

INCARCERATEDLY YOURS,
issue i

PRISON RENAISSANCE PROJECT

a collaboration between artists
in san quentin state prison and at
stanford

made possible through phone calls,
snail mail, and shared humanity

SMITH P-24614
STATE PRISON
CALIFORNIA 94974

ZINE PROJECT
Michelle Chang & NETTA WANG

SWEET HALL 3RD FLOOR
590 ESCONDIDO MALL



Prison Renaissance Project
All walks of life
Stanford, CA 94305
San Quentin, CA 94974

Dear Reader
Where you are at
Here & now

Dear Reader,

This first issue of “Incarceratedly Yours,” is a collaboration between 4 artists from San Quentin State Prison and 4 artists from Stanford University, paired together based on each artist’s thematic interests and mediums. What follows is the artwork that was created in these pairs, through weekly phone calls and snail mail, from February to May 2018.

At the core of this project is artistic collaboration between unlikely others. To include only the work of one group would be isolating and divisionary; we thus put the two contexts in dialogue against the backdrop of the shared human condition. This zine bears witness to moments that, as incarcerated artist Emile DeWeaver puts it, “build bridges over walls”. Over the phone, we sang happy birthday, crafted humorous hamster metaphors, and showed incessant gratitude for mutually restorative transformation. This zine is an imperative that asks, “How are we committing acts of violence everyday by choosing to see someone as more or less than a messy human being? And how do we heal those wounds everyday in small ways?”

While this zine is the end product, we see it as an artifact of the journey we underwent through its creation. When bureaucratic complications stopped all our phone calls for over a month, we felt a minuetia of what it must be like to be systematically isolated and in prison. We tried to capture our focus on the process in the following pages through images of the letters sent and logs of the calls made (or not made).

The title, “Incarceratedly Yours,” comes from the signage of a letter we received from one of our incarcerated artists, Joe. This signage struck a deep chord with us—in the midst of such oppression, to choose to stand in humor, humility, and graciousness regardless.

h soon. be well and smile lots.

incarceratedly yours:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joe Kravitz". The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized script. It is positioned below the typed name "Joe Kravitz" and is enclosed within a white rectangular box with a thin black border.

We hope you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed the privilege of creating it.

Yours,

Michelle Chang



Netta Wang

Prison Renaissance Project

emile deweaver

(San Quentin)

Emile DeWeaver is a 36-year-old writer, musician, and a member of Artistic Ensemble, an abstract movement company. He writes poetry, creative nonfiction, fantasy, and contemporary fiction. For him, citizenship means embracing a role that contributes to a more humane society. He would like to collaborate with other writers and graphic artists.

He is a 2015 Pushcart nominee with creative work in a dozen publications, including *The Lascaux Review*, *Frigg*, *Punchnel's*, and *The Rumpus*. You can find his work on his website and by visiting his monthly column "Good Behavior" at *Easy Street*. He is a co-founder of *Prison Renaissance* and has been granted

a commutation by the governor of California.

Artist's Statement: I woke up one morning in a cell wanting to change my life and the world that had shaped my life. All I had was my art, so I learned to use that.

vince pane

(Stanford)

Vince is a PhD student in chemistry, who enjoys sculpting, sewing, silk painting, and just generally making things. He mainly works with naturally colored hardwoods, but explores stone and metal as well. Vince has made over 50 pieces, created a wooden statue of a Trojan warrior (the school mascot) for his high school (Longmont High) and has been published in *Highgrade*. He hopes to continue to pursue the arts during his PhD and further

get involved with the community.

Artist's Statement: I don't carve bears.

mesro coles-el

(San Quentin)

George "Mesro" Coles-El is a poet, emcee, and graffiti artist incarcerated in California. As the glue holding this project together, he has been the main organizer coordinating among the artists in San Quentin. His first novel, *Triumph*, is forthcoming Summer 2017 by Capital Gaines LLC. When Coles isn't playing *Dungeons and Dragons*, he mentors kids in juvenile hall through his work with *The Beat Within*.

Artist's Statement: I never want to stop learning.

julianna yonis

(Stanford)

Julianna Yonis is a 19-year-old writer, actress, and theatre-maker currently studying at Stanford. She is interested in using art to foster empathy and encourage dialogue around the injustices in society.

Artist's Statement: *I picked up the phone, and my heart and mind were changed for the better.*

passion for alternative comics, says that "Community has always done more for me than I've done for it. I have to change that." The artist has a lot of experience that he would like to share with other artists, but he's most interested in finding a mentor to guide him through a career as a graphic artist.

Artist's Statement: *"Life imitates art, and art imitates life." — Oscar Wilde*

orlando smith

(San Quentin)

Orlando Smith has created and composed over 57 graphic novels and comic books. His work has appeared in *Heavy Metal*, and he's completed a host of commission work including covers for Omega Comics. He did storyboards for the movie *Social Tick* and for the upcoming film *Charlie Charlie*. Before Smith was a graphic novelist, he spent six years as a professional tattoo artist and ten years doing custom art on cars. Smith, a 49-year-old graphic artist with a

itamar orr

(Stanford)

Itamar's main mission is creating freedom in education and he looks at art to liberate the thought and push critical and creative thinking. He is a former Captain in the IDF, builds art for the burning man project and is currently perusing a MA-MBA in education at Stanford University.

Artist's Statement: *"Raise your words, not voice. It is rain that grows flowers, not thunder." — Rumi*

james king

(San Quentin)

James King is a 46-year-old writer. He loves to think about race, class, and stratification. But when it comes to himself, he's a man of few... He describes himself as a novice who's interested in Christian-themed fiction, personal essays, and poetry. He believes community involvement is the root of his rehabilitation. He would like an experienced writer to mentor him.

Artist's Statement: *I want to write for those who feel trapped by their circumstances, so they know that change is possible.*

marc osborn

(Stanford)

Marc Huerta Osborn is a young writer out of Alameda, California. He writes most commonly about multiracial identity, curious about the ways that mixed-race perspectives might be uniquely positioned to build bridges between American communities, especially those that have been historically marginalized.

Artist's Statement: *Art is solidarity.*

ARTIST BIOS

PROCESS. *what did it take to organize this zine?*

Our mantra throughout the project was, “It’s all about the process.”

There is no email, no Internet, no text-messaging in prison. To communicate with our artists, all we had were our weekly scheduled phone calls and snail mail. For every call that successfully went through were countless hours of waiting for calls that never came through—cancelled due to a slew of reasons such as lockdowns, bad weather, or broken phone lines.

This list is a log of the organizational calls it took to communicate logistics and updates on the project. Each cancelled call is delineated with a strikethrough. Each call that did make it through is accompanied by a line from the artist during the conversation. Not included in this list are the calls between Stanford and inside artists in creating their collaborative art.

Every 5 minutes on a call, the phone line interrupts to repeat, “This call and your telephone number will be monitored and recorded.” Every 15 minutes, the phone line automatically ends the call.

“Even our families sometimes don’t want to be bothered with navigating all these barriers to communication and connection,” says Emile DeWeaver.

1/17 8:30am: Emile call, "We want to highlight stories that confront people with the human condition."
~~1/24 8:30am: Emile call~~
~~1/26 8:30am: Emile call; ducating~~
1/31 8:30am: Emile call, "There's a lot of transformational space here."
2/2 9:12am: Mesro call, "This is going to be a little too much fun."
2/7 8:45am: Emile call, "Do you know the story of St. Valentine?"
2/7 5:18pm: Mesro call, "This is Prison Renaissance at Stanford, and we approve this message."
2/9 9:10am: Orlando call, "It's an honor for me to do this for you."
2/9 9:27am: Joe call, "If I'm not learning something, I feel like I'm drowning."
2/11 12:00pm: James call
~~2/14 5:00pm: Mesro call; phone lines crash~~
2/14 6:15pm: Mesro call, "I have no words right now, I feel like I need to scream."
~~2/20 8:30am: Mesro call~~
2/21 8:30am: Emile call, "Happy birthday! I haven't heard someone so full of joy in so long."
~~2/23 2:15pm: Mesro call~~
2/28 9:05am: Mesro call, "I'm tired of seeing kids in here."
3/5 2:30pm: Mesro call, "I would lose what's left of my marbles if I had to sit around all day."
~~3/7 8:30am: Emile call~~
~~3/8 10:30am: Mesro call~~
3/12 8:30am: Mesro call, "We gotta take care of each other— if we don't take care of each other, who's gonna?"
3/14 8:30am: Emile call, "The only worse thing than being sick is being sick in prison."
~~3/16 4:30pm: Mesro call; phone lines down due to weather~~
~~3/22 2:30pm: Mesro call; lockdown due to violent breakout~~
4/4 8:30am: Emile call, "Be aware of the limits."
~~4/4 9:30am: Mesro call~~
~~4/10 2:30pm: Mesro call~~
~~4/17 1:30pm: Mesro call~~
4/18 8:30am: Emile call, "Thank you to Ita for visiting. That kind of proximity is what the project is all about."
4/19 8:30am: Mesro call, "I've been sick missing you guys."
~~4/25 8:30am: Mesro call; lockdown due to flu~~
~~4/26 5pm: Mesro call~~
5/8 1:30pm: Mesro call, "The goal is to create hope. Hope is in short supply."
5/9 5:30am: Emile call
5/15 1:30pm: Mesro call, "Stay strong and keep smiling, can't be smelling like old people's toenails."
5/22 1:45pm: Mesro call, "I will be wearing my Sunday best, which is the same as my Wednesday okay."
~~5/23 8:30am: Emile call~~

Termino High School was stratified as fuck. Racially.
time. Why? Is it natural to kids? Did we g

SO CLOSE TO THE CENTER

JAMES KING (Writer, San Quentin)

MARC OSBORN (Writer, Stanford)

Both mixed-race writers, James and Marc collaborate on this short story as a way to investigate the similarities and radical differences between separate multiracial experiences. "So Close to the Center" is a fictional letter correspondence between the two close men as they reconnect after a period of silence which follows Julian's imprisonment. The letters flow between Cris (written by Marc), a white-passing Mexican American student who goes to school at a predominantly white university, and Julian "J-Money" (written by James), whose mother is White and father is Black and who writes his letters from a prison cell. What follows is a multidirectional exploration of pain, incarceration, confused racial identity, empathy, and memory. As Julian and Cris trade new stories and recall old ones, they gradually reinterpret what it means to be mixed-race and try to figure out where the racial self, body and mind, belongs in relation to the soul of America.

Cris,

You may never get this letter. I don't want to bring you into my world. I don't...man, I don't know what I want to do. I'm frustrated, exhausted, and though they say there's always a light at the end of the tunnel, I can't find it. Still, you didn't come to prison, I did, and I know it's not fair to put all this crap on you. After all, what could you do about any of this?

At the same time, you are probably the only person who would get me right now. So I'm going to write this, and maybe I'll send it to you. Probably I won't. I met a guy in here who reminded me a little bit of you. He was Mexican, but you could tell he'd grown up around Blacks. Though it's against the little race politics here, we used to trade CD's. His cellie found out, and last week they stabbed him. Just for swapping CD's with me. Just for having a Black friend.

It woke me up. Racism is as American as football. As American as rock and roll. As American as lynching niggas for not wanting to be niggas.

When I found out what they did to my friend, I tried to get my own knife. But the dudes here was too afraid of a race riot. Blacks got the numbers here, but no Black was willing to risk their life over some Mexican getting hit. They couldn't see that it wasn't about him, it was about us. They disrespected us. And I can't believe that I actually thought you could get away from race.

So when my so-called homie wouldn't help me get a knife, I decided to make my own. But my cellie saw what I was doing and told a few others. They jumped me at breakfast yesterday, then told

me they would kill me if I didn't get off the yard. I had to go to the guards to tell them to put me in the hole. My God, it was the hardest thing I've ever done.

So, I'm writing this, if I decide to send it to you, to tell you that you were right. There is no ignoring race. Trying to ignore race is like walking into a mass shooter situation and trying to ignore the bullets flying all around you. They keep shooting at us. I can't just live my life as if it doesn't matter that I'm Black. It's all anyone ever sees and it's the first thing they judge me by. Just last week my teacher told me I'm articulate. What does that even mean? That I can articulate words? We say Black lives matter, but it's obvious that my Blackness matters even more than my life. It's my cross, my living stigmata, and I can tell you from experience; the blood doesn't cleanse, it stains.

I used to think that prison was a jarring counter to the principles of America. In here, there is no democracy, and very few rights. Now I see that prisons are actually the soul of America. It's the place where America connects most intimately with its determined oppression of people of color. Prisons embody the patriarchal, misogynistic, fundamental faith in violence that fueled this nation's rise from rural outpost to cosmopolitan center of all the world's vices. I once heard that the soul is the seat of our emotions, and emotions themselves are responses to our values, whether they are upheld or violated. Being here in prison, so close to the center of America's values, is like living closest to a leaking nuclear reactor. We are infected the most and our brutality towards each other

over race is impressive to watch.
Uncle Sam would be proud.

Please don't worry about me.
Soon, they'll transfer me to a
new prison, and I won't make the
same mistakes there, that I made
here. I get it, and I'll act
accordingly.

J-Money

PRISONS ARE THE SOUL OF AMERICA
SOUL OF AMERICA

PRISONS ARE THE SOUL
PRISONS ARE THE SOUL

WHERE IS YOUR SOUL

WHERE IS YOUR SOUL

Julian,

You remember Khiem's? That old Vietnamese joint around the way? How we used to skip class and head over there before lunch break, because you and me were both swooning over that older girl Cassandra who worked the register. We didn't really have the money to cop a sandwich or anything, but we would go up to her with stupid grins plastered across our faces, and she'd look over her shoulder, making sure her parents weren't watching, and hook it up with some free potstickers. We were shorties then. I wonder if she'd recognize us now. I wonder if she's got somebody to take care of, who takes care of her. There was that one time when she waved us over and, eyes wide, showed us her new tattoo. That cartoon napping cat on her waistline. She covered it up quickly, and said: "You tell my parents, I fucking kill you." We nodded, awestruck, and she smiled, ruffling our hair. "My lil bros. You guys really get me." I still remember her voice. The lowness of it. It was like when she spoke, the sound would be coming from inside my own diaphragm. I bet you felt that, too.

Remember how that one time Lee's cousin, Caroline, got messed up in a car accident? He was so scared to see her all broken and bandaged in her coma, so we all went with him to the hospital. When we got in there, Lee's mom and aunties kept telling him, talk to her, talk to her. But he didn't know what to say. He just stood there, trembling, staring at all the tubes sticking out of his cousin, speechless. That's when you went up to him and put your arm around his shoulder. You would listen

to Lee's whispers, and then turn to Caroline. "Lee says you should get better soon. Lee says you tougher than that. Lee says he loves you." A week later the four of us were in the hallway when Caroline finally passed. All at once, the sound of Lee's relatives wailing in unison came down the hall to our ears. We all wrapped Lee up and held him while he shook. That time, too, the quiet way his shoulders sobbed felt like it was coming from inside my own chest. His tears were my tears. I know you felt that shit, too.

Look, Julian. I know it's hard, buddy. And you're not wrong about America, not in the slightest. I don't have any hard-fact arguments to prove to you that this country isn't, like you said, "a leaking nuclear reactor." These states are still in many ways a wild frontier, terrorized by an amazingly adaptable monster called Racism. It keeps killing, and looting, whispering in powerful ears, and then hiding. Denying its existence won't dispel the monster, or change the way it operates; and yet we insist on running blind, refusing to truly reckon with this thing we have created in the United States of America. It is because this monster hunts with stealth, subtly, in the shadows of our policies and daily conversations, that we can allow ourselves to pretend blindness.

But it ain't all like that. There is also beauty in race, and solidarity across race. Right? We know this. When we treat race the right way, with respect and openness and a willingness to make and address mistakes, we have a lot to gain. Our communities thrive on difference. Like us as kids.

The United Nations.

I understand that being in prison, you are most commonly exposed to the ugliest manifestations of race. Where it divides and damages, instead of enriches. I hurt for you and for your friend that got jumped, J. Really I do. I feel helpless and I hate that I can't put hands on the guys who did you like that.

At the same time, though, man, I beseech you not to let the monster of Racism fill up your whole world. Maybe you'll find this useless and sentimental, but I believe with all my heart America is as much ours as it is theirs. Fuck, I don't even know what to claim as my own race, but I know that I belong here. Because this is where I do my living. This is where I do my loving.

Prison is just an aspect. And that's not all you are. There are so many levels to your identity, so many ways for you to understand race as something more than a source of madness and confusion.

Just take a few moments and look through your memories. Our memories. Most of them are evidence of how solidarity across racial lines can exist, does, and must. You and I are alive today because we protected each other, with our fists and with our words and then, other times, just by seeing each other. We had our rough spots, but ultimately we had us. And isn't that fact enough to keep writing?

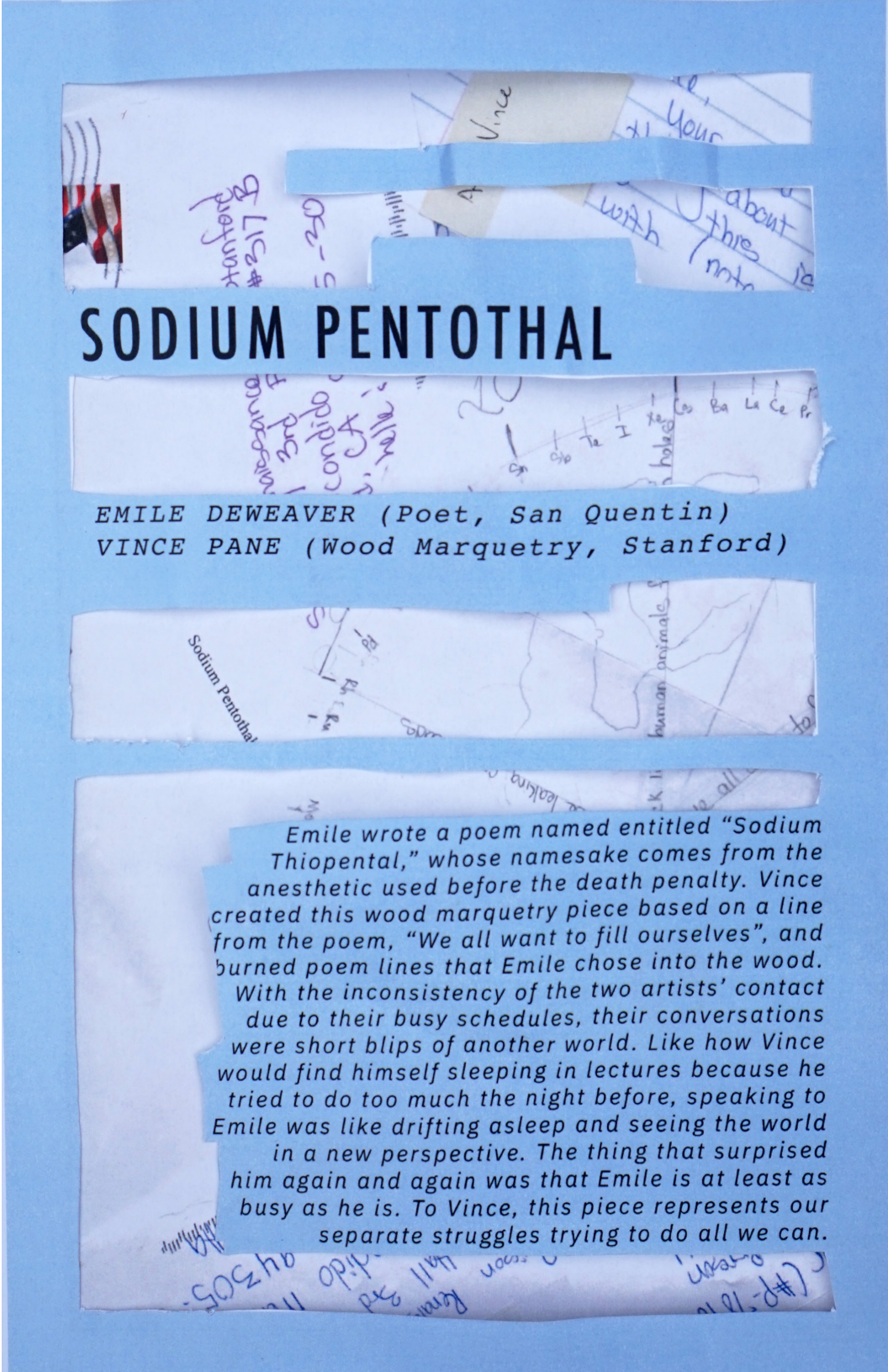
But alright, though. In the end, you know best, and you choose yours. And I don't mean that in a bad way. I recognize that you've

seen these horrible things raw and fresh, with your own eyes, and I haven't. I haven't even seen your face in almost a year.

But please, keep these letters around, just in case. I don't know what it is, yet, but I think there's something in these worth preserving. Something life-saving, even.

Whenever you're ready, you write me back.

Your Friend,
Cris



SODIUM PENTOTHAL

EMILE DEWEAVER (Poet, San Quentin)

VINCE PANE (Wood Marquetry, Stanford)

Emile wrote a poem named entitled "Sodium Thiopental," whose namesake comes from the anesthetic used before the death penalty. Vince created this wood marquetry piece based on a line from the poem, "We all want to fill ourselves", and burned poem lines that Emile chose into the wood. With the inconsistency of the two artists' contact due to their busy schedules, their conversations were short blips of another world. Like how Vince would find himself sleeping in lectures because he tried to do too much the night before, speaking to Emile was like drifting asleep and seeing the world in a new perspective. The thing that surprised him again and again was that Emile is at least as busy as he is. To Vince, this piece represents our separate struggles trying to do all we can.

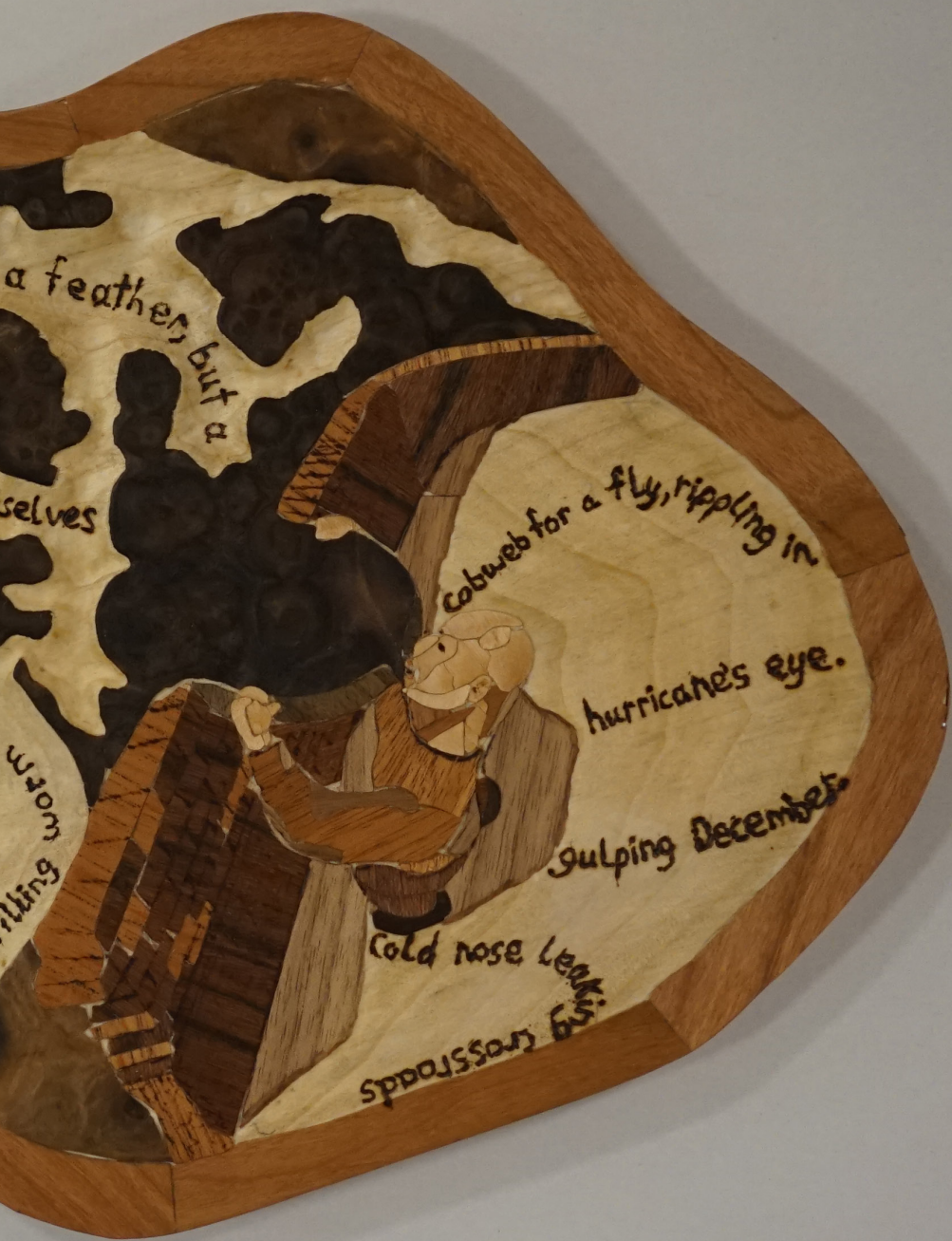


№ 4

hope isn't just

we all want to fill our

fuck like human animals
copy



a feather, but a

selves


cobweb for a fly, rippling in

hurricane's eye.

gulping December.


Cold nose Leaking
sparrows
crossroads

worm
filling

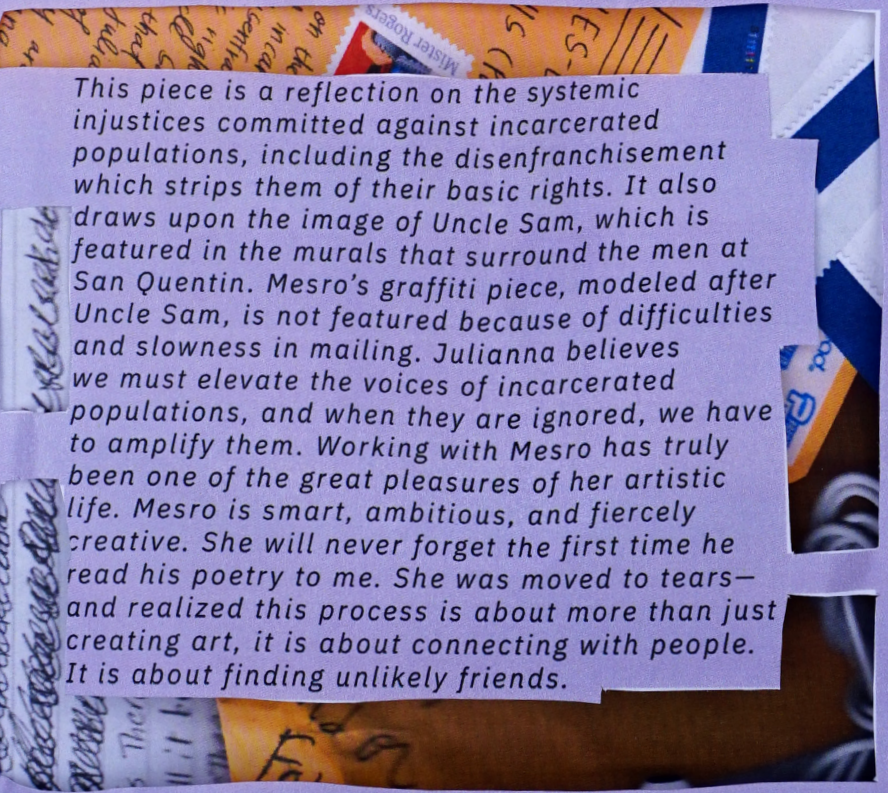


13TH

MESRO COLES-EL (Graffiti Artist, San Quentin)
JULIANNA YONIS (Poet, Stanford)



This piece is a reflection on the systemic injustices committed against incarcerated populations, including the disenfranchisement which strips them of their basic rights. It also draws upon the image of Uncle Sam, which is featured in the murals that surround the men at San Quentin. Mesro's graffiti piece, modeled after Uncle Sam, is not featured because of difficulties and slowness in mailing. Julianna believes we must elevate the voices of incarcerated populations, and when they are ignored, we have to amplify them. Working with Mesro has truly been one of the great pleasures of her artistic life. Mesro is smart, ambitious, and fiercely creative. She will never forget the first time he read his poetry to me. She was moved to tears—and realized this process is about more than just creating art, it is about connecting with people. It is about finding unlikely friends.



13th

Pre-jazz sax riff of freedom

14th

Blue notes like armor stop those who would bleed 'em

15th

Black hands finally check boxes to choose who will lead them

13th

Freedom with a conditional clause
Your rights as a person put on pause
If you don't follow the conductor of someone else's laws

And the musician sputters
And the key feels wrong
Like they lied to you when they wrote this song

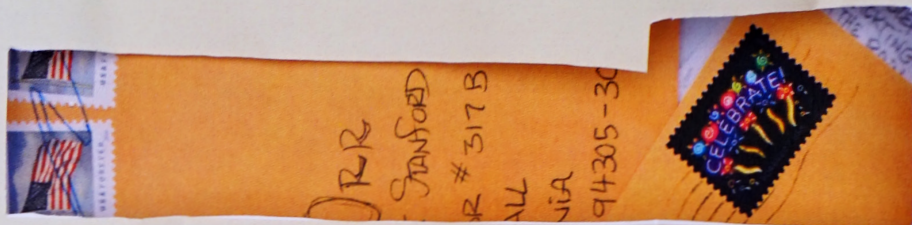
13TH
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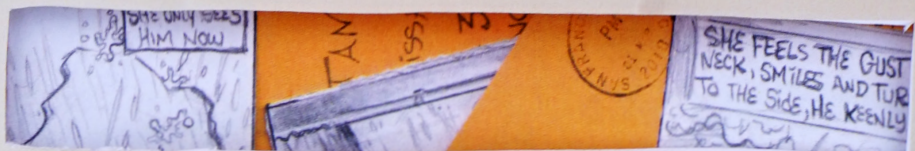
This isn't my story
But when the sax can't sing, silenced by the statutory
How can we beat our feet to the music that gave America its rhythm
Without moving institutions so the musicians are let in them

Because Uncle Sam said
"I want you."
He pointed at a man from the cover of a library book in a prison called San Quentin
And a voice at the other end of the line said
"I want you."

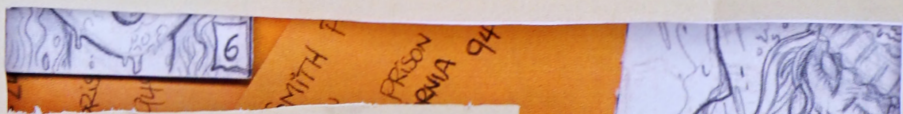
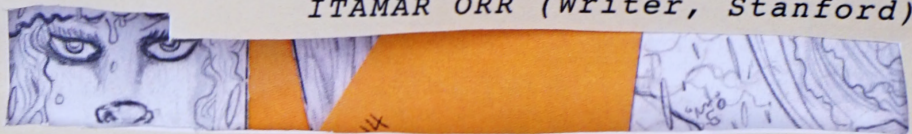
Because even if I am the only one listening,
your music has something to say.



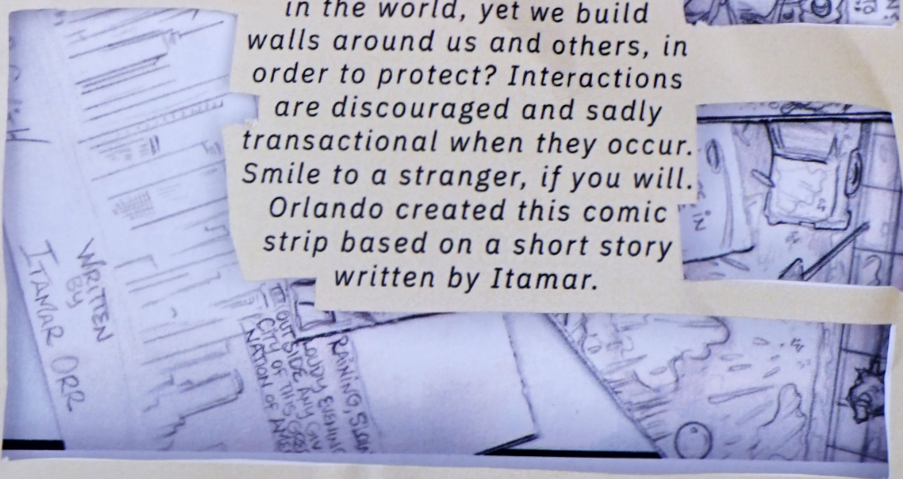
NOTHING

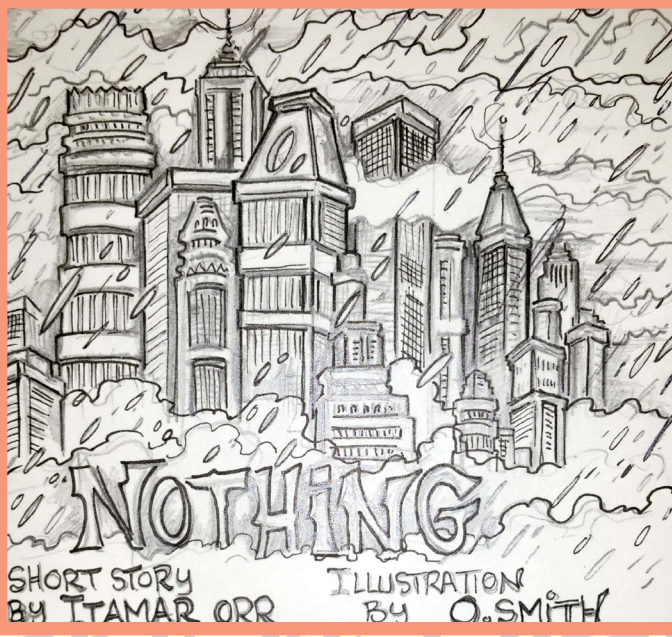


ORLANDO SMITH (Graphic Novelist, San Quentin)
ITAMAR ORR (Writer, Stanford)



There is so much loneliness in the world, yet we build walls around us and others, in order to protect? Interactions are discouraged and sadly transactional when they occur. Smile to a stranger, if you will. Orlando created this comic strip based on a short story written by Itamar.

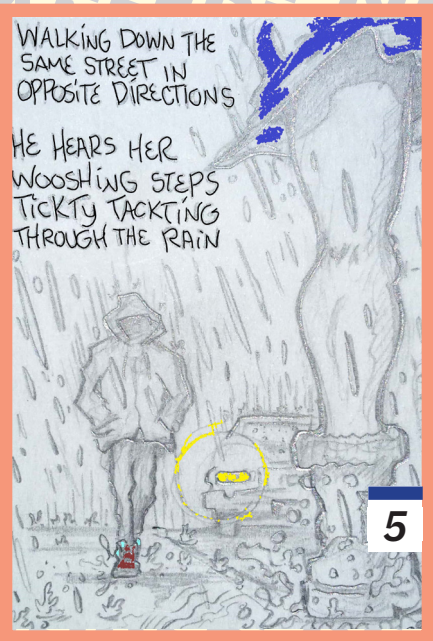






THE ONLY SOUND IS COMING FROM AIRPLANES CROSSING THE SKY. SHE HAS BEEN LONELY

4



WALKING DOWN THE SAME STREET IN OPPOSITE DIRECTIONS

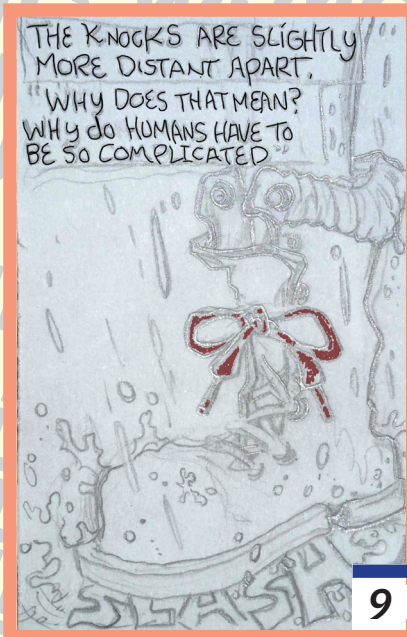
HE HEARS HER WOOSHING STEPS TICKTY TACKING THROUGH THE RAIN

5



HE FEELS A CHANGE IN THE RHYTHM OF THE DANCE

8



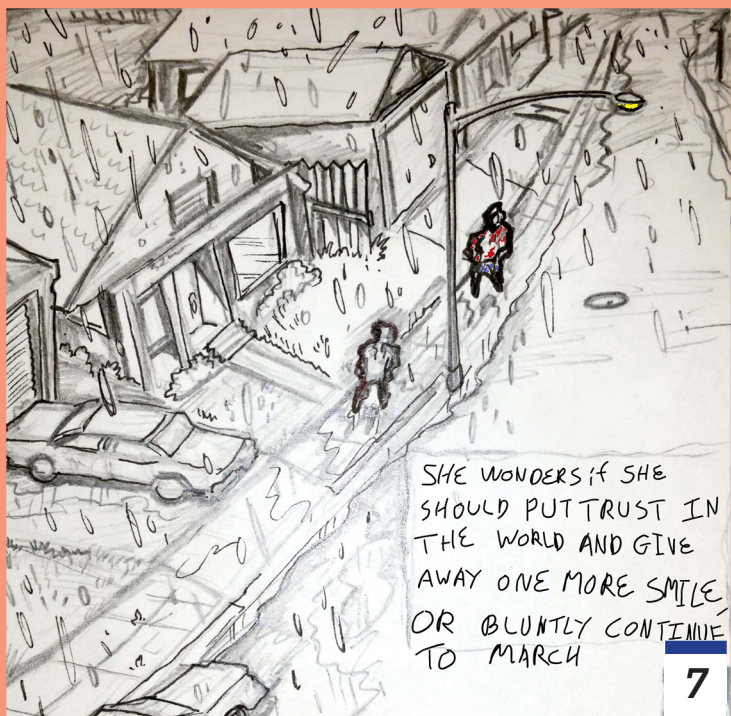
THE KNOCKS ARE SLIGHTLY MORE DISTANT APART, "WHY DOES THAT MEAN? WHY DO HUMANS HAVE TO BE SO COMPLICATED"

9

SHE IS WEARING A BLUE
JACKET AND A PAIR OF
JEANS
SHE ONLY SEES
HIM NOW



6



SHE WONDERES IF SHE
SHOULD PUT TRUST IN
THE WORLD AND GIVE
AWAY ONE MORE SMILE,
OR BLUNTLY CONTINUE
TO MARCH

7

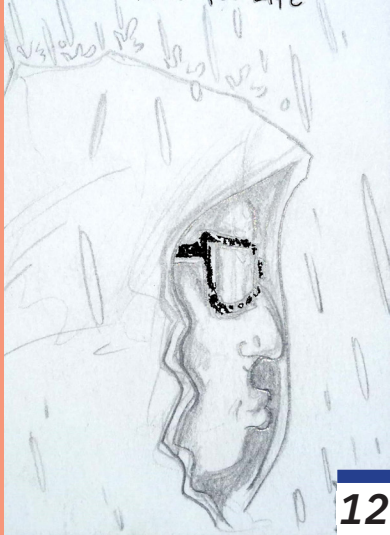


10



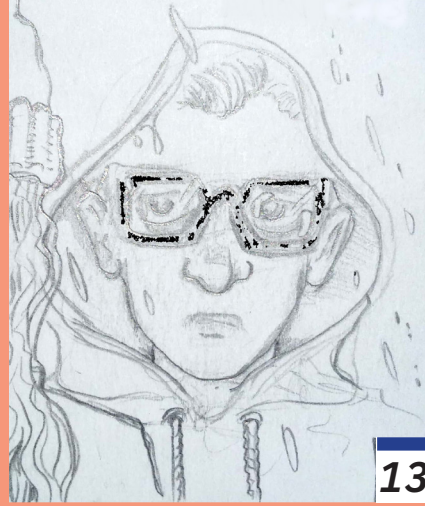
11

HE POSSESSED A STRONG
WILL TO BE SIMPLE, TO
LIVE A SIMPLE LIFE



12

THE SHOULDERS OF HIS MIND
SCREAM IN THE PAIN OF
COUNTLESS DECISIONS



13

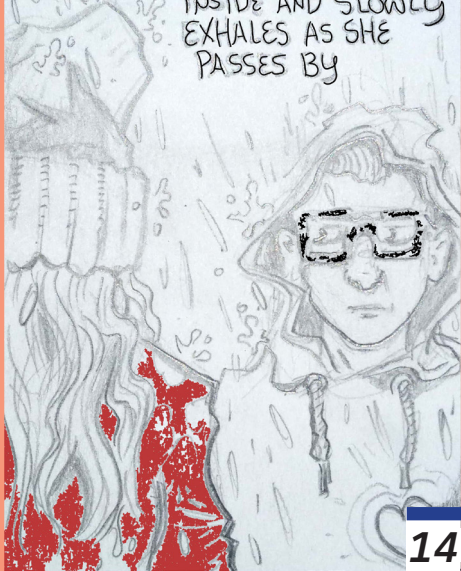


16

17

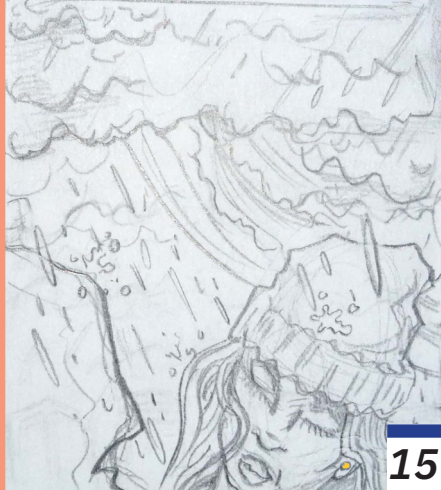


HE BREATHES DEEPLY
INSIDE AND SLOWLY
EXHALES AS SHE
PASSES BY



14

SHE FEELS THE GUST BY HER
NECK, SMILES AND TURNS HER
TO THE SIDE



15

HIS MIND GOES BLANK,
WALKING AS ON AUTOPILOT,
ONLY RETURNING TO BE
AFTER ABOUT A DOZEN...

STEPS

HE SWAYS HIS
HEAD BACKWARD
TO HAVE A
GLANCE



FIN

yours,
PRISON RENAISSANCE PROJECT
MAY 2018