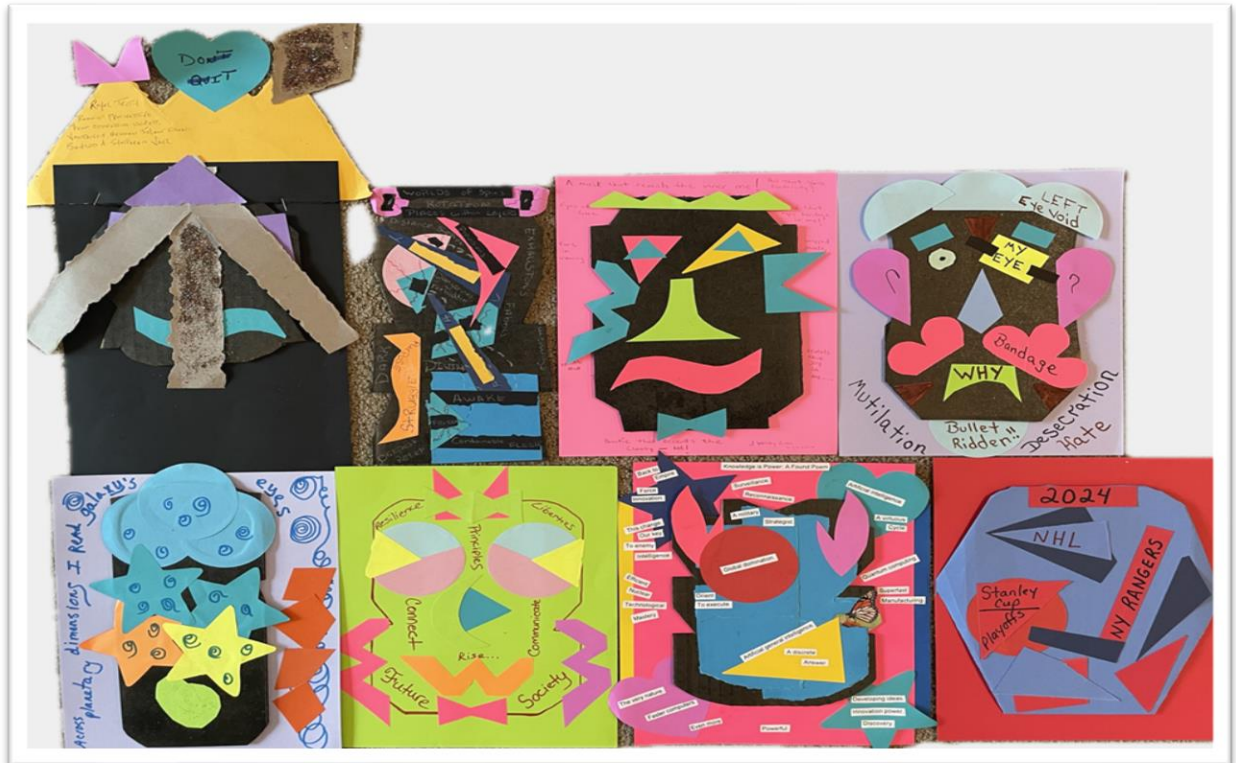


Mask // Unmask

Ekphrasis Inside

Poems from Bedford Hills

Correctional Facility



Poems by
Krystal, Cindy, Candace, Key,
Yarenis, Brenda, Jacqueline

Editor: Pam Hart



Building Bridges: Prison Arts Initiative presented by the Katonah Museum of Art
in collaboration with Rehabilitation Through the Arts



Building Bridges: Prison Arts Initiative is supported by a Humanities New York Action Grant with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Broken Effigy

By Krystal

Broken effigy

From continuous rebellion

Continuous consequences

Lashed, gagged, chopped, foot like Kunta Kinte

Swollen ~~Beaten~~-Soul Sodomize, Spirit stronger

From the beautiful struggle.

Am I human?

What does it mean to being human?

The effigy secretly transforms hidden flaws

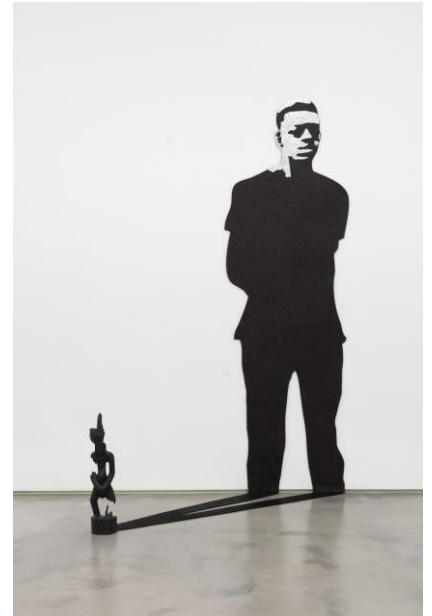
The truth of existence lies tattered to the

Shadow

Always loyally connected

The ground gives it room to lay

Wall provides leverage for it to extend its power



Power Behind the Mask

By Krystal

Hidden treasure behind gigantic galactic mask

Marble finish curved to shape the universe

True image molten in, to protect the system Caste?

Protect the mask or protect the power behind the mask first

Displayed to ~~Betray~~, ~~Berate~~, Behead a loyal Goddess

Sold or sell on the wooden block

Confidently authentic a symbolic of modest

Silent tales from ancestors seen as cash crop

Visible and invisible

Captured and captivating

Invisible captures visible

Captivating without capturing

Reaching while remaining poise

Barely covered

~~Screaming~~ Thinking Silently out loud drowning noise

Barely Smothered



Krystal graduated from NYTS with a master's degree. Liberation means nothing if you don't liberate others. The freedom to write gives value to my worth and gives permission for others to see value within themselves in my words. Evolution is inevitable. Stagnant is poison.

An Enigma

By Cynthia

Anyone can be the man in the mask
The water reflects all his strength to fight
Smothered in mystery is what he asks
As he continues to dance in the light

Feeling betrayed by his soul's fear
Hoping that nobody will see the truth
As he loses everything that he holds dear
Praying that time rewinds back to his youth

A time where he felt so easily free
To be anything that he hoped and dreamed
A feeling intertwined with what he sees
But nothing in life is what it has seemed

A life worth living is what he'll ask
To die with pride, now that's his task



Posing No More

By Cynthia

Zooming past the
Yellow sun-flowered fields
Xenophobic comments slowly
Withering away. This
Vagrant is not
Useless but
Transcendent.
Stolen away from the
River of dreams,
Questioning what's real...
Present predicaments, an
Ordeal too much to bear
Nervous laughter is

Multifaceted
Layers of
Knowledge, dwells.
Justifying my beliefs,
Ideas...my feelings.
Healing.
Glory to my Higher Power
For removing my fear
Entwining my hopes and
Dreams
Contrary to their hatred
Believing I will overcome
Always.

Cynthia is currently incarcerated at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility and has been incarcerated for six years. She is graduating with her BA in sociology in May 2024 and will continue to pursue higher education during her incarceration. She is a current member of Rehabilitation Through the Arts for the past three years, which has helped her transform herself into the person that she is today. She is a writer and a poet, currently working on a book of short stories as well as a zuihitsu. She has also taken classes through the REAP certification program that is affiliated with Columbia Business School, which has allowed her to explore the possibility of starting a non-profit organization that will emphasize spiritual transformation and reduce homelessness as well as reduce recidivism.



Hiding Behind My Mask

A Villanelle

By Candace

Pondering, who am I?
Who I want to be or
What I want you to see, why?

A consuming need, please let me try
Willing to adapt, but is it enough
Pondering, who am I?

So tired it makes me cry
Trapped behind my mask
What I want you to see, why?

Ready to break free and fly
An adventure to discover
Pondering, who am I?



The Poet Behind the Mask: Ars Poetica

By Candace

Poetry's foundation
Creative writing and expression
was not my favorite
Lack of understanding, typically
attempting to find my inner poet
Yes to this style, no to that style
Structure and format
great friends of mine
Add history to the mix
the seeds are planted
Bring my faith roots in too
Now I start to blossom
Keep my mind open
embrace constructive critique
Gain confidence in sharing
We never know
who is listening and
what we can learn from each other

An Ode to the NY Rangers

By Candace

You oh NY Rangers
You look like patriots on ice
I celebrate your dominant season
Your color is like the American flag
I love the sound of fans roaring
Your shape is Madison Square Garden
You taste like beer and nachos

You oh NY Rangers move like ice skating
warriors
Oh NY Rangers you are important because

Your loyal blue shirt fans love you
And because we want the Cup as much as
you
You remind me of fierce determination
You are as talented and skilled
As you are deserving
I feel like a part of the crowd when
watching you on TV
I honor you NY Rangers
Because you have earned it

Oh NY Rangers
You are the best in the league
Now bring home the Stanley Cup to MSG!

Candace is dedicated to her spiritual growth. She is an avid hockey fan. Go Rangers! Though she has no previous creative writing experience, she hopes RTA will help her discover the therapeutic benefits of creative expression.

More Than Meets the Eye

By Key

Mask of self-protection

or

is it the world that needs protection

Broken shoulders of history

The defense is the opposition

Pedestal of 40 x 8 ½ x 9 ¾ inches

Aluminum strong or breakable

What you feel, think

I am I just a product

or do you see me!!!

Am I mistaking

Progression for limited obsessions

Mistake me for a

Fool

or

Queen, maybe King

Cages are for beasts

Wild things solitude domesticate

Devils' advocates two windows
perceptions

Whose Property

By Key

Structures of wonders unknown

I know why a caged bird sings

Bended knees of prostration's throne

views an oppressed empress brings

pain or torture remembrance of descendants

Sounds the mind of the peace

mercantilism enables dependents

Frozen moments of time release

Shallow structures perceptions of who we seek

Artifacts ancient origins delete

Sacred place royal chambers peek

Levels of inclusion incomplete

Tuff skin or thick glass

Steel frames eyes viewed

Pass, past

Rituals renewed



Key: I am currently 4 credits away from my associate degree. My fav color is lavender. Poetry has always been my escape from reality for as long as I can recall. I have been a member of RTA for about 4 years. This has been a continuous life changing experience. Every day I grow and even surprise myself with my transformation.

My Deity

By Yarenis

My deity.
The only one to love me.
Other than mother.

Protects me.
Sees all things.
Overcomes average men.

No need to fear.
I listen to my deity.
I am valuable.

My deity reads minds.
All thoughts in my head.
Tells me apart.

My deity puts me on a pedestal.
I am humble.
I do not take this lightly.

Our souls mingle.
To my deity, my heart belongs.
Controls my life.

That's all I ever wanted.
To serve one that is deserving.
Molded into perfection.

It's not always easy.
Easier for me than most.
This is what I want.

I cry.
I suck it up.
I accept my prize.

Wiser than my enemies.
More understanding than all my
teachers.
My deity's words, honey in my mouth.

"I never sleep 'cuz sleep is the cousin of
death."

I fear falling short of my deity's honor.
I shall die for my deity's honor.

Blameless to my deity.
My deity believes in me.
I only prosper.

Breath in my lungs.
Nourishment to my soul.
Living, a prayer to my deity.

I sit still.
I listen.
I observe.

I imbibe love.
I am blessed.
I am grateful.



I Belong Here:
The Reflections of a Culture Vulture
By Yarenis

I belong here.
They do not want me around.
Tried to comply.

Evaporate like moisture.
Breakup on the subatomic level.
Dissolve in rain.

Swept up.
Becoming atmosphere.
Participate only in spirit.

Didn't work.
Failed.
I'm still here.

Black women say, "You are not Black."
"None of this is yours."
"Be Dominican."

Dominican parents.
Dominicans say, "You are not Dominican."
Looks, too Black for them.

Poor mindsets.
Empty culture.
Nothing to miss.

Everyone agrees.
They do not want me around.
Where do I go?

White physical features
Do not come natural to me.
I do not pursue.

A planet overcome
With Black women who do.
I pay close attention.

Think ugly.
Behave ugly.
Look ugly.

I can't afford ugly.
I get treated ugly.



I want to be married.

Study Holy doctrines.
Study society and politics.
Educate myself.

Africans sent to Caribbean Islands.
Transatlantic slave-trade begins.
It makes perfect sense.

I look in the mirror.
I know I'm Black.
Been Black my whole life.

This whole planet comes from Africa.
Blacks and whites, Brothers and sisters.
Tried to keep me in poverty.

Africa is abundant.
Africa is infinite.
Africa belongs to all.

Blacks play victims.
Nothing exists in a vacuum.
The cause of their own enslavement.

Being smug.
Self-serving.
And greedy.

Without Africa,
We have nothing.
We are in poverty.

Share what you have.
You will prosper.
You will be risen.

I belong here.
They do not want me around.
I cannot comply.

The Big Reveal: A two-part sonnet poem series
By Yarenis

Part 1: Camouflage

The African mask, diced, twisted, obscured.
Textile prints, world origin statements.
Undying, high rank to my thoughts
occurred.
Like kilts or flannel shirts to Caucasians.
The head slave-master, the counterfeit truth.
A leading man and world power, a dream.
Although I said it, when will it hit you?
Offer my life to what's behind the scenes.
The face, piece together, drape the body.
A great Black man, make it out lucidly.
Inherently like his skin tone, motley,
A calculating ingenuity.
Attempt to outsmart him and shoot your
foot.
Might find a crutch...it's nowhere as
good.

Part 2: Artifice

Disrobed woman behind African mask.
Military, always so durable.
Want a reason why she's exposed then ask.
Protected in the front, vulnerable.
The female form available, risqué.
The bridle, a foothold, and the stirrups.
She thinks she's fooling man, make no
mistake.
Always thinking the appeal is Europe.
Inherit the Earth, glory, sacrifice.
A weak device to him, she thinks it's strong.
Her sex is truly used as artifice.
It was the African man all along.
Think you can wage war better than a man?
Be a better man, put you in command.



Yarenis is a hip-hop lyricist and prolific poet. With a rough background in cultural anthropology from the New York city streets to the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility prison setting, she uses intelligent, conscientious lyrics to heal the world. She has been incarcerated for almost six years, with RTA for 18 months.

The Tragedy

By Brenda

BAM presents reverence
reflection ritual desecration
masks sacrifices killings
ritual mutilates figures
Bullet ridden bodies
Left eye void
Spirit memorializes tragedy.



Jordan's Tragedy

By Brenda

Jordan's mutilated face
coated in wax
Fractured features

Bullet ridden
Traditional headdress
Jordan's mutilated face

Bullets through the eye
So many destroyed
Fractured features

Police officers
Shooting causing
Jordan's mutilated face

Texas schoolboy shot
Leaving distorted
Fractured features

All this devastation
No consequences for
Jordan's mutilated face
Fractured features

Abecedarian

By Brenda

African American
Boy bludgeoned with bullets
Cops do not care
Death is his destiny
Evil individuals
Forgetting they must
Guard our youth
Hatred overrides humanity
Intense brutality
Jordan has not justice
Keep killing kids
Loved ones
Mutilated maliciously
Nobody is allowed to
Oppose the violence
Police are forever
Quickly pulling the trigger
Responsibility is removed
Shields save them
Tragedy remains
Under the law
Victims violated
Wild weeping
X marks the spot where
Young kids killed
Zero punishment.

Brenda has been in RTA for seven years. She has become a poet and artist.

Cento: Ten Lines

By Jacqueline

We will rebuild, reconcile and recover
Life becomes human again
Wayward energy, moving right
Call it the unknown
Voices across the pool
Like the solution to the mystery
To climb, in this instance
upon the horizon
Sideways. Upwards. Again in succession.
Sprung.



Poem Inspired by Ballad Written in 2016

With Thoughts of My Husband

By Jacqueline

Still waiting to show you
how much you don't know
My mate for more than 3 decades
I pray time permits our reunion.
It's unfair to speculate how
things will be the same.
With time comes age
With age wisdom
Honor and newness.

The Reckoning That Wasn't

A blackout poem

By Jacqueline

Disappointing wars
Wake up!
More broadly – humiliation
Disastrous folly did irreparable harm.
The crisis that projects
a dead end.
United States establishment refused
Clinging to what the
world needs
Power
Rashness chaotic!
Spectacle to declare.
Aspirations which gave rise.

Invasion revived
U.S. history vanished
War launched.
Poised to continue:
The same mistakes
Justified global leadership
restrained.
Outmoded, moralistic, recklessly
altogether different –
disastrous!

Collect Poem

By Jacqueline

The deity is Creator/Spirit
The Spirit/Creator is alive: Huge.
A combo of both genders
—NO—
Beyond gender.
Energy—moving all encompassing
Everywhere, always...
Fulfilling my purpose
Free to be even in a penitentiary
With each new day assuring
physical presence is on the way.
While anticipating Spirit flows
and shows my physical presence
in a spiritual way.
With thanks and praise
illustrated in many ways

Jackie is an actor/comedienne and newly studied poet. A master's graduate, she anticipates advocating for a humanitarian approach to the criminal justice system and is working to establish an Over-Sentence Watch organization.

There Is A Body: Legacy of the Ancestral Arts in the 21st Century

At the Katonah Museum of Art March 17 – June 30, 2024

David O. Alekhuogie, *Mask 99/2*, 2021.

Archival pigment print. 47 1/4 × 36 in. Collection of Lisa and Stephen Eisenstein. Photo: Courtesy of the artist and Yancey Richardson, New York. © David O. Alekhuogie

Sanford Biggers, *The Soothsayer*, 2019-23

White marble on custom cedar plinth. 49 3/4 x 38 1/2 x 33 in. Unique in a series. Courtesy of the Peter og Mulle Korsholm Collection. Photo: Lance Brewer. © Sanford Biggers

Sanford Biggers, *Still*, 2020

Sequins, wood, roofing cement, glitter, and Velcro. 96 x 29 x 34 in. Collection of Deborah Beckmann and Jacob Kotzubei. Courtesy of the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York and Aspen. Photo: Lance Brewer. © Sanford Biggers

Sanford Biggers, *BAM (for Jordan)*, 2017

Unique in a series of three. Polished bronze. 12 x 7 1/4 x 4 1/2 in. HD Video, duration 0:38 sec. Collection of Stacy and Rob Goergen. Courtesy of the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York and Aspen. © Sanford Biggers

Matthew Angelo Harrison, *Culling Figure*, 2021

Wooden sculpture, polyurethane resin, and anodized aluminum. 66 1/8 x 8 1/2 x 9 3/4 inches. Private collection. Courtesy of the artist and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco. Photo: Dan Bradica. © Matthew Angelo Harrison

Lyle Ashton Harris, *Afropunk Odalisque*, 2018

Dye sublimation print on aluminum. 48 x 64 inches. Edition 1 of 3, 2 Aps. Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94, New York. © Lyle Ashton Harris

Lyle Ashton Harris, *Tafakari* (Diptych), 2018

Dye Sublimation Print on Aluminum. 64 x 48 inches. Edition 2 of 3, 2 Aps. Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94, New York. © Lyle Ashton Harris