

PRISON ARTS COLLECTIVE

"Facilitators/participants share their experience"

By: Jose Bello

After the Prison Arts Collective graduation there was much talk about how successful the program had been. Those that had been part of it expressed their hopes that it will in time become an I.L.T.A.G and be a permanent class here on "C" Yard. I believe that positive activities such as Prison Arts Collective deserve to be talked about and so I took the time to speak to some of the Facilitators and Students, and this is what they had to say.

Malil (Sky) who taught "Acting Techniques" says that teaching this class was very rewarding. It reminded him of how much reverence he has for the craft of acting and the discipline it requires. I asked Malil what motivated him to teach this specific class. He says that he wanted the participants to get a better understanding of what acting consists of and what it does not consist of. He believes that the biggest misunderstanding at least in a professional level is that acting is "pretending". In grade School, High School and maybe even in College that may be the case but in professional acting; pretending will not suffice.

Mr. Malil believes that the direct correlation between how an inmate hopefully tries to transform back into a citizen, and how an Actor transforms into his character are very similar.

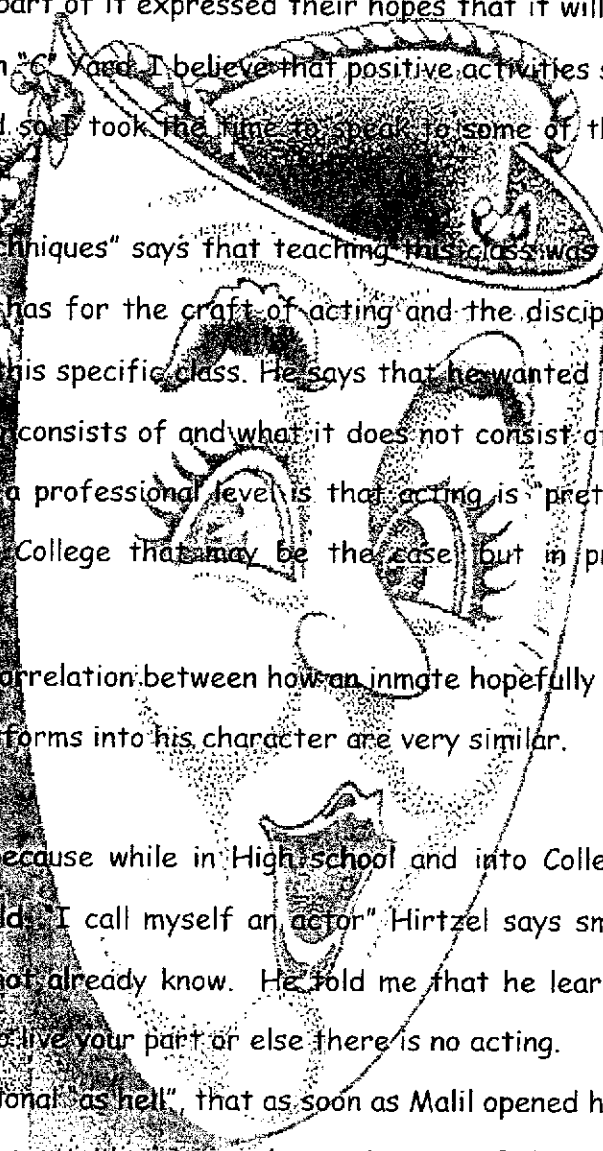
"Without truth is meaningless"

Hirtzel signed up for this class because while in High school and into College his professors encouraged him into this professional field. "I call myself an actor" Hirtzel says smiling. I asked him what he'd learned this time that he did not already know. He told me that he learned that potential acting is reality not pretending, you have to live your part or else there is no acting.

Hirtzel stated that Malil is professional "as hell", that as soon as Malil opened his mouth one could tell that he knew what he was talking about. Malil spoke to the students as if they were professionals. "He talked to us, not down on us." On a personal note, Hirtzel learned that as an Actor there are emotional barriers that one has to break down.

Chris Munoz took up on the task of teaching "Music Theory". He knew that people would come to his class to learn to read music notes, learn the structure of music, and create their own scales.

He had fun teaching this class, because he had the opportunity to share with others something that he really enjoys. What motivated him to teach this class is the fact that he tries to be a better person, he says that his current environment is negative and at times judgmental. However, he believes



that the past does not always define who we are, it's the present choices that we make. I asked Munoz if there was something other than the experience itself that he found valuable, to which he answered, "I worked with a Christian Brother, and though we don't share the same beliefs our love for music brought us together. I was able to teach him to play lead in one day, and the expression of joy in his face made us bond together in a positive way".

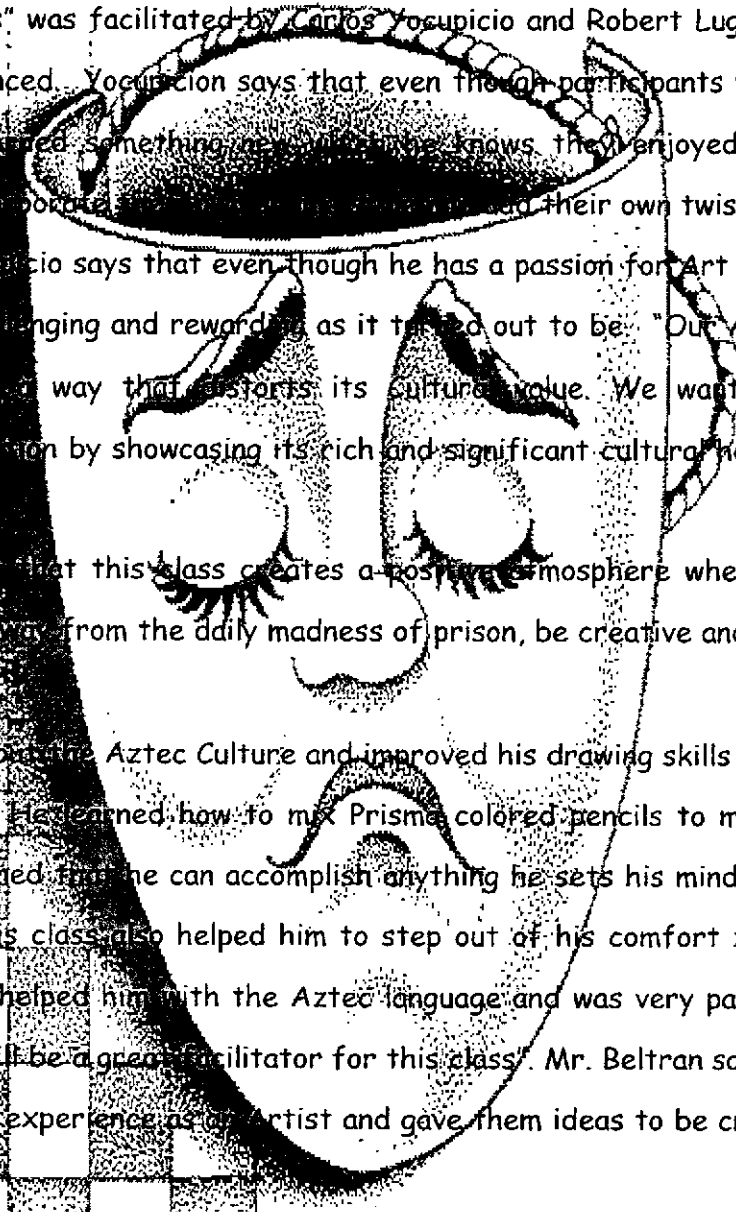
"Aztec Drawing and Glyphs" was facilitated by Carlos Yocupicio and Robert Lugo. This class was for all levels; beginners and advanced. Yocupicio says that even though participants were not familiar with the Aztec Culture they learned something new, which he knows they enjoyed. This Art Class encouraged the participants to incorporate their own ideas and their own twist. Speaking about his experience as Facilitator Yocupicio says that even though he has a passion for Art He didn't imagine that this project would be as challenging and rewarding as it turned out to be. "Our Aztec culture has been misrepresented unfairly in a way that distorts its cultural value. We wanted to take this opportunity to combat that distortion by showcasing its rich and significant cultural heritage, which we have been blessed with."

Yocupicio and Lugo believe that this class creates a positive atmosphere where people can be themselves. Participants can get away from the daily madness of prison, be creative and learn something while they're at it.

Beltran wanted to learn about the Aztec Culture and improved his drawing skills and so he did not let this opportunity pass him by. He learned how to mix Prismacolor pencils to make his drawings stand out more. Mr. Beltran learned that he can accomplish anything he sets his mind to regardless of how difficult things could be. This class also helped him to step out of his comfort zone. Mr. Beltran wants to thank Lugo, because he helped him with the Aztec language and was very patient with all the students, "that's how I know he will be a great facilitator for this class". Mr. Beltran says that Yocupicio taught them a lot, he brought his experience as an Artist and gave them ideas to be creative... "for that I'm grateful, thank you both".

Robert Heflin "R.J" taught "Realistic Drawing" (Portraits, life-like drawing not Cartoonish). For him this experience was a lot of fun, and was surprised how he and the students were able to accomplish so much in a short amount of time. "R.J" says that he is a self-taught Artist, and as such he is always looking for ways to do better and would like to pass on what he has learned so that others can experience the same joy."

Jeremy enjoys drawing and he is always looking for ways to improve his drawing skills, and knowing how skillful "R.J" is he signed up for his class. One thing that he learned was how to use reflective light from light sources which he says can be a little tricky. Jeremy says that as a group in general, Art is a



funny thing, sort of like a "double standard". There are those that already have the skill, where as others had to earn it, either way, in the right setting and with patience anyone can learn.

Another class that was unique and interested was facilitated by Ramon Torres and Herbert OrtizMonroy-"Visual Art". OrtizMonroy says that for him, this was an enjoyable teaching experience. He believes that art is a way to understand other cultures and people. "I think that through the learning of different cultures we can understand each other easier than through merely every day interaction". Torres and OrtizMonroy agree that this type of programs provide rehabilitation without forcing it upon the inmates, "Art is a way to express ourselves leading us to open up, and keep an open mind".

Richard Daniels is new to any type of Art, and he appreciates the opportunity he had to see different types of it. He understands how different cultures have influenced art as a whole. In the "Visual Art" class he learned how the Asian perspective of distance differs from the Western perspective. As a first timer he says that he had no idea what prison was like. He did not know how prisoners think, but one thing he has noticed is that for the most part the majority of inmates have very little self-worth. However, he noticed a difference among this program's facilitators, they had confidence, and in turn they provided a very therapeutic environment. To Mr. Daniels this was a life changing experience.

Danny Salgado and Drew Ortega got together to form the "Guitars, Thugs, and Harmony". They both taught the very basics of Guitar Theory, and how to play the Blues by teaching 12 bar blues chord progressions, and improvising with the blue's scale.

Having been able to teach people that had never picked up a guitar and see them play a blue's song in 5 hours was a humbling experience says Salgado. I asked Salgado what motivated him to teach this class. He said that people took the time to teach him to play guitar, and so he wants to continue giving in return by teaching others.

Salgado says that in his experience, while in prison, having a music program where people can express themselves are less likely to get in trouble. Music is a way for inmates to let out steam when writing music instead of taking it out on others.

Hopefully if the administration is willing and able these fellow inmates will continue to pass it on in the future. That is the goal of the Prison Arts Collective.