

Breaking Barriers The Artist Inside



Meadow Soloway, *Grandfather Thunder Bird*, 2016
Pen and marker on paper,
Collection of Alberta Corrections

"Breaking Barriers through my art has been quite the journey through my own addictions. Most of this journey has been while incarcerated. Self-taught and discovering my art behind these walls has helped me know myself better. I am no longer a stranger to myself. I have discovered if only I could break the barrier while in society this could help me know myself that much better, help me disengage the stranger and expose my artist within".

Anonymous offender, Calgary Remand Centre

The exhibition **Breaking Barriers - The Artist Inside** was inspired by the many observations of creative pen, ink and pencil drawings that are done by offenders while in custody in a provincial correctional centre. Supported by the Department of Alberta Justice and the Solicitor General and organized by the Art Gallery of Alberta for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program, the works in this exhibition expose the healing expressions of the circumstances that led someone down the path to their loss of freedom, and the observer gets a glimpse into the lives and journeys that led them there.

This exhibition features artworks by Alberta First Nations artists who completed these pieces while in a provincial correctional centre: talented men and women who have struggled in life and channel their feelings through paintings and drawings or through poetry. Many of the works reflect the artists' spiritual connection with their culture and with their families.

The artists have donated their pieces for the opportunity to share their hearts and stories with Alberta communities. Perhaps through their art, understanding and insight can break the barriers that exist between society and *The Artist Inside*....

This exhibition was organized by Kathryn Wheaton and Wendy Vanderbleek of Alberta Correctional Services and Shane Golby from the Art Gallery of Alberta for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program. The AFA Travelling Exhibition Program is supported by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts.

The exhibition **Breaking Barriers - The Artist Inside** was made possible through generous sponsorship from Syncrude Canada Ltd.

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program

The Art Gallery of Alberta is pleased to present this travelling exhibition to venues throughout Alberta. Currently the Art Gallery of Alberta serves approximately 60 venues in over 35 communities. Exhibitions on tour from the Art Gallery of Alberta easily adapt to space requirements of smaller venues: schools, libraries, museums, health care centres and other community facilities. The exhibitions are organized in such a manner as to make unpacking, packing, hanging and shipping as easy as possible. Along with the exhibition each venue receives an Educational Interpretive Guide. These materials enable teachers to use the exhibition within the school curriculum.

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Collection is the primary source of works featured in the travelling exhibitions. Other sources for exhibitions may include community partners, archives, private collections and loans from artists. Each year we welcome new venues to enrich their community art through the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program.

Our Thanks

The Artists
Alberta Department of Justice

Syncrude Canada Ltd.
The Alberta Foundation for the Arts

and to the many individuals, organizations and communities who contribute to the success of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program each year.

COVER IMAGES:

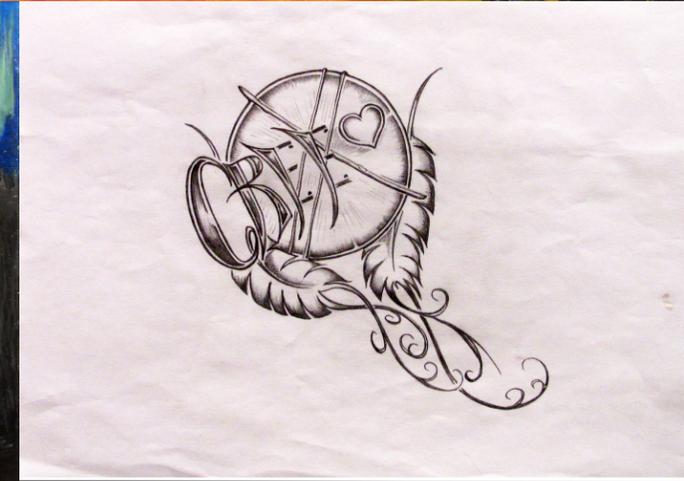
Top: Matthew Michaud, *The Raven Who Stole the Sun and got Burnt*, 2016, Oil on canvas, Collection of Alberta Corrections

Bottom Left: Justin Moses, *Untitled*, 2016, Oil pastel on paper, Collection of Alberta Corrections

Bottom Right: Meadow Soloway, *Cree Pride*, 2016, Pencil on paper, Collection of Alberta Corrections

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The Alberta Foundation for the Arts
Travelling Exhibition Program

Breaking Barriers The Artist Inside



Shane Blyan
Untitled, 2016
 Ink on paper
 Collection of Alberta Corrections

Many of the art works in the exhibition **Breaking Barriers - The Artist Inside** make use of imagery/symbols relevant to First Nations spirituality. Imagery such as the eagle, feathers, the sacred pipe and the sweat lodge feature in many of the drawings found in the exhibition and are integral to the drawings created by Shane Blyan.

The importance of such elements to First Nations spirituality are, as old as time itself and have long been expressed in First Nations visual imagery. It was not until the 1960s, however, that this imagery was recognized by the Canadian Art establishment as anything more than cultural artifacts or records.

The first First Nations artist to achieve any recognition in Canada was Norval Morrisseau (1932-2007) who developed what has come to be termed the Woodland School of art. Morrisseau was known for taking traditional icons expressed in his native culture in rock art and birch bark scrolls and translating these images in the Western media of easel painting and printmaking. In Morrisseau's work there is little attention to figurative modelling, and no delving into the problems of perspective or pictorial depth. Instead, he presented stylized versions of what he knew: the bears, loons, fish and other animals and the people in the town around him. The rudiments of Woodland, also called the pictographic style or x-ray style, paintings are expressive formline; a system for transparency and interconnecting lines that determine relationships in terms of spiritual power.

Three generations of native artists have followed in Morrisseau's footsteps, producing variations of the Morrisseau style using black outlines to enclose flat shapes and line designs to connect shapes and forms. These elements are expressed in the drawing by Shane Blyan seen above. In this work the main forms - the sacred pipe, feathers, and the eagles - while clearly recognizable, are primarily composed of outlines rather than modeling/shading and are quite stylized in nature rather than realistically formed. Also, unlike Western derived art styles, the composition in Blyan's drawing can be described as 'design' based rather than being concerned with an illusionistic sense of space.



Junior Key
Eagle Spirit Caged Within, 2016
 Ink on paper
 Collection of Alberta Corrections

Break Free

No boundaries on the invisible side
 Walls get built up by unseen hands
 As we find ourself caught in a tide
 Drifting outwards in an unknown sea
 It pulls and sways to a dark channel
 Swells and waves so rough that we can't see
 Education is our oars to steer clear
 Faith is our boat in life's troubled water
 Talking calms the waves and the shore near
 Health matters, not just body but mind and soul
 With all these things together you feel better
 We can Break Free and reach our goal.

David Ross



Abray 'Tiger' Isaac
Sean, 2016
 Pencil crayon and pen on paper
 Collection of Alberta Corrections

While many of the art works in the exhibition **Breaking Barriers - The Artist Inside** are inspired by traditional themes and symbols and show the influence of earlier First Nations artists such as Norval Morrisseau, other works are very contemporary in nature and demonstrate affinities with broader cultural expressions. This is clearly witnessed in the drawings of Tiger Isaac which are inspired by hip-hop culture and street/graffiti art.

Graffiti refers to writing or drawings that have been scribbled, scratched or painted on walls or other surfaces, often within public view. In most countries marking or painting property without the property owner's permission is considered vandalism and a punishable crime. Despite this, however, graffiti is also a rapidly developing art form and since the 1970s has found legitimacy within the art world.

Graffiti has existed since ancient times, with examples dating back to Ancient Egypt, Ancient Greece and the Roman Empire. In contemporary times graffiti writing is often seen as being intertwined with hip hop culture and the styles derived from New York City subway graffiti.

Contemporary graffiti makes use of a variety of materials. Spray paint in aerosol cans is the number one medium for graffiti and from this comes different styles, techniques and abilities ranging from quick 'signatures' to master works. The 1980s saw the emergence of stencil graffiti which, by 1985, had appeared in places ranging from New York City to Melbourne, Australia. Stencils can range from cut outs combined with spray paint or wheat-paste stencils. Some artists also make use of self-adhesive stickers.

As well as having many styles, graffiti has many uses. Sometimes graffiti writing is used as a memorial, recording a person's presence at a place at a particular moment. This is seen, for example, in some tagging, such as seen in Abray 'Tiger' Isaac's work included above, where a graffiti writer's tag is his or her personalized signature. Graffiti also has a reputation as part of a subculture that rebels against authority. It can express political or social practices and can form just one tool in an array of resistance techniques. Finally, graffiti has been used as a means of advertising both legally and illegally and may also be used as an offensive expression.