

Offering nuanced portraits of women's lives inside razor wire and prison walls, *Razor Wire Women* puts incarcerated women in dialogue with scholars, artists, educators, and activists who live outside of prisons but work on issues connected to the prison industrial complex. Women make up the fastest-growing group within the U.S. prison population, yet prison scholarship largely overlooks the struggles of incarcerated women, and their voices are often silenced both in and out of the prison infrastructure. From the vantage points of those both inside and outside of prisons, this collection of essays and art illuminates many of the distinct experiences and concerns of incarcerated women, including abuse and rape; the policing of women; incarcerated motherhood; mental health issues in prisons; incarcerated women's artistic and cultural production; and prisons' impact on families, health, and sexuality. Combining the transcendence, hope, and clarity of art with powerful analytical and conceptual tools, *Razor Wire Women* reveals the gendered dimensions of incarceration in the United States.

"Jodie Michelle Lawston and Ashley E. Lucas have created a powerful call to action, a reminder that resistance is not futile. With powerful images, testimony, intersectional theorizing, and examples of educational and visual organizing, *Razor Wire Women* offers essential readings for organizers and scholars—both inside and outside of women's prisons and detention centers. This is a central read for courses in women's and gender studies, justice, and sociology, and for all invested in interrupting our nation's expanding carceral nation."

— Erica R. Meiners, author of *Right to Be Hostile: Schools, Prisons, and the Making of Public Enemies*

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A VOLUME IN THE SUNY SERIES IN WOMEN, CRIME, AND CRIMINOLOGY
Meda Chesney-Lind and Russ Immarigeon, *editors*

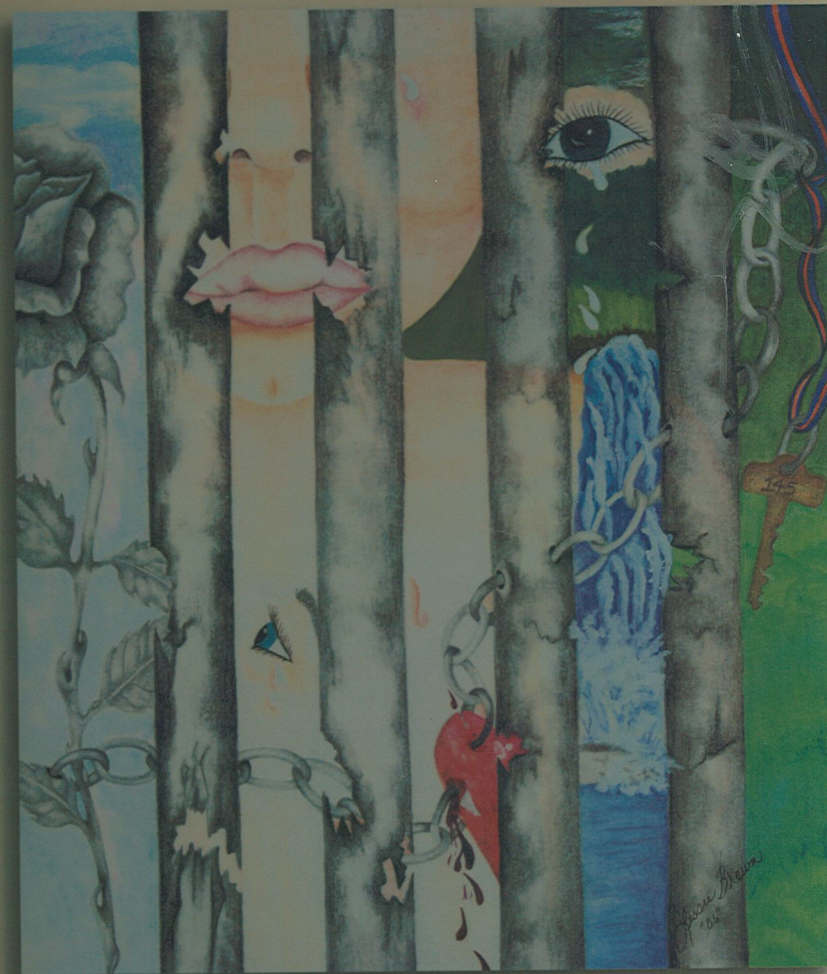
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razor wire women



prisoners, activists,
scholars, and artists

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*For Patricia K. Thorn,
who did not live to see her art honored here.*

*For the woman we could not find,
may your life on the outside be joyous.*

*For all razor wire women,
as we strive to find community in one another.*

On Visual Politics and Poetics: Incarcerated Girls and Women Artists

Jillian Hernandez

A grainy drawing depicts two young girls whose names are not given. “Girl One” wears a white smock with a frilly lace collar. “Girl Two” dons a striped dress and a ribbon in her hair that fails to smooth back the unruly bangs that jut out beneath it. Girl Two protectively clutches Girl One’s shoulder. Girl One looks out to the viewer with suspicion, as if knowing she is being read. It is explained that the physical “anomalies” of the five-year-old girls depicted, such as facial asymmetry, are biological indications of their innate delinquency.

This illustration is found in *Criminal Woman, the Prostitute, and the Normal Woman*, a text published by criminal anthropologist Cesare Lombroso in 1893. Lombroso applied a positivist, scientific approach to investigating the phenomena of female deviance. Drawing from social Darwinist methodologies, he framed delinquency in the context of degeneration in a hierarchical evolutionary scale and located criminality in the body through cranial and genital anomalies revealed through visual examination and anthropometry, the then popular practice of measuring human subjects.

Lombroso argued that European female criminals are throwbacks to early stages of human evolutionary development, and he often compared them to “savages” such as Africans and Native Americans. He attempted to support these colonialist, racist, and sexist claims by references to visual materials such as drawings and photographs of incarcerated women and girls such as the one described above, illustrations of indigenous women,¹ and reproductions of criminal women’s tattoos. These images served to evidence criminal women’s unbridled sexuality, the atavistic nature of their physiology, and virile or masculine appearance. *Criminal Woman, the Prostitute, and the Normal Woman* (previously known as *The Female*

Offender) has been significantly influential in scholarship concerning “delinquent” women in the West. Historian and Lombroso scholar Mary Gibson describes how it was the only work of its kind for decades, as female criminals were not a subject widely investigated in criminology, and how it “continued to influence interpretations of female crime until the 1970s; it became the classic text in its field” (Lombroso 2004, 4).²

The reading and representation of the body have persistently affected the treatment of women and girls in the penal system. In “Appearance and Delinquency: A Research Note,” criminologists Jill Leslie Rosenbaum and Meda Chesney-Lind point to how conventional notions of physical attractiveness inform the way girls’ cases are processed in the juvenile justice system. In examining the files of intake personnel at the California Youth Authority from the 1960s, Chesney-Lind and Rosenbaum found that 71 percent of male case workers made references to the physical appearance of girls in their evaluations. They state, “From the descriptions of the girls’ appearance [by male staff], four general categories emerged: attractive, unattractive, plain/wholesome, and “well-built.” Of the wards whose appearance was mentioned, 26 percent (19) were described as attractive (e.g., ‘the ward is an attractive, physically mature 13-year old’)” (Chesney-Lind and Rosenbaum 1994, 256).

Although they have found that references to the attractiveness of court-involved girls in intake evaluations has declined in recent decades, the authors link the effects of such biased visual readings to the persistent use of *status offenses* to target girls for state interventions. These are noncriminal offenses such as running away, curfew violations, and “incorrigible” behavior, actions with which legal adults could not be charged. Sexuality has implicated girls in the justice system since the establishment of early-twentieth-century reform institutions such as the State Industrial School for Delinquent Girls (Geneva, Illinois) and the Home of the Good Shepard (Memphis, Tennessee) through the labeling of their sexual activity as “immoral” and “incorrigible” (Knupfer 2000; Shelden 1981).

Despite the passage of the 2002 Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act, which prohibits the placement of youth charged with status offenses in secure facilities, a report published by the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention finds that females continue to be more likely to be held for status offenses (i.e. “technical violations”) than males (2004, 14). Once involved in juvenile courts, girls are often in the problematic position of contending with staff who perceive them as “more difficult to work with” than boys. As the authors of “Girls’ Delinquency and the Justice Implications of Intake Workers’ Perspectives” note, “The major themes of the negative attitudes about girls [by juvenile probation and parole officers] were girls’ attitudes and the perception that girls are manipulative and uncooperative” (Maupin, Maupin, and Leisenring 2002, 65–66). The view of girls summarized by the authors is widely held by staff in U.S. juvenile justice departments.

In this chapter I will demonstrate the potential of visual politics to work *progressively* as an awareness-raising tool and vehicle for incarcerated girls to express

their agency and subjectivity while involved in a punitive juvenile justice system through interactions and collaborations with women artists. My observations are based on the work created by the women and girls involved in the Women on the Rise! program run by the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) in Miami, Florida, at the Miami-Dade County Juvenile Detention Center (JDC) through a partnership with the Girls’ Advocacy Project, a Florida initiative that serves girls while they await adjudication. I will particularly focus on *MOD 11: Discourses with Incarcerated Girls*, an exhibition of works artists produced in response to their experiences teaching at the detention center I curated at the Bas/Fisher Invitational art space in Miami. The exhibition, for which the title was derived from the name of one of the girls-only cellblocks at the center, was on view from October 13 through November 11, 2007.³

Prior to the recent surge of interest in the 1970s feminist art movement spurred by the establishment of the Feminist Art Project, the Feminist Future Symposia held at the Museum of Modern Art (New York), inauguration of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum, and the WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution exhibition organized by MOCA, Los Angeles, the relationship between artistic practice and social activism has been generally underaddressed in women’s studies. Feminist artists such as Carol Jacobsen have been making interventions into women’s correction institutions for many years. Jacobsen has utilized film, installation, and photography to draw attention to the realities women face in prison. Her film *Segregation Unit* (2000) was a response to the media ban imposed by Michigan’s governor on state correction facilities due to human rights investigations conducted in its women’s prisons. The film is based on documentary footage of a female inmate at Scott Prison being forcibly restrained by correction staff.

The works Jacobsen has shown in museums and galleries serve as “public education” tools for the Michigan Battered Women’s Clemency Project, which files petitions and appeals for court-involved women. In “Creative Politics and Women’s Criminalization in the United States,” Jacobsen writes: “As an artist, making issues of women’s criminalization, past and present, visible in emotionally arresting ways to ever-widening audiences is a necessary antidote to my howling rage at such persistent injustice” (2008, 468–69). *MOD 11: Discourses with Incarcerated Girls* is akin in “creative politics” to the work Carol Jacobsen has done with the Clemency Project.

The exhibition was a free, citywide event drawing on cultural, law, social justice, and philanthropic constituencies through the support of the Women’s Fund of Miami-Dade County and Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs. In addition to the exhibition, I moderated a panel discussion that served as the public awareness, discourse-generating component of the project. The panel included the artists and Vicki Lopez Lukis, statewide expansion director for the Girls Advocacy Project.⁴ Lukis, a formerly incarcerated woman and exoffender activist, discussed the abuse, poverty, and violence that most incarcerated girls suffer and the real reasons why they become involved in the juvenile justice

system such as the reclassification of status offenses (Chesney-Lind and Belknap 2004). She also contextualized the violent crimes committed by the girls within the larger framework of the community violence and trauma they have experienced (Schaffner 2004).

A standing-room-only audience attended the panel, and hundreds of visitors viewed the work on display. The issue of incarcerated girls was raised through the lens of art making and advocacy work. Support from an organization such as the Women's Fund, which conducts activism and provides financial support to essential gender-based social justice programs in Miami demonstrates the promise of arts and community coalition building. Although the JDC girls could not visit the exhibition because they are not allowed to attend field trips, they continue to work with most of the artists and girls outside of the detention center served by Women on the Rise! viewed the show, and met with several of the artists.

MOD 11: MAKING MIAMI'S INCARCERATED GIRLS VISIBLE

"Aggressive," "mean," and "delinquent" girls are visible in contemporary culture through films such as *Mean Girls* (2004), TV talk shows such as Maury Povich, and news stories on the violent behavior girls display on YouTube videos. The MTV (Music Television) reality show *Juvis* focuses on the experiences of male and female youth detained at Lake County, Indiana's Juvenile Justice Center. The show portrays the day-to-day routines of incarcerated girls and provides some context regarding their family and community life, yet the dramatized reenactments of their "crimes" and focus on Judge Mary Beth Bonaventura recalls sensationalized "real life" programs such as *Judge Judy* and cable station MSNBC's *Lock Up* series. The realities of poverty, physical/sexual abuse, and community violence experienced by thousands of girls implicated in the juvenile justice system are rarely represented in these media. As researcher Leslie Acoca describes, "The persistent invisibility of girl offenders is particularly remarkable given that they currently represent the fastest growing segment of the juvenile justice system" (2004, 78).

Though in line with national trends of rising numbers of girls entering the system, the "rates of arrest and incarceration for girls in Florida—that is the number of arrests and incarcerations as a percentage of the total population of girls—are considerably higher than elsewhere." In the 2008 Florida Department of Juvenile Justice Blueprint Commission report "Getting Smart about Juvenile Justice in Florida," researcher Angela Wolf found that in that state, girls "appear to be treated more harshly for less serious offenses than are boys. In the last five years for example, about 75 percent of girls referred to the Department of Justice had *not* committed a felony; where about 55 percent of boys referred had not committed a felony" (Florida Department of Juvenile Justice 2008, 29). Most female inmates at the Miami-Dade County Juvenile Detention center are girls of color, reflecting the overwhelming racial disparity in U.S. correctional facilities.

This is the troubling context in which Women on the Rise! workshops at the detention center take place. I launched the program in 2004 in response

to the lack of arts instruction for girls enrolled in alternative schools and social service institutions, and it is conducted on-site in the facilities of organizations that serve girls throughout Miami-Dade County. Women on the Rise! (WOTR) is a series of workshops in art and art history based on the work of contemporary women artists such as Ana Mendieta, Carrie Mae Weems, and Shirin Neshat, among others. Art history lessons focus on the issues of identity addressed in their work, and the images are used to engage students in critical thinking. Workshops also include experimental hands-on projects based on the practices of the artists featured.

In addition to the workshops conducted at each partnering institution, Women on the Rise! organizes field trips for students to view exhibitions of work by women artists at MOCA and other cultural venues in the community. As girls incarcerated at the Miami-Dade County Juvenile Detention Center cannot attend field trips, I invited women artists from the community to run workshops there as visiting teachers.⁵ Artists presented images of their work to the girls and led them in hands-on art projects.⁶

The majority of girls served by the program annually are those residing at the detention center. Women on the Rise! workshops there are conducted in an undersized space with up to thirty students, one small table, and no screen for projecting images. Classes are led in the center of the cellblock (also called a "mod"), which is the focal point of the space. Doors to the girls' individual cells ring the perimeter of the structure, and windows that face the outdoors are slathered with opaque black paint. The mod poses consistent challenges to the goal of helping the girls to think beyond it. The space persistently reminds them of their status as detainees through the uniforms and relentless buzzing of correction officer walkie-talkies.

As sociologist Laurie Schaffner accurately describes in her book *Girls in Trouble with the Law*, "Juvenile detention centers can be tense hotbeds where conditions are volatile, and the youth brought in from the streets or from other facilities are typically unsure of what is going to happen to them next" (2006, 17). Conducting WOTR classes in the mod can sometimes be a harrowing and emotionally taxing effort as girls desperately seek information from staff about their court dates or are on painful calls home during workshops. At times correction officers are unhelpful, especially when they feel the girls have "acted up" and are undeserving of a fun "special class."

The disaffecting, austere, and panoptic quality of the mod does not undo its temporal status as an artroom and its attendant fostering of *deviance*, as educators Martin Rosenberg and Francis Thurber have noted, "The artroom is one of the few classroom settings where students can be frequently and genuinely rewarded for divergent and individual thought" (Rosenberg and Thurber 2007, 23). The implementation of an art class in the mod is a process fraught with practical limitations, occasional failures, and remarkable creative successes. In addition to the challenges posed by the physical aspects of the institution, projects executed at the detention center are limited by regulations concerning contraband items. Materials such as scissors and cameras cannot be used with the students due

to security and confidentiality concerns. These materials, cameras especially, are essential elements of standard Women on the Rise! lessons. Detention center policies have presented considerable challenges to the program, yet they have served to push the instructors to creatively problem solve. The artists who have worked with me at the detention center are Rosemarie Chiarlone, Susan Lee Chun, Nereida Garcia Ferraz, Naomi Fisher, the GisMo collective (Jessica Gispert and Crystal Molinary), Isabel Moros-Rigau, Ali Prosch, and Kathleen Staples.

I curated *MOD 11: Discourses with Incarcerated Girls* as a result of the profound and creatively fruitful collaborations between the girls and artists.⁷ The works in *MOD 11* vary in both content and media, as the artists manifested impressions of working with the girls in varied, unpredictable ways. The disparate works share a concern with subjectivity and agency in both their quotidian and philosophical contexts. Agency is articulated in these projects as the ability to control your actions—meet with a friend or choose a perfect weekend outfit—activities to which the girls have temporary, yet painful restriction to. The artists also engage with larger questions of agency as it relates to the girls' sexual lives and the constricted ability to express subjectivity they suffer as inmates. In some pieces the artists express deeply personal reactions to their experiences at the detention center. In what follows I thematically describe, interpret, and



Installation shot of pieces by Nereida Garcia Ferraz, Ali Prosch, and Rosemarie Chiarlone. Photo: Rosemarie Chiarlone.

contextualize the works in the exhibition. I conclude the chapter by providing pedagogical strategies, some drawn from suggestions by the girls and JDC staff, for visiting practitioners working in detention settings.

I would not suggest that the works discussed in this chapter faithfully represent all of the more than seventy girls who participated in workshops led by WOTR artists in the spring and summer of 2007. The inability to document the workshops through video/photography and the role of the artists and myself as teachers (not researchers) prompts the utilization of personal experience, visual analysis, and references to feminist scholarship as methodologies in this chapter.⁸ These resources work to illustrate issues of prevalence in the girls' lives and how the girls and artists affected each other. The reproduction of artworks in this volume will likely elicit a multiplicity of readings beyond those outlined here.

UNDOING THE DOCILE BODY

The juvenile justice system purports to serve a protective, welfare function for the youth in its charge. The explicit aim of processing these youth as detainees in a “child-friendly” miniprison is to keep them safe from the outside world and each other. Philosopher Michel Foucault has shown how punishment is the most oblique aspect of the modern penal process (1977, 9) as discourses of security, correction, and education obscure the punitive and disciplinary functions of the prison. Artist Nereida Garcia Ferraz read Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* while conducting her work at the detention center.

In her lesson the artist provided the girls with pages from *The New York Times* that she spray-painted black while allowing fragments of text and image to remain visible. Students were instructed to respond to and embellish the pages using white, red and gold charcoals and pastels. Garcia Ferraz utilized this technique in the drawings she created for the exhibition. The artist's works in *MOD 11* were sparked by thoughts that came to her as she read the book and considered her students. For example, the drawing *El Arbol Torcido* (The Twisted Tree, 2007) is her reinterpretation of an illustration found in *Discipline and Punish*. The original image, titled *Orthopedics or the art of preventing and correcting deformities of the body in children* (1749) by N. Andry depicts a bent tree being constrained and reshaped. *Orthopedics* demonstrates how notions of degeneration and deviance were linked to the body in modernity, recalling Lombroso. The illustration exemplifies the notion that “wayward” children are to be “corrected” through the constriction of their bodies. Garcia Ferraz's appropriation of the image points to the persistence of penal practices that work to make the bodies of young girls docile.

The semiotics of the “deviant” body are the focus of the artist's painting *El Apartado* (The One Who Is Separated, 2007). The title points to the outsider status of the incarcerated girl represented in the work, whose stigmatization is symbolized by a uniform and a dunce cap. The vivid orange hue of the painting that references the color of JDC uniforms washes out the identifying features of

the subject's body. A thick orange line encloses the figure and severs her connection to the lush South Florida landscape in the background. The girls are in a homogenized (and homogenizing) group situation in the mod; in response to this, Garcia Ferraz has attempted to connect to them as "individual young women with friends, lovers, mothers, daughters, husbands, and neighbors, ending up away from the streets for a period of time in a gray area of society."⁹

Susan Lee Chun's work in *MOD 11*, titled *Peace, Love, Harmony* (2007), also referenced the girls' uniforms. Uniforms appeared in Chun's work prior to her engagement with the JDC girls. Upon her relocation from Chicago to Miami in 2004, which has a small population of Asian Americans, the artist experienced more overt forms of racism than she ever had before. Chun responded to these experiences through works such as *Camouflage No. 5* (2005), where she utilized signifiers of whiteness, such as a plaid uniform and blonde wig, to function as a disguise. The artist utilized the uniform to immerse her body into a room where the walls and floor were covered in plaid fabric. In describing the work Chun has stated, "The installation's primary function is to act as a stage or platform that I perform within, depicting the process of assimilation and the stark contrast between my ability and inability to conceal my identity."¹⁰

Chun was struck by rules regarding dress and style that were posted in the mod that had gendered and racial overtones such as, "No weaves, extensions, artificial nails, etc." allowed. The regulation seemed to further homogenize the girls beyond the uniform. The artist read *Uniforms Exposed: From Conformity to Transgression* by Jennifer Craik in the period she was visiting JDC. Craik echoes Foucault's articulation of how welfare institutions function as sites where disciplining pedagogies are implemented in her description of the emergence of uniforms in the United Kingdom.

The introduction of compulsory school uniforms was entirely in keeping with the role of schools as disciplining institutions to shape young boys into citizens. The first of the English charity (or "Bluecoat") schools to adopt a uniform was Christ's Hospital founded in London in 1552—and other charitable foundations soon followed. Generally, there was little attention to the children in charity care—"welfare" was meant to contain a perceived social decay (abandoned or orphaned children) with the visible sign of the problem being institutionalized and "hidden away." (Craik 2005, 58)

The centuries-old phenomenon Craik describes reverberates in many contemporary juvenile justice facilities that are inaccessible to the public, where there is tension between the protective role of the institution and its constrictive, normalizing regulations.

Like Garcia Ferraz, Chun aimed to underscore the subjectivity of the girls she worked collaboratively with to create *Peace, Love, Harmony*. In her JDC project the artist provided girls with swatches of fabric upon which they gener-

ated designs for a garment they would potentially wear. The students created lively patterns using bright colors, text, and shapes such as rainbows and hearts. Among the works was a piece in which the words *LOVE/PEACE/HARMONY* were emblazoned in blue and green. For Chun, the hope and promise articulated in the girls' works, executed under circumstances of considerable duress, attested to their resilience. In describing her workshop the artist stated,

In the time I had the opportunity to spend with these young girls, I became aware of how their vibrant and resilient personalities consistently revealed themselves although their current situation was not the ideal. What turned out to be encouraging and moving for me were these unexpected moments, smiles, and laughter from their personal narratives regarding what they wish they had inside the facility or what they missed, such as favorite foods (flaming hot Cheetos, wings, home cooked meals), family, familiar spaces (home, bedrooms, pillows). It was the energy and content of their dialogue that became the highlight and inspiration for the garments.¹¹

In her *MOD 11* piece Chun created hooded sweatshirts in the orange hue of the girls' uniforms.

Peace, Love, Harmony recalls artist David Hammons' sculpture *In the Hood* (1993), which references the stereotype of the deviant black male "hooded" figure



Installation shot of pieces by Susan Lee Chun, Kathleen Staples, Ali Prosch, and Naomi Fisher. Photo: Rosemarie Chiarlone.

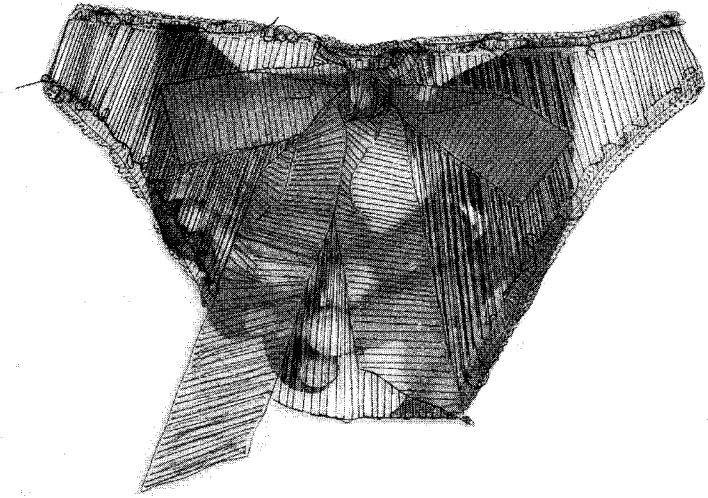
and the ghetto in which he is situated. In Chun's piece, the austere sweatshirts that hung in the exhibition space were activated by the girls' vivid, light-hearted designs that lined the interior of the hoods. The artist's infusion of the girls' creativity and hope into the garments destabilized the normalizing function of their state-issued uniforms.

GIRLHOOD EROTICS

In addition to dress and style, agency and subjectivity are also expressed with the body through sex. The work of artists Rosemarie Chiarlone and Ali Prosch touch upon the problems and poetics of girls' sexuality. Chiarlone's *Panty Series* (2006) suite of photo-collages were inspired by her initial workshop at JDC. In the work, the intricately sewn undergarments created by the artist frame photographic fragments of male and female bodies. The representation of male figures in the work signals their role in constructing notions of "feminine" sexuality. Although men hold the dominant position of power, they do not escape the entrapment of gender norms. This double bind is articulated in *Panty Series #11*, where the vertical stripes that pattern a woman's underwear cage a man's hands.

In her project with the girls Chiarlone provided them with a wide array of garments from secondhand stores that they were instructed to embellish with poetry, lyrics, and designs using markers. The artist presented students with images from her residency project at the Atlantic County Women's Center *Journey to Healing: Surviving Domestic Violence and/or Sexual Assault* that was on view at the Noyes Museum of Art in Oceanville, New Jersey, from February 4 to May 7, 2006. The subject matter of Chiarlone's work struck a chord with the girls, and the workshop became a space in which they expressed the anger, hurt, pride, and pleasure they associated with their sexual experiences. The artist states, "The works of two girls really stand out in my mind. One expressed being sexually assaulted at a young age on a small garment . . . Another created a powerful drawing on a large garment conveying her homosexuality. Each seemed very self-motivated to share her experience."¹²

The girl Chiarlone refers to first created a moving work using a pink, long-sleeved blouse onto which she inscribed, "Why did you rape me motherfucker! I was only 11!" in large, bold letters. The other applied an intricate, corset-like design onto a plain t-shirt using the colors of the LGBT pride flag. The student's decision to express her sexual identity in this context was also courageous, given the challenges lesbian, bisexual, and transgender inmates face in detention. Schaffner notes, "Sleeping, showering, and dressing become harrowing locations of harassment for gender-exploratory youth and for their frightened and ill-prepared fellow detainees . . . One young woman testified that when she was locked in detention, she was never given a roommate because she was a lesbian and that special showering arrangements were made to prevent her from showering with other girls" (2006, 139–40). Chiarlone felt that the workshop "facilitated a form of healing. As a result, I completed a series entitled *Panties* that addresses



Panty Series #11 (2006), Rosemarie Chiarlone, silver gelatin print, cotton thread on Dura Lar: 21" x 23.

connection and disconnection in the context of humans as sexual being."¹³ In a subsequent workshop at JDC, the artist provided students with pillowcases upon which they represented their dreams with text and images. In describing the workshop Chiarlone wrote, "Most of the girls conveyed her existence, identity, and future linked directly to a [male] lover. One girl decorated her pillowcase with the words *Property of* . . . and the boy's name . . . First, she is the property of her parents, now of the Miami-Dade County Juvenile Detention Center, and her dream is of being the property of her 'rescuer.'"¹⁴ What most concerns WOTR instructors about expressions such as the one described is that some girls end up in detention for taking the rap for their boyfriends. However, we do not judge the girls' choice of topic or approach to making their pieces. We instead encourage them to think of other dreams/thoughts to depict in addition to thoughts about their partners. Perhaps daydreams about reuniting with romantic partners keep the girls optimistic while they are in detention.

The problem of court-involved girls' sexual agency is decidedly opaque. Schaffner notes how boyfriends, who are usually older, are often the only source of support for many incarcerated girls who have empty families due to incarceration, death, and/or caregivers who must work more than one job to make ends meet. "Dealing with an older boyfriend could be injurious, but considering the alternative of putting up with ongoing abuse, hunger, or homelessness, dealing with an older man might seem less bad. As a least-harmful compromise strategy, girls' tactics of getting involved with older boys and men in order to meet

ordinary needs is neither legal nor healthy, but it might save girls' lives and get them through adolescence. (Ibid. 112) In response to this workshop, Chiarlone created *Cinderella's Days and Dreams*, a pillow onto which the words *Property Of* are embroidered with hair" (2007).

Unlike Chiarlone's male-defined Cinderella, in Ali Prosch's work, the girls themselves are the desired subjects of their fantasies. The arguments in psychologist Sharon Lamb's book *The Secret Life of Girls: What Good Girls Really Do—Sex Play, Aggression, and Their Guilt* resonate with Prosch's *MOD 11* project. The book centers on stories of women's sexual experiences during childhood. Lamb discusses male identification, coercion, and abuse; however, *The Secret Life of Girls* is primarily concerned with addressing the guilt and shame girls feel about the pleasure and power they experience during childhood sexual play. In her effort to advance a new perspective within the victim-oriented discourse of girls' sexuality, Lamb describes how girls are not mindless receivers of mass media images and how they are often the subjects of their own desires (2001, 39).

They are their own best audiences and use mirrors to watch themselves be transformed into sexy grown-ups. In these mirrors they sense the power of the sexual. That's why these games are private and usually halt when a parent or other adult enters the room . . . Their gaze can't be reduced to a male's gaze. To say that they look at themselves as they imagine a man would suggests that a woman can't look at herself as a sexual being without pretending to be a heterosexual man. It makes her sexuality only a gift derived from male attention. (2001, 43–44)

The girls depicted in Prosch's drawings for *MOD 11* are situated in a whimsical world where they are subtly engrossed in their own sensuality. The drawings *Girl on Chair I*, *Girl on Chair II*, and *Castle* (2007) have a still, private feel to them, due in part to their intimate size and the immediacy of the graphite marks upon the pages, which look as if they have been torn from a diary. The young women occupy solitary domestic spaces and don Victorian-era clothing. One girl is depicted straddling the arm of a chair with her back to the viewer. The other, dressed in an outfit reminiscent of Lewis Carroll's Alice, reclines on an ornately decorated couch with her legs spread, seeming lost in a daydream while her hands rest on her pelvis.

The students appreciated Prosch's frank and humorous approach to sexuality in her workshop at JDC, in which she presented them with images from her photographic series *On Top* (2003). In the photographs a verdant South Florida landscape is littered with women riding atop the backs of men on all fours as if playing "horsy." Prosch's staging of the bodies in the photographs destabilizes the art historical convention of the reclined female nude set against a pastoral backdrop. The stoic, defiant gazes of the women in the photos signal the feminist undertone of the work, communicating the seriousness of this "game" to

the viewer. When Prosch asked the students to identify an issue the *On Top* series was concerned with, a girl shot her hand up and assertively offered, "It's about power."

The artist's drawings in *MOD 11* were inspired by a project in which she provided the girls with images of flowers and Victorian-era designs to create small-scale collages. Although the girls often exhibit a very a-romantic, nitty-gritty attitude toward sexuality and pleasure, the project elicited expressions of whimsy in the girls, whose status as children is often undermined by a penal system that makes consistent efforts at trying them as adults through practices such as *direct filing*.¹⁵ In addition to reminding us that incarcerated girls are children, capable of conjuring beautiful works in the face of institutionalization, Prosch's works should also remind us that the possibility of a pleasurable and healthy sexual life for these girls is not foreclosed.

The GisMo collective's (Jessica Gispert and Crystal Molinary) *MOD 11* project provides an innovative vantage point for engaging discourses of girls' sexual representations in visual culture. The artists were born and raised in the ethnic South Florida enclave of Hialeah-Miami Lakes, a largely working-class Cuban exile community. In their satirical depictions of Latina stereotypes, Cuban conceptions of bourgeois femininity collide with the raunchy sexuality of mainstream hip hop. GisMo's work is inspired by the musical genre known as Miami bass or "booty" music, exemplified by the controversial hip hop group 2 Live Crew. When presenting their work to the girls at JDC, the piece that generated the most responses from students, uncontrollable laughter among them, was the video *Booty Sandwich with Bass* (2005). The work humorously depicts the artists dancing energetically to a song by 2 Live Crew with their friends. The girls not only related to the artists because of their taste in music, but in their positive, in-your-face attitude regarding their "overweight" bodies. Several girls in the cellblock shouted "Big girls—that's right!" as the video played.

GisMo frames their adoption of booty music as an oppositional stance to mainstream Euro-American beauty standards and norms of bourgeois, "demure" feminine comportment, a view that diverges from scholarship that describes representations of women in hip hop as damaging to girls (Schaffner 2006; Sharpley-Whiting 2007; Stephens and Few 2007; Stephens and Phillips 2003; Weekes 2004). The artists found that the dancers featured in Luke's¹⁶ videos looked more like them than any other women they had seen on television growing up. Engaging with GisMo provided the students with a feminist model of hip hop-inspired sexuality that disarmed the male-identified nature of booty representations by infusing them with their own meaning, a strategy many of the girls already practice. As Lamb posits in *The Secret Lives of Girls*, "Girls play an active role in taking in these [popular culture] images, rearranging them somewhat, and creating new expectations for themselves. But while they obey the images and re-create them, they also undermine them" (Lamb 2001, 47). The liminal space between pop culture appropriation and subversion

is where contemporary feminist art thrives. This “disidentificatory” approach, to use performance theorist José E. Muñoz’s term, facilitated the connection the girls made to GisMo’s work. Muñoz’s description of the term is as follows, “Disidentification is the third mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather, disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology” (Muñoz 1999, 11).

GisMo recalled their adolescent lives in the project *Miss, You Look Like a Bratz Doll* (2007). The title was inspired by a humorous exchange between a student and me, in which she compared me to a Bratz doll. Referencing the toy, which is unpopular among feminists who believe they are hypersexualized, fit the artists’ project as it centers on the girls’ urban aesthetics (Hernandez 2009). Bratz dolls provide girls of color with one of the few alternatives to Barbies and what are generally held as more positive, asexual images of white girls playing soccer with swinging, golden blonde ponytails. The artists provided JDC girls with paper-doll type images of themselves that the students transformed into fictional characters with accompanying narratives. The girls used markers and colored pencils to design hairstyles, clothing, and accessories on the figures and envisioned everyday scenarios for their characters such as going on a date or hanging out with friends.

The artists then created a series of photographs drawing from the girls’ designs and stories. The photographs were later arranged into an album by JDC students and displayed in the exhibition as if they were situated in the bedroom of a Miami teen. The artists state,

Growing up our bureaus were our altars, the place where we kept the relics of those we held close to our hearts. This almost insignificant space served as a sanctuary for day dreaming, reminiscing, and recollecting our thoughts. Where our bureaus were our altars—our slambooks were our bibles. In them we kept records of our friends, styles, and the minutia of everyday adolescent life. The girls at the detention center don’t get to have a bureau full of picture frames or photo albums housing their adolescent memories. In *Miss, You Look Like a Bratz Doll* we have collaborated with the girls to create a collective album of fictional Miami characters.¹⁷

The girls framed their works in the context of friendship. In compiling and embellishing the album the girls celebrated images of the artists looking bored at school, going to family parties, and modeling.

Schaffner has described the frequency and severity of *girl hating* among female inmates in juvenile justice settings, which she frames in the context of internalized misogyny (2006). Women on the Rise! staff have also witnessed instances of girl hating; however, on the whole, the students tend to bond, particularly by braiding each other’s hair, as they do not have products or mirrors with which they

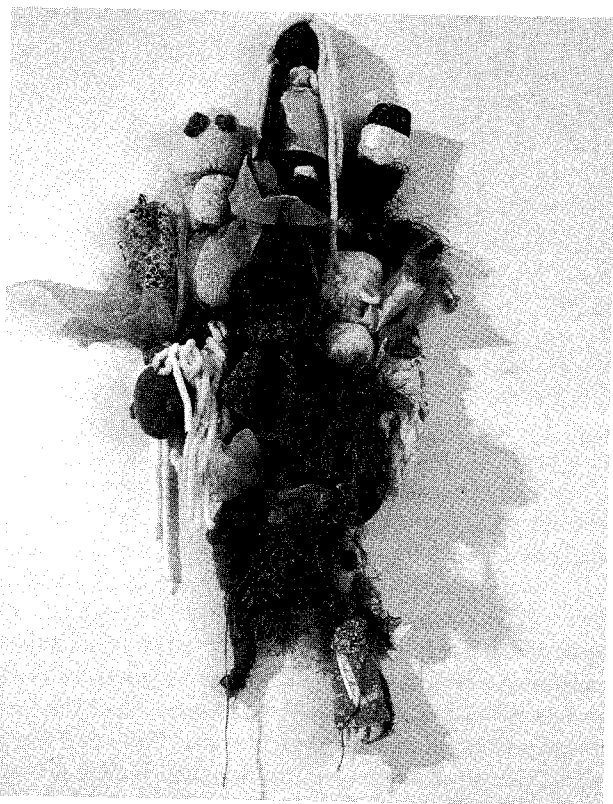


Installation view of *Miss, You Look Like a Bratz Doll* (2007), GisMo (Jessica Gispert and Crystal Molinary) multimedia installation, dimensions variable. Photo: Crystal Molinary.

can style their own. Although they do form cliques at times, the mood among students is generally one of solidarity vis-à-vis their status as “locked up,” especially when they feel the staff has treated someone unfairly. Some could argue that the positive woman-to-woman relationships the girls depicted in *Miss* are undermined by the conformity of the scantily dressed characters they crafted to hypersexual, mainstream, male-identified standards of attractiveness. However, I find that unlike the typological women often represented in pop culture, the characters created by the girls in GisMo’s work are subjects who have relationships and are connected to place, thus making them more difficult to exoticize (Hernandez 2009).

Like GisMo, Isabel Moros-Rigau's works in *MOD 11* titled *Subruler of the Element X* (2007) were created in collaboration with the JDC girls. The artist presented her nonnarrative films to the students that feature animated biomorphic fabric sculptures. As needles and scissors are not allowed in the facility, the artist taught the girls to use tying, knotting, and braiding to execute their works. The girls created a host of abstract, human, and animal forms from t-shirt fragments, yarn, and swatches of cloth. Dresses, hair, bodies, and wings were skillfully crafted by the students using only their hands and the materials available. These were grouped together in the exhibition space to create a sculptural form upon the wall. Inspired by the girls' ingenuity, Moros-Rigau decided to take the project further in her subsequent workshop.

The artist created a four-foot fabric doll of a female body the girls worked collaboratively to dress using a wide array of fabrics. The primal, totemic qual-



Installation view of *Subruler of the Element X* (2007), JDC girls and Isabel Moros-Rigau, mixed-media, dimensions variable. Photo: Isabel Moros-Rigau.

ity of the resulting sculpture recalls the fabric work of French, New York-based artist Louise Bourgeois, who has been featured in *Women on the Rise!* lessons at the mod. Bourgeois is a pivotal figure in contemporary art, who, despite the fact that she is more than ninety years old, continues to produce innovative multimedia work.

The girls relate to Bourgeois despite her difference in age and cultural background due to the highly personal content of her work. One of the first contemporary artists to openly engage with personal experiences in their practice, Bourgeois is known for her singular ability to infuse abstract forms with emotion. She has returned to her childhood practice of sewing in recent sculptures, recalling her work in the family tapestry repair business (Morris 2003). Bourgeois' childhood is the consistent subject of her work. The artist's anger at her father, who openly and regularly expressed his disappointment with her having been born female (and thus gave her his name) and engaged in an extramarital affair with her nanny, remains the predominant force of her practice.

The girls connect to Bourgeois' dramatic work as it melds figuration and abstraction. For example, students often express a connection to the fabric work *Spiral Woman* (2003), in which Bourgeois expresses violent rage via the contorted, twisted neck of a hanging figure. Pain and righteous anger are given voice and form in Bourgeois' work, which draws the girls in and presents them with a possible artistic strategy for expressing their feelings. Although the works they created with Moros-Rigau do not overtly speak to their lives, they are charged with emotive power.

FINDING RELEASE IN PAINTING

The emotionally and psychologically freighted experience of visiting the detention center informs Naomi Fisher's untitled painting (2007) in the exhibition. The work reflects a dream she had the night before what was her third workshop with the girls at JDC. Fisher was reading texts in Jungian psychology at the time, keeping a dream journal, and learning about the tarot. These new interests prompted her to present something different to the girls, as the previous drawing workshops she conducted were based on her provocative photographs and paintings of women in nature. In her most recent session at JDC, Fisher provided students with copies of images from the feminist Motherpeace and Barbara G. Walker tarots. Her aim was to provide them with imagery of archetypal female characters that possess both positive and potentially negative attributes, as the girls sometimes internalize the stigma of being incarcerated.

Fisher's goal was to present them with a complex view of anger, strength, power, and peace, themes she has explored in previous workshops in which the notion of making "mistakes" is problematized. In describing her approach to a drawing workshop at JDC, an activity the girls are usually hesitant about as they feel they do not have the skills to participate, the artist recalls, "I would show them my artwork and say that to make my series of fictional portraits I

would first draw the eyes and then let the face freely form around them. For their project, I would try to get them to start drawing in a similar way, starting with the eyes and letting the face form, embracing and incorporating their mistakes.”¹⁸ The girls culled symbols from the tarot characters they related to most and created hybridized images they affixed onto poster board to create their own cards. The most popular among the students were variations of the Priestess of Swords, Daughter of Wands, and Priestess of Wands.

Whereas Fisher’s painting was created the night prior to her lesson, Kathleen Staples’ *MOD 11* pieces were executed an evening following her workshop at JDC. In her project with the girls, the artist instructed them to liberally pour paint over large sheets of paper with no effort to create recognizable images. They then utilized blow dryers to move the paint along the surface of the page to generate patterns and facilitate drying. After the paint dried, the girls were prompted to highlight marks and shapes that interested them in the patterns using charcoal.

The artist’s free form approach to painting is echoed in *Arisen* and *Frith* (2007), in which she applied layers of paint over the canvas to create a thick and luminous texture upon the surface. The works are caked with the candy-colored tones of pink and aqua that are conventionally associated with girlhood. The color in the works arose from her thoughts about the girls that night. Staples states, “They are so powerless over their space and their actions. So many freedoms are taken from them that they are left only with what they can keep inside themselves—the freedom of thinking and feeling . . . For me, freedom is intrinsic to the act of painting . . . The nature of the art allows me to paint any way I want, and even to let the paint do what it wants, to give paint its own freedom.”¹⁹

THE POLITICS OF VISUAL POETICS

The *MOD 11* exhibition and panel discussion provided a forum for presenting complex views of detention center inmates that move beyond the troubled history of “deviant” girls and the visual to raise awareness of their needs and shift uninformed and biased perceptions of them as uneducated, viciously violent, and sex obsessed “bad girls.” The contrasting works, which were connected by their explorations of agency and subjectivity, vacillated between the political and the poetic. Expressions of pain mingled with images of whimsy, hope, and sensuality. Where Nereida Garcia Ferraz reminded us of the threat incarceration poses to the girls’ sense of self, Chun’s work showed how they work creatively to maintain it. Ali Prosch’s capricious drawings were grounded by Rosemarie Chiarlone’s focus on girls’ male identification. GisMo’s work became a platform through which the girls asserted their aesthetic sensibilities and celebrated bonds of female friendship. The sculptures Isabel Moros-Rigau created with students revealed their fearlessness in taking on new forms of art making—creating imaginative works with meager resources. Paintings by Kathleen Staples and Naomi Fisher attested

to the emotive weight of working in the mod and underscored the importance of working through mistakes and attaining freedom.

The staff members of partnering organizations provide MOCA with their assessment of the Women on the Rise! program and descriptions of how it impacts the girls in their care on an annual basis. In the partner evaluation for the 2006–2007 year in which the MOD 11 project was conducted Girls Advocacy Project (GAP) staff noted the following:

WOTR has had an overall positive effect on the behavior of the girls detained at JDC (Juvenile Detention Center). In addition to the educational, cultural, and inspiration effects, GAP personnel have observed that verbal and physical altercations have decreased during/after the WOTR workshops and that the girls’ engagement in the presentations has increased. Such effects promote a safe and learning-conducive environment vital to the success of any programming in a detention facility.

A few of the girls have expressed interest in focusing on careers in art and strengthening their artist talents.

WOTR offers an educational and cultural opportunity for enrichment which is often absent in these youths’ lives.

WOTR meaningfully explores female gender issues, which encourages self-awareness, bolsters potential for improvement, and perfectly compliments GAP’s own gender-specific programming.

GAP’s feedback attests to the potential of visual art and engagement with women artists to make a meaningful mark on the lives of court-involved girls. Such workshops should be implemented in juvenile justice facilities throughout the nation in order to provide youth with opportunities for self-expression, critical reflection, and awareness of social issues that impact their lives.

In closing I will briefly offer some pedagogical strategies for visiting practitioners working with girls in detention settings.

Involve correction officers and other staff in your program: The work we conduct at the detention center often adds a workload to the staff, as we introduce outside materials into the space that they must insure are safely removed from the facility (i.e. beads, paint brushes, strings of yarn). They also amend their routines to accommodate the time slot of our lessons. Involving staff as *participants* in your program helps build rapport and support a positive workshop environment.

Avoid sensitive content if you do not have counseling staff on hand: We did not anticipate the emotional response a student had to Rosemarie Chiarlone’s presentation as her work had no images of violence or victimization. A GAP counselor we work in tandem with helped us respond to the situation, and the girl expressed she felt better

after participating in the workshop. Many court-involved girls have experienced a range of traumatic events, and it is difficult to gauge what may trigger a response. Be sure to have a qualified staff member on hand if a project covers sensitive issues.

Be flexible: When girls see our art materials, such as paper and pencils, they immediately want to use them to write letters to friends, partners, and family. We allow the girls time to do so within the workshop period. This helps build rapport with and participation from the girls.

Be sensitive to the mood of the group: A host of factors contribute to the mood of a cellblock on a particular day. You may want to approach your lesson differently (focus on the most “fun” aspect or abbreviate it) if the girls seem sullen or anxious. Plowing ahead as planned usually results in an awkward workshop atmosphere. When some girls do not want to participate we do not take it personally or pressure them to work. We have found that often they often come around and begin working when they feel ready.

NOTES

The author thanks the girls and artists whose moving work inspired this chapter in addition to the staff and supporters of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Miami, Girls Advocacy Project, Miami, and Women's Fund of Miami-Dade County. This chapter benefited from insightful feedback from the reviewers and editors.

1. This includes vaginal diagrams.
2. Quotes from Gibson are found in the introduction to Lombroso's *Criminal Woman, the Prostitute, and the Normal Woman*.
3. I had previously organized exhibitions of work by *Women on the Rise!* students at the Roxy O' Neal Bolton Women's History Gallery (on view May–June 2007) and the Miami International Airport (September–December 2007), which provided them with a platform through which to present their work to the public.
4. Save for Susan Lee Chun (who had a previously scheduled performance that night) and Ali Prosch.
5. I relocated from Florida to New Jersey in August 2007 to pursue a PhD in women's and gender studies at Rutgers University. The program is now administered by artist Isabel Moros-Rigau and continues to reach hundreds of girls on an annual basis.
6. This chapter is focusing on workshops related specifically to the *MOD 11* exhibition; the artists, with the exception of Ali Prosch, who relocated to California in summer 2007 to attend CalArts, are continuing their work with *Women on the Rise!*
7. Rosemarie Chiarlone had already created work inspired by JDC students (*Panty Series*, 2006), prior to the conception of the *MOD 11* show.
8. Unless otherwise noted, artist's quotes are derived from *artist statements* submitted to the author via e-mail (most, but not all, artists in *MOD 11* composed artist statements).

Artist statements are unpublished documents in which artists articulate the concepts that inform their work. These documents are provided to curators to aid them in the process of generating essays and other didactic materials related to exhibitions.

9. E-mail correspondence with author September 24, 2007.
10. E-mail correspondence with author May 11, 2007.
11. E-mail correspondence with author October 2, 2007.
12. E-mail correspondence with author August 9, 2007.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. A procedure that gives prosecutors the discretion to try minors in criminal court.
16. 2 Live Crew front man.
17. E-mail correspondence with author September 17, 2007.
18. E-mail correspondence with author October 10, 2007.
19. E-mail correspondence with author September 9, 2007.

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CHAPTER TWENTY

Hope in a Box: Sanity Sold Separately

Sisters of Unique Lyrics (SOUL)

The Sisters of Unique Lyrics (SOUL) is a poetry workshop that meets weekly at Scott Correctional Facility, a maximum-security women's prison in Plymouth, Michigan. SOUL was established as a poetry workshop in 2004 through the Prison Creative Arts Project (PCAP), an organization housed in the English Language and Literature Department of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. PCAP's mission is to strengthen the community through creative expression. Since SOUL began, more than thirty women have participated, and it is one of the longest running poetry workshops offered by PCAP. At the time that this collection was written, SOUL was comprised of eight women, including the two facilitators who provided a loose structure for the workshop but who were fully active participants in the poetic process.

Each week SOUL comes together to share poetry written from assignments or prompts inspired by lines from our writings, relevant topics in our lives, or as a part of a planned series. Inside of the workshop, poetry is read by its author, as she stands in the front of the room. After reading and listening to the piece, generally more than once, the other sisters reflect on, comment on, and question the author's work. Using creative criticism, SOUL guides and challenges each member with critical minds and loving eyes.

Twenty-week cycles of SOUL culminate with a vibrant reading at Scott, where guests come to celebrate our individual and collective poetry. This experience showcases our talent and growth while providing us an opportunity to be heard. Attendance has grown exponentially, thanks to PCAP's ongoing relationship with Scott's administration. The initial three outside guests granted to SOUL's first poetry reading has grown to more than thirteen in addition to at least a dozen women from the inside. Our readings always include a group poem