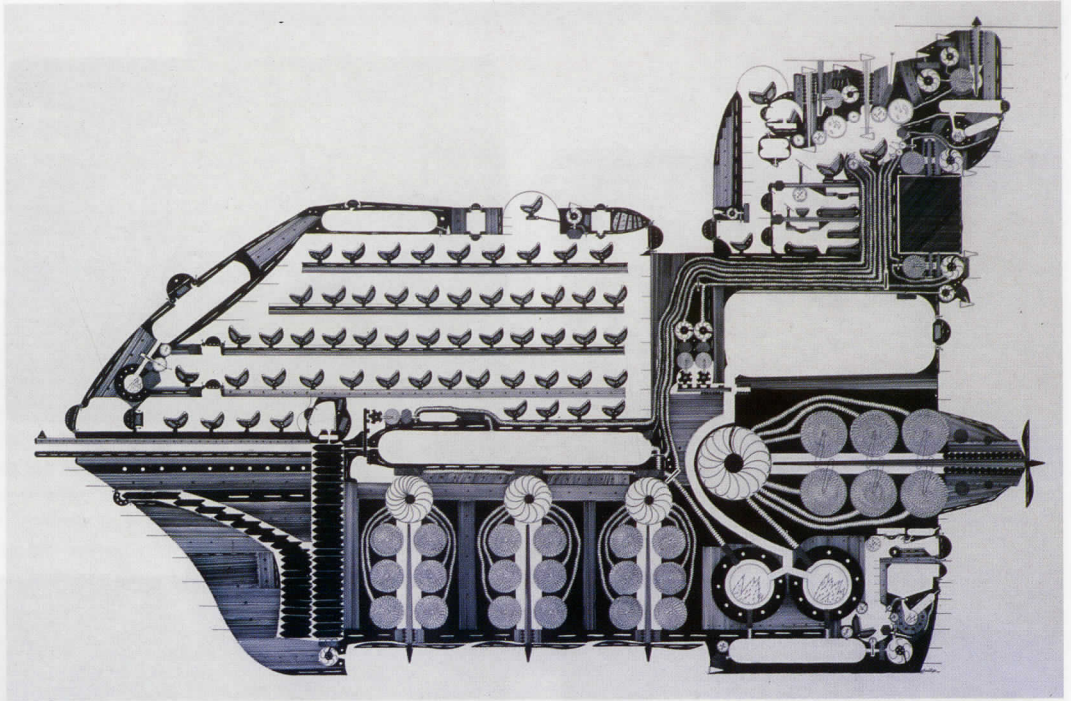
To make his *Tarbaby's Obsession*, **Virgil Williams III**, cut shapes out of cardboard and like a topographical map, arranged them in various heights to construct the body parts. The surface was made with glue and pen and the hair with toilet paper covered in shoe polish.



Calvin Sawyer, What Man Made Man Can Destroy



Virgil Williams III, Tarbaby's Obsession



Frank Peretti, Machines Fast Transport

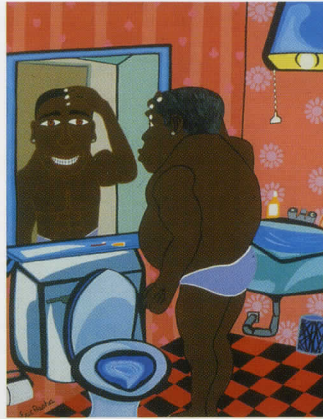


Felipe Planes, Things of Life

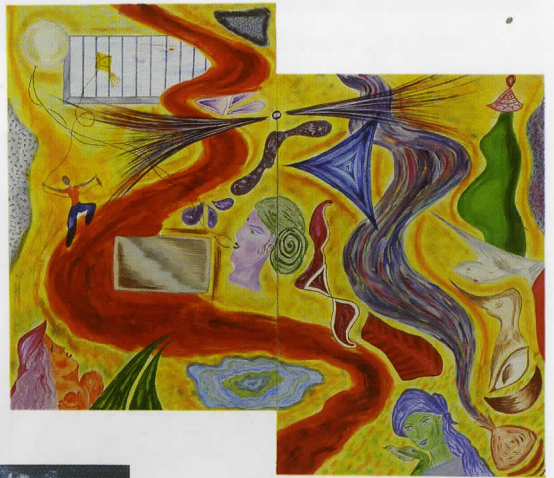
In resistance to uniformity,
there is idiosyncrasy and freshness of vision.



Wynn Satterlee, Free Hats



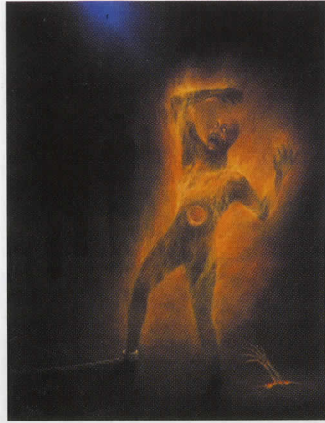
Eric Pasha, I Wish



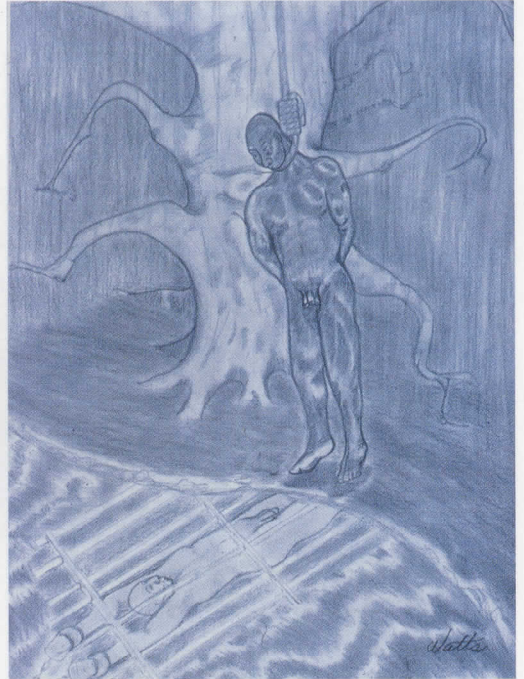
Kinnari Sutariya, Linked Vitality



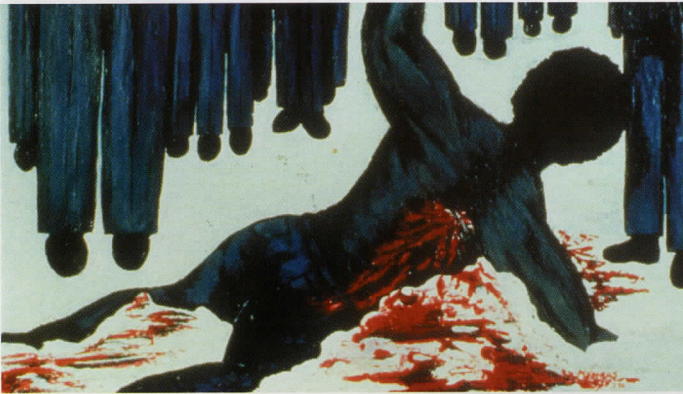
Patrick Harris, The Third Eye



Rod Strelau, *Just Another Day*



Andre Watts, *Art From A Sea of Lost and Living Dead II*



Martin Vargas, *Prison Death Scene*

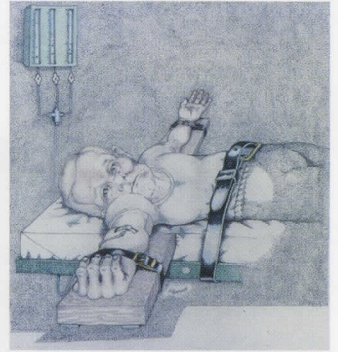


Cary Safarian, *Everything's Alright I Guess*

In resistance to the hidden devastation and violence of prison,
artists depict harsh realities that we need to know about.



Sheldon Murry, Life and Death



Duke Simmons, A.D. 2000



Charles Young, A Glimpse of the Past
and Vision of the Future



Duane Montney, Persona Non Grata



Richard Phillips, Showers of Stability



Daniel Valentine, Nurturing II



Gary Smith, Mom



Monty Wade, Like Father, Like Son

In resistance to the coldness of prison,
artists create images of love and tenderness.



Raymond Brown, Self-Portrait



Nancy Jean King, Anxiety



Martin Vargas, The Lifer, A Self-Portrait



Anthony James, Self-Portrait

And in resistance to invisibility,
artists create images of themselves.



Tom Odell, *The Ever Worms*

Last year over 4,000 people came to see the Annual Exhibition of Art by Michigan Prisoners. What they saw were 343 works of art — each one a world created by someone who had been made invisible. By their struggle, invention, persistence, knowledge, practice, joy and growth each artist has asserted the complexity, individuality and richness that make up a human being. The vividness of their presence on the walls of the gallery demand that we think hard about how we perceive and judge each other, whom we banish from the world and why, and what kind of change we think is possible in a human life.

Janie Paul