

Artist Name: Carsten

This year presented a set of difficult challenges for me.

I moved facilities and levels. I am now in a facility and level that makes working on my art difficult. My supplies are severely limited and the environment is not conducive for art at all. It is loud, dark, dirty, and cramped at all times.

This year I am still working with my figurines that I finished out last year with. I am trying to give them more agency this year, let them interact with their environment in a more meaningful way, and let them share space with other figurines.

I am also more adventurous with the postures, shapes, and proportions of my figurines. But I am still only scratching the surface of what is possible.

This Art Show will be my second-to-last show, I am working on actively running out my supplies, and I am nearing my out-date. So this year I have been trying more material-intensive projects to help exhaust my stash. I still find new and meaningful ways to express myself through my paper, and most importantly I am still enjoying the heck out of this.

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"Chasing the sun into the ocean"

This piece started its life as part of another piece, but I had to scrap the white rolls from the initial piece. So instead I put the rolls on stilts, each one a different height and a different combination of supports. In the end the rolls formed a sort of impromptu stair case.

I am ALWAYS tempted to pour/dump paint over pieces, especially if they are white. So I did this here. I then let the whole piece sit for close to a month. Out of sight, out of mind. I knew I wanted to do more to it, but I wasn't sure what.

It took me working on "Kissing in the Rain" until inspiration hit. I wanted to use the paper rope again. I cut tag board into $\frac{1}{8}$ strips and braided them. I love the look of it and the idea of a paper rope. I wanted it for this piece. So I added mini figurines that climb the stair case, following the sun along its path.

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"Old man and the sea"

This piece is just a flight of fancy. I did not create it with a message in mind. All I wanted to do was have one of my figurines sit and do something. Fishing came to mind pretty quickly. I also wanted to test-drive my water idea that I wanted to use in another upcoming piece, so I double-dipped.

This actually took much longer than anticipated because I needed a lot more grass than I thought. I ran out of green rolls twice and had to stop to cut and roll them. But in the end I feel that this piece turned out nice. I like it and I hope it finds a lovely home somewhere.

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"Buchou"

This piece is based on something that I saw on a couple of episodes of "RuPaul's Drag Race" this past season.

Buchou is a Japanese performance art, and part of that is a circle, it features prominently. I wanted to create this open circle in red and white, just to see if I could do it. I feel that this circle made out of circles has a nice organic flow to it.

This piece has turned out even better than I had hoped for. And the colors make it look somewhat elegant even.

Creating this piece has led me to try two other pieces that use some similar concepts, but those two did not turn out as nice. One of them I had to completely re-do and it cost me some 20 hours of wasted work.

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"The trash we live and play on"

I've had this piece planned for a while. The idea was to use leftover pieces from other projects to build up a layer and also the wave on which the figurine is surfing. The leftover pieces show through the layer of water that I build over it, they symbolize the trash that pollutes our water and oceans.

We have just accepted this trash and pollution, it is part of life now, we play on this trash. And so my figurine is surfing on the water, but underneath it all is a layer of trash, of pieces that have otherwise become useless.

We have become so numb to the ever-present trash that we just accept it as part of life now, it is the foundation on which we now live.

I thought it would be fitting to not "create" trash, but just use the trash that I create - if that makes sense.

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"Struggling for self-determination"

"Struggling..." started out completely different from the final product.

Initially it was meant to be inspired by Georgia O'Keeffe, but once I started to glue rolls down it quickly became apparent that I could not match the fluid and feminine lines. I could not give it the organically flowing lines, I had to pivot. But even that pivot was not enough. I had to partially deconstruct the piece and so the third and final iteration was born.

"Struggling..." symbolizes the little person trying to reach higher but being denied and pushed down by those who are bigger and higher up.

I was excited to use the figurines again that I started building for last year's show. But this time I also got to make smaller versions of them.

I wanted to include "windows" or blank spaces in the my solid structure to show that anything build to keep people out is penetrable, nothing is build to keep people down forever. The human spirit can overcome and conquer all. It just may take longer and more of us to tear it down.

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"What about us who are not perfect, huh Vitruvius?"

This piece is based on DaVinci's "The Vitruvian Man", which in turn is based on a statement by roman architect Vitruvius, who said "... a well-shaped man fits into the perfect shapes of a square and a circle." That made me think about those of us who are not well-shaped and perfect, what is our place in society? Where do we fit? Where do I fit? I always seem to be searching for my place, what I am good for, and where can I add rather than subtract. I search for that because I know that I am not perfect or well-shaped, who is? And so I wonder which ideal person he was refering to when he said that. And who is that perfect fit in that perfect place?

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"NIL - the elevation of the Me over the We"

The idea for this piece crystalized in a split second. The week before the election a couple of guerrilla art pieces appeared in Washington D.C. and the second I saw them the idea for this piece popped into my mind. I saw the "poop" on the desk and knew I wanted to blow up my signature logo to cover the majority of my art piece.

Once I had that idea, the message came quickly. NIL - name, image and likeness - has been a huge deal in sports this past year, but I feel that it is a symptom of a larger issue in society. The "Me" is being glorified and the "We" is being pushed into the background. A lot of people seem to be out for themselves only and they neglect to support the group at large. And it bothers me a lot that society has become so self-focused and selfish, and those who try to better society as a whole are laughed out of the room.

Artist Name: Carsten"Kissing in the Rain"

I was beyond excited for this piece, a true challenge. And it came with plenty of challenges. The braided paper rope was the easiest part. Spider-man is supported by 3 strands of $\frac{1}{16}$ in. paper that are braided. But even then he is precariously supported and hanging from the feet and his hands. It was an exercise in patience and finger dexterity.

The arch was an even greater challenge. This is the 2nd. iteration of the arch. The initial arch was build from hollow rings and after two weeks Spider-man's head touched the ground as the arch slumped. I tore it all down and rebuild it from solid rolls. Much better.

I learned two things from this project:

1. A structural engineer I am not
2. I have the patients of someone approaching sainthood.

I love the suspended Spider-man, even though the arch gives off serious Mardi-Gras vibes.

Artist Statement — 29th Annual Exhibition of Artists in Michigan Prisons

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"Lighting the Fagot, a renewed favorite pasttime"

This piece came together after the election. I had the idea for it for a while, but after Nov. 5th. 2025 it had an added layer of meaning. I believe that the political discourse of the past couple of years has exposed a nasty and dangerous attitude toward the LGBTQIA+ community. And one of the parties has given permission to say things out loud that ought to have stayed in the 1940's and out of democratic mouths. These feelings have now been watered, feed, and given sunlight - they are thriving.

I cannot tell you what to see when you look at the piece, but the figurine is dressed in a specific sequence of colors and the pole is reminiscent of red-and-white stripes. The country is on fire and and some people feel it more urgently than others.

I previously used a slur on a piece some 4-5 years ago, this time I went even further. I did this because the time for sugar coating is past and bluntness is needed, and also because of literary serendipity - Fagot has another fitting meaning.

fag·ot /'fa-gət/ n: a bundle of sticks or twigs

Enjoy