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Museum of the African Diaspora (MoAD) presents

Meet Us Quickly: Painting for Justice from Prison

A digital exhibition of the work of twelve artists incarcerated at San Quentin State Prison

Curated by Rahsaan “New York” Thomas, co-host and co-producer of *Ear Hustle*

Online now at moadsf.org/meet-us-quickly

(San Francisco, CA)— The Museum of the African Diaspora is proud to present *Meet Us Quickly: Painting for Justice from Prison*, a digital exhibition of the work of twelve artists incarcerated at San Quentin State Prison. The twenty-one works in the exhibition include linocut prints, acrylic paintings, ink drawings on paper, and collage and are presented with accompanying statements written by each artist, allowing these incarcerated men to speak for themselves and share their vision and perspectives in their own words.

The exhibition, initiated in partnership with Flyaway Productions and Prison Renaissance, is organized and curated by Rahsaan “New York” Thomas, well known as the co-host and co-producer of the Pulitzer Prize-nominated podcast *Ear Hustle*. The Brooklyn native is currently incarcerated at San Quentin from where he chairs a chapter of the Northern California Society of Professional Journalists, is a contributing writer for *The Marshall Project* and *San Quentin News*, and co-founded Prison Renaissance, a journal and a movement that uses art and community to create a culture of transformation to end the cycles of incarceration.

In Thomas’ essay *The Art of Proximity*, included as part of the online exhibition, he writes, “How do you get the public to be proximate with people in prison? Immediately art comes to mind. Art because it allows you to turn your most painful experiences into something beautiful. Art because even in prison, you still have freedom of speech, freedom of expression. Art because you see amazing incarcerated painters Bruce Fowler and Lamavis Comundoiwilla and cartoonist Orlando Smith create works worthy of huge commissions for free as

acts of remorse. Art because it can be mailed past the bars. Art because it's attractive. Art because writing is an art you practice. It has to be art because it has always been art for you."

Eclectic in influence, certain works in this exhibition nod to pointillism and neo-constructivism while others honor the importance of the artists of the Harlem Renaissance.

Gerald Morgan contributes *Pyramids*, a painting that captures the vision of Aaron Douglas, a 20th century Black artist. Morgan writes, "From 1934 to 1936, three of his paintings inspired me to tie his message together on one canvas. The titles are: *African Setting* 1934, *Into Bondage* 1936 and *Aspiration* 1936. Aaron's vision of the past and the future continues to unfold today."

Gary Harell, incarcerated for 42 years and counting, blends block printing with pointillism to create vivid portraits including the two works on view in the exhibition, *Gary Harell Plays Blues* and *The Queen*.

Orlando Smith, a tattoo artist prior to being given 8 life sentences under the Three Strikes Law, contributes a number of finely detailed graphic novel illustrations, powerfully depicting life behind bars.

Tafka Clark Rockefeller paints oil and acrylics and believes that all art should deliberately and meaningfully break at least one rule. His style, which he calls Neo-Constructivism, is clearly on view in his painting *Make Skeletons Dance*.

Bruce Fowler's *Ruth* is a richly painted portrait of Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Fowler writes, "My inspirations come from internal struggles that haunt me, places I dream of escaping to, and people I admire, which led me to paint Judge Ruth Bader Ginsburg. She suffered terrible losses and conquered unimaginable odds to become the most powerful woman in America—a woman I have great respect for. I am honored to have the opportunity to paint her; this is coming from the most unlikely admirer."

Other artists include Phillip "Ansar" Anthony Davis, Stan Bey, Ben Chandler, Christopher "Khalifah" Christensen, Lamavis Comundoiwilla, David Gabriel, and Antwan "Banks" Williams, co-creator and sound designer of *Ear Hustle*.

Meet Us Quickly: Painting for Justice from Prison is part of a series of programs developed in partnership with Flyaway Productions, Prison Renaissance, Bend The Arc Jewish Action, and CounterPulse designed to explore how Black, Jewish, and JPOC voices can work together to amplify the call for racial justice via an end to mass incarceration. The series included a recent talk hosted by MoAD entitled “Finding Mercy: Black and Jewish Voices against Mass Incarceration” (available on MoAD’s YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b-sBtmSiuAM>) and the currently postponed performance piece *Meet Us Quickly With Your Mercy*.

Prison Renaissance is planning an auction of the works on view in *Meet Us Quickly: Painting for Justice from Prison*. The public can learn more on MoAD’s website.

This exhibition is made possible in part by a grant from The Creative Work Fund, a program of the Walter and Elise Haas Fund that also is supported by The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

About MoAD

Opened in 2005 in San Francisco’s Yerba Buena arts district, MoAD, a contemporary art museum, celebrates Black cultures, ignites challenging conversations, and inspires learning through the global lens of the African Diaspora.

For more information about MoAD, visit The Museum’s website at moadsf.org.

For media information or visuals visit our online press gallery or contact:

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General Information

The Museum is currently closed to the public. For general information, visit The Museum's website at moadsf.org or call 415.358.7200. MoAD is located at 685 Mission Street (at Third), San Francisco, CA.

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