

Culture:



We Are Interwoven

Creative Arts Therapy
Correctional Health Services | Rikers Island 2021



Correctional Health Services Creative Art Therapy Department

Creative Art Therapists are trained practitioners that utilize the arts along with an understanding of the psychological and emotional needs of the populations they serve. They provide both individual and group therapy and are an integral part of the interdisciplinary teams they work on. The following therapeutic modalities are currently used by

- these practitioners: art, music, poetry, and drama. There
- are currently nine Creative Art Therapists assigned to work
- on the mental observation units throughout Rikers Island.

This year's catalogue and associated soundtrack, *Culture: We Are Interwoven*, are compilations of artwork created by individuals detained on Rikers Island. These presentations reflect what people learn about themselves while creating work through the various modalities. It is also our hope that it will help enlighten you about the power of the arts.

Enjoy, in Joy!

Masks were used as a projective to explore culture and identity. Through the mask creation that was in partnership with discussion, journaling, scene writing, and improvisation, the question of "Who Am I?" evolved into the exploration of qualities, strengths, weaknesses, wounds, and repressed attributes. The internal versus external self and societal labels versus self-perception were dominant themes in the work.



Who Am I?
Bernard O.



Who Am I?
Tyree S.



Who Am I?
Kenneth R.

How Others Perceive Me

Weird, stupid, insecure, lazy
You will never meet another Ken.



How I Perceive Myself

Smart, handsome, different, hopeful
Though awkward, I wear my heart on my
sleeve and I am a good man.



How Others Perceive Me

Funny, thinker, money, handsome, hardworking,
for the family, manipulative, troublemaker

Who Am I?
Lamont T.

How I Perceive Myself

Thinker, not trusting anyone, consistent



How Others Perceive Me

Most people view me as a bad person. Some people realize my wisdom. In my past I was viewed as a good person but after I got kicked out I turned into a monster.

Who Am I?
Blue K.



How I Perceive Myself

I can be a better person. I got to apply my own advice. I am patient. I am a good man that got clouded... I am damaged after losing my spiritual side. I become envious.



How Others Perceive Me

Menace, problematic, ugly, stupid, dumb

Who Am I?
Carlos R.

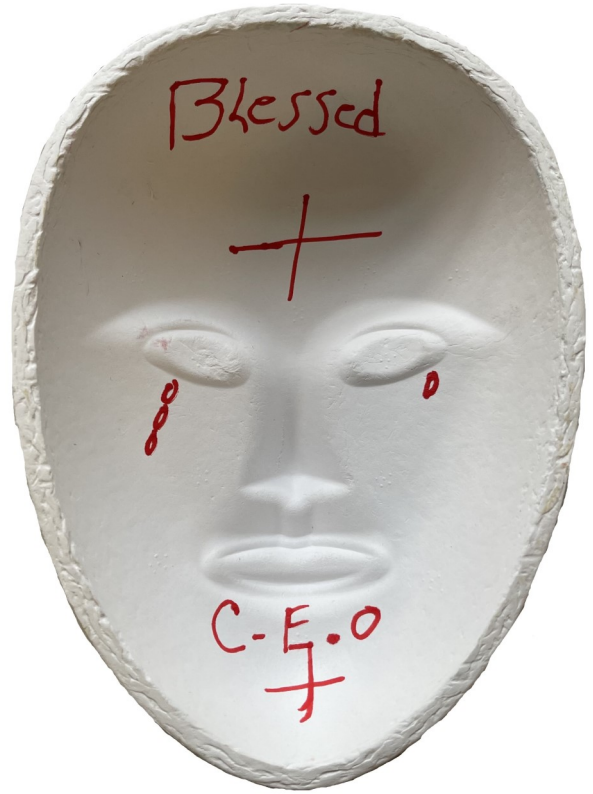


How I Perceive Myself

Smart, kind, handsome, good-hearted



Who Am I?
Karim M.

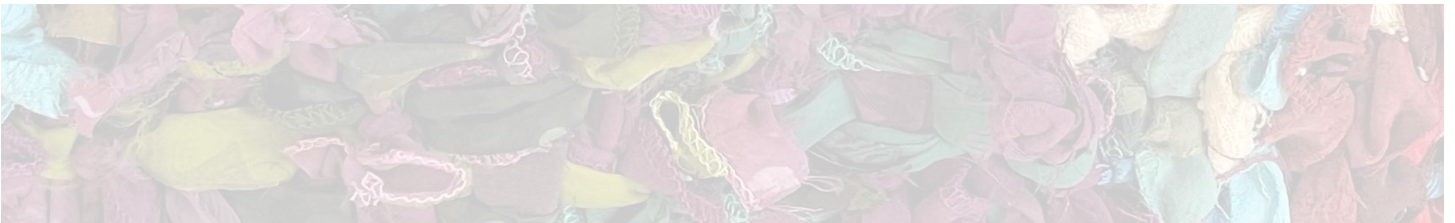


Who Am I?
David H.



Who Am I?

Louis P.



***Prompt:** After exploring "culture" and elements of one's identity you are proud of through group discussion and embodied improvisation and play, devise a spoken word piece exploring the culture you were born into and how it has molded who you are.*

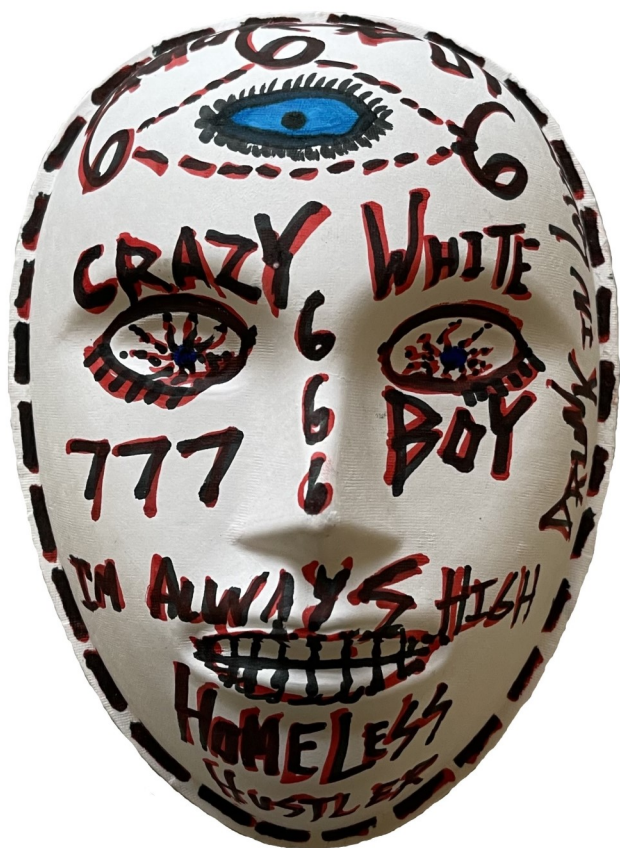
Birthright – Culture! 🎧 (Listen to the audio version on SoundCloud)

I come from rice and beans, and then on the other side Dad likes to put curry on the rice and "Tings." I'm from Harlem where they say who you "B." I "B" from D.R. and on the other side CR if that means anything, I mean it's a Caribbean "Ting." Either way I love everybody all the way all day. We the people like you my people even though the system treat us like we see through. But who I am today makes me love my people no matter where you from or who you "B" ya all with me.

-Bernard O.



Who am I?
Durell B.



Who Am I?
Michael N.



Overlord Pack

In hell kickin' the Devil's chest in,
Demons & false gods

The Overlord baby,
Heavenly Mother always got my back

When you been through the creation process I been through
Being raised by all the OG'z
Your entrance & exit alone is like God
Satan is here

Big bro 730. I'm Lil 730.

Big bro Big Wolf. I'm Tiny Wolf
When you piss us off we fuse too
It's crunch time
Alpha to the Zeta, A to Z Wolf.

Brooklyn & North Newark's finest
Biggie and Tupac back

World wild global patrol's finest

Life lookin us in the face like enjoy & if death show his face
No fair ones til there's no more death

-Steven H.

***Prompt:** Write a speech from the perspective of someone honoring you at an awards ceremony. Create a name for the award and describe what the award is for. Describe how you represent this award with your personal characteristics and actions. Show yourself LOVE!*

Good day to you all, ladies and gentlemen. Today is a very special day for a "very normal person" that stands out uniquely as no other. I would like to present this award to Mr. R. for being extremely "kind" and steadfast love. Mr. R. shows affection to all humans that surround him. He executes the righteous words love thy neighbor like you love yourself. I can honestly say Mr. R. is following in Jesus' footsteps. Last but not least I want all to know and recognize that I said and stated and started off with "a very normal person" because I want to emphasize that all can do just as Mr. R. Be kind to one another and let love abundantly reign.

"Kind Normal Person" Award

-Carlos R.

***Prompt:** In light of troublesome current events in the media and the personal impact of the pandemic and these events on our community at Rikers Island, art as advocacy, activism, and protest was explored.*

We All We Got

Write! Write! Write!

Fight! Fight! Fight!

Plight! Plight! Plight!

Of corruption, or the deduction of our Black population and taking us off the streets with these prison vacations.

System = Screams, Black man go get them!

Justice = Screams, Black man can't get none!

We all we got!

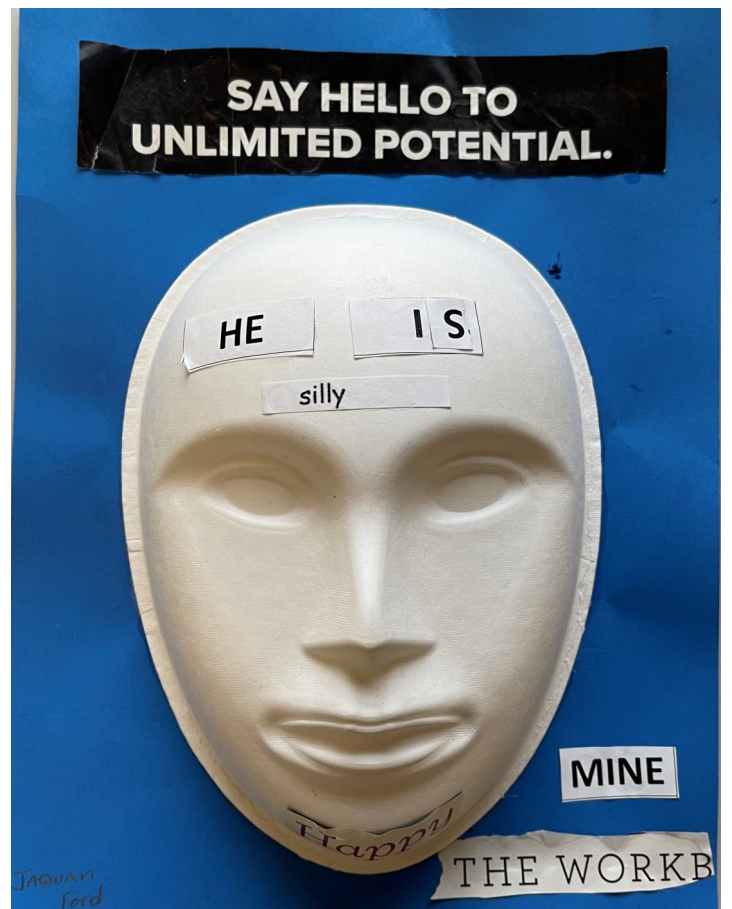
Oh I forgot, / We are what we think we not / Bigger and better than standing on these corners and blocks. Or protecting the block that belong to that man.

Together we should stand

We all we got!

-Bernard O.

Who Am I?
Jaquan F.



Who Am I?
Louis P



Prompt: As part of a book-reading series exploring the intersection of hope/faith and incarceration, participants read excerpts from Assata Shakur's autobiography. Group members – including Bernard O. – analyzed and actively engaged with her poem "Leftovers – What Is Left." Bernard's contributions to the poem appear in bold text.

Leftovers – What is Left

by Assata Shakur

After the bears and the gates
and the degradation,
What is left?

Morality

After the lock ins and the lock outs
and the lock ups,
What is left?

Humbleness and strength

I mean, after the chains that get entangled
in the gray of one's matter,
After the bars that get stuck
in the hearts of men and women,
What is left?

Hope and freedom

After the tears and disappointments,
After the lonely isolation,
After the cut wrists and the heavy noose,
What is left?

Life

I mean, like, after the commissary kisses
and the get-your-shit-off blues,
After the hustler has been hustled,
What is left?

Imagination

After the murderburgers and the goon squads
and the tear gas,
After the bulls and the bull pens
and the bull shit,
What is left?

Fight to live another day

Like after you know that god
can't be trusted,
After you know that the shrink
is a pusher
and the word is a whip
and the badge is a bullet,
What is left?

Perseverance, good deeds, and a little faith

After you know that the dead
are still walking,
After you realize that silence
is talking,
that outside and inside
are just an illusions,
What is left?

Thoughts

I mean, like, where is the sun?
Where are her arms and
where are her kisses?
There are lip-prints on my pillow-
i am searching.
What is left?

Memories

I mean, like, nothing is standstill
and nothing is abstract.
The wing of a butterfly
can't take flight.
The foot on my neck is part
of a body.
The song that i sing is part
of an echo.
What is left?

Imagination

I mean, like, love is specific.
Is my mind a machine gun?
Is my heart a hacksaw?
Can i make freedom real? Yeah!
What is left?

Freedom of the mind, knowledge

I am at the top and bottom
of a lower-archy.
I am an earth lover
from way back.
I am in love with
losers and laughter.
I am in love with
freedom and children.

Love is my sword
and truth is my compass.
What is left?

I'm a King, I'm a servant, I love God's creation, I love poor and the unhappy, I love love. I love freedom, I love family.

-Bernard O.

I Wonder

I wonder

Is life worth it

The happiness + sorrows that come with it

The pain + agony

Ooooh the agony

Why me

Where does destiny take me

And do I truly follow it

Or leave it alone

Who knows

Again; I wonder

Which appeals to me more

The laughs or the cries.

The bonds that ties

Like pressure to a planet

It's either too much or too little

Oh how I wonder

-L.P.



In many art therapy groups, the therapist presented the theme of culture and what culture means to each individual. Group members responded to this prompt using different modalities. The groups allowed individuals to explore their identity, reflections, and self-awareness and to learn about their peers' cultures.



Untitled

Christopher B., Daniel J., Jason J., Kenneth E., Tajah, D., Terrance C., Triquang, A.



Untitled

Alfred G., Michael B., Percy D., Troy B. Vincent L.

The years of 2020-2021 were trying as well as difficult for most of us. With a pandemic of global proportions many of us experienced death, as well as experienced the feelings of loss. I personally experienced the greatest loss I had ever experienced – that of my 78-year-old mother, who served our family dedicatedly, as well as our local community, as a seamstress. A mother to 6 children, a grandmother to many, and a friend to all. While working hard to care for her in in-house hospice – watching her deteriorate quickly to death, after exploding in heartfelt agony as well as unique emotions, all I could do is write, and this is what came out of my soul:

The River

The pain that is derived from your loss
Is like a deep river – which I realize somehow, I must cross.
The spirit that flows within impels me to just jump, and dive right on in...
Yet I stand on the banks, questioning my ability to swim.

At night, there is darkness which I regard as the enemy.
At present, there is a rainstorm,
As my heart is flooded with memories.
How can a person so strong, just instantly wizen,
And become so weak...
Now tears pour from my eyes, as I reflect on how you struggled to simply speak.

You were the Jupiter to our family,
Preventing asteroids from destroying our Earth.
Your magnetic field of faith, bound up our family's pain and hurt.
You truly were a rare kind;
As we can't think of another with the composition of our mother.
You weren't combative with your husband,
Nor did you seek prominence and authority over others.
Yet neither were you weak.
In your wisdom, it wasn't necessary for you to constantly speak.
This type is a precious gem to her husbandly owner of which he will always cherish,
And of her fondly speak.
Some women may question your strength, reasoning that these days, your willing submission was odd.
Yet you chose to reflect the quiet and mild spirit,
Which is of great value in the eyes of Jehovah God.

For this you will be rewarded, undoubtedly we will see your face again.
Yet we just have to supplicate Jehovah for the faith and wisdom to swim.
For on the other side of this river, about 50 yards to the other side,
It's a brand-new world of Jehovah God's making - It's an earthly paradise.

So while we weep and sorrow on this side,
With our hearts temporarily filled with pain,
If we look ahead, not where we stand,
We see the life we stand to gain.

And amazingly, right in the river's waters we see,
Congregations of friends, holding hands tightly,
They're literally rejoicing, and praising, while carefully wading through.
Joyfully singing, just see yourself,
Just see me too,
Just see us all in a world that is new.

-Leland P.



The following words are from a prompted writing request about "A Time When I Needed Help," based on a poem with that title. Patients responded to the prompt during a poetry therapy session facilitated on a mental observation unit at Rikers Island in August 2021. As regular attendees, patients used their poetry therapy group to express themselves openly and to alleviate stress through a creative conduit. They also found peer support in group sessions, as participants empowered and encouraged one another.

A Time When I Needed Help

"I need help with my mental health and getting out of depression mentally. My mental health triggers my addictions which triggers my anger and then makes me become violent. I need help. Without help I am damned to repeat this entire process of failure to incarceration or suicide, either way, failure is failure. I also need help in the process of grieving my mother properly after losing her to drugs while serving time."

-Michael F.

A Time When I Needed Help

"Right now I'm here. Need help because I'm in here and no good for myself."

-Jose R.

A Time When I Needed Help

"The time I need help is today and tomorrow. It's very difficult to proceed in the Bronx judicial system with no information related to my case being delivered."

-Earl T.

A Time When I Needed Help

"The time I need help was when I came to jail and the judge gave me bail and I had the money to bail out. But nobody to sign for me... happens every time I get locked up."

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-Reynaldo P.

A Time When I Needed Help

I need help today
I will need help tomorrow!
But most importantly I needed help yesterday!

For tomorrow is shaped by what we do today.
And today is the results of yesterday.
I was hungry yesterday. No one fed me while I asked for help. So, I stole a sandwich to quell my churning stomach. So today, I sit before you locked down, cast away, distant, forgotten, condemned, today!

And my future (tomorrow) will be determined on my range of feelings I will have today and how I managed. And I do not have all the answers so I will need you to help me get out of whatever I will get myself into tomorrow. For what I do today is the culmination of my actions yesterday.

"No man is an island unto themselves."

-Victory

Untitled
Justin P.



Untitled
Vincent L.





Money Making Mitch

Jarred M.

This is a collage to show me out in nature, enjoying the weather.



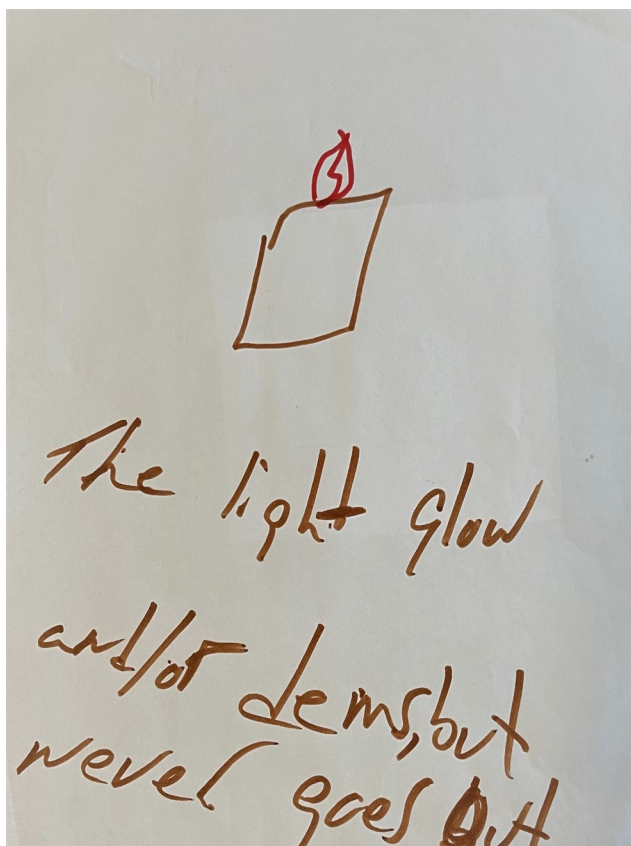
Family Illusion

Jarred M.

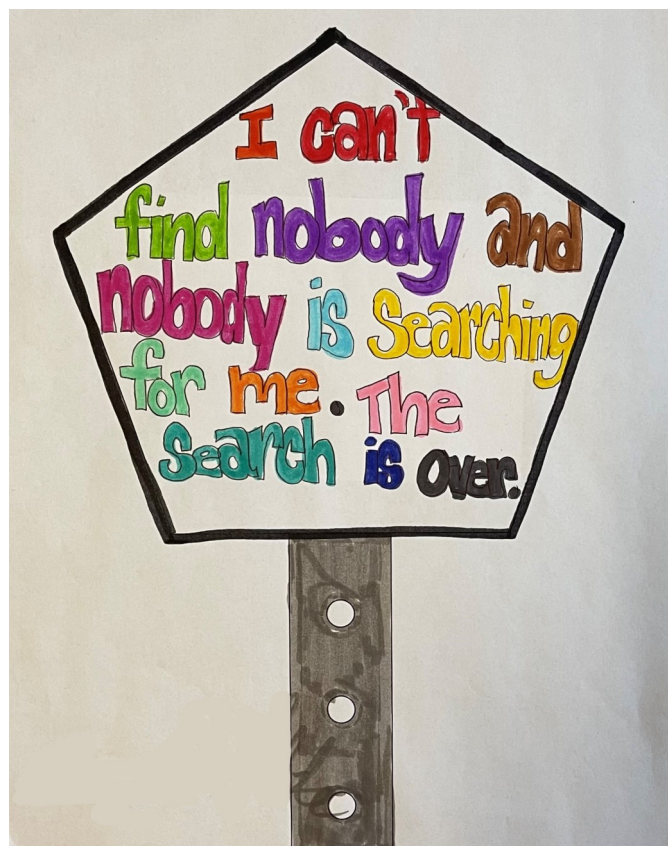
Untitled
Vincent L.



Untitled
Ronald P.



Untitled
Ronald P.



Untitled
Sedlis D.



Untitled
Sedlis D.





Untitled
Adam N.



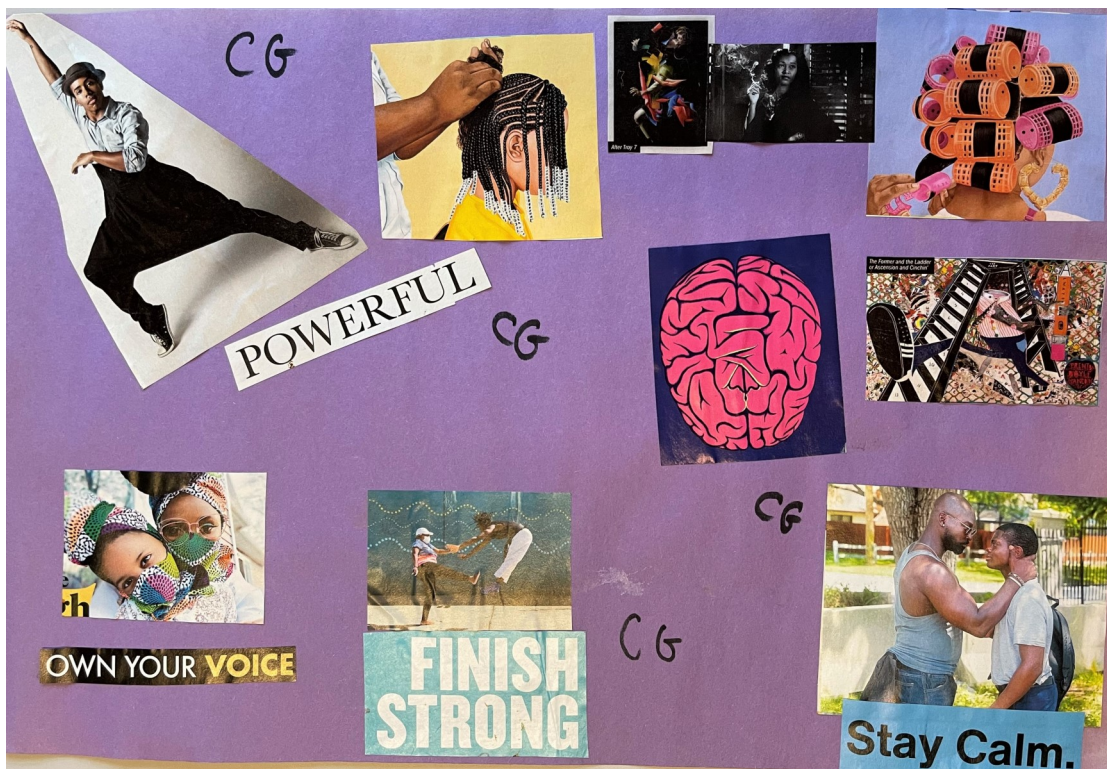
Untitled
Adam N.



Untitled
Maurice M.



Untitled
Nyreek O.



Untitled
Cody G.

Untitled
David S.



This song is about two people trying to figure out their path in this world, but one of them is letting the other down and now the work is on the shoulder of the guy to make things right between the other.

-Dkiddmulla (Anonymous)

It's Our World 

Okay, okay, okay
Yeah, yeah, yeah

Every day I think about the great times we had,
I never let it make my day a driven negative day,
All I see is the positive path which in turn make me wonder what kind of lifestyle you on,

I mean you use to be my world even when I was coming up in the streets
Trying to reach my dreams
Investing time which I knew was just the beginning
Lingering thoughts about how am going to carve my path out of nothing
Still making sense of it all,
Trying to grasp the feel of greatness which I know am going to make it work,

Watch me make history, watch me make life story, watch me grab it all, watch me fulfill it all
Am talking about the Grammy's, great numbers on the billboard chart, sky rocketing numbers on streaming services,
Woo it's smooth work, woo putting in late night shift

Am just getting started making it all count
Like backstage access to exclusive concerts and packages, woo exclusive designers,
Like you know designers Patek on wrist, Balenciagas on feet.
Dripping you know woo foreign cars be my wife, even when I see you dry up your tears from the feels of good loving which you push to the side

Come on girl you the one I make all this plans for but now all is changing
Am thinking of doing it all for myself without you
It's all the wait now it's not the wait
Just saying more and more an more it's not for jokes it's real
Making it realistic oh it's fantastic it's my turn to rule.
Let's shine jowo baby, let's shine.

Yeah, yeah, yeah

It's our world, yeah yeah (6x)

Am feeling it all, let's make it all work
It nothing without nothing
It's something with everything

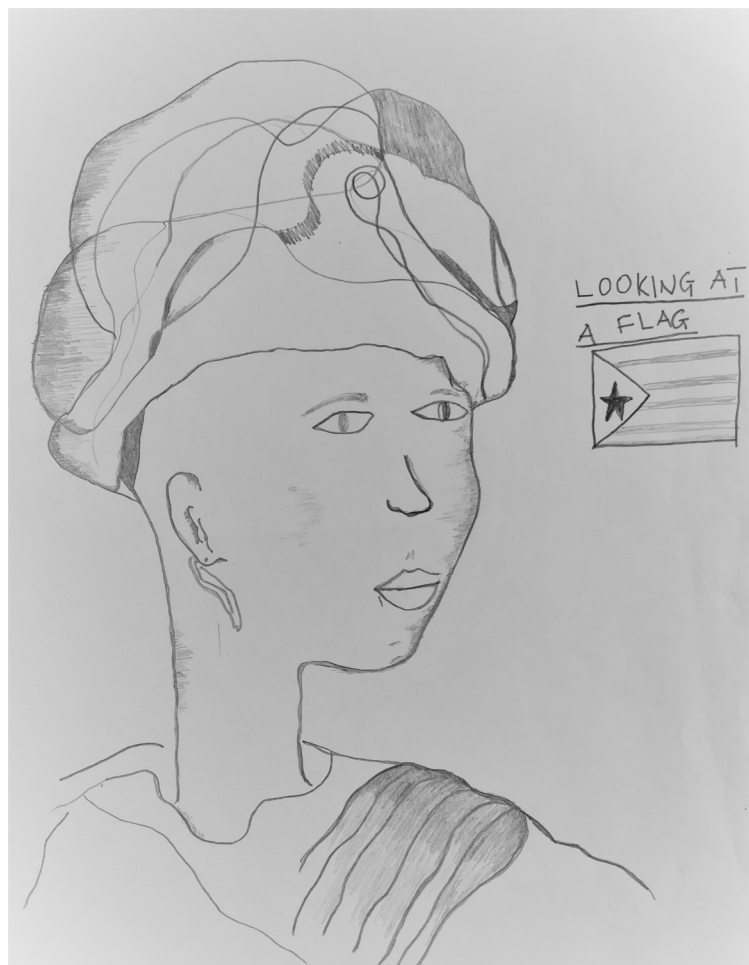
It's our world let's roll the dice
One more time it's going to be a fun time
As long as we both play our path in a crazy world
It's our world, no drama avoid the commotion

Options on deck all thoughts fresh to make it all count
What's your body count never mind it slipped through
Slide through the cracks on top for real

It's real cause I am one of the realest
I keep it cool and calm always classic tunes forever in tune
Thanks to the most high
We all wanna get high at some point in our life
Let's jaiye together alright.

It's our world, yeah yeah (3x)

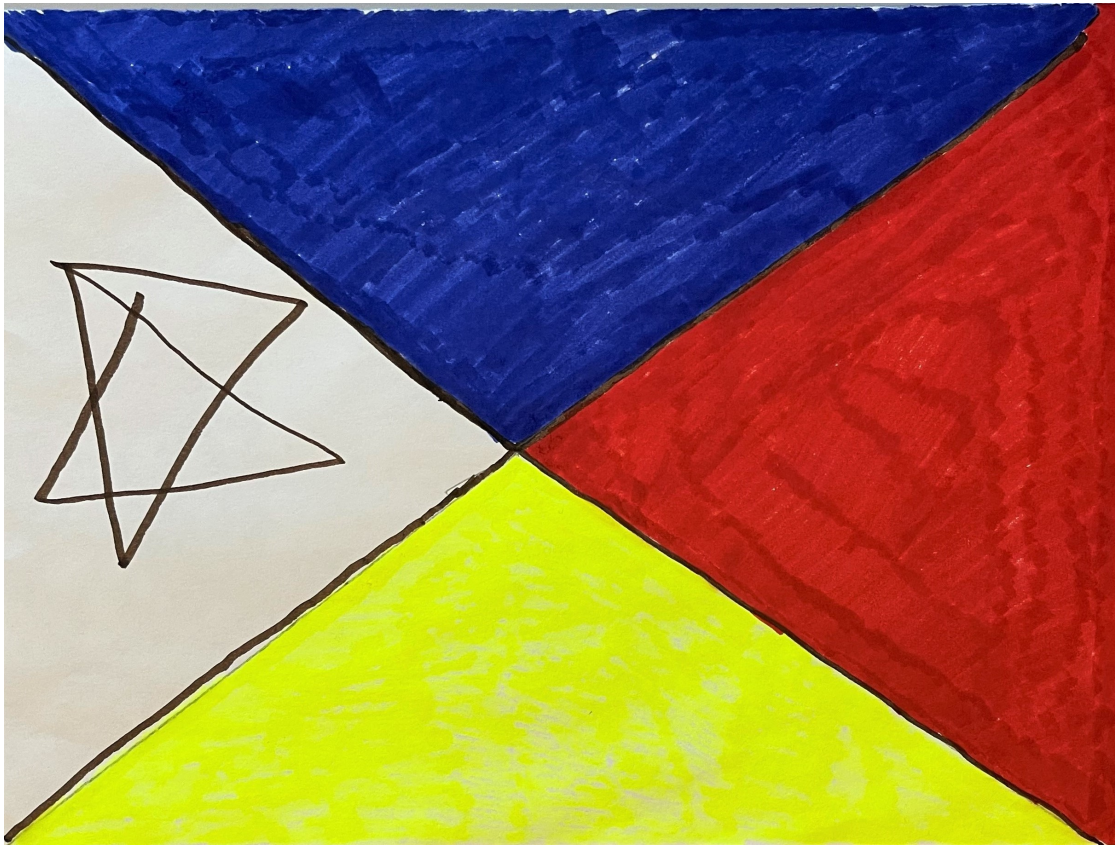
During an art therapy group, the topic of "Culture: We are Interwoven" was presented. Some participants chose to depict culture as a collection of many, while others chose personal symbols and an exploration of their own culture. Together, the artwork shows a glimpse of the culture on Rikers Island.



Looking at a Flag
Mustapha K.



Trees
Mustapha K



Personal Flag
Carden M.
Untitled
Juan D.

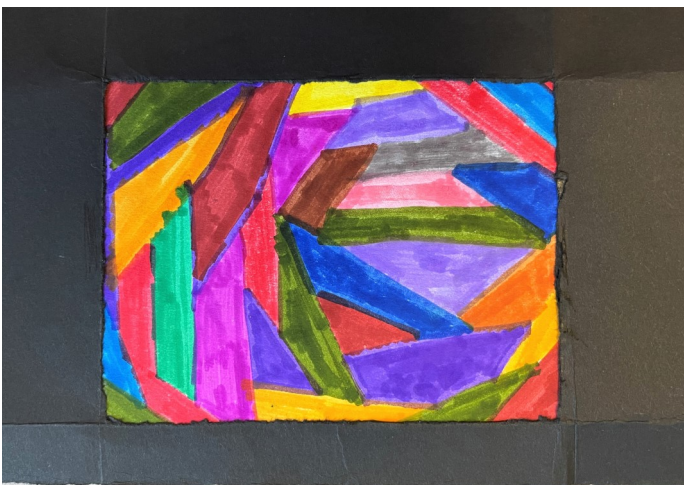
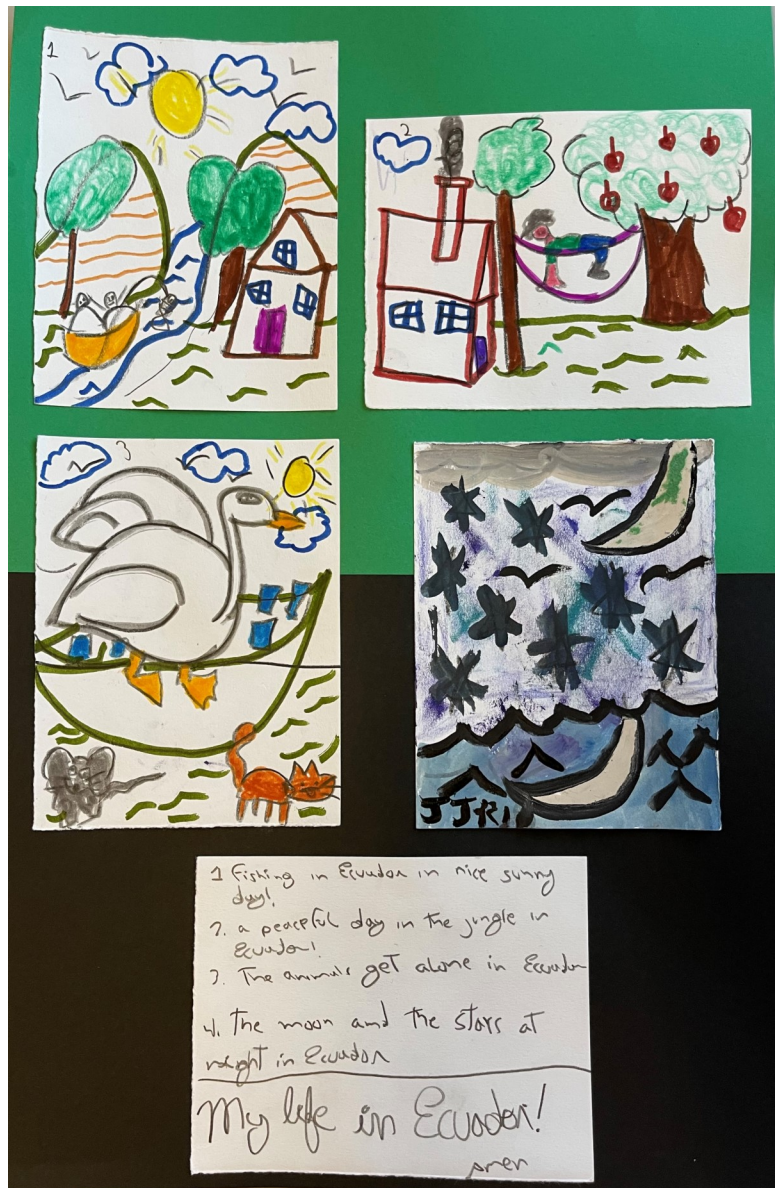


Storyboards of Culture

Culture was introduced as a theme for the group to consider, and patients were invited to create either an individual or collective storyboard that would reflect an aspect of their identity and culture, using watercolor paper, watercolor paints, markers, and colored pencils. Through discussion, each group member used a small card to reflect on his life and share a brief story about each piece.

My Life in Ecuador
Jesus D.
(right)

Untitled
Christopher H.
(below)



Next page, clockwise from upper left: Harlem, Joel H.; Rhythm and Blues and Jazz, Christopher H.; Puerto Rico, Justin T.; Queens, Eddie F.; Dominican Republic Demitre C.; Queens, Eddie F.; Space, Richard R.



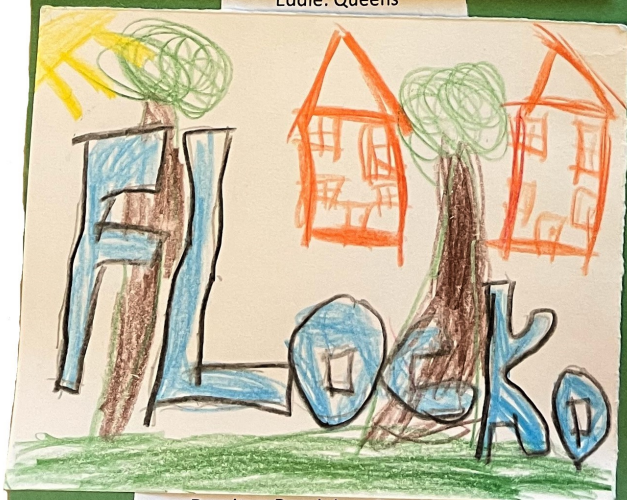
Joel: Harlem



Richard: space



Eddie: Queens



Demitre: Dominican Republic

CULTURE



Christopher: rhythm & blues, jazz



Justin: Puerto Rico



Eddie: Queens

Under the banner of "Storyboard of Culture," group members were invited to create a piece including family members and/or pets. They were asked to draw or paint – using watercolor paints, colored pencils, and collage materials – a picture of a relaxing place where they have fond memories with their family. Patients were then asked to write or talk about that time with family.



Cityscape, Eddie F.



Warning Hungry Dogs
Richard R.



The Beach

That's Coney Island

And the people get to fish, like clams, lobsters, sharks, whales

The theme park only has 2 rides left, the 4 seats the 1 person

They have the straws and then they open and you crush them

The cyclone gone the satellite station

The bumper cars

It was comfortable united with my family better than jail

-Joel H.

Group members talked about the theme of culture and how culture is an interwoven experience – especially for those who identify with more than one family culture. In talking about themselves, they thought to explore aspects of their identity, and the impact of culture on that identity, through mask making. While painting prefabricated masks with watercolors, group members were asked to determine a positive quality they have that helps them get through the difficult times. When their masks were finished, patients shared their creations with one another and stood up and embraced their own resilience.



Summer Colors
William P.



Mask of Joy
Tague M.



Wonderings
Malik B.



Self- Preservation
Antone B.



Jumpy Jump
Yusef V.



Untitled
Antonio C.



Improvisation

Patients discussed the theme of culture and reflected on a place that they remember growing up where they were connected with family. They improvised a dialogue based on the story used to create context provided by the protagonist. Patients improvised the story, which was typed for review and enactment with patients in the group setting.

The Portal

Rodney S.

In a common commercial building I came across a bronze sculpture. Intrigued, I walked around it and immediately spotted a bronze circle. Beyond the circle was light. I stepped through the circle and was transported to the English countryside. There I met a couple with two children, nice and well behaved.

My visit was kinda special for I was welcomed and treated like one of the family. Mrs. B would cook the most fabulous meals. We'd sit up and talk for hours about everything especially about America, my place in it and my travels.

Smart, beautiful children – I enjoyed the entire family. I felt as though I had come home. In America, I was a loner, a wanderer of sorts. Here today, gone tomorrow. However, after a while I felt drawn to return to America in my time and space. The portal in England was closing more everyday. Torn... Do I go or do I stay? America has its issues but it was my country, my home.

Mrs. B and the children walked me back to where I had appeared. We said our goodbyes. The children hugged me. I felt a sense of loss out there's no place on earth like New York, L.A., or Tennessee.

Me & My Dad

Khphruan C.

Me and my dad used to sell incense and oils. We used to take extremely long walks, we stayed all the way by the lake, at least 15 miles to the trains. As we walked, we'd stop in deli stores, and laundromats, where we could sell his wares. He had a silver tongue.



K: Dad, you ready to go?

A: Let's go let's get this paper.

K: We got to walk there?

A: We gonna walk it then.

K: So A, where we gonna stop at first?

A: Beauty salons, barber shops, check cashing place and maybe a couple of restaurants.

K: What about the laundromat?

A: Yes, let's go.

K: Dad are we gonna get some food? Some vegetarian samosas with rice and greens?

A: Yes, we like whatever you like.

K: Wise. Love is as natural as the baby's wail for the nurturing touch of its mother. When the pendulum swings in favor of one it eventually swings in favor of its opposite. Thus the balance of life is maintained. The birds, the bees, the flowers and trees God provides for the sustenance of these.

Across multiple sessions, artists were prompted to think about how culture can have many different meanings to different individuals, ranging from ancestry, to subcultures, and beyond. The artists were encouraged to reflect on their personal meaning of culture and its importance. A wide selection of art materials were offered in order to express this meaning in a way that emphasized individuality and reinforced identity. A directive was given to the participants to create an expressive piece of writing complementing their visual artwork and allowing them to explore and reflect upon their deeper insights.



Feel The Love of Jamaica

Jamaica,

Jamaica is the culture of joy and amazing themes

The island is relaxing and makes you feel the love of coconuts,
mangos, and such other fruits

Jamaica,

Jamaica makes you wanna celebrate the culture of the islands.

-Anonymous

What is Black?

We made Rock,
Yet they made Elvis the King
It's less of what we earned,
Let the chorus sing
And more of what we lack,
So what the hell is Black?

It's never what we have,
It's always what we can't get back
Never how to honor us,
Always something to attack
So what the hell is Black?

These outdated notions of cops
and robbers,
Ski-mask and money sack
A nation under fire,
And I the token hire
So what is Black?

I is we stand alone,
When we preach of our dreams
Is this what they see as black?
Nothing is ever what it seems
So why do we embrace the shade?
Why not give it back?

Because that would be aggressive,
And that just holds us back
Embrace, trace, do not erase
We are Black



-Angel C.

When the broad topic of culture was introduced to a group of women in custody at the Rose M. Singer Center, conversation naturally and swiftly flowed to the fact that America has so many interwoven cultures. In fact, each individual within themselves may have a quilt of interwoven cultures that make up who they are. Immediately, the group agreed on weaving something together of many colors and patterns, and then decided to use their weavings to create a basket. As the process unfolded, so, too, did the layers of each woman in the group as they shared these parts of their identity with one another and passed on cultural wisdoms to those around them. It was not lost on the group that the weaving and basket-making processes are inherently feminine in nature, and this felt appropriate to the artists, as a group of women living and working together. It was also noted that, just as baskets are used to contain things, women are “containers of culture,” the storytellers, the bearers of children in which a next generation of combined culture continues.



Culture Basket

Group of six women in the
Rose M. Singer Center

Basket-weaving was a challenging project because it required learning an intricate knot tying process, which transferred delicate fabric cloth into a much more sturdy and utilitarian tool (a basket). I enjoyed this art project because it made me realize that, as a culture of women, we are often perceived as weak and fragile, but we all have hidden strengths.

- *Anonymous*

As part of many cultures, we build ways to create a unity atmosphere where we come together in people, places and things, animals and ethnicity. By using multicolored pieces of material, we symbolized bringing together these pieces, to form a basket. We show how we can keep cultures a part of us by weaving pieces of material together. In the ending of our art masterpiece our goal was to create, and have something to show a unified way of how we adapt, and hold on to the many things that signify ways from a variety of different cultures. This was our symbolic way of how we define culture! It took some time for me, but I found a place for me to be in and out with. I hope you enjoy it, too!

- *Latrisha M.*

I felt it was a way to express myself and engage in different aspects of culture through using designs of different colors and going into depths of how culture can be expressed.

- *Sophia A.*

Baskets can hold food, and foods can be an important part of someone's culture. Alcapuria is what I would have in my basket.

- *Anonymous*



Prompt: After reading and analyzing the poem "Butterfly" by Darius V. Daughtry, write a poem utilizing your own metaphor to explore change.

Broken Glass

They see all the glass
Scattered all over the floor
Pieces of pain
Stains from my past
I cut my barefoot and laughed out loud
I see why my life has become broken
Each piece tells a story
My Homeless little Hell
My Million Little Pieces
All I want is to fill up this broken bottle
That's All I want to do but how
I Turned to God today and something happened
I found a bag of crazy glue and started my process
I began gluing pieces back together
The bottle will never be the same but I want change
The bottle will never be the same but I want change
The bottle will never be the same but I want change
I'm okay with difference.
I want to be better.
It took a whole year but now I can fill up the bottle with water for my travels.


-Michael N.




Acknowledgements

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