

ARTS CREATIVE FUSION

How does a petite college professor get interested in bringing university level artistic perspective to a prison population? Easy! Just ask Professor Annie Buckley, founding director of the Community Based Art Program, The Prison Arts Collective (PAC), based at Cal State University San Bernardino.

In 2013, she began the project with students from CSUSB. Over time the project has grown from a handful of classes on one yard at CIM, to its current capacity, which includes 20 to 25 weekly classes led by teaching artists and interns at four California State Prisons each week. During our discourse, Professor Buckley stated that she came up with the concept of teaching in prisons, first by helping college students to teach art and to help the surrounding community have more access to the arts. She created a course called 'Service Learning', where students develop and teach an eight week art curriculum. She then reached out to the Inland Empire's disadvantaged, lower income community. This allowed her to use that leverage in the community and in a major breakthrough, she found community partners, senior centers, public housing projects, and youth centers.

Chino prison also reached out and wanted to start a program. It would be the first art program in Chino Prison and it created interns and alumni.

I asked Professor Buckley what inspired her highly motivated teaching style and she replied, "I'm inspired by art and I love sharing it with people who don't have the opportunity... To me, this is very rewarding... Team collaboration works well." As an art writer, Professor Buckley has 200 reviews and a wealth of essays. She also has an "Art Inside" column in *L.A. Review of Books*. She stated that she is very motivated and inspired by prisoners and students she teaches. "Students hunger to learn, people give their best," she says. According to Professor Buckley, the future of this project is supported by CDCR's Office of Rehabilitative Programs. The main ongoing project is supported by 'Arts In Corrections', an initiative of CDCR and the California Arts Council. These collaborative efforts will continue to offer excellent opportunities to learn, to teach, and support art communities in prison.

During the course of the curriculum, students at CVSP teamed up to fully show the power of artist collaboration. Herbert and Ramon exposed the relevancy between visual art and creative writing. Jose, Lugo, and Carlos laid out working with a grid to show the pageantry and spectacle of Ancient Aztec/Mexica Art. Chris Robledo and David collaborated portraits and art history in a very well researched niche. R.J. showed the class how to use shading to draw a sphere on a table. Rob taught the finer point of drawing a 'point perspective', or the view or angle of a scene.

On the musical side of the artistic spectrum, Danny and Fabian enlightened us with beginners' musical theory, tones and vibrations, and the science of sound. Chris and Drew coached students on

more advanced music theory in regards to the music scale. A very beautiful song was performed by Drew and Danny as an added bonus.

From the days of Vaudeville to modern theatre, Sky kept us enthralled with his sultry style and wit, as he explained his 'moment to moment' acting technique. Paul, on the other hand, showed us a meticulous and precise method of beading or how to create artistic pieces of bead jewelry. Ronnie's workshop highlighted the joy of creative writing with his unique brand of passion.

Diego, a PAC facilitator, was a huge motivation, along with Christina, who showed us real professionalism and patience. Azzir and Ashley, both interns, completed the teaching team. Very few courses find the relevancy between visual arts and creative writing. This training does that. Its principles are so valid that they apply equally well to music, drawing, painting, sculpture, script writing, etc., etc. It is people that move a story and give it life. It is people who animate a lump of clay, and give life to a drawing or painting. For it is people, their thoughts, their passions, their desires and their 'interrelationships,' to quote another one of Professor Buckley's students, that move an art piece and give it life

Well before recorded history, man has worked with his thoughts and his hands to bring a lifeless lump of clay and breathe life into it. The instructors teach with the solidity, the ease (which seems to me), that comes only from knowing more than one art form. The best props we can give to these dedicated educators is that from now on, the average art student, me included, will have no more excuses for atrophy of unused talent.

By Ramon Torres

