

Artist Statement: 27th Annual Exhibition of Artists in Michigan Prisons

Artist Name: Christopher A. Levitt

Breaking Free:

With this painting I wanted to create an image that speaks to my belief that we all hold the Key to the things that hold us back from pursuing our goals and dreams. For me my pursuit is art and I do not allow the limitations of prison to confine who I am as an artist or how I express myself as an artist.

The Weight of Time:

For us inmates time weighs heavily on us. In this painting I wanted to create an image that expresses how I often feel when I am feeling the weight of my life sentence hanging down on me. I wanted to paint the figure in a way where it is not clear if he will get back up because I often feel like I am not able to get back up and continue on.

Hard Rock:

This painting was inspired by Etheridge Knight's poem 'Hard Rock Returns to Prison From the Hospital for the Criminal Insane'. This poem is written from the perspective of a group of inmates reflecting on a particular inmate who was forced to undergo a lobotomy because he was too difficult for prison authorities to handle. The following two stanzas inspired the painting:

Hard Rock / was / "Known not to take no shit
From nobody," and he had the scars to prove it:

Split purple lips, lumbled ears, welts above
His yellow eyes, and one long scar that cut
Across his temple and plowed through a thick
Canopy of kinky hair.

...

And even after we discovered that it took Hard Rock

Exactly 3 minutes to tell you his first name,
We told ourselves that he had just wised up,
Was being cool; but we could not fool ourselves for long,

And we turned away, our eyes on the ground. Crushed.

He had been our Destroyer, the doer of things
We dreamed of doing but could not bring ourselves to do,

The fears of years, like a biting whip,
Had cut deep bloody grooves
Across our backs.

Inspired by these two stanzas, I painted a portrait of Hard Rock using both Knight's physical description of him and the emotional response of the inmates to what happened to Hard Rock.

Please edit your Artist Statement to fit the space provided.