

Interview with the Artists

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The second Unguarded Art Auction for charity is Feb. 15. DOC Communications recently interviewed two previously incarcerated individuals who are now at the Progress House Work Release in Tacoma. They contributed art for this year's auction, which raised money for the YWCAs of Seattle, King, Snohomish, Kitsap and Pierce Counties. They were also part of the steering committee and donated art pieces for the first Unguarded Art Auction in 2018.

The following is an abridged interview with previously incarcerated artists Stacy Dockins and Carmel Garipee.

What type of art do you specialize in and how did you learn?

Stacy Dockins: I started painting in 2016. I just picked it up. A guy in my cell had some painting and was like 'try to learn how to paint.' There were no books or formal lessons. It was just watching people and trying stuff and seeing what looked good.

Carmel Garipee: I'm a Chippewa Native. I learned beading from my mom. From a young age, I learned the basics and then when I got locked up, I had all that time sitting down and expanded learning myself. I got more artistic with it. I would give it to other Natives for their dance outfits or regalia.

Why do you make art?

SD: Before I was in prison, I cut hair. I like to see people happy and make them smile. When I cut their hair, I could tell if they had a bad aura and as I'm cutting it, we talk and I see that they're looking better and feeling better so when they leave the shop, they feel better. Same with art. I start off with nothing, a couple of references and then a thought becomes an idea and then it becomes something and people see it and it makes them happy.

CG: It feels like I am passing on my culture.

What inspires you in your art?

SD: I think it's the challenge of doing things. If I see something challenging, it's inspirational. When I did my painting of Barak Obama, it was like, 'I'll try it.' I didn't know how to paint. At first it was like a blob, but I kept going, I probably painted that picture 20 times and probably took four months to paint, but it came out good.

The money we raise is going to the homeless. It's just crazy how the world changed. Since I've been out (of prison) all I see is homeless. The picture I'm painting now is dealing with that. And the picture I painted last year—the woman crying draped in the American flag-- was with the

politics of what's going on with the world about Americans being sent back to 'their country' when they were born in the country.

CG: My ideas always come from when I see something already made, or I'll look through Native literature and see something I like. My inspiration comes from these things and then redoing it with a newer vibe, with a more up-to-date-technique or a more up-to-date technique with that cultural piece.

Has art affected the way you see the world around you?

SD: Yeah. A whole lot. One thing it's taught me is that life ain't gonna wait for you. Three of these people in my paintings (Muhammad Ali, Aretha Franklin, Prince) are deceased. They weren't deceased when I went into prison. They were alive and you'd never think that they'd be gone. The way I look at life now is think first. Think twice. Think three times before you make a decision.

CG: It's changed me maturity wise. It's allowed me to start taking things seriously that are important for my culture and my spirituality and being able to have something to pass on to my kids. I want to teach them how to do it (Native art). I feel like it's made me a better person and it'll make my kids better people and if that affects the world, my heart will be the world. I think art is passing beauty to the world. Everybody likes to look at beautiful things, whether it's a picture or a beautiful piece of beadwork. Beauty makes the world a better place.

What are your plans for after you leave work release? What do you want to communicate about people leaving prison?

SD: Right now, I'm working at a restaurant depot, it's like a warehouse for restaurants. Eventually, I want to open up a hair and tattoo shop. And give people a chance. Not everybody's the same. A lot of us have made mistakes and been snatched away from our families. I did something and I learned my lesson. I spent years learning my lesson. We're good people and we've got a jump on life because we've had to live under structure. A lot of guys who come out of prison have done positive programs like this and we've got a better insight. We've made decisions that weren't good decisions but found a lot of ways to learn from mistakes to help others not make those same mistakes.

CG: I'm working on my certification to be a forklift driver. By the end of this month, I'll have all the hours to get my Commercial Driver's License. Right now, I work at Raceway Technologies as a forklift driver. They gave me avenues to pursue for a better job in the future. They helped me out and taught me stuff and got me ready for after work release.

What does it mean for you to do something for charity?

SD: I've been blessed myself. There were times when I've needed things and a lot of people came out to help and did things for my family. We don't know where it came from, just out of their hearts and I want to pass it on.

CG: For the first part of my life, I did enough bad stuff and made victims out of people and left enough bad steps behind me. For the second half of my life, I want to try to right as many wrongs as I can and create as many positive circumstances I can so when I do finally meet the Creator I have righted some of these wrongs. I don't even want to know who will benefit from the money we raise. It's just the satisfaction of knowing I selflessly did something for someone else in life.