

Artist Statement: 26th Annual Exhibition of Art by Michigan Prisoners

Artist Name: Ryan G. "Popsicle Stick Chess 2.0"

January of 2019 marked the beginning of my design and build of "Popsicle Stick Chess 2.0". My schedule cleared during October of 2021 due to a Covid unit quarantine. During that time, I completed the chess set. It required three years, 450 hours, and 3,000 popsicle sticks.

The creative process infuses me with purpose, gratification, joy, and furnishes me with an avenue for service. Some of my creative abilities developed before prison when aspirations of an industrial design degree became a distant reality at Kendall College of Art and Design. Then, I found the realities of incarceration. Michigan Department of Corrections generously included a Hobby Craft Program. The Prison Creative Arts Project combined with the previous two elements, nurtured my continued growth as an artistic designer.

Chess maintains high value for those of us in prison. The game provides opportunities for prisoners to spend time together, earn bragging rights, hone critical thinking skills, cultivate conflict resolution, and improve problem solving ability, and step out of prison reality for the period of time it takes to play a game. My personal experience naturally progressed with creative art, design, and chess. This progression culminated in the production of valued chess sets.

Life in prison, chess, and art parallel with patience. As we all wait patiently for our sentences to expire in prison, we also wait patiently for our chess pieces to find locations on the board where victory is certain. As I built, refined, and finished "Popsicle Stick Chess 2.0", it required the same patient waiting, persevering, and endurance to see its outcome. In addition, my life consisted of constant work with education for ministry, relationships, and serving where needed during the last three years. I scheduled work on "Popsicle Stick Chess 2.0" around my prior existing commitments with God first.

Construction of "Popsicle Stick Chess 2.0" consisted of creating a schematic for every piece - King, Queen, Bishop, Knight, Rook, Pawn, and board. The blueprint provided an overall full scale shape for the exterior of each chess piece and the exact position, shape, and quantity of every interior popsicle stick to fill and provide structure for the exterior. The interior of each chess piece is solidified with wood and glue. Please see my original schematic designs included in the handmade book with the board for further explanation. Solid wood pieces have more weight and durability. As the playing surface, the chess board is entirely created from popsicle sticks using a four inch square parquetry pattern. The storage boxes under the playing surface are high density eighth inch thick chipboard with cotton canvas laminate and framed with popsicle sticks. I intend to provide a high level of quality and value for game play, a memorable impact, and visual aesthetic experience.

I hope that "Popsicle Stick Chess 2.0" will bring to the owner more than an enjoyable game of chess. Thank you for your time and thoughts. May God bless you.

Please edit your Artist Statement to the space provided.