

## University of Michigan hosts 26th annual exhibition of art by Michigan prisoners

by Sejal Patil  
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The 26th **Annual Exhibition of Art by Michigan Prisoners** opening gallery was held on Tuesday evening at the **Duderstadt Center Gallery**. The exhibition was put together by the **Prison Creative Arts Project** (PCAP) in coordination with the **Michigan Department of Corrections** (MDOC). The gallery is open to the public from March 22-April 5.

The first exhibition was held in the University of Michigan Rackham Galleries in February 1996; seventy pieces of art from 50 artists were featured in the first exhibition. This year, all 26 Michigan prisons sent in artwork by people who are incarcerated there – 714 pieces were displayed from 392 artists.

Nora Krinitsky, PCAP director and lecturer in the Residential College, said this year’s exhibition would be the first one in three years. Krinitsky said people who are incarcerated face isolation and unimaginable loss over the years and are excited to share their work with the public.

“Viewing another person’s art is absolutely fascinating,” Krinitsky said. “A population that has been almost entirely cut off from human contact over the past two years really deserves our attention ... I think you’ll also find incredible examples of resilience in the artwork. Looking at the pieces and spending time with that is uplifting in ways that I couldn’t have even imagined.”

The artists work independently using supplies they have obtained themselves. Various media were used by the artists such as acrylic, colored pencil, watercolor, embroidery floss with glue and more. Art selection teams, consisting of curators, staff, students and volunteers, travel to each prison to meet artists to select work for display and provide general feedback and support to the artists.

Krinitsky said the art selection process happens from October through the beginning of January and the visits are always very rewarding for both the artists and the staff.

“It was really exciting to be able to go back inside and collect art this year, because we haven’t been able to go inside the prisons since March 2020,” Krinitsky said. “It was a privilege to meet the artists again and see what they’re working on. When all those pieces were collected, every piece was professionally photographed and all of the art that is featured is for sale. The artists price their own work and they receive all the proceeds.”

When asked if there are workshops available for the artists to improve their skills, Krinitsky said the show is a testament to the way artists have taught one another new skills and tricks.

“We do have visual arts workshops and some visits, but with so many prisons in Michigan, we rely on the incarcerated artists themselves to serve as teachers,” Krinitsky said. “Every year, once the show has concluded, we create a slideshow of all the photography we’ve done and send that on DVD to every prison.”

Additionally, PCAP sends each artist a packet of exhibit promotional materials, notifications of any sales of their works, a certificate and a copy of the guest book.

LSA freshmen Siena Weisbrodt and Chloe Outland both attended the event and volunteered with PCAP for this year’s exhibition.

“We both started working with PCAP this year and have been helping with the setup for the event,” Weisbrodt said.

“We originally interviewed Mary (Heinen-McPherson), one of the staff members, for a class and that’s how we first got involved, and then we came to see the opening,” Outland said.

Outland said hearing about the work the organization does drew them in and helped them realize they wanted to get involved in any way they could. Weisbrodt said even though she helped with the setup, she was astonished seeing everything all together.

“It’s so impressive. I got to see some of the art during the setup, but there’s still so many pieces I haven’t even seen yet,” Weisbrodt said. “It’s just astounding that these prisoners were able to create these art pieces while they were incarcerated ... I couldn’t do this, and I have all the resources I could ask for.”

Krinitzky said it has been a long time since the public has been in the gallery together to see the work of the prisoners firsthand.

“There’s nothing like being in a gallery with a piece of art,” Krinitzky said. “Many of our artists use really creative materials, found objects and other things amongst them. But sometimes you cannot really understand (a piece) unless you’re standing next to it. So I hope that we will see a lot of students and community members in the gallery over the next two weeks.”

*Daily Staff Reporter Sejal Patil can be reached at [sejpatil@umich.edu](mailto:sejpatil@umich.edu).*

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