

ABOUT MY ART

Isolation in supermax limits my access to art supplies to only two black ink pens and 8½" x 11" and 9" x 13" white paper; no erasures, no pencils - colored or otherwise, requiring me to expend more time and care upon a drawing. A prison reform activist once appealed by letter to the warden here to allow me access to coloring pencils. The reply was that if I were permitted to have them, then they would also have to allow them to the rest of the prisoners here in segregation [sounds like a constructive idea]. And so another means to become productive proves incompatible with the system's aims. . . . With a set of pencils I could do some amazing artworks.

I do portraits and can draw practically anything else I can see well enough. The rules prevent me from enterprising, so I either give my art to family and friends, or donate much of it to prison reform groups such as Forum for Understanding Friends which they use for fundraising to support their prison work.

Having now been in isolation here in supermax for almost 12 years, and endured its draconian repression, the monotony of day-to-day existence here runs like a dismal episode of *Twilight Zone* thematic of one of my own traumatic childhood experiences:

From an early age I showed artistic ability. When I reached 7th grade Junior High [middle] School an art teacher, whose name I cannot now recall, invited the class to do creatively whatever comes to mind and he made available various art supplies for that purpose.

I decided upon a project that was purely original and experimental. I chose a few sheets of white art paper, a pair of scissors, Elmer's glue and some old magazines. I then cut out from the mags

pictures of various people and experimentally transferred heads and torsos, one to another, by fixing them with glue, creating a sort of humorous montage. Except my art instructor didn't think so, though he never expressed it to me directly. As I recall he sent a letter to my mother inviting her to the upcoming parents teachers meeting, at which my mother did attend bringing me along. He took my mother beyond my earshot to talk with her. Later she revealed to me that he told her that something was wrong or deviant with me because I [artistically] cut peoples' heads from magazines and glued them onto other peoples torsos.

Was this a stifling of talent? deviant art? or deviant behavior?

These events occurred in the late 1960s. I was perhaps 12 or 13 years of age. This art form was a creation of my very own. I don't think it could be found, I could be wrong, in any artistic expressions of the day. Yet today this art form, now decades old, can be seen in mainstream America on TV shows such as Lena and Jimmy Kimmel, or in various magazines, billboards and other advertisements. What about Dr. Frankenstein's creations?

A body in motion, like an idea, will stay in motion until acted upon positively or negatively by another body or force or idea. No scale can measure to what degree I or my artistic ability was impacted or stifled by this experience. Most certainly it was not in a positive way. To blame a single isolated occurrence ~~occurrence~~ for the trajectory of something as complicated as a life invokes too much of conjecture

and scapegoating. But everything is connected by cords to everything else, and all life is bound in one. If a child's talents, like a diamond in the rough, go undiscovered, uncultivated or stifled, then a waste is the result and the course of that life must alter.

Again, there can be no reliable weighing of the impact ~~of~~ this childhood experience had in my downward spiral into this abuse-imprisonment. If a child's talents are cultivated, or they are taught something very useful, their chances increase exponentially to use those skills to help themselves and others and be productive. I was left to cultivate this talent at my own.

My childhood experience resonates again today where prison officials, bent upon punishment, and gladly spends \$60,000 per year [college education sums] to house me in Supermax, feel it a service to society to deny me basic art supplies by which to express a greater range of my creativeness, and a need to give back to society.

In the future I anticipate sharing some of my experiences in the free world and some of the atrocities that I have witnessed and myself experienced within these dismal crypts; they are incredible.

4/19/2011

Peace & Love
LaRon McKinley Bey