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### Note on the second edition

This edition of the We Bear publication is a treat to present. When I came up with the project idea, a number of years ago, I was tentative about how an international collaboration across prison sites might work. Then the Covid-19 pandemic hit and the logistics of making new contacts within severely stretched prison services was even more daunting.

But I couldn't ignore my awareness that lockdowns and other Covid restrictions were having extremely negative impacts on incarcerated populations and their families. This made the project even more urgent and relevant.

I'm incredibly grateful to the partners that made We Bear possible – principally the Prison Creative Arts Project (PCAP), Novus and Coventry Biennial – and to the participants who responded profoundly amid circumstances most of us will never endure.

I'm also thankful that everyone involved has pulled together for a second phase of the project,

originally intended as a one-off exhibition at Herbert Art Gallery & Museum as part of the Coventry UK City of Culture year.

The success of that exhibition – reaching 52,068 visitors – means we're now celebrating an American exhibition too.

Thanks to funding from Arts Council England and further support from partners, We Bear is now part of the Ann Arbour Art Fair, presented in collaboration with PCAP and the Guild of Artists & Artisans.

Being present at the largest juried art fair in the US (attracting almost half a million visitors) provides ample opportunities to hold workshops and gather feedback for participants, amplifying the ability for all the artists involved to stretch out and touch communities beyond their walls, and to belong in a conversation about the arts and humanity.

This, combined with a global zoom talk and the creation of an online experience\* of the project,

ensures we'll be able to celebrate the talents of everyone exhibiting and add to a growing community interested in creativity, wellbeing and citizenship.

In this small way I hope we're able to contribute to international reform discussions around incarceration and its impacts.

### Faye Claridge

\*At the time of going to print the website hasn't launched, but a link will be posted on www.fayeclaridge.co.uk and via social media @fayeclaridge



# Bear Baiting

Artist unknown Oil on canvas 1830s

Compton Verney Art Gallery & Park, Warwickshire (UK)





Man Feeding A Bear An Ear of Corn

Artist unknown Watercolour, ink and pencil 1840

American Folk Art Museum, New York (US)

Faye Claridge worked remotely with people in prisons in the UK and US, asking them to create new artworks inspired by themes around the Warwickshire symbol of the chained bear.

She paired two folk art paintings from the two countries, showing different treatment of captive bears which, as metaphors, provided inspiration for participants to explore personal experiences of incarceration.

The artworks were all made in the most difficult of circumstances, in 25 different prisons in the middle of a global pandemic that meant people in prison were experiencing an extreme form of lockdown, some literally in cells 23 hours a day, with no access to communal areas or education spaces and materials and no visits because, as one participant said: "Covid tears through these places like fire in kindling wood." (1)

Because of the pandemic, even though they worked together for more than a year, the participants and Faye Claridge never actually met. The artist sent copies of the folk art paintings to men and women in prison in America and the UK and asked them to produce an artwork inspired by the pictures. The logistics of this were challenging during the pandemic and the project wouldn't have been possible without support from PCAP (Prison Creative Arts Project, University of Michigan) and Novus (prison education, UK).

Participants fed back how important it was to have We Bear as a focus whilst locked up in lockdown. One man said he hadn't been able to focus on making anything for 8 months until the We Bear letter arrived and now, because of the motivation it gave, he's back into painting every day, which he said is critical because "I use art to escape the suffocating reality I am in". (2)

Lots of participants said they related deeply to the two folk art paintings and the We Bear theme. Many of the resulting works articulate the painful experience of punishment and attempt to show how life in prison feels. One UK female participant said: "I'd like others to see in my art that we

may all be like a bear, trapped by our own chains of doubt, low selfesteem, feelings of negativity... but we can take very small steps to a happier life, with guidance and help..." (3)

In the US, another female participant also described how incarceration can be internalised: "Confinement doesn't start or stop with imprisonment or a physical restraint... Judgement from others depletes and oppresses you like whips and chains. Self-judgement plummets you further into darkness..." (4)

One man made his artwork for his mum, who he was unable to see in person throughout the pandemic. She wrote: "No painting has impacted him the way this one has. He dedicated the painting to me and, trust me, the tears are flowing down my face as I write this letter to you." (5)

One UK participant explained his use of the bear as a metaphor, writing: "What a bear is, is often down to the observer. A bear could be dangerous in some circumstances, a bear could be

warm, loving and curious... As with many dangerous individuals there was, and probably still is, an innocent curious kid inside." (6)

Another participant said: "Much like the bear in the painting I have felt powerless to defend myself against attack in full view of strangers...I am constantly being baited, like the bear." (7)

In the US, the treatment of prisoners was tackled by one man who will have the final word here. He said: "This theme spoke very strongly to me. Bear is a big and powerful animal subjected to humiliation, ridicule and torment fuelled by fear of the bear's strength and power, the damage the bear can inflict.

I can identify... the bear was raised by bears, he only knows how to be a bear. And all the beatings, punishment, isolation and confinement only makes the bear angrier and more resentful, less human.

Compassion, forgiveness, love, patience and understanding are the best tools that can help

working with an animal like me."(8)

US artists:

Parker Ayers (Oaks Correctional Facility) Susan Brown (Huron Valley Correctional Facility) John Gaik IV (Newberry Correctional Facility) Samuel Hendley (Chippewa Correctional Facility) Jacob Mann (Cooper Street Correctional Facility) Destrey McCoy (Alger Correctional Facility) Duane Montney (Thumb Correctional Facility) Theo Moss (Macomb Correctional Facility) Daryl Rattew (Cooper Street Correctional Facility) Alvin Smith (Muskegon Correctional Facility)Serge Tkachenko (Central Michigan Correctional Facility) Amber Wilson (Huron Valley

Correctional Facility)

Correctional Facility)

Andy Wynkoop (Handlon

Supported by the Prison Creative Arts Project (PCAP) University of Michigan, USA

UK artists have to remain anonymous and are from:

HMP Altcourse
HMP Askham Grange
HMP Buckley Hall
HMP Cookham Wood (YOI)
HMP Hewell
HMP Hull
HMP Humber
HMP Isis
HMP Leeds
HMP Liverpool
HMP Oakwood
HMP Pentonville
HMP Stafford
HMP Thorn Cross

Supported by Novus (prison education, UK)

We Bear is dedicated to the family of participant Robert Schoonover and all others grieving the loss of loved ones to Covid-19.



- (1) Darryl Rattew, letter to the artist
- (2) Darryl Rattew, letter to the artist
- (3) Anon, HMP Askham Grange, We Bear statement
- (4) Susan Brown, We Bear statement
- (5) Mother of Jacob Mann, email to the artist
- (6) Anon, HMP Isis, We Bear statement
- (7) Anon, HMP Stafford, We Bear statement
- (8) Serge Tkachenko, We Bear statement



### Participants' view

I participated in the We Bear exhibition in 2021. My name is George I was serving a three-year sentence in the UK under the dreadful lockdown conditions when the opportunity to produce a piece of artwork for We Bear came under my cell door.

I read the brief over and over again but I had major doubts about my ability to produce a suitable piece of work. Thankfully my prison art tutor encouraged me to give it a go, through our written correspondence. I owe so much to her now.

Having the goal and involvement for We Bear felt like a massive darkness was lifted in me, I had never been at a lower point in my life than during the constant lockdown in prison.

My mental state was so dire it was difficult to keep normality in my thoughts, I had started self-harming as I felt numb of feelings and direction. None of this is easy to admit to, even now.

But eventually I attacked the We Bear opportunity with a new revived vigour, strength and positiveness. Living 24/7 with the artwork I was making became enjoyable, seeing it develop and grow until it was finally completed.

My work produced for the project during that time was so important and it is now clearly visible to me that it has contributed greatly to my current ability and stability. I am grateful to everybody involved in the project for this.

I visited the We Bear exhibition in November 2021, after being released in the May. I had the idea of writing an account about my visit to help other participants in the USA and the UK still incarcerated to visualise their exhibition. The letter I sent to everyone is on the following pages.

Since the UK exhibition ended I have been able to look back at that time in my cell, producing that piece of work.





My name is George I am a 65-year-old male ex-offender from the UK, I was released in May 2021 after serving a three-year prison sentence in HMP Altcourse (Liverpool) and HMP Thorn Cross (Cheshire). I am currently on a three-year licence. Like yourself, I was a participant in the We Bear Exhibition which is currently being shown in the City of Coventry at The Herbert Art Gallery and Museum.

I was fortunate enough to have recently been able see the exhibition but I know sadly, through one reason or another, this will not be possible for many of you. So, I thought I could extend my experience and thoughts of that visit to you, as someone who was not only a participant but also a prisoner going through the Covid 19 lockdowns we all experienced while incarcerated. I hope my account helps you visualise your exhibition:

The Herbert is a modernised building in the City Centre. I was impressed with its last phase of modernisation, the high rounded glass covered court as the spine of the building. The We Bear exhibition is situated on the first floor in a prominent position in a bright airy space leading to the world-renowned Turner Prize exhibition currently being shown only metres away.

I recall the first thing to hit me was the overall amount of colour displayed in the artwork. It was so bright and visually uplifting; the images were bold and detailed.

On entering the exhibition, on one wall was a written insight into the We Bear project and a TV showing a film nicely presented and narrated by Faye Claridge quoting parts of some of the artists statements and showing all the artwork. Further along the wall were the names and prisons of the participants from the USA and the names of the prisons in the UK that the participants where from.

The exhibition was on the opposite wall, showing all your artwork together, either on the wall or on plinths. I felt it was planned and laid out thoughtfully and professionally-displayed by Faye. I personally feel it would have been beneficial to have the artists statements on display to enable the viewer to further engage with the artwork, space might have been a factor in the decision not to include them I feel.

But as I stood there studying each artwork the true meaning and message of the work came out and I felt the pain and anguish, frustration and anger during those times of isolation in lockdown. I felt privileged to be part of this exhibition with all of us producing the work in one of the most difficult periods imaginable in prison. Looking at the artworks my empathy was raised to another level.

I found art in prison and the impact on my mental health was significant. I shall always be grateful to this project as it came at a time of extreme darkness and kickstarted me out of it, and I am sure you all felt the same.

I wish you all the best in the future, take care, George.



# We Bear, Coventry Biennial and Turner Prize

Back in 2017, Coventry won the UK City of Culture competition run by the UK Government's Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport every four years). I was overjoyed to hear that my hometown - 'Cov' as we call it for short - had won. It meant opportunity and change...it meant we were going to have a lot of fun!

Typically the City of Culture award boosts tourism, as people travel to visit incredible events the host city curates. The media spotlight turns to the winning city, investment grows and plans to maintain a new thriving cultural economy are built on a bustling year of programming. It's all pretty exciting.

Fast forward to 2020, test events had begun, creative programming and planning was at its highest and I had just started working with the Visual Arts and Placemaking teams at City of Culture Trust. During the same period, Faye Claridge had started working with prisoners. Already an experienced socially engaged artist, she went into a

prison for a one-off commission. The experience inspired an interest in supporting creativity for incarcerated people, and led to the emerging idea of We Bear.

But then lockdown happened. No City of Culture events, no tourism, the media spotlight was focused on a pressing issue: Covid-19. But it wasn't just us in Coventry, the world was closed.

That moment changed something for so many people. We were united in thought, feelings of helplessness, but also a feeling of togetherness. We saw local communities supporting each other any way they could. Neighbours helped with groceries for those who couldn't shop. Children drew rainbows for windows as a public symbol of hope to be seen as we all took our government recommended single daily walk.

Life was different, globally, but what I noticed about Coventry was something I had seen before: Coventry is a Do It Yourself (D.I.Y.) city. We find a way. If you need something doing, you can be pretty sure that someone you know, knows someone who can. That spirit, that essence of 'no matter what' rings so true. It's also the spirit behind We Bear; eventually created through partnerships as the artist couldn't operate alone as prisons became completely closed to non-staff.

As the world opened up and we marched forward with a revised series of cultural activity for Coventry, I noticed that national institutions, gallerists, city councils and big businesses were all embodying the D.I.Y, from the heart, let's give it a go attitude that was so familiar.

City of Culture offers a chance to tell stories about people and place. A very important opportunity. We are fortunate enough to have Coventry Biennial, a contemporary arts festival with a focus on social, political and critical artistic practice. The very Biennial that showcased We Bear. For 2021-22, the Biennial was side by side with Turner Prize, one of the best-known prizes for visual arts in the world. Often recalled for controversial artwork (like cows

encased in formaldehyde) made by artists in the media spotlight.

Each year, a jury selects its Turner Prize nominees. This time, a wonderfully diverse, youthful and knowledgeable jury took time to consider their approach and made an historic decision to nominate collectives instead of individual artists. Collectives who worked with socially engaged practice, away from media or mainstream attention. They were spread geographically across the UK.

They looked at soundsystem culture, climate change, human rights, accessibility, community and activism. The nominees felt like the very core of Coventry in a never seen before group of champions who worked with D.I.Y spirit to uplift their local scene.

It felt like the Biennial and Faye Claridge saw the value in socially engaged practice long before many others. The shared experience of lockdown helped bring others onto that journey

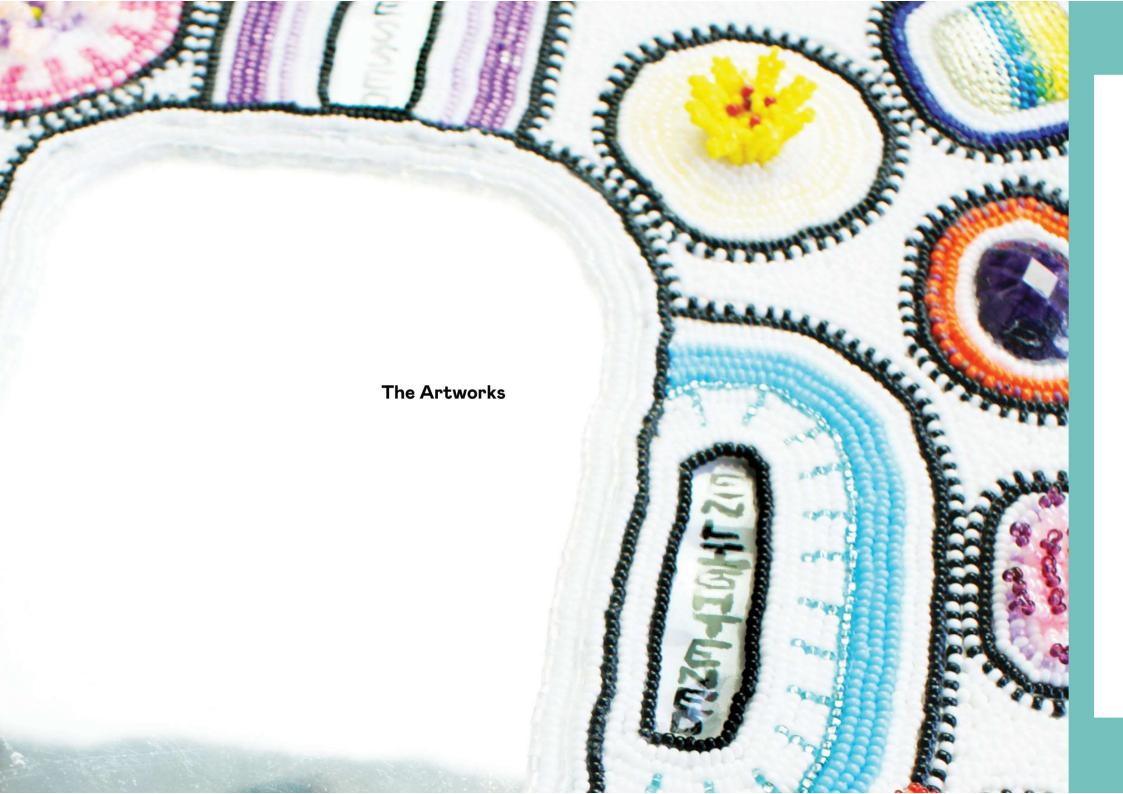
We Bear was sitting alongside one of the best-known prizes for visual

arts in the world, in Coventry. It felt like universal understanding of the power of making works like this, but also the importance of showing it. It felt like artists like Faye Claridge were the oracles of artistic delivery. Doing the work, but spotlighting the communities they worked with.

As an arts producer, it made me realise that through all circumstances we have the potential to create a platform that showcases people and place. In the case of We Bear, Coventry Biennial and Turner Prize 2021 there was a collective embodiment of a moment that I am sure none of us will ever forget and I, for one, am grateful that it happened in my home city.

**Cara Pickering** 





### **HMP Altcourse**

My work explores a free bear in the woods where he belongs, then the second bear in a world where he does not belong but he is fighting on with all that is going on in our world.

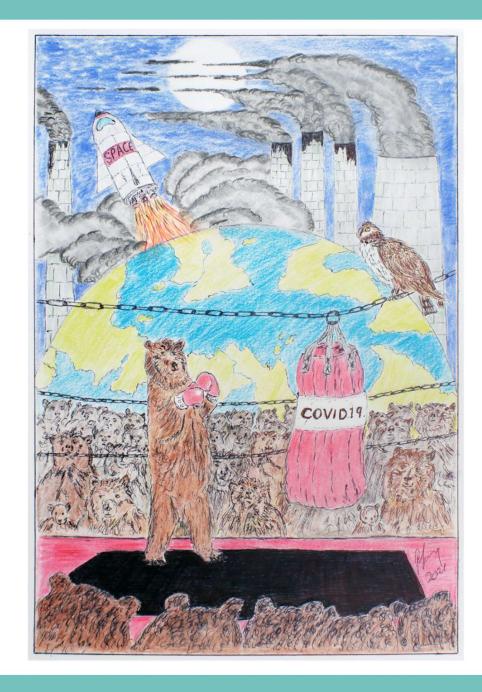
I created the art using pencil, biros to create the art piece.

I hope people will look at my artwork and that it will make them think what is going on in this world.

Whilst making the artwork I learnt how bears have feelings and how the world is changing at this time so we have to change it too before it is too late.

I will be free again soon; the bears will never be free unless we change the world that we live in.





### **HMP Askham Grange**

I liked the Bear Trap pictures because it made me think what really was going on for the bear, was it simply the entrapment by humans or more than that?

I would like to believe a deeper meaning that the bear was both trapped inside and out, not just by chains you could see but the pain of being treated. Was the Bear starved of food and affection or just locked inside himself?

I was inspired to think about the Bear as one trapped but potentially could be freed, how would I feel if I was the Bear? Would I just accept the inevitable or fight for freedom?

My project 'Paws for Thought' reflects on how often I see myself, and others saw me, as trapped within because of past hurt and experiences. I'd like others to see in my art that we may all be like a Bear, trapped by our own chains of doubt, low self-esteem, feelings of negativity that could keep us chained, but if we want to we can take 'paw' steps to a happier life and

a future of endless possibilities, we just need to unchain ourselves from life's burdens by taking very small steps and accepting that with guidance and help, also a few stumbling chain tangles, we can become the person we want to. Like the Bear, no longer bound by chains but given the freedom to move positively in our lives and truly leave the trauma and go towards tranquillity.



Parter Slug" Avers Looking at the bear paintings I couldn't heip but to see myself in the bears place. Being lockedupor (chained). As well as the taunting by dog's, or we're you might see the man feeding the bear. I see him taking it away. So for my Piece. I used the Portrait of the bear to represent myself. likea spirit animal. I chose a Panda because I am white and covered in tattoo's and the Panda reminded me of That He look's pissed for the rage I feel to have no real control overmy Own life. I made the graffic pattern going from the bear to some red Poppy flowers to represent (the chain), and a addiction to opiates witch is what landed me in Prison. I chose the word "Stereotype" because it come's with any prison Sentence, addiction, or tattoo's ... ect. The red eye is another nod to drug use. Hope you all enjoy, Cheer's In fear and loathing,



Artistemit o

BARE to BEAR

Confinement doesn't start or stop with imprisonment of a physical restraint. The elements are far more greater than that. Facing confinement can leave you Bewildered, often experiencing Anxious and Repressed feelings. That is why holding Entangled thoughts within complicated circumstances can leave you feeling judged.

Judgement from others depletes and oppresses you like whips and chains. Self-judgement plummets you further into darkness, therefore, looking into a mirror you only see a distorted image looking back. This leaves you spiraling in brokenness until all that is left is an existence of overwhelming loneliness and truly feeling.... B.A.R.E.

In contrast, when viewed in clarity, a clear crisp image stares back in the mirror. This allows you to take time to focus no longer on the obstacles but on the solutions to the dismay that is before you. You'll find yourself Blessed. Even Enlightened and truly Aspired with spiritual insight to tolerate and absolve your restrained ambitions. Hence becoming Renewed with strength to reestablish your true purpose. Unveiling the truth lets you reveal what was always there. Now it is time for the Glory of Gods gift in you to break free for all the world to.... B.E.A.R.

I am so grateful for this opprotunty. I pray that it touch all of you for creating it was an exciting and fun time expensable in a pandemis. I dedicate this to my beautiful children. I you was an do Amything.



### **HMP Buckley Hall**

I wanted to paint a double-sided painting showing the disparity between how humans think of Bears.

In the monochrome painting, I wanted to show how an adult generally perceives 'the bear' as a big, angry, ferocious and hugely intimidating creature. That's why I painted a man that is in distress and his inner self is portrayed in the shadow which is a roaring bear.

I wanted to paint it in monochrome to give it a sense of deep and dark to get the viewer into the head of the man.

On the flip side, the painting on the reverse is of the man's children waiting for his release. As it's a stressful, anxious and nervous time, the children seek comfort in the one thing children all around the world seek out in times of anguish; their Teddy Bear. It's a safety blanket that helps them think they're protected and everything will be ok.

It just goes to show that we learn to hate/fear, we are not born that way.





### **HMP Cookham Wood**

I started my initial response to the project by creating small pencil drawings of a stylized Bear incorporating pattern, line, tone and words. Most of my drawings were made in cell while some of my artwork started off as being tutor led.

I applied acrylic paint with a roller using a limited palette to my initial pencil drawings to create both a story and mood to my artwork. I wanted to somehow show my apprehension and fears of being released from prison, I am the Bear.



# Artist's Statement

To: We Bear Exhibit
From: John C. Gaik II (#382407)
Newberry Correctional Facility

Artist's Statement: I believe there is no such thing as an uncreative person. Just those who are unwilling to materialize the images in their mind. Case in Point, DREAMS. I'll give another example.

Close your eyeas and listen to music, Your vision is unique. We are all unique.

There has been a debate going on inside of me for guite some time now over how the imagination works. Do we build creative thoughts with the tools of experience and the materials of instinct. Or do we break down the walls and allow the floodgates to wash over us, a sea of imagery?

The artist has the ability to take beauty and materialize it for the rest of us. To set the caged bears free.

Best Wishes, John C. Daik II



Would you like to make any additional comments about this project or the artwork you're submitting?
The Love of and for PCAP Program has been the
insperation that has push me to Grow as a Artist
to PROJUCE Painting threw thier view.
to PROduce Painting threw thier view.  Can these comments be included in the exhibition and publication?  EYES INO



# ARTISTS STATEMENT.

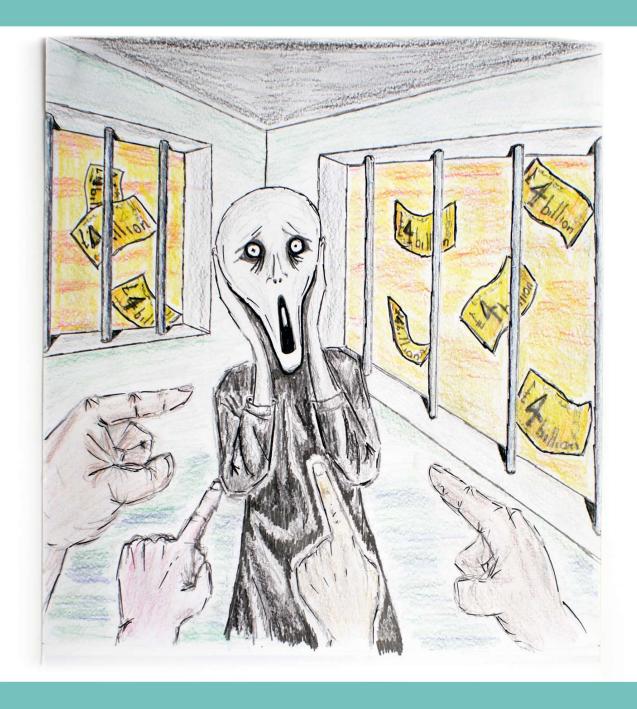
DREEST, CONDEM, IMPRISON, APPROVE

WITH THE CONTINUED INCLEASE OF PUNITVE JAIL SENTENCES, THE UK HAS MORE PRISONERS PER CAPITA THAN ANY OTHER WRSTEIN EUROPEAN COUNTRY

IF THAT IS NOT DISTURBING ENOUGH, THE UK GOVERMENT HAS ALLOCATED A STAGEBRING & A BILLION POUNDS TO CLEATE A FURTHER 18,000 PUSON PLACES OVER THE NEXT 6 YEARS.

THE PARADIEM NEEDS TO STAFT IN
OLDER THAT THE FOCUS IS ON 'HOW
CAN WE REDUCE PRISON NUTIBERS?'
AND 'HOW CAN WE BETTER INVESTIN
REFORM, REHABILITATION & REINTECRATION?'

DESPITE ALL OUR FAULTS & WEAKNESSES, WE ARE ONE HUMANITY. WHITH THE COTTPASSION, KINDNESS & RESPECT WE WOULD HIKE TO BE SHOWEN.





# We Bear: Exploring the complexities of incarceration and the notion of enclosed spaces.

The prison environment is a controlled space. What happens inside its walls is often the subject of morbid curiosity, but will remain unseen for most. However, society retains a strange interest in prison culture and the complex nature of criminal psychology.

For this project prisoners have been asked to take inspiration from two paintings and create their own artwork based on the theme.

Following critical analysis and discussion regarding both paintings, it was agreed that the narrative which accompanies the paintings also reflects life in prison and the perceptions and preconceptions that come from those looking in from the outside:

"...ideas about civilization and taming fears about wild beasts and unknown frontiers".

Several pieces of artwork were produced in response to these paintings and their overarching link to the following notions:

- Fear
- Judgement
- Captivity
- Control
- Change

In addition to this we have discussed how these ideas may be presented, especially as exhibition material.

For this we revisit the notion of the activities undertaken within the confinements of the prison environment and their relationship with the outside world.

Take a shoebox for example, to act as a controlled space. The contents are revealed if we lift the lid and look inside. Regardless, the content remains the same but in a sense does not exist to the viewer until it is observed. Several references were made during the discussion which raised questions regarding observation and perception.

"If a tree falls in the forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?"

In this same sense, society will often not directly observe what happens in a prison (from a creative or developmental point of view), but would most likely 'lift the lid' if an opportunity were to present itself.

Our exhibition presents such an opportunity.

The final artwork is a collaborative piece, the contents of which were submitted by several learners in response to the ideas and concepts discussed above.

HMP Hull 2021



### **HMP** Humber

Unbearable Scenario
Water based Oil on Canvas
42cm x 32cm x 3cm 2021
(stretched on wooden frame)

#### **Artist statement:**

I decided to depict a role reversal of the characters in the original folklore painting of a bear baiting scene. Switching their roles in my painting hopefully highlights the vulnerability that the bears must have felt while being chained up and tormented by the humans and their dogs. The title 'Unbearable Scenario' is self-explanatory.

### Artist/tutor discussion:

## What do you think of the brief?

Animal cruelty still exists in one form or another. The brief set me thinking about how we humans seem to think that we are the most intelligent life form on the planet (which is debatable) and as such, have the right to dominate and in some cases, abuse other species. I am against animal hunting and killing wildlife for trophies etc. My painting

simply turns the tables and puts the bears in the domestic setting in control of the humans.

### Did you welcome the opportunity?

To be honest, with this 'forever lockdown' I have not felt able to really get into my painting frame of mind much. However, after reading the brief...an idea popped into my head and I reached for my pencil and started to sketch an idea. I was grateful to be asked to be part of this project and completing the painting has been a distraction for me.

# Are you looking forward to being in an exhibition in the Coventry City of Culture year?

I am looking forward to my painting being shown to the public in a gallery. It would be nice to have some feedback on my painting from what the public think to it maybe? If that is possible. As this all helps me to grow and develop as an artist, I think.



### **HMP** Isis

A Bear

Some see it as a large dangerous beast.

Some think of a cuddly children's toy.

What a bear is, is often down to the observer.

A bear could be dangerous in some circumstance.

A bear could be warm, loving and curious.

A large fierce male bear was once an innocent curious cub.

As with many dangerous individuals there was, and probably still is, an innocent curious kid inside.

My painting is my interpretation of what

A Bear

ls.



### **HMP** Leeds

We live in a feral world. The older we get, the more of a fox we become.

All my life I have always felt different to everyone else and lived differently to others.

INSPIRED BY England's blood based sports.



### **HMP Liverpool**

I was struck by the idea of power in the chained bear paintings, the power of one creature over another.

I imagined what it would look like if the roles were reversed.

What if the bear was the dominant power, free to assert itself, and the human was 'chained'.

My painting explores the diminishing power of humanity – symbolised in the crumbling house and the vanishing figure.

The power hungry arrogance of humanity, in comparison to the loving power of the Earth, embodied in the strong motifs of the bear, tree and sun, is explored in the painting.

This line of thinking began to bring up current environmental issues: the future of the Earth and the part humanity will play in this. The vanishing figure also suggests the passage of time, which is in short supply.

The statement is based on discussions between the artist and facilitating teacher.



#### From the Artist

I would like to take the time to personally thank each and every person(s) who made this exhibition possible. Thank You!

The inspiration I got for The We Bear exhibition was more personal than I could have imagined.

(No Greater Love)

This piece means so much to me! It symbolizes the unconditional Power of Love a mother has for her children. To a mother, there is nothing more important, beautiful, or a precious gift of life then their children. This painting has a more personal meaning to me. My mother has never stopped being there for me, even when I don't deserve it. I've been locked up since I was 16 years old, and I will be turning 30 this June. Even though so many years have passed by, not once has my mother stopped being there for me. So I know first handedly the power of unconditional love a mother has for her children.

It is my hope that all who see this painting can reflect on all the times your mother has been there for you, whether good or bad, thick or thin. And if your mother is no-longer with you and you're missing her; You can always find her celestial being in the sea of stars.

Sincerely.



	Would you like to make any additional comments about this project or the artwork you're submitting?
THE	KEY To be truely free, one must rise up, find your inner strength, break
	the chains that bind you and SEEK the light Freedom is truth and
	forgiveness.
	Can these comments be included in the exhibition and publication?  Please include to  help understand concept
	help understand concept



## "WE BEAR WITNESS" ACTIST: MONTNEY

The painting "Bear Barding" was an inspiration for "WE BEAR Witness" with its Metaphors and Composition This painting fits The experiences of The Incarconated so well. The Circus Theme belps Shift The Blood sport entertainment and Incarconation onto a store and Squeeze The Viewers gaze to the bear to The original painting's Composition did for it.

IN "WE BEAR WITNESS" The BEAR Clutches The Simple Building brocks of life, The Things That are impostant to each of US.

The Ringmaster and dogs ensure The Bear Connet Move forward, Just as band decisions, Court Pulings, and The Foode of apportunity That decades of Incarceration con have on a prisonce. The Ring Itself has The teeth of The geness That con grind The BEAR downs over time.

As you look to the upper left you can see a split family of Buses. Could his be the Victims family on the Buses own family? Either way these family's are effected by the Buses's actions.

The Section to The Left Contains Many Animals who Represent Fasend and family, while The section to The Right Shows Many "WE BEAR WITNESS" Massages. The American Bison NEAR The Aisle Spoks to The Notice Americans and The injustice They and was in The States. The flog Next to him Sounds The Alarm to what is implening Arand him.

The little Deg showe The fonds symbolizes what it was like to create this flece in a unit That has been Ravaged by Covid-19 during this pondemic. While the Circus bond underweath beat a those drum with MILLER & MENTGOMERY on it. Mese are landmark asses handed down by the U.S. Supreme Covet essentially and if Life without fapede for Juaniles and give them a second chance at life. We see the family of Buses Just about who Represent Social Justice. These Bears give Their Young Cub The Talk's about police as the tothers shiret contains on Equal Sign.

All of This takes place As All of Re Humans Are on Their Smart phones. They are present, yet disengaged.



# Dear Reader

PARTICULAR PIECE is to illustrate the power and beauty of this Animal.

LIKE WISE MEN AND WOMAN
has the Ability to demonstrate
the greatest potential. He gr
She Also has the power of
destruction. Men has three
developmental stages, Animal,
Human and Divine.

Closing thoughts, the process printing has allowed me to see his glory in Croation.

Stoy SAfa

THEO



### **HMP Oakwood**

Melting Face

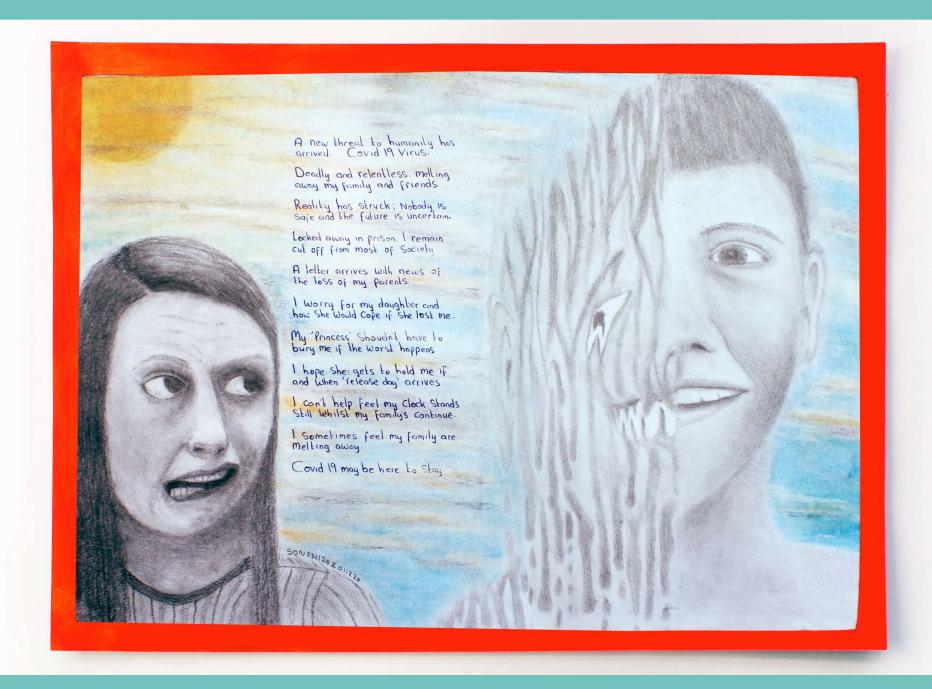
This idea came as I was drawing a portrait of my friend and his sister.

Hearing that COVID is destroying families, I thought of my family melting away.

This gave me the idea of having my friend melting and his sister looking on in horror.

Just like confronting the bear, this helps me confront my fear of my own family melting away,

unable to see them and having no one left to go out to.



The thing I've always found interesting about this painting is the fact that despite the depictions of Several hundenseings Dear Bacting 'is devoid of all humanity, the needless Killing of Something defenceless for sport is something only us humans as a species part take in get still we have the check to question the Sanagedry of the animal Kingdom. As far as f'un concerned the animals in this painting are all wearing waist coats. That is why I have Sketched this human-animal hybred in black biro.



Painting: Exiles from the Island of Mistit Toys " Artists Statement The picture I submitted: Exiles from the Island of Mistit Toys." is a cerebral piece. The bear sits on a raft adoft in the ocean. An anchor is charmed to his Neck. All around him, toys (which are defeating) fun around destroying eachother. The mistit toys are those that society rejects as proken, untit for play. They are the prisoners I see constantly running around blaming eachother, hurting eachother. They do not comprehend a common enemy and instead them on eachother. The bear walts patiently for release, but at any time, the misfit toys could capsize the roft. I believe that there was a "Rudolph The Red Nosed Reinder, Christmas special that introduced an Island of Mistit Toys to me, Prison is indeed an island of prisfit toys. Men and women who are broken and unlit for society. They are exiled and torgother. Their purpose is lost.



see "Corn" on the Meal trays Three or four times a week. I guess The Genrs of wild cheests, and unknown frontiers) are still being tamed.

Artist's Statement By Alvin Smith

(Revealed in Shadow) is you me an outlet of feelings L've held. Having to endure a Constant barrage of repeated Checklist questions, and useless healthcare arocedures," some even aerformed cby The national go quard. Who Came across like a paceless group of people because no one knew anything about them, if gult very much like an unwilling lob rest, gearfully subject to Mad scientist's entertainment. I im sure that even the most ferocious, Rowerful Chains Bear facer Simular gears!

Side B, title, WE THE BEAR" Singely represents the many, Many Bears" returning to their natural habetal. Seins a Man of goeth, that habitat is illustrated here a





WE BEAR PROJECT STATEMENT.

The arework is strongly inspired by the painting 'Bear bailing' (circa 1830)

The image of a bear being treated in this way is a strong metaphor for my own Jarney through the Justice system and feelings towards being an incarcerated person

Much like the bear in the painting I have felt powerless to defend myself against attack in full view of strangers. This is a huge example of my feelings as an impocent man facing a trial.

My own image reflects the daily struggle of a person in prison. The newspaper print is taken from a newspaper that is free and available to all prisoners. The newspaper encarages prisoners to write in and expresses and reflects all aspects of daily life with its reporting.

The use of the Newspaper print so depicts the problems we suffer in prison and have old of time to think which can be a very dangerous place to be.

as even the smallesto of issues can swirl around us and almost be the only thing we see:

The addition of a tree in the Artwork represents
The passage of time. I like to think that I am
only in the winter and like the seasons it
will soon change and a brighter time will come
again. The sense of winter is felt in the Minimal
colour pallet which is also felt around the
prison estate. The prison estate is also devoid
of colour with a arey and blue prison clothing
which gives a break outlook.

In reflection the artwork shows that I am Constantly being paired, Much like the bear. I am being tormented by my own sense of anger, my fear of the Riture and my Guilt that I didn't Right harder to prove my innocence. Thankfully I have been guen the apportunity to take part in projects such as we bear project which gives me a chance to channel those feelings in a position way. We may have lost a few areads along the way they may have assumed we'd mared away but in prison we are just hibermeeting.



#### **HMP Thorn Cross**

"Bear with me"

The box signifies a 'sweatbox', the prison's transportation vehicle, in which we are taken from police cell to courts then on to prison. Locked and confined, hand-cuffed and led, at times feeling part animal: a man/bear. It's an early indication of your new life, but with an acceptance because of your actions.

The man/bear stands alone with his back to his cell, his time of thoughts and reflections as he leaves his past behind him. In front of him is danger and distraction (drawing pins) a path he must negotiate. Around him are the reminders of what he has broken and damaged.

His mind is clear and determined, full of change, repair and armed with hope.

In this artwork I tried to show the relationship between the bear paintings and my time, experiences and feelings going through the justice system.

It can be viewed from above, seeing the overall picture, or through the clear windows, giving you a more personal, closer view of my journey inside.



# Artist Statement

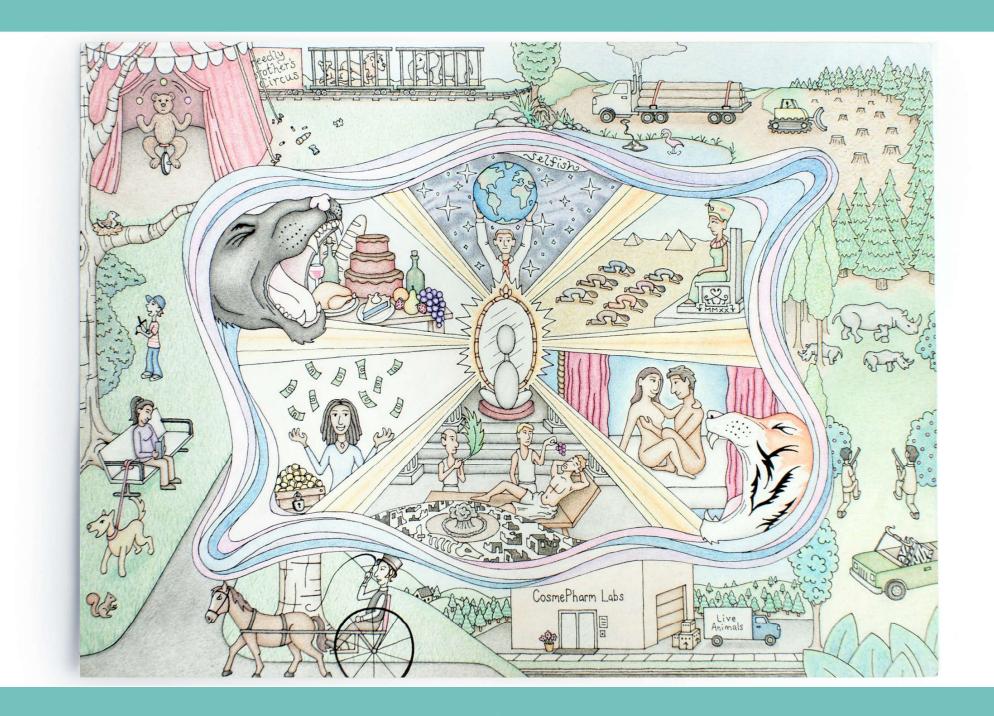
## TRACHENKO, SERGE #483581

Thank you for taking interest in my creative process. This theme We Bear "sporce very streongly to me. Beaux is a big and powerful aling is taken out of his environmen subjected to humiliation, ricicule and to rement. The tormen tores superiority and their justified indifference to exact un limited amount of personal satisfaction at the expanse of the imprisoned. The persecutores lack of compassion, unwillinguess to underestand the captive. Fixed by fear of the pears strength and powers, the damege the bears can in fict on them. If they show any reachess or let off their oppression.
I can identify with the bears shock, unfamiliarly to this hostile suppoundings The bear was raised by bears, he only knows how to be a bear. And all the beatings, penish ment, isolation and confinement, only makes the bear anglier and more resentilless ruman. Compassion, forgiveness, love, patience and underestanting are the best tools, Heat can help working with an anrua! like me.



## ARTIST STATEMENT by AMBER WILSON

When I look at the two bear paintings I see human selfishness and arrogance and the injustice those so inclined inflict upon wildlife, whether it be exploiting it for their perverse enjoyment or capturing it to make believe they are stronger than it. The paintings inspired many thoughts and feelings in me, like the idea of how commonplace or socially acceptable is the destruction, disregard and exploitation of Nature and wildlife; and the feeling of helpless outrage experienced by the creatures victim to such carnage. I tried to illustrate these things in my drawing.



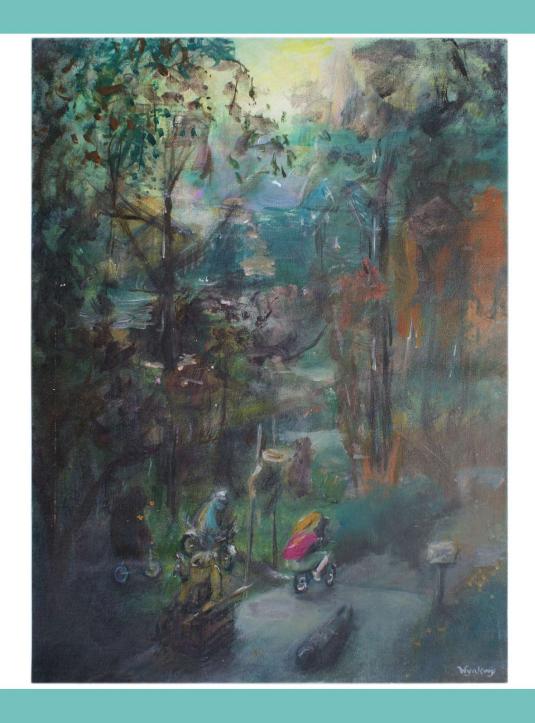
## Statements

I threw a pirtol at a Bear once,

I was at a park and the Bear wolked up on me so fast that I could only throw the pistal at him in fear and I ran up the true next to me.

### state ments

I was in Alaska in 82 and the airport in Anchorage had a stuffed Brown Bear standing on his hind legs. He must of been 13 feet tall. scary as hell.



## Frequently Asked Questions on creative work in prisons

1. Why are people with convictions given creative opportunities?

If we don't provide space for new experiences, we are not equipping people with the right skills to lead a different life on release.

There is great value in prisoners engaging in the arts, as they provide space for self-development through self-expression, improved personal skills, new aspirations, increased self-efficiency and confidence, which enable change as part of a rehabilitative culture\*.

Personal skills are transferable and integral to successfully accessing work. We can support and teach practical skills for jobs, however behaviours and personal skills are qualities which come from these experiences. Creative sessions are often the first step into education for people who have not engaged with mainstream education.

2. Why are only some We Bear participants anonymous?

In the UK, many organisations working within prisons use anonymity, if sharing outcomes in public. This follows guideline from HMPPS, to protect victim impact. In the US, names and convictions of incarcerated people are seen as public knowledge and participants can choose to use their name or a pseudonym when exhibiting.

3. How is victim impact managed in projects like this?

Creative outcomes being shown in public gives prisoners the space and autonomy to have a voice, express themselves and demonstrate the talent, skills and remarkable achievements that they can contribute. These skills all support transition back into communities.

Also, public sharing provides space for conversation with audiences, destignatising prisoners and the Criminal Justice System, supporting community cohesion. in a rehabilitative culture.

This value is carefully considered following a rigorous process before anything public happens, to mitigate victim impact. The context of the work, as well as a number of factors relating to a person's offences and possible victim impact, are assessed. Outcomes are all finally checked b the Ministry of Justice press office, who also consider value versus risk.

4. Where I can see more creative work from prisons?

All the partners' websites and social media channels show their current projects:

coventrybiennial.com fayeclaridge.co.uk lsa.umich.edu/pcap novus.ac.uk

There may be future combined partnership projects to look out for too...

\*Reducing reoffending is made up of 7 common pathways (Health; Accommodation; Attitudes; Thinking & Behaviour; Children & Families; Drugs & Alcohol; Education, Training & Employment; Finance, Benefit & Debt) all of which collectively support a person, addressing key areas that help to be an effective citizen upon release.

We Bear was produced with support by:

### COVENTRY BIENNIAL































Thanks also to the American Folk Art Museum and Compton Verney Art Gallery & Park for supporting the use of collection works as We Bear inspiration.



In the depths of the covid pandemic lockdown, 31 people isolated in prisons in the UK and US produced extraordinary artworks exploring personal experiences of incarceration.

Artist Faye Claridge sent each participant a letter inviting creative responses to the symbol of the chained bear. She paired two folk art paintings from the two countries, showing different treatment of captive bears. These, as metaphors, provided inspiration for the remarkable artworks of We Bear.

"A really exceptional, deeply moving and humane exhibition and project."

We Bear visitor

