

Education for Socially Engaged Art

Chapter 3

Is William Martinez Not Our Brother?

Introduction

Helguera Chapter 3

Situations— how to identify a variety of particular social scenarios and navigate the realm of shifting expectations and perceptions in a given community.

What kind of situations is SEA concerned with?

Situations that result in a social exchange— interpersonal situations.

Social Exchange Theory— individual relations based on a sort of social economy.

While we are vastly complex, many of our social situations conform to identifiable patterns.

These patterns are helpful in understanding forces that shape conflicts and potentialities in every social encounter:

1. Corresponding versus conflicting interests
 - a. Common goals
2. Exchange problems
 - a. either party initiates the project by offering something desirable for both.
3. Information conditions
 - a. conflict will often result if parties have different ideas
 - b. different motivations
 - c. information not shared
 - d. actions not welcomed

A common problem is most communities don't understand conceptual art, what conceptual artists do or the demands on our profession.

Social Work vs. Social Practice

While Social Work and SEA can look similar, they differ widely in their goals.

Social work is a value-based profession based on a tradition of beliefs and systems that aim for the betterment of humanity and support ideals such as social justice, human dignity and the strengthening of human relationships.

Artists— in contrast may have the same values but make work that ironizes, problematizes and even enhances tension in order to provoke reflection.

Art-making may demand self-reflexivity and criticality.

Helguera believes a stronger argument may be that SEA has a double function that social work lacks.

When we make socially engaged artwork, we are not just offering a service to a community; we are proposing our action as a symbolic statement in the context of our cultural history (and art history) and entering into a larger artistic debate.

SEA – have an explicit purpose to serve a community.
And at the same time, find a symbolic action to reflect the
issue.
And enter into a larger artistic debate.

A community + the art world.

So, there's a distinction. What are the similarities?

History of the community with art or social issues.

Practices based on the postmodern perspective that is the perception of the facts, not the facts themselves that matter.

Awareness by artist or social workers of the public's perception of them and the situation should inform their approach.

Trust

Management of situation

Dialogue

Is William Martinez Not our Brother?

The Prison Creative Arts Project is one of the most long-running and comprehensive art program operating in prisons in the US. You have read several articles about this project so you should have a good understanding at this point.

The program works with various populations related to prisons (both inside and outside) in writing, dance, theater, visual art, poetry and music.

Every year they host one of the largest prisoner art exhibitions in the world.

Public Scholarship

a reaction against specialized academic language and against academic “overemphasis on critique” and satisfaction with ‘arenas of deliberation.’

rejects professional withdrawal from the public as well as college and university intervention in communities only as advocates, problem-solvers, and volunteers how practice ‘service learning.’

These tasks constitute the ‘public good.’

These are spaces where people disagree, perhaps even hostile, spaces of contention, struggle.

High tolerance for complexity and fluidity....

Imagining America

universities must commit to civic engagement on an institutional level.

Imagining America rose to build a broad movement for cultural democracy tied to civil engagement and efforts to change the culture of higher education.

The Prison Creative Arts Project

Since 1990, incarcerated youth and adults, urban and rural youth, University of Michigan students, faculty, and community members worked with 24 prisons, six juvenile facilities and seven high schools...

The Prison Creative Arts Project

created 506 plays, art in over 100 workshops, 179 creative writing workshops and 87 in-house anthologies.

Dance workshops.

Arts in high schools.

Curated 15 annual exhibitions by Michigan prisoners.

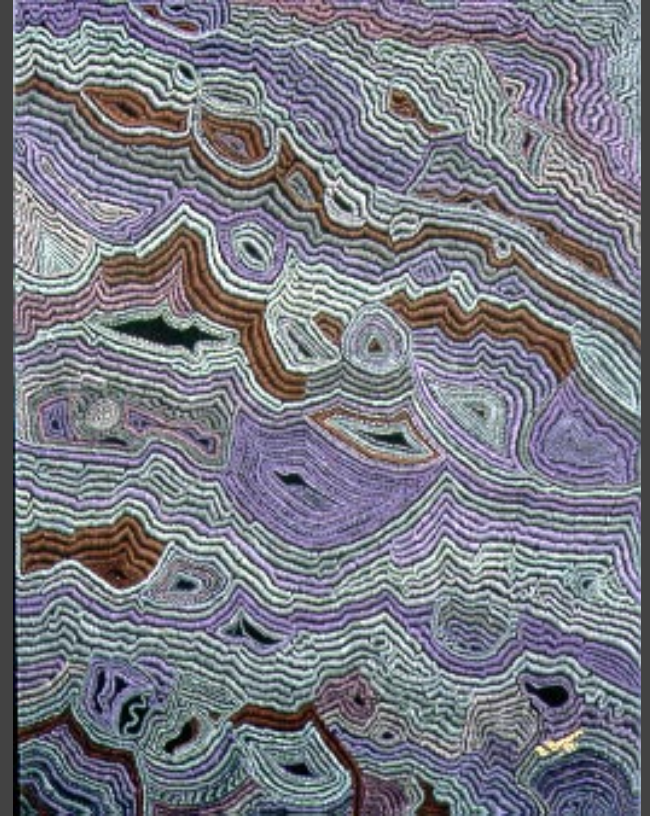
11 curated exhibitions by incarcerated youth.

2009 published On Words: Michigan Review of Prisoner Creative Writing– 294 writers from 44 prisoners.

Prison Creative Arts Project:

This is one you all have researched. Here are some voices of the artists.

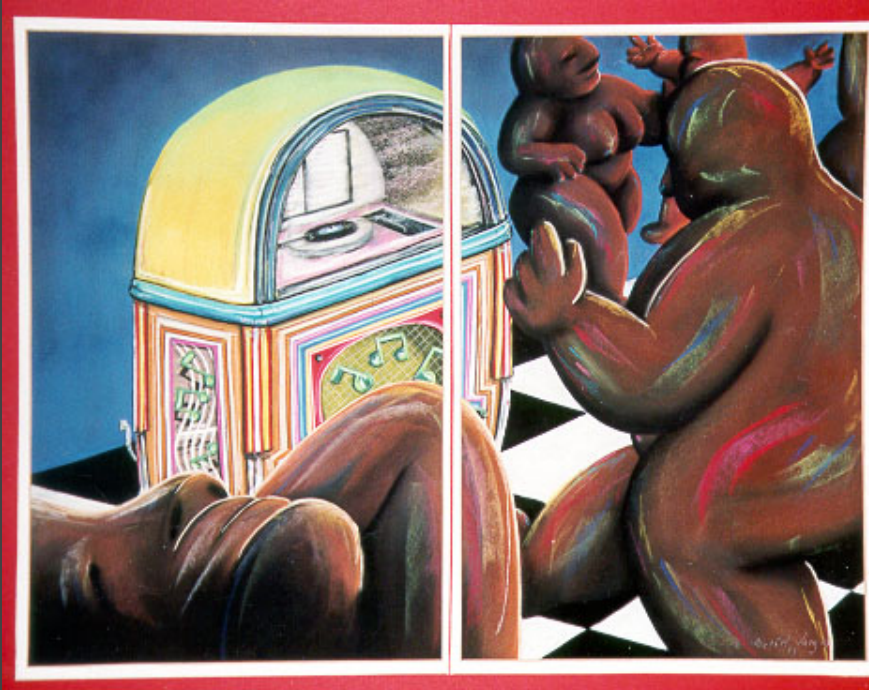
Statement from the Artist: Billy Brown
I started in the art class over four and half years ago, here at ICF. I got to meet art teacher Herschell Turner. Working with him was three prisoners. Mr. Turner talked with me and asked me what would I like to learn. At that time, I said I wanted to work with pastels, so I got started in pastels and loved working with them, and I did some good work. But one day Mr. Turner was telling the class we had to come up with our own thing. I prayed about it and one day I got some colored pencils and black paper, and I came up with Billy Art. And to know that my art is like by others really makes me want to work to make it better



Prison Creative Arts Project:

<http://www.lsa.umich.edu/pcap/>

Martin Vargas At age 18, I came to prison to serve a "parolable" life sentence. Scared, angry and defiant, I was easily swallowed up by the negativity saturating prisons. Now I am 46. Although the parole board voted unanimously to proceed to public hearing on my case in both 1992 and 1993, no action has been taken. So like many other middle-aged "lifers" who become eligible for parole after serving 10 calendar years, I am now a prisoner of the current board's policy that "life means life." It is frustrating to know that nothing I have done to become a mature, responsible adult, and nothing I accomplish from now on, will affect this parole board's willingness to release me. In spite of this, I know there are millions of people in worse prisons than I'm in and I try to be a productive, contributing member of society even though I must do it from here. My artwork is a great help in making this connection. Art is a tremendous gift! It brings peace and freedom where none is meant to be and has substantially raised my level of dignity and self worth. It's a big reason why my past is no longer a part of my present and I no longer have a need to prove myself





Inmates Journey

When men in a Pennsylvania state prison join with victims of crime to create a mural about healing, their views on punishment, remorse, and forgiveness collide. Finding consensus is not easy but as the participants move through the creative process, mistrust gives way to surprising moments of human contact and common purpose.

The film, featuring Philadelphia's internationally recognized Mural Arts Program, raises important questions about crime, justice and reconciliation, and dramatically illustrates how art can facilitate dialogue about difficult issues.



Victims Journey

Some links for additional research:

Community Arts network

<http://wayback.archive-it.org/2077/20100906194747/http://www.communityarts.net/>

Prison Creative Arts Project

<http://www.lsa.umich.edu/english/pcap/>

Artists United for Social Justice

<http://www.ausj.org/>

Prison arts coalition

<http://theprisonartscoalition.wordpress.com/>

Corrections Documentary Project

<http://www.correctionsproject.com/>