

Artwork from San Quentin Prison Arts Project at the San Francisco Opera
Prison Arts Project is part of the William James Association, supported by Arts in Corrections, a program of the California Department of Corrections and the California Arts Council.

San Quentin Prison Arts Project was very excited to be asked to exhibit work at the San Francisco Opera House during the production of Fidelio. The request came just as programming was re-starting after Covid quarantines, so was especially welcome. Themes of the opera are close to the hearts and minds of many today, and are especially meaningful to those who are incarcerated or were in the past, like the artists seen here. This work focuses on themes of Freedom, Injustice, Political Persecution and Loyal Love.

The combination of fine arts and prisons can be both surprising and highly unusual. Bringing art to people in institutions is based on the belief that participating in the artistic process helps a person's self-esteem and outlook on the world. Art workshops teach self-discipline, problem solving, and concentration and these skills can translate to other aspects of life and fulfill a need for creativity, self-expression, and self-respect. Begun in 1977, William James Association (WJA)'s Prison Arts Project hires professional artists to offer classes inside prisons. With positive results seen by incarcerated artists, teaching artists and by staff, the California Department of Corrections embraced the program and maintained Arts-in-Corrections (AIC) statewide for thirty years, from 1980-2010.

Since 2013, WJA has been part of a team of California arts organizations that have revitalized AIC through a series of initiatives and pilot programs. As of 2017, each of California's 35 prisons has fine arts programming serving incarcerated men and women. WJA's Prison Arts Project sponsors arts programs that help prepare students for a successful return to their community through classes that reconnect them with their families, teach social and communication skills through theater and creative writing, and give participants opportunities to contribute to their community through the arts.

BENEFITS OF Arts-in-Corrections Programs: Lower Recidivism and Lower Costs: Studies show that participants in the Arts-in-Corrections program have 75% fewer disciplinary actions and a 27% lower recidivism rate than the general prison population. This translates into reduced incarceration costs to the public, as well as improved lives. Ninety percent of incarcerated people will return to our communities and it serves us all to offer opportunities for rehabilitation, change and hope. To learn more please visit www.PrisonArtsProject.org

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