



**Arts Community Grants**  
Last call to apply for a 2008 cultural arts project grant for individual artists and arts organizations. See page 5 for application and guideline information.



**spotlightOn...**  
*Danza Negra* (left) and *Criolla Cuatriza* (right) by artist José Guerrero, Jr. Read more about José and view additional artwork on page 6.



**artsExpress**  
David Topps. See page 7 for additional cast shots from previous performances by The Creative Theatre – Muddy Water Players.



# ArtSpace

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## Inmates' Creativity Turns the Inside Out

### Prisoners Say Their Art Has Freed Them

By Mary DeCicco

With its vistas of green turf and rolling countryside, it could pass as a typical college campus. Deceptively, freedom seems near. So close.

Then the barbed wire comes into view.

For 39-year-old Joseph Hernandez, looking at the surroundings of the Mid-Orange Correctional Facility near Warwick is as close as he will get to the outside for at least two more years. Brooklyn-born Hernandez is serving a 22 years-to-life sentence for murder.



Joseph Hernandez

"You come here, you hear birds singin', everyone's respectful, laid-back" he says. "It's like being in the 'Twilight Zone'" compared with the other prisons he's been in.

His art, Hernandez says, has helped get him through his long sentence.

"It's therapeutic," he says. "It's taught me patience and not to take my eyesight for granted. I appreciate a lot of things I see."

Hernandez, a graffiti artist in his youth, started out creating customized envelopes and greeting cards, caricatures and signs for other prisoners in exchange for food, cigarettes, stamps and other "luxuries."

He says he started working on something artistic to make his time pass and to "broaden my horizons." He realized art was "something I was pretty good with."

Hernandez, who taught himself by studying textures and techniques, has made signs and murals "everywhere I've been," but he didn't begin doing oil paintings until his stint at Green Haven Correctional Facility in Dutchess County.

Photos of some 30 to 40 of his paintings are a testament to his creativity, expression and skill. One shows him in meditation or looking out from behind bars; others are more graphic and bold. Another is a stylized portrait of Emily, one of his four sisters. His attention to detail and form is striking.

He has his stash of art materials that he has kept with him through prison moves, like his "best" paint brushes he's had for more than 14 years.

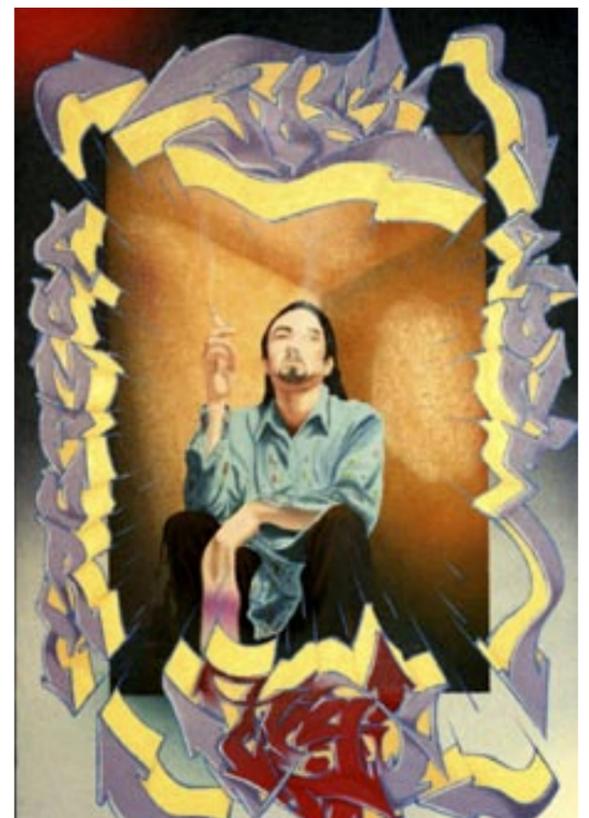
"I just take really good care of them," he says, noting their expense. (He is allowed most materials, which his family orders for him, although materials such as razor blades, certain chemicals and combustibles are banned.) "You always have to improvise."

A 14-by-17-by-13-inch sculpture was made of soap, pencils, a cigar box – "whatever you can find, pieces of anything," he adds.

Hernandez, who has worked in Mid-Orange's sign shop since arriving there about a year ago, says he makes all the prison's signs. Right now,



Painted Sculpture by Joseph Hernandez made mostly from soap.



Untitled Self-Portrait by Joseph Hernandez

he's in the process of creating a mural in the handball court that will be 60 feet wide by 12 feet high and dedicated, he says, to "America's love for dogs" and the Puppies Behind Bars program that brings dogs to prisons to be trained as guides for the blind or disabled or for law enforcement purposes.

"Right now, I'm so busy between doing signs and murals" in other parts of the prison, Hernandez says, but he's eager to get back to his own artwork. In addition, he teaches a basic drawing class to about five or six inmates on Fridays.

"I start them simple with shading, perspective, so they don't get discouraged," he says. "A couple of them come to me on their own" and he gives them tips. "I don't mind helping people out."

In his experience in prisons, he's found "so much talent," like one man who made a grandfa-

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# Inmates' Creativity Turns the Inside Out

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ther's clock entirely from matchsticks or another who managed to take colors for his artwork off M&M's. "The talent they have is phenomenal."

Hernandez, who also taught art when he was in Green Haven, was permitted at one point to put his artwork in a show in Albany until that option, where all proceeds went to victims' families, was discontinued. He says he tried to get a show like that started at another facility, but his work was stolen. "Now I just send them home with my mother and she puts them up."

He hopes upon release to start a small mural business and make a portfolio of his artwork so he can get it shown. His long-term goal is to "document what Puerto Ricans have contributed to New York and America."

"It's been quite a journey, quite a journey," Hernandez says. "I grew up in here."

## Art became 'my escape'

José Torres, incarcerated in Otisville Correctional Facility, has growing older in prison in common with Hernandez. In addition, both are from Brooklyn and both were teenagers when convicted of murder. Torres, nearly 39, has served about 20 years of a 15 years-to-life sentence in several state prisons.



José Torres

Another similarity has been the impact of art on their time behind bars. When his mother faced cancer about 14 years ago, Torres says, art became his way of dealing with her illness. He had never drawn or painted before, but it became "my escape," he says, "so as soon as I got involved with it, it was my way of forgetting about everything that was going on in here, everything that was going on out there (by) just thinking about tones and shades and lines."

"I took it up also as a challenge," he says. "It was, like, let me do painting or something that would occupy my mind so much that I wouldn't be able to think about things too much."



Floral watercolor by José Torres

Torres says he had "always admired painters and artists," so when he ran into an older inmate at another prison who was "great at pastels" and willing to give him tips and lessons, he took the man up on his offer.

"So that's how I got started ... it was from life, drawing a tree, drawing a branch." When he saw that man seven years later, "he was so happy I had progressed, kept up with it."

Although he started sketching from photos, his art evolved and now "I just want to sketch from life." He does a lot of watercolors, and has grown to appreciate the "happy accidents" that sometimes occur in the process. It is "more natural-like, just flows by itself."

Like Hernandez, he says there are "some brushes you get attached to." He, too, has had problems at other prisons getting materials for his art, although Otisville is very lenient that way, he says.

Not only has Torres done exquisite watercolors, he has branched out to expressive oil paintings and dramatic charcoal sketches. He keeps a sketchbook handy for drawings and ideas as they come to him.

The bigger pieces he sends home with his sister, the only family member left in Brooklyn, so they don't get lost or ruined when cells are routinely checked.

When he is working on an art project, Torres says, he gets so involved with it, "by the time you know it, the whole day has gone by." He doesn't hold art classes as Hernandez does, but teaches by example. "They come to me, I show them things. I try to be objective about it, say this and that, this line goes here ..."

Art "opens your mind to so many other things," Torres says. It has "helped me a lot. It got me through a lot of things," he says. If he had had art as an outlet when he was younger, he says, things "would have been different, they would have definitely been different."

Jonathan Talbot, a painter, printmaker and collage artist from Warwick who has had exhibitions all over the U.S. and at numerous places worldwide, has some insight into what Hernandez and Torres face inside. He was invited years ago to sit in on an art class at the State Correctional Institution at Graterford, a maximum security prison near Philadelphia.

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Pencil study of a child by José Torres

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Talbot says he found during that experience with inmates that "all made great efforts to be authentic in their art-making and much of their work was wonderful."

"It is very difficult to be creative in confinement," he says. "But the act of making art can be, in and of itself, liberating."

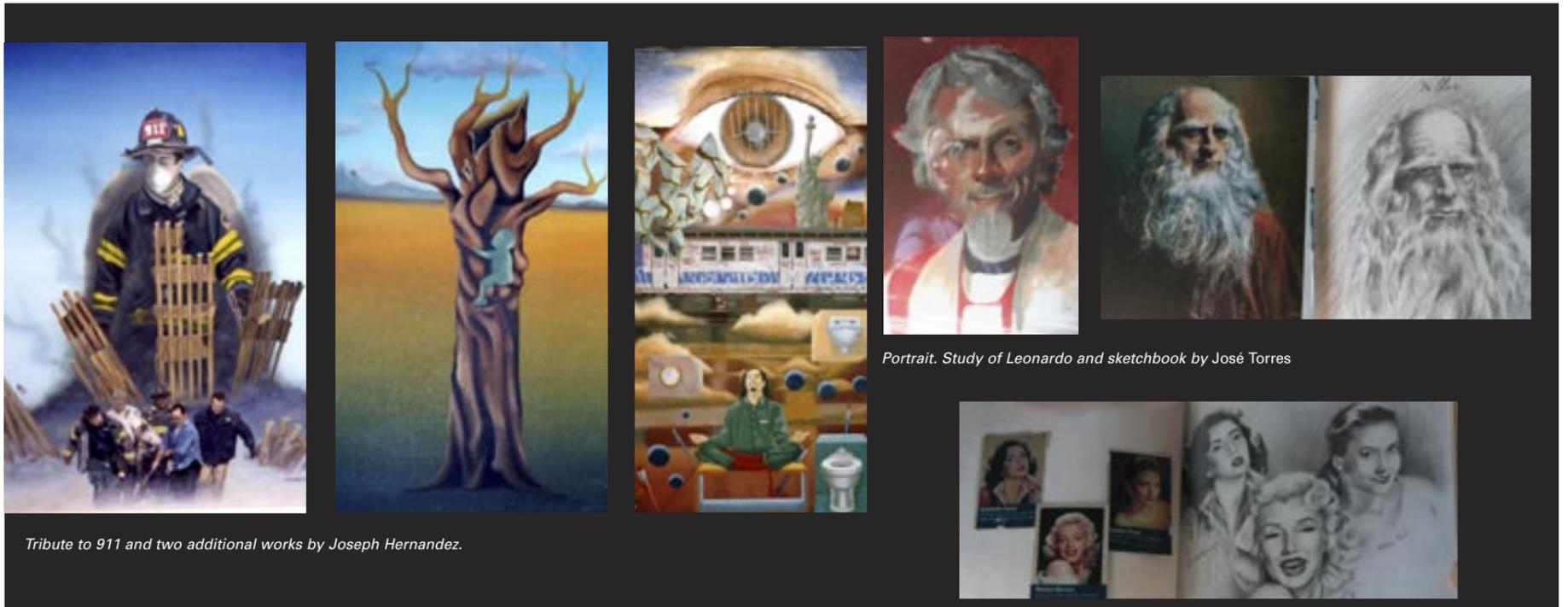
"If people learn healthy, nonaggressive ways (like making art) in which to express themselves, they are less likely to turn to aggression," he adds.

That pretty much parallels what Torres has in mind for the future. He says "art will be involved," but he also would like to counsel kids, teach some kind of class or run an after-school program when he goes back to his native Dominican Republic.

Right now, art for Torres is "what you come back to, your comfort zone, what gets you through the day."

"You look at things differently."

*Prison art is considered by some to be the ultimate outsider, or visionary, art. To see more examples of that genre, go to [www.artbehindbars.com](http://www.artbehindbars.com) or other similar links. For reading material on the subject, check out "Sins and Needles": A Story of Spiritual Healing", by Ray Materson and Melanie Materson, and other related books.*



Tribute to 911 and two additional works by Joseph Hernandez.

Portrait. Study of Leonardo and sketchbook by José Torres

## grantOps

*Below is a sample of available grant listings. For the latest and most up-to-date listings, please visit our website at [www.artsinorange.org](http://www.artsinorange.org)*

**New York Foundation for the Arts Strategic Opportunity Stipends (SOS)** are designed to help individual artists of all disciplines take advantage of opportunities that will significantly benefit their work or career development. Literary, media, visual, music and performing artists may request support from \$100 to \$600 for specific, forthcoming opportunities that are distinct from work in progress. SOS is only available to New York state artists, excluding residents of the five New York City boroughs. Call 845.424.3960 or e-mail [dir@garrisonartcenter.org](mailto:dir@garrisonartcenter.org)

**NYFA's 2008-2009 Artists' Fellowships:** \$7,000 cash awards for unrestricted use are made to individual originating artists living and working in New York. Grants are awarded in 16 artistic disciplines, with applications accepted in eight categories each year. Deadline is early October 2008. [www.nyfa.org](http://www.nyfa.org) for applications.

**2008 National Geographic All Roads Seed Grant Program** provides funding for film projects by and about indigenous and underrepresented minority-culture filmmakers. Up to 16 awards between \$1,000 and \$10,000 may be used toward development and production of a feature film, long or short documentary, short, animation, or music video. Deadline is Nov 15. Guidelines and application online at [www.nationalgeographic.com/allroads/](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/allroads/)

**National Endowment for the Humanities' Fellowships at Digital Humanities Centers Program:** Supports collaboration between digital centers and individual scholars to encourage innovative collaboration on outstanding digital research projects; expand digital literacy and expertise; promote work of digital humanities centers; and encourage broad and open access to the humanities. Fellows receive stipends of \$4,200 per month for periods of six to 12 months of work. Centers may receive up to \$4,200 per month to cover direct and indirect costs. The maximum award for a 12-month grant, therefore, is \$100,800: \$50,400 for the fellow's stipend and \$50,400 for the direct and indirect costs of administering the fellowship. Guidelines and application, [www.neh.gov](http://www.neh.gov). This round of entries due Sept 15.

**Craft Emergency Relief Fund (CERF)** provides grants, no-interest loans and access to brokered goods and services to professional craft artists who have experienced a recent career-threatening emergency. For more info, [www.craftemergency.org/](http://www.craftemergency.org/)

**Capelli D'Angeli Foundation** offers fellowship grants of up to \$500 each to artists in treatment or survivors of cancer who are creating art in all disciplines. Grant recipients and award amounts will be determined after a review of the artist's statement and work in slide form. Applications available at [www.capellidangelifoundation.org](http://www.capellidangelifoundation.org)

**Women's Studio Workshop in Rosendale** has residency grants, including a stipend of \$2,000 to \$3,000 and \$750 for materials, available for artists to produce a limited-edition book at WSW. Working in WSW studios for six to eight weeks, artists will print and bind their own books. Technical assistance includes training on equipment, introduction to materials and assistance with production. Deadline is Nov 15. For more info, [www.wswworkshop.org/\\_opp/artopp\\_grant\\_abr.htmws](http://www.wswworkshop.org/_opp/artopp_grant_abr.htmws)

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