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# Community-based Art: A University and Prison Collaboration

Professor / Artist / Writer:  
Annie Buckley

Research Assistants / Teaching Artists:  
Jessica Agustin  
Christina Quevedo

California State University,  
San Bernardino



# Investigation



How do we balance flexibility and structure?

How does this project provide mutual benefit?

In what ways are traditional or preconceived roles transformed?

# Philosophy

- ◆ Community-based Art is an approach to making, teaching, and learning art that directly engages community in the process through collaboration, interaction, discussion, feedback, and sharing.
- ◆ Throughout the courses integrated into Community-based Art at CSUSB, students examine the ways that social, cultural and economic forces impact access to and understandings of art.

What is art? Who decides? Who has access to art?



# The Inland Empire

San Bernardino is located in the Inland Empire, a region of Southern California. In 2012, 31.1% of San Bernardino residents were living in poverty. The average number of American living in poverty was 15%. That same year, the city of San Bernardino declared bankruptcy.

Currently, there are a number of community renovation projects in place in San Bernardino county, including a community art center.

There are three state prisons located in the Inland Empire, a men's and only one in the much larger Los Angeles County.

# California State University, San Bernardino

California State University, San Bernardino is a public university in a an economically disadvantaged community.

70% of our students are the first in their families to graduate from college. CSUSB has a diverse student body. The median age of students is 21 years old. A majority of CSUSB students maintain jobs and or families while in school.

# CSUSB Community-based Art

CSUSB Community-based Art is an initiative in which students, alumni, and volunteers facilitate art throughout our community at sites that don't otherwise have access to art, including a public housing project, shelters for teens, low-income senior housing, County Probation, the CSUSB Reentry Center, and three California state prisons.



# On Site: Ongoing Curriculum Development

All CBA classes include: **Art History, Art Making, and Reflection.**

CBA classes and workshops are based on the needs and interests of participants, facility, and teaching artists. Projects include:

- ❖ Family workshop
- ❖ Collaborative murals
- ❖ Creative Writing Workshop
- ❖ Portfolio development and Critique
- ❖ Classes in: Printmaking, Collage, Painting, Drawing, and Crafts
- ❖ Future Goals: Multidisciplinary (music, theater, dance)

# Ongoing Community Sites and Classes:

- ◆ **Boys and Girls Club, Waterman Gardens**
  - Family Art Workshop: Illustration and Book Making
- ◆ **Our House, Redlands**
  - Art Workshop
  - What is Art? Art Class for Youth
- ◆ **Job Corps**
  - LACMA Inspired Workshops
- ◆ **CSUSB Re-entry Initiative**
  - Mural Renovation
- ◆ **engAGE: Low Income Senior Housing**
  - History of Painting Workshop

# Collaboration and Mutual Learning

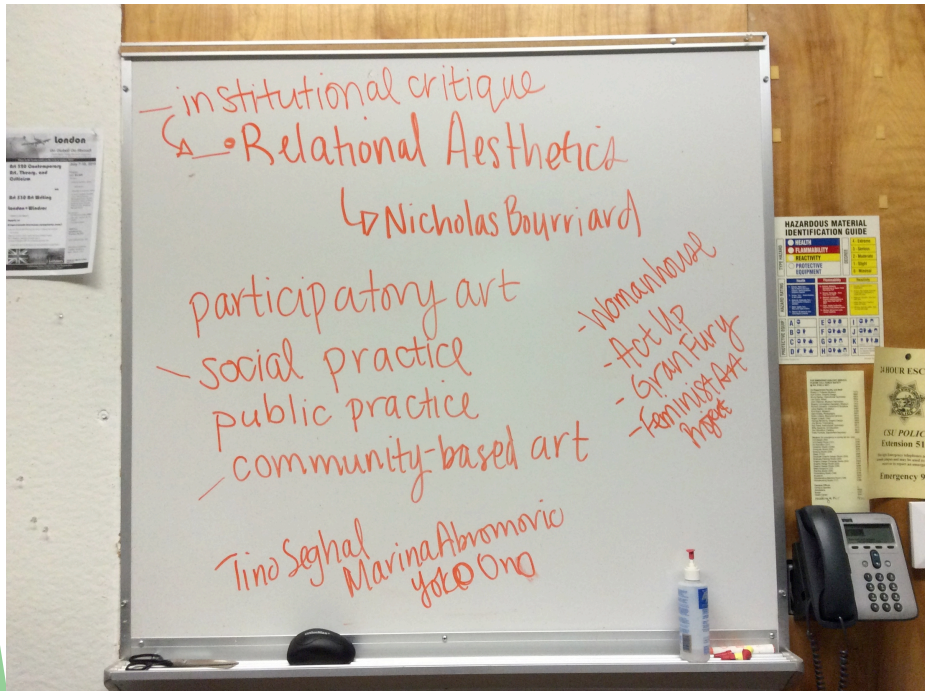
How do we move past preconceived expectations and biases in working with: Students? Inmates? Administrators?

What is the benefit of allowing individuals and communities to conceive of themselves in new roles and with new opportunities to share, receive, communicate, and make a difference?



# Mutual Learning

On campus and at the prison site, **communication**, **mentorship**, and **personal development** are as important as the **creative process** in our classes.



Faculty and student researchers at CBA discussed the importance of language used to describe who we are and our work, including the importance of **people-first language**.

#### CBA Participants Include:

- ❖ Youth and children at-risk
- ❖ Seniors in low-income housing
- ❖ Persons who are incarcerated
- ❖ Individuals who are homeless
- ❖ People with disabilities

#### CBA Teaching Artists Include:

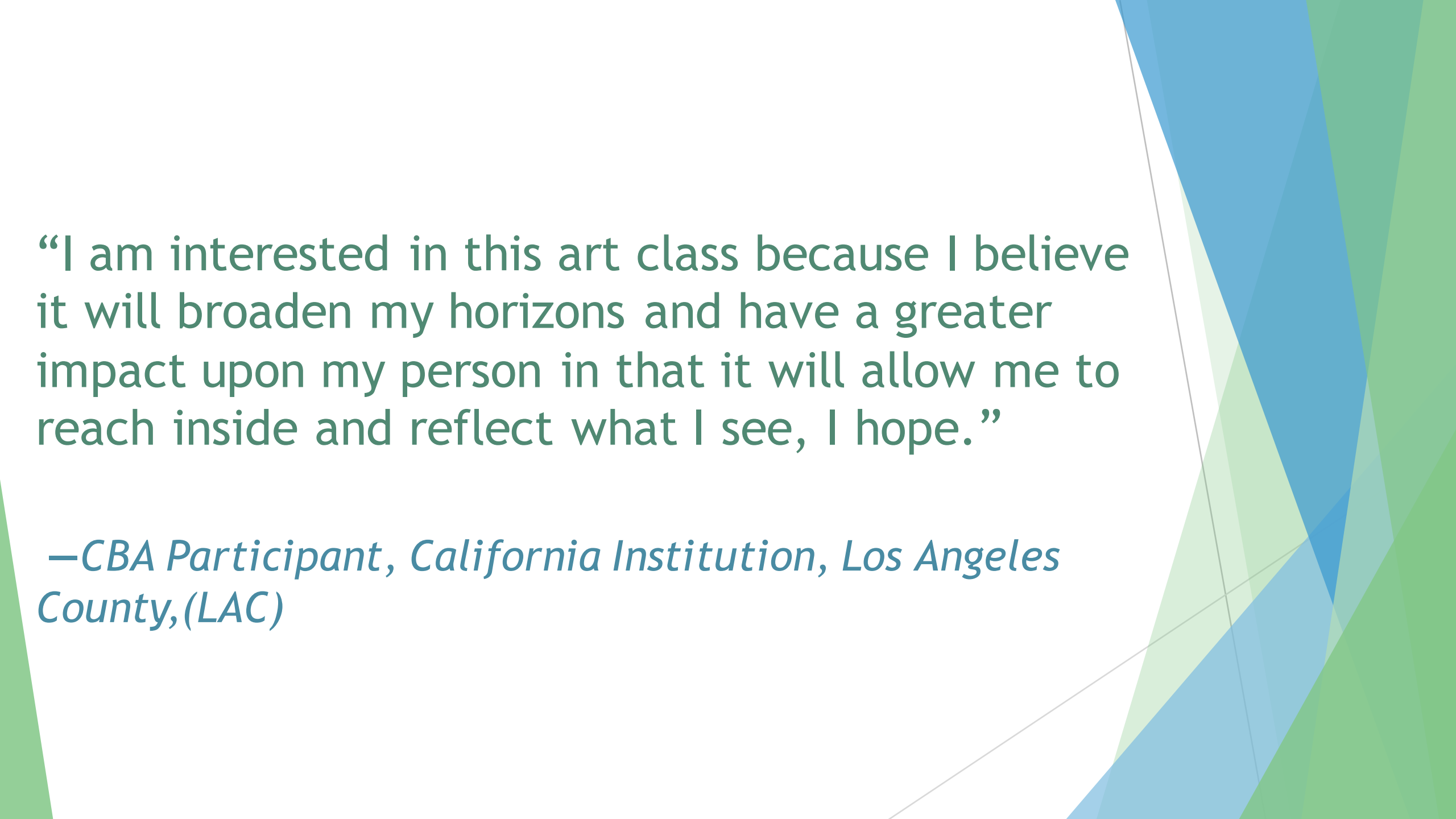
- ❖ Art students
- ❖ MFA students
- ❖ Alumni volunteers
- ❖ Volunteer artists and writers
- ❖ Guest artists and writers
- ❖ Co-teachers (inmates)



# Prison Arts Collective



The Prison Arts Collective emerged out of the CSUSB Community-based Art initiative.



“I am interested in this art class because I believe it will broaden my horizons and have a greater impact upon my person in that it will allow me to reach inside and reflect what I see, I hope.”

*—CBA Participant, California Institution, Los Angeles County,(LAC)*

# Context for American Prisons

**The United States has the world's largest prison population.**

- Today, roughly 2.2 million people are behind bars in the United States, an increase of 1.9 million since 1972.
- Today, the US is 5% of the World population and has 25% of world prisoners.
- African Americans now constitute nearly 1 million of the total 2.3 million incarcerated population.
- African Americans are incarcerated at nearly six times the rate of whites.
- Together, African American and Hispanics comprised 58% of all prisoners in 2008, even though African Americans and Hispanics make up approximately one quarter of the US population

## **Sources:**

**The Southern Poverty Law Center**

**The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People**



# Every voice matters. Every contribution is key.

- ▶ How does this work in practice?
- ▶ How do we overcome barriers?
- ▶ How can we value and integrate varied perspectives on art, teaching, and working together?

# CBA Prison Arts Collective Partner Sites & Curricula:

These classes run simultaneously in eight- to ten-week sessions. All sessions culminate with a certificate ceremony and exhibition.

## ◆ California Institution for Men, Chino (CIM)

- Portrait Workshop
- Drawing Workshop
- Creative Writing Workshop
- 3-D Workshop
- Art History
- Printmaking and Design
  - Art History and Critique
- Portfolio Development

## ◆ California State Prison, Los Angeles County (LAC)

- Foundations in Art
- Printmaking

## ◆ California Institution for Women, (CIW)

- Watercolor & Creative Writing
- Collage & Mixed Media
- Sculptural Crafts
- Art History



Ezequiel Gonzales, CIM Class Participant/Co-teacher



## Collaboration and Mutual Learning in Practice: Example: Collaborative Mural at CIM

This collaborative mural project began in spring 2014 and was completed over nine months. It was conceived, designed, and painted in collaboration. Four Teaching Artists (three students and one alumna) and approximately 30 inmates created it together.

One innovation was that the two lead artists were an inmate and an alumna. They brought different approaches to mural painting and melded them into an innovative combination.

One Teaching Artist worked with each of three groups of men of the three distinct panels of this 45' mural.

*Photographs of the mural process: Andrew K. Thompson*

# CIM Mural Workshop



*"I plan to stay in the art program for as long as I can. It has been invaluable in helping me cope with prison & exploring my creative potential."*  
—Class Participant, CIM





From working as a group to come up with the idea to finding reference material and sketching the design, inmates were artists and students were teachers.







Lines blurred between facilitators and learners. Everyone learned from one another.





Many men didn't know how to paint when they started. They learned during the process of creating together.







The mural became something to return to each week, providing a physical space for growth and at the same time an opportunity for connection and reflection and conversation.







*"I think that I've learned more than I've taught! There are just some things that no classroom can teach. The only way to learn is by doing." — Nancy Stevens, Teaching Artist, CIM*





All classes culminate in a certificate ceremony.





# CIM Critique & Creative Writing



*"That as long as there are programs such as these while incarcerated it gives us a constructive outlet to finish out time in a positive environment."*  
—Class Participant, CIM





# CIM Paper Crafts: Co-taught by student and inmate

*This paper flower tree was co-created by 7 men. In this class, participants can teach for one day to share their skills.*





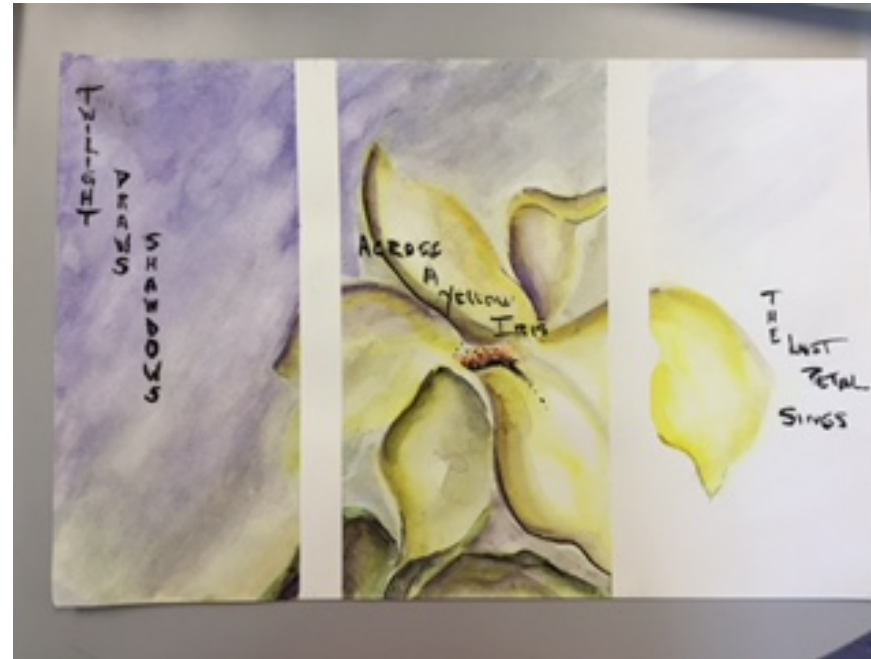
<http://anniebuckley.wix.com/prisonartscollective>



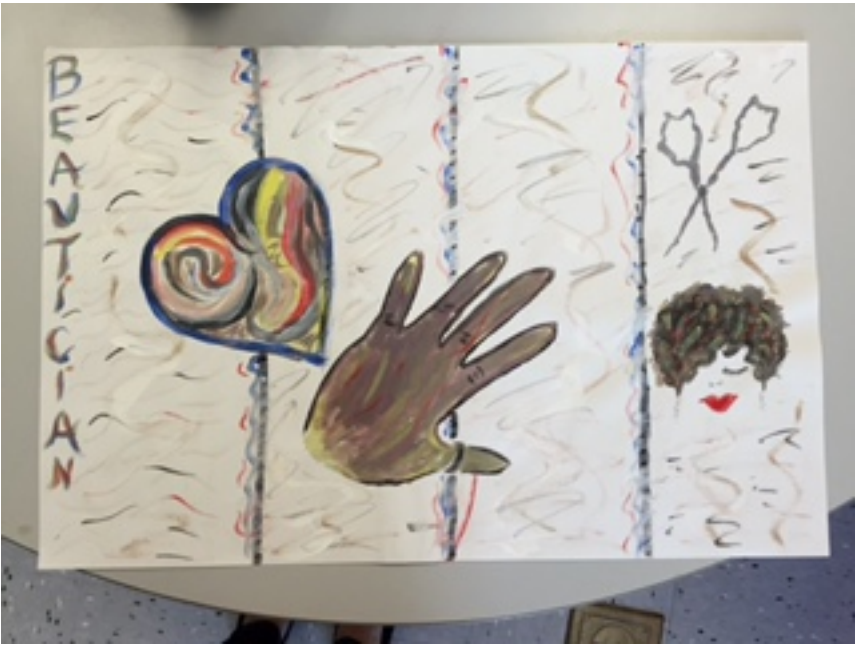
# California Institution for Women



Our first pilot at the women's prison started in the summer of 2015. Four teaching artists facilitated three weekly classes and an art history component with approximately 20 participants. We are currently in our third 8-week session.









# Logistics and Structure

- Organic Growth
- Integrated Curriculum
- Components for Success
- Highlights and Special Events

# Organic Growth

We began with seven students teaching four classes at one prison. Approximately 40 men completed that first session and received certificates.

Currently, 15-20 Teaching Artists facilitate 12 classes at three prisons across Southern California. A fourth prison has requested our program. We plan to start as we build capacity and funding.

Our program grows in response to the needs and interests of our community, participants, and teaching artist (students, alumni, volunteers).

# Integrated Curriculum

- ◆ Community-based Art is an approach to making, teaching, and learning art that directly engages community in the process through collaboration, interaction, discussion, feedback, and sharing.
- ◆ Throughout the courses integrated into Community-based Art at CSUSB, students examine the ways that social, cultural and economic forces impact access to and understandings of art.

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# Visual Studies

Students from all four majors participate in CBA. But preparation for facilitating CBA programs comes primarily from Visual Studies and the MFA program. We redesigned the Visual Studies major to be more interactive and integrate **project-based learning** and **service-learning**. These courses and CBA are mutually supportive and grew together.

- ◆ History, Philosophy, and Theories of Visual Studies
- ◆ Art and Human Development
- ◆ Art and Community
- ◆ Teaching Practicum
- ◆ Internship in Art



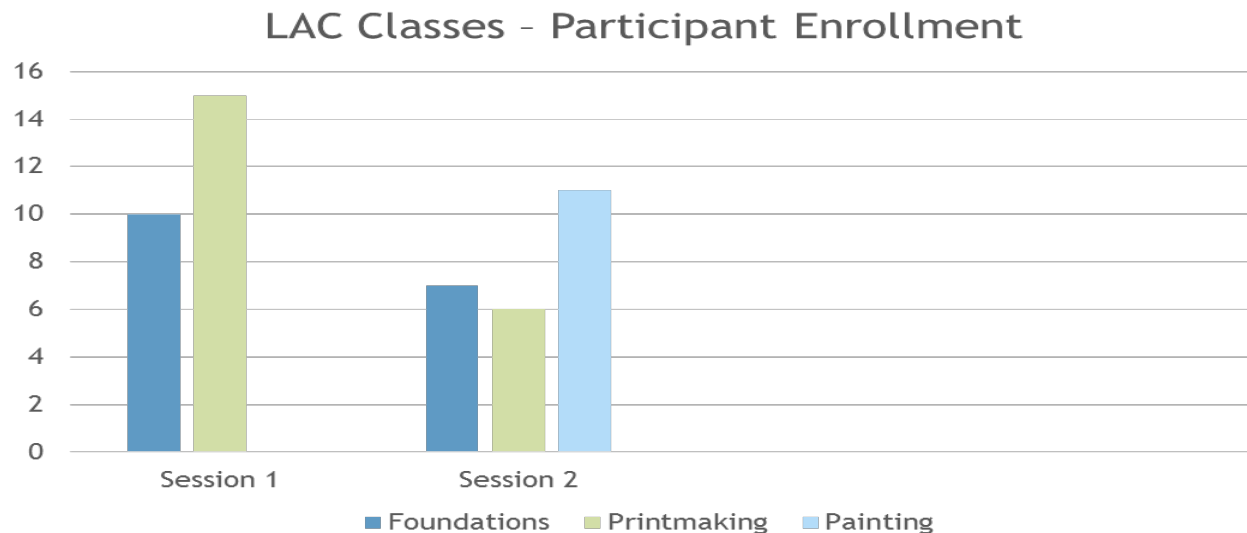
# Prison University Partnership: Vital Components for Success

- ❖ Flexibility – we say it is our number one rule.
- ❖ Strong communication network across varied spaces
- ❖ Curriculum synchrony between university and prison site
- ❖ Basic training for Teaching Artists from different disciplines
- ❖ Support for change including opportunities for inmate teachers
- ❖ Assessment and reorientation of program based on feedback
- ❖ Proceed in stages, starting with pilot and making small changes from there based on feedback from all involved in partnership

# California State Prison, Los Angeles County (LAC)

**CBA Pilot Session at LAC: August 2015 through December, 2015.**

**Session 2 - Start Date: January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016**



# Prison-University Partnership

What is necessary for these two institutions to work together?

How does the university curriculum influence and relate to the curriculum on site?

## **Future goals:**

Consistent funding for teaching artists

College credit for inmate participants

Off-site exhibition for work from prison programs

# Highlights & Special Events

- ▶ Presentation at the European Association for Prison Education, Belgium, October 2015
- ▶ Presentation for National Conference on Higher Education in Prison, November 2015
- ▶ Article on *The Huffington Post* by Rodrigo Ribera D'Ebre, November 2015
- ▶ Article on *Art & Education*, November 2015
- ▶ Participants and Teaching Artists published on Radical Actions, March 2016
- ▶ UPCOMING Public Exhibition at CB1-G Gallery in Los Angeles, May 14-28, 2016

# California Prison Arts: A Quantitative Evaluation

An evaluation through surveys, completed by D. Lawrence Brewster from the University of San Francisco found the following:

- ◆ Inmates with previous arts education and practice, including former Arts in Corrections participants, were statistically more likely to be intellectually flexible, self confident, motivated, in control of their emotions, socially competent, and better managers of their time than inmates who have never studied or practiced art.
- ◆ A comparison of the pretest-posttest survey results for the 31 inmates who had no previous arts education or practice showed a positive and statistically significant correlation between their participation in the theatre, writing and visual arts classes and improved time management, achievement motivation, intellectual flexibility, active initiative, and self-confidence.
- ◆ A significant majority of participants reported that the arts program helped them to relieve stress, feel happier, and gain valuable insights. Over half (58%) said their art brought them closer to family; enriching their conversations and nurturing a new identity as artists, rather than convict.




# Skills gained through art practice:

## Soft Skills

- ◆ Growing self-confidence
- ◆ Improvement in communication skills
- ◆ Patience
- ◆ Accountability
- ◆ Creative development
- ◆ Collaboration
- ◆ Perceptiveness
- ◆ Stress management
- ◆ Interpersonal relationship skills
- ◆ Dedication & motivation

## Hard Skills

- ◆ Punctuality
- ◆ Art Historical knowledge
- ◆ Writing skills
- ◆ Visual skills
- ◆ Fine motor skills
- ◆ Reading & analytic competency
- ◆ Problem solving skills



“When I become angry painting calms me down.  
When I become lonely, painting comforts me.  
When I become confused, painting brings me  
clarity. When I experience painful emotions,  
painting helps me reconnect to positive emotions  
and I never want to use drugs or alcohol again.”

—*S. Hunter, Class participant/Co-teacher, CBA at CIM*

“I really appreciate the chance to be able to have a class like this to express myself positively in a negative environment.”

—CBA Participant, California Institution, Los Angeles County, (LAC)



# *Thank you!*

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<http://anniebuckley.wix.com/prisonartscollective>

You can reach Annie at: [abuckley@csusb.edu](mailto:abuckley@csusb.edu)