

Words in Flow

Poetry inspired by the Art of Shen Wei

Poets of the Sing Sing Correctional Facility

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Reginald
Sharc
Daniel
Vincent
Jaquan
Alex

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With poems inspired by Shen Wei: *STILL/MOVING*
at the Katonah Museum of Art
October 19-April 19 2026

Building Bridges: Prison Arts Initiative
Katonah Museum of Art & Rehabilitation Through the Arts
Winter-Spring 2026

The Spirit of 3

By Devin

When you think of a spirit
You think of a ghost

With three different paintings you wonder
Which one represents you most

I know there are good and evil spirits
But what if there was a third
Called indifferent

Meaning nothing is never consistent

Green represents good, spirit
Calm, cool, and collected. Everything
Flowing like the River Jordan

Red represents evil, all you see
Negatively, all you hear agony
And your life a calamity

All you can be is bitter
It never gets sweeter

Orange is tricky, it's the indifferent
One, you can't explain how
You feel. Don't even believe it's real

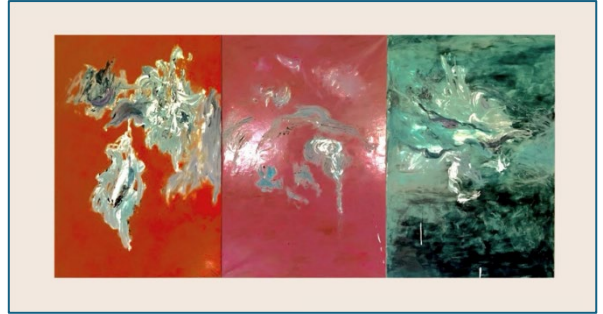
Thoughts running through your head
Unsteady, but never a time
When I'm not ready

The spirit of orange soothes
and moves you at the same time

It makes you anxious and contagious

Let me ask – what do you think
When you hear Spirit, what color
Best represents you

Green, red or orange.



Sunglasses

After Joy Harjo

By Devin

I had some sunglasses that protected me from the world
I had sunglasses that hid me from the shame
I had some sunglasses that guarded me in my pain
I had sunglasses that were shattered
I had some sunglasses that were fancy
I had sunglasses that were broken

I had some sunglasses

I had sunglasses that sparkled in the rain
I had sunglasses that were stripped of their lens
I had sunglasses with only one arm
I had sunglasses that spoke to my integrity when no one else would
I had some sunglasses that embraced me with every flaw

I had some sunglasses

I had some sunglasses that caught the attention of everything in the room
I had some sunglasses that could get me any and everything I wanted
I had some sunglasses that made me invisible
I had sunglasses that were big
I had sunglasses that were small

I had some sunglasses

I had sunglasses in every color
I had some sunglasses that exposed me
I had some sunglasses that controlled me
I had some sunglasses that were light
I had some sunglasses that were heavy

Then I realized they were all the same sunglasses

Life

By Devin

Life is like an ocean
Sometimes it can be calm like a
sunny day
on the porch in your lawn chair.
The place that brings you peace
as you sit, watching the sun set
with a cup
of lemonade with ice.
As the sun goes down you sit and
reminisce and have reflections on
your life thus far.
As the sun starts to fade you feel
the cold breeze.
You reach to the back of your chair
grab your blanket to bring you
warmth.
It gets dark and your emotions start
to charge.
There is no more relaxation.
The water from the ocean starts
to weigh down on you and it feels
like you're drowning.
I can't allow myself to float.
Because I am finding it hard to
process
this thing called life.
It feels like death is knocking at
my door.
I feel so confused, don't know
what to do.
Then I finally elevate my mind and
thoughts
and come to the reality
that this is just the way life is.

Trust the process.

Boots

By Devin

Skillfully and wonderfully made.
But there was a great price that had to be paid.
Suede of any color leather.
I provide protection from all types of weather.
Being dragged through the mud, rain and sleet.
I manage to survive as I walk through these streets.
Built to stand tall.
No matter how many times I've been worn
I must not fall.
Corns and bunions I seen it all.
No matter how bad the smell
I still must go when I'm called.
I break down barriers and kick down walls.
There's no giant big enough that cannot fall.
Laces and buckles are strategically placed
to keep you safe and secure.
Even when you step in manure
I still feel like a piece of couture.
Working hard from 9 to 5
I still must thrive.
Ten toes down I'm always going to be around.
Never will I let you drown even with a frown.
Everything I've been through truly I deserve a crown.
Silk, wool and cotton, boy I'm spoiled rotten
This boot will never be forgotten.

I Had Some Roads

After Joy Harjo

By Jaquan

I had some roads which led to prison
I had some roads which led me to pain
I had some roads which led to success
I had some roads which led me to stress
I had some roads which made me sweat
I had some which led me to be my best

I had some roads

I had roads where I couldn't see
I had road where it was only me
I had roads where I ain't get sleep
I had roads where I smoked down the whole street
I had roads I hated driving down
I had roads where I couldn't stick around

I had some roads

I had roads that made me think twice
I had roads where I drank all night
I had roads where I partied with a chick
I had roads where I let off whole clips

I had some roads where I went off to move work
I had some roads that led me to hurt

I had roads tougher than me
I had roads which led me to the dirt

I have roads

Mysterious Bleed: A Pantoum

By Reginald

Why do you bleed ink?
It falls from the mountains, but
the snow remains impeded
Is this a cry for help?
Will this pass or will this be our
doom?

It falls from the mountains, but
the snow remains impeded
Soft fluffy snow in contrast to the
red, blue, black ink
Will this pass or will this be our
doom?
We should pray for the best but
prepare for the worst

Soft fluffy snow in contrast to the
red, blue, black ink
Only if everything could be like
fresh snow
We should pray for the best but
prepare for the worst
Because if that ink touches you,
you could burst

Only if everything could be like
fresh snow
Is this a cry for help?
Because if that ink touches you,
you could burst
Why do you bleed ink?



Your Laguna

By Reginald

Trying to find peace in this deep
WATER
where if you're too emotional
you're looked at as prey
If you hold your feelings in too
long your insides start to decay
Life & Death is everyday
See you can drown in this water
Once your body becomes **ICE**
You plunge to abyss
never to return
Or you can **FLOAT**
BUT living like this you'll never
elevate
Being too laid back like in a lawn
chair
may confuse your process &
blanket you in
COMFORTABILITY
Now if you stay calm in this water
& **REFLECT**
Reminisce on flaws & past
mistakes
You can become deep as the
OCEAN
vast in values, morals &
principles
that can fill up a bank
Lighting up your present & future
Smoking away the negativity
like a volcano
Soaping the surface with
DIGNITY
Bringing warmth to your soul
In this water that should be
everyone's **GOAL!**

Nana & My Youth: A Sestina

By Reginald

Universal Circus was a great time
Memories I'll cherish forever with Nana
The funnel cake, cotton candy & dipping dots
The lights, the smoke, what a vibe
Amazing how the parking lot transforms into a spectacular
I can't wait till we go again

Aww man my sister is hogging up the space in the car again
We need to hurry up & get home I can't take it this time
Went from a great night to a car spectacular
Mad uncomfortable, I push her & scream Nana!
She turns around with that look & I know I just killed her vibe
Can't wait to spread my legs like dots

I enter my room with the blue paint & white dots
Disney has the same episode of the Proud family again
It don't matter this that vibe
Damn it's 9 o'clock look at the time
This food looks amazing Chef Nana
Spectacular!

Here comes story time from my grandfather in law spectacular
Talking, talking, talking you got to cover your food from the spit dots
Sometimes I question the judgement of Nana
How can she put up with this same story over & over again
It's like someone stopped time
Let me just enjoy this incredible food vibe

Today was really a good vibe
When we do these family gatherings it's spectacular
I pull my space jam blanket over my head sleep time
Here come my sister, "Joe where you put the dipping dots?
You ate it all again.
Now go to sleep before you get caught by Nana"

I wake up to see a note, "Went to work, breakfast on the table, Love, Nana"
She's the best such a jubilant vibe
I wouldn't choose no one else if I could pick a grandma again
Nothing but memories spectacular
In our family she connects the dots
What a precious time

We going with Nana to Disney this time
Straight magical vibe, look at Minnie Mouse with Polka dots
My sister doing it again, turned the car ride to a space spectacular

Beautiful Bruising

By Share

Long have I longed for a bit of
attention

Now I understand be careful when
wishing

Becoming beautiful came with a whipping

How something so soft caused the severest
of damage

Bristles raking my skin rendering me blaq
& blue & battered all over

Fluid strokes – thin brush – thick brush with
no coordination

Big splashes – small splashes – no regard
for feelings

Swirling & Twirling braising my surface blaq
& blue & beaten all over

But once it's done my wish couldn't be truer

Droves of admirers I've become the muse of

Many suitors staring, surveying my suttras

Being beautiful begets bodily bruises
Blaq & blue & beautiful all over



Rubber Duq

After Frida Kahlo

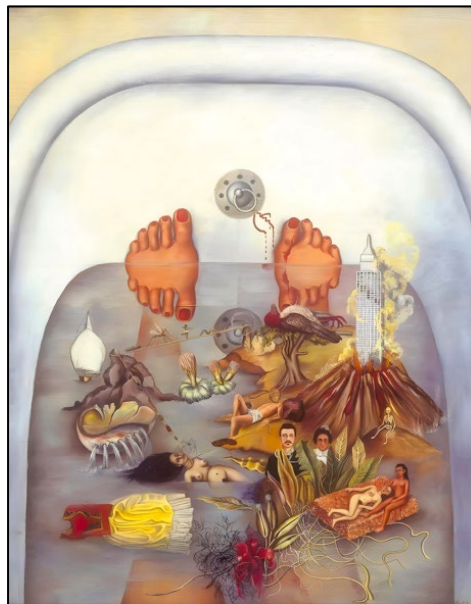
By Sharc

Was my company inadequate
Wats with the crowd
Didn't I provide you comfort
Squeeze me & smile

Wats with the rubble
Drifting debris of trouble
Clear out the clutter
Bring bac the bubbles

Wats with the despair
Floating mounds of pain
Feed them down the drain
Bring bac the cheer

Wats happening to us?



What the Water Gave Me,
Frida Kahlo (1938)

We Had Some Voices

After Joy Harjo

By Sharc

We had voices drowned by the loud
We had voices who were shouting to the clouds
We had voices who were void of sound, still got
heard cuz where they were written down
We had voices who were strained turned hoarse
We had voices who were soft but still coarse

We had some voices

We had voices who were loud but never heard
We had voices who were sweet though spoke only turds
We had voices who were keys that opened doors
We had voices who were serene but caused a stir
We had voices who were clean with a hint of dirt

We had some voices

We had voices who were wise but didn't make sense
We had voices who were rich but never made a cent
We had voices who were broke but always found a fix
We had voices who were lively but ended up in a ditch

We had some voices

We had voice who were shaky but always stood firm
We had voices who were sturdy with bagbones of worms
We had voices who were soothing though always stayed stern
We had voices who were wavy but straighter than a perm
We had voices who were squeaky but deep as baritone

We had some voices

We had voices who were void of names
We had voices who were sans any shame
We had voices who were masters of concealing pain
We had voices who were shy but chased down fame

We had some voices

We had voices who were whiny always casting blame
We had voices who were dark when shedding light
We had voices who were close though out of sight
We had voices who were weak but exuded might
We had voices who were broken, paid the price

We had some voices

We had some voices we accepted
We had some voices we shunned
We had some voices we hated
We had some voices we loved

These were the same voices

Brush Movement and Music

By Daniel

I painted rhythm with blues,
blacks, yellows and whites of the most vivid hues
on a board to strike a chord as the acrylics infused
produce the soundtrack to life every lyric a muse
A faint touch from the paint brush and the vision imbued
is a melody to remedy the limited views
allowing narrow sighted individuals to live in the shoes
of the creator and challenge them to never give into rules
or separate people by color like prisms or use
religion as tools to indoctrinate like prison or schools
Art is free expression where you have the decision to choose
to open doors somewhere once forbidden to use
Just like the da Vinci code the message is hidden in clues



Who Am I

By Daniel

Who am I, I reply that's a loaded question
Who am I to you or who do I see in my reflection
Who am I to my mother or who am I to corrections
Who am I as a race, or a part of the spectrum
I can say a human being so far from perfection
With a heart hard from neglect due to a lack of a father's affection
Labeled antisocial but really, I harbored aggression
because as a youth I was starved for attention and thus robbed of expression
Who am I to police a target I'm guessing
16 shots with no vest I thank God for protection
As a boy in Harlem I had dreams of a Harvard acceptance
But my school was hard knocks I still got scars from the lessons
Like not being armed with a weapon and charged with possession
and enough time to see parole when it's flying cars like the Jetsons
But who am I to complain I can't bother with stressing
My ancestors were slaves put on the Amistad for selection
in America to work to death but those at odds with oppression
broke free without GPS they followed stars for direction

Movement

By Alex

These lines look like words
On a canvas
I am calligraphy, like messages
On an olive leaf, pronouncing anger
Sadness and mystery

Like an infant producing teeth
Making sounds serene as
A – E – EE – EE

These are subtleties, subjects, objects
Verbs that can make words connect
To create a gazillion poems

Don't be a verb, object or subject
Or be subjected to a narrative
That shows chaos

But chaos can be beautiful
Check the canvas!



Brush Black Blue

By Vincent

Language is art
They said blind eyes don't talk
It's a university of thought
How a tongue can become a paintbrush
With each stroke revealed as a rainbow
Before it reflects colors from the stars
Symbolic of the passionflower
The framework is the miracle of God
The oral arc of justice
The willingness to perform
The destruction of art
The whole of my heart
The same size as the hole in my heart
When a ruptured pupil has a story to tell
You just gotta listen to the art



Alphanumeric

By Vincent

If you take the ABCs 123s put 'em in your palm
Smash 'em in your hand then move it all around
Throw 'em in the air, look back into those hands
Would relics of the alphanumeric now appear
It's the universe's calendar and you're the
Youngest archeologist of the year



Self-Country-Stone Interpretation: A Ghazal

By Vincent

Pain where blood boils set to a volcanic palpitation in the earth
A stone's throw from doged to sea in waters meant to be deftly cold

Nine-tenths of the law is obsession, possessed in me in an objection to a system
Contrived by forces that would say the law is a dish best served when cold

How will we prosper no devil so gallant no challenge too small
No name will befall his stature it shall forever remain stone cold

Nicole Alex George Minnesota Ice surge Derek Chauvin America
Is too the home of my own and it's never been so cold

From an O to a V from a V to an O from the struggle was born
The younger we once were adorned and bared all in the bitter cold

Bereft of her warmth as blood cherries the left wing of a snow angel
Forever etched in her crown covered in ice are the letters C O L D

So will the sun come down on a renewed ark to self, country and stone
Just as waters rise, skies grow clear, life brings warmth, art stays cold

He Had Some Philosophies

After Joy Harjo

By Vincent

He had philosophies he checked
He had philosophies he flexed
He had philosophies about a lot of things
He had philosophies on par with Socrates
He had philosophies on democracy and government
He had philosophies on poverty and punishment
He had philosophies on the eroticness of the body politic

He had some philosophies

He had philosophies on upside down flamingoes
He had philosophies on them Gringos
He had philosophies that touched self esteem
He had philosophies none of you fuck heads would believe
He had philosophies that came from the dreams of a king

He had some philosophies

He had philosophies on doing time
He had philosophies that came alive
He had philosophies on philosophies
He had philosophies he put in a bottle for you to buy

He had some philosophies

He had philosophies and superlatives that were considered felonious
He had philosophies that were the loneliest
He had philosophies as deep as an ocean
He had philosophies about covid
He had philosophies on folks who don't own shit
He had philosophies on the elders who give us our voices

He had some philosophies

He had philosophies that showed enemies his alchemy with power
He had philosophies that showed a profane vanity with violence
He had philosophies on the saintly sins of a prince
He had philosophies for the loved and the loveless

He had some philosophies

He had philosophies that were musical
He had philosophies for sunshine and rain
He had philosophies that came to him in his sleep
He had philosophies he beseeched

He had some philosophies

He had philosophies he blamed
He had philosophies he changed
He had philosophies he shared with his peers

He had some philosophies

He had some philosophies he cherished
He had some philosophies he buried

These weren't the same philosophies

Wrong Place to be Real

By Vincent

We in the wrong place to be real
Where everything is compromised
The facades hard the infrastructure frail
You ever been in a cell alone just you and your thoughts
Time VS man time is God and God controls time
It's easier said than to understand
This is the wrong place to be real
But even with the wing of an angel as your shield
Loneliness promises scars
The constant posturing of power exhausts the heart
You can't get water from a rock
But a natural order is at odds
They put a check and a flex between what connects us
House of Cards built by Correction
Small building in a large world
Where coal is being mined and every now and again a diamond is found
The question is not who it's you
It's not what it's how
We're quick to recognize the humanity of tomorrow
With nothing to be said for the insanity of now
If keeping it real is wrong
I can't help but wonder if I'm ever gonna make it home

Tears U Cry

By Vincent

Tears U cry

Are for
The loss of a father
And now a mother

The love you suffer

From a burdensome brother
To an often times too emotionally
Quiet significant other

The pain you know

It's etched in stone and
More crushing than a broken bone

The weight of the world

How you gently put it down
Just to pick up my call

Look at who you are

That even in your loss
You found a young girl's smile

The joy you give

Is a sterling interpretation
Of the value our mom gave

The home you built

Will change the trajectory
Of our family legacy
I wanna thank you for that

The pragmatism you show

An only girl among all boys
It would be worth it to me
If I had to live the same life all
Over again knowing you
Would become the woman
You are today.

Love you all the way
Your Big Bro

Forever Loved Our Angel Thou in Noble Glory Love Escapes Altruisms

Finality

By Vincent

Floating leaf
As small and light as a leaf can be
Floating from its tree

How lucky am I to have had the imagination
To catch a floating leaf

Occasionally you drop by, dazzling my eyes

It's no wonder you chose to stick around
You knew I'd rather go blind

Now when I see a floating leaf
I'm reminded of what I always knew

A mother's love, a mother's touch
A mother's job is never through

As you came back to me
A floating leaf

Poe-Try

By Vincent

Inside my body philosophy
There's an economy of a million languages
Dare I speak artiste with the French
Culture to the Japanese ancestry with Africans
The pictures we never got to paint
The artistry we never got to hang
Needles we thread
bare a reality for all who dares
When poetry stitches every letter indelibly
Into the desolate heart of those who reached
Into the Hall of Fame of History
It was poetry that drew a straight line
From there to the silly season
Where art lives to laugh at pain
Adultrates in love bleeds in black and white
It's what's left after what's right said goodbye
When a thought cloud becomes your sky
To know Edgar Allen Poe is to try
 'This is Ars Poetica

Mountain and Valley Sestina

After Shen Wei's Untitled No. 6

By the writers of Sing Sing CF

I painted my life with her lines then came rain
Reminiscing, my heart grew damp
Bleeding tears of bronze
Leaving like leaves of autumn
I contemplated a leap from this mountain
To escape the shadows of its valley

Yeah, though I walk through that valley
Emotions continue to rain
I won't stop climbing this mountain
Aspirational perspiration, clothes all damp
Leaving chills like the breeze of autumn
Reaching the top, only reaching bronze

Up there, her complexion was bronze
Her vibe like autumn
Her presence a mountain
Nothing could stop her not even rain
As lines poured down, she wasn't damp
Gorgeousness blossomed in the valley

Years later darkness covered the valley
Greys overwhelming bronze
Sun shining beautifully. But she stayed damp
I remember when she was my autumn
Now all it does is rain
The view is clearer from the mountain

How every October reminds me of autumn
The long rustic trail wooded and damp
The leaves again turning beautiful shades of bronze
As I approach the sterile cratered valley
Noticing strange forms lining the mountain
And begin to observe fresh waves of rain

Love like paint drips in the rain
I revise my colors, make a new autumn
With clouds spiraling at the peak of the mountain
Where storms come and go and the thirsty are damp
Fresh breeze, clear air my heart singing this valley
I walk through its lines, tracing beauty in bronze

Feelings flow damp emotions like rain
In an autumn sky I shout tears of bronze
After the valley is the joy of the mountain



Author Bios

Reginald is a published poet, actor & former rapper. He's been incarcerated for 16 years & is a proud husband & proud member of RTA-Rehabilitation Through the Arts. His goal upon release is to become an entrepreneur, activist & philanthropist.

Share is an artist who creates in various forms of the arts. With his works being confined, he credits his focus & determination to John Hicks falling in love with his wife Jordane.

Vincent is a reluctant poet inspired by loss who discovered the conversations he wanted to have.

Editor's Note

Through the winter, a group of writers at Sing Sing Correctional Facility met for ten weeks to reflect on and respond to the art of Shen Wei through poetry. Led by Katonah Museum of Art writer in residence, Pam Hart, writers explored the rhythms, contrasts, and textures of artworks featured in the Museum's exhibition *Shen Wei: STILL/MOVING*. Through guided prompts, close readings of work by poets such as Joy Harjo along with art by Frida Kahlo, the writers translated Shen Wei's visual movement into poetry, letting image and imagination spark unexpected connections. The group experimented with poetic forms that included the ghazal, pantoum and sestina. Their writing illustrates the power of poetry "to give name to the nameless so it can be thought," as the poet Audre Lorde wrote, exemplifying that everyone in the room can be a creative genius. We thank the Katonah Museum of Art and Rehabilitation Through the Arts for the ongoing support of the Building Bridges Prison Arts Initiative.

Shen Wei's artwork in order of appearance

- *Spirit of April 15 (triptych)*, 2019. Acrylic on canvas
- *Untitled No. 6*, 2014. Oil and acrylic on linen canvas
- *Brush Movement in Blue and Black*, 2017. Acrylic on canvas
- *Brush Movement and Music No. 4*, 2023. Acrylic on board
- *Movement No. 3 (Chinese Guqin in White)*, 2005-6. Oil on linen