Jail Wall Drawings and Jail Art Programs: Invaluable Tools for Corrections

Lee Michael Johnson¹
University of West Georgia, USA

Abstract

Art can be a valuable tool in corrections. Very little has been written about the use of artistic activities specifically in jail, but a good amount of literature does support arts programs in prison. The arts have several benefits for prisoner rehabilitation (therapy and education), prison quality of life management, and for society in general. It seems that the uses of art in corrections also apply to the more temporary holding environment of jail. Included in this essay are photographs of drawings made on the interior of a county jail. While these drawings are technically “graffiti,” they could suggest an opportunity to productively direct the energies of incarcerated people. The drawings suggest that those who produced them seek creative autonomy and outlets for expression. Perhaps people in trouble with the law would become more seriously involved in rehabilitation programs aimed at reducing recidivism if more opportunities for creative expression were provided.

Keywords: Art, Jail, Programs, Wall Drawings

Introduction

In October of 2002 several photographs were taken of artwork drawn on the interior of a county jail in Indiana, after the population was transferred to a new jail building. A full day was spent thoroughly searching through all of the cells and photographing the artwork. Most of the photographs were taken in lock-up cells (where the artists could better isolate their work and avoid detection) and holding cells (usually distinguished by a great deal of background markings), while a few were taken in day-use areas and the corridors just outside the cells. The artwork largely consists of drawings (made with pencil, pen ink, scratching devices, and other sources of removable color) on the walls and ceilings of the jail. It is fairly evident that alterations and additions to artists’ work were commonly made. Drawings varied greatly in size—some were tiny and others were quite large, drawn in areas of the cell that allowed the most uninterrupted space. They addressed a wide variety of subjects, including Christianity, pop culture, humor, and love as well as violence, horror, doom, fantasy, mystery, evil, death, and drugs. The period over which the drawings accumulated is unknown, but most appeared to have been drawn

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology & Criminology, University of West Georgia, 1601 Maple St., Pafford Building, Carrollton, GA 30118-3010 United States of America. E-mail: ljjohnson@westga.edu
in recent years. According to the county police chief, the interior walls were last painted roughly ten years prior to the jail’s closing.

The artists created the drawings with few resources. Virtually everything they could have used would have been contraband. As one would assume, their drawings were created against jail rules. They were considered minor infractions instead of formal crimes—vandalism or destruction of property. The chief explained that controlling graffiti was very difficult. First, it was difficult to administer sanctions, mostly because there was no separate disciplinary area in which to place detainees. Limiting visitation and privileges such as television and microwaves were punishment options but were seldom feasible. Usually, the most that could be done was to document the action on the detainee’s conduct record. Second, acts of graffiti were nearly impossible to detect. The jail was very overcrowded, making it hard to monitor such behavior. Officers could not enter cells often enough to catch someone drawing on the walls. Also, the transient nature of the jail population made it difficult to determine who, exactly, was responsible for the drawings. Therefore, one very rarely got caught for making graffiti.

Despite aggressive efforts, none of the artists could be located for interviews. The chief and jail supervisors asked many of the detainees and jail staff if they knew of anyone who could have made the drawings, but to no avail. Anyone responsible for the drawings was asked to come forward on a local public access television program that featured some of the photographs, but no one obliged. It is likely that most of the artists were no longer in custody or in the area. Also, even though reassurances were made that the artists would not be prosecuted, they still may have been reluctant to make contact. It is understandable that one would remain fearful of being charged with destruction of property despite this reassurance.

The chief estimated that just before moving to the new jail, the inmate population (totaling about 250) was about 80% White, 10% Black, and the remaining 10% consisted of Hispanic or Latino/a and “other.” Although Blacks make up a rather small proportion of the jail’s population, they appear to be over-represented, making up less than 1% (0.9) of the county’s population in the year 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau 2004). Hispanics or Latino/as are not as disproportionate, making up almost 5% (4.8) of the county’s population in 2000 (92.2% of the county is white) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). However, racial representation cannot be accurately portrayed here because many detainees live outside of the county, including a neighboring county with a much higher minority population. Individually, nothing is known about the artists other than their sex. Drawings by women were scarce, mostly because only about twelve females were there at any given time. Also, a female cell tended not to have nearly as many drawings and writings as a male cell. The result is that only a handful of photographed female drawings were obtained. Yogan and Johnson (2006) feature more of the women’s drawings from the jail in their analysis of gender differences in the art. All of the drawings presented in this essay were created by men.

Jail Wall Drawings

In an article, art therapist Michael Hanes (2005) provides a rare and interesting analysis of jail wall artwork and reveals the importance that creative expression has for enduring the conditions of incarceration. This section, like Hanes (2005), presents visual images created on the walls of a county jail. The drawings that will soon follow speak to the
creative potential that exists behind bars and hopefully suggests the opportunity to get persons in jail more involved in creative activities that are legal and constructive. Figures 1 through 10 are a few examples of the wall drawings located in the jail.

Figure 1: Celtic Cross

(The pages on the left contained some bible passages.)

Figure 2: Cross & Heart

The Cross was a frequently used symbol among the jail's many Christian drawings; they could represent the artists' feelings of redemption and atonement (Hanes, 2005).
"Scary" images were also popular, especially skulls.
Figure 7: “Pandy”

The symbolism of the pencil-dagger impaling the snake provokes curiosity.

Figure 8: Snake
While the jail’s drawings are technically “graffiti,” perhaps their characterization as “artwork” is more important than the fact that the artists created them on property that
did not belong to them. The term graffiti carries some connotation of illegitimacy, and it may imply the inconsideration of or intent to destroy property that belongs to other individuals or the general public (to vandalize) as a major motive and/or way to get a point across (such as the projection of gang representation or political statements). However, it is unknown that any of this applies to the thoughts and feelings that most of the jail artists had when creating their images. Perhaps many of the artists were driven more, or solely, by creative desire than some kind of aggression or defiance, and the interior of the jail was the only “canvas” they had at the time. While graffiti cannot be condoned, and can get one into further legal trouble, the jail’s wall drawings show that incarcerated artists can be quite talented, their work can be fascinating, and they have a strong desire to express themselves. The drawings imply a way to spend time in incarceration productively and that art is available as a constructive activity after release.

Various forms of “jailhouse art” likely have been around since the creation of jails and prisons (Ursprung 1997), and even earlier. Artwork created spontaneously under detainment (wall drawings and carvings, small handmade items, tattoos) existed long before the creation of formal penal systems in other prison-like environments like gladiator barracks, medieval dungeons and oubliettes, prisoner of war/internment camps, concentration camps, and insane asylums (Cardinal 1997). Captives have proven to be quite resourceful throughout history (Cardinal 1997; Riches 1994b; Ursprung 1997), not only using alternative drawing materials like pen ink and makeshift carving tools to create wall art and tattoos, but also crafting objects (symbols, sculptures, toys, replicas, etc.) from materials like clothing and other fabrics, meat bones, wood, matchsticks, straw, paper, playing cards, and even bread dough (Cardinal 1997). It is apparent then that “creativity and artistic expression are naturally inherent in correctional settings” (Gussak and Ploumis-Devick 2004, p. 35).

Discussion

Prison Art Programs

During the twentieth century, as prisoner art and craft work became more popular art forms in western countries, they were adopted as formal prison programs (Cardinal 1997; van der Hoeven 1988). Arts in corrections programs have a noticeable presence in the United States (Hillman, 2003), but they appear to be more widely used in the United Kingdom and Europe (Schoonover 1986). Proponents argue that the value of such programs is multi-dimensional—they offer simultaneous opportunities for therapy, education, vocation, and recreation (Kornfeld 1997). Further, many fascinating works of art have been created in prison art programs. Some fine examples are presented in Kornfeld’s (1997) book on prisoner artwork and Gussak and Virshup’s (1997) anthology text on art therapy in corrections.

Despite the need to explore alternative approaches to corrections and the recognized uses of artistic activities, there has been a significant decrease in the support of prison art programs (Hillman 2003; Kornfeld 1997). Prison art programs in the United States declined sharply in the 1980s, likely due to demands by political leaders and the public for prisons to cease providing prisoners with what were thought to be unwarranted privileges and amenities (Hillman 2003). Although they seem to be more highly regarded in England (Schoonover 1986), prison art programs there too experienced sharp cuts in the late 1990s (Clements 2004).
It is difficult to find evidence that prison art programs failed in meeting important correctional goals (Hillman 2003). In fact, an extensive review of the academic and professional literature supports the use of artistic activities in prisons (Johnson 2008) and in community-based corrections (Johnson 2007). In the literature, prison art programs receive a great deal of validation from researchers, teachers, artists, therapists and counselors, and administrators. This international community of scholars and practitioners identify several benefits for therapy, education, institutional management, and society in general.

Liebmann (1994) and Gussak (1997a) each discuss the key benefits of art therapy in corrections. First, art communicates meaningful nonverbal messages for clients who have trouble with oral and written communication. It removes the vulnerability associated with verbal expression and provides another option to those with poor literacy and verbal skills. Further, art yields concrete products that can be used to initiate discussion and note developments over time. Next, art can be a bridge between therapist and client for dealing jointly with issues that make clients feel uncomfortable. It bypasses clients’ reluctance to explore treatment issues honestly and gets them actively involved in the therapy. Next, art provides a safe and acceptable way to express, release, and deal with potentially destructive feelings like anger and aggression. It allows clients to make expressions socially acceptable to both the prison subculture and outside culture. Finally, art is a means of self-expression and self-exploration that lets clients be creative and perhaps enjoy themselves. It taps into the creativity that stems from the intense need for diversion and escape in prison (Gussak 1997a; Liebmann 1994).

Art therapy can be used to respond to diverse prisoner needs. Artistic activities can be used to treat incarcerated clients with substance abuse issues (Williams 2003), mental illnesses and disabilities (Cheney 1997; Day and Onorato 1989; Delshadian 2003; Edwards 1994; Karban and West 1994; Sundaram 1997; Teasdale 1997; Woodall, Diamond, and Howe 1997), physical impairments (Sundaram 1997; Taylor 1997), child abuse and other victimization issues (Day and Onorato 1997; Merriam 1998; Williams 2003; Williams and Taylor 2004), and issues of grief and loss (Ferszt, Hayes, DeFedele and Horn 2004). Further, artistic activities can be used to identify those who are potentially self-harmful (Cheney 1997; Day and Onorato 1989).

Art therapy helps participants cope with the stress of prison life (Hall 1997; Merriam 1998; Riches 1994a; Schoonover 1986; Teasdale, 1995). Gussak (2006 & 2007) showed that art therapy groups can significantly reduce prisoners’ depressive symptoms and improve their mood. Learning and creating art can improve prisoners’ self-confidence (Williams, 2003), self-worth (Grace 1993; Karban and West 1994), and self-esteem (Clements 2004; Merriam 1998; Riches 1994a; Schoonover 1986). Participating in art helps prisoners create and maintain favorable social identities against the loss of identity provoked by the prison environment and stigma attached to the status of prisoner (Hall 1997; Williams 2003). Also, art can help improve and maintain relationships between prisoners and their families. Prisoners can use artwork to convey thoughts and feelings to family members that are difficult to express verbally, as well as a way to provide them with gifts (Murphy 1994; Riche, 1994a; Schoonover 1986).

Corrections demand that offenders take responsibility for their behaviors and desist offending. Art therapy can be used to confront offending behavior (McCourt 1994; Teasdale 1997), break the cycle of violence and fear that characterizes the lives of many offenders (Graef 2002), and explore strategies against re-offending (Grace 1993).
used as a process to help clients emerge from avoidance and denial (Graef 2002; Murphy 1994), come to terms with the realization that they have hurt others, and cope with shame (Murphy 1994). As a safer form of ventilation, art teaches an alternative outlet for angry and aggressive feelings that clients may tend to project outward as destructive behavior (Cronin 1994; Graef 2002; Gussak 1997a; Hall 1997; McCourt 1994; Merriam 1998).

Art serves an important purpose in the prison education curriculum (Billington 2002; Williams 2003). The goals of art education are closely linked and overlaps with those of art therapy (Edwards 1994; Riches 1994a). Art encourages individuals to look at and learn about the world in a fresh way (Edwards 1994) and can be used to help prisoners develop an awareness and appreciation of social and cultural diversity (Carlyle 2000; Gussak and Ploumis-Devick 2004). Engaging in art offers prisoners opportunities to explore their inner potential and alternative interests, improve their communication abilities, appreciate their own and others’ ideas and cultures, become active citizens, and develop the critical attitude necessary to examine lifestyle (Clements 2004). Further, art education serves to attract and help prisoners who have experienced little academic success and are apprehensive about participating in education programs (Clements 2004; Gussak and Ploumis-Devick 2004; Hawk, Bohna Jr., Riddell, and Stark 1993; Leach 2002; Riches 1994a; Schoonover 1986); it is “hands-on” learning that offers the opportunity to do well at another important type of study (Riches 1994a).

It is important to recognize that art and craft activities in prison are not merely recreational. They strengthen cognitive abilities and help students integrate knowledge, feelings, and manual skills (Clements 2004; Riches 1994a). Recent research shows that well implemented programs that truly address prisoners’ multiple educational needs are more strongly associated with improved employment capabilities and reduced re-incarceration; effective education programs are more likely to contain academic, vocational, social skill, emotional self-management, and artistic components (Vacca 2004). Graef (2002) argues that the arts are not just a supplement to prison education—they are integral to achieving its primary goals.

Art programs contribute to the security and quality of life of the prison (Clements, 2004; Gussak and Ploumis-Devick 2004; Schoonover 1986). Through their various functions, art programs help humanize the prisoners and their environment (Hall 1997; Williams 2003). The harsh environment of prison threatens to deprive its residents’ of liberty, individuality, and relationships with the outside world. It allows few outlets for creative expression, stimulation, and self-development (Williams 2003). Artistic activities helps individuals survive these conditions (Baroody-Hart and Farrell 1987; Schoonover 1986), as art involves acts of creation that are inherently liberating and exploratory, even inside the restrictive space of prison (Grace 1993).

It has been shown that art programs can boost prisoner morale and improve behavior (Graef 2002; Gussak and Ploumis-Devick 2004; Leach 2002; Riches 1994b; Schoonover, 1986). Artistic activities provide prisoners with some relief from the pains of imprisonment (Day and Onorato 1989; Gussak and Ploumis-Devick 2004; Hall 1997; Riches 1994b; Schoonover 1986). They serve as a way to deal with boredom (Baroody-Hart and Farrell 1987; Clements 2004; Gussak 1997a; Williams 2003), an alternative outlet for venting frustration and aggression, a distraction from acting out (Clements 2004; Day and Onorato 1989; Hall 1997; Riches 1994a), and a way to distance oneself from the violent and exploitative behavior of other prisoners (Baroody-Hart and Farrell 1987).
Also, art programs foster peaceful, cooperative relationships among and between prisoners and staff (Day and Onorato 1989; Hall 1997; Mullen 1999; van der Hoeven 1988). The privileges of being able to engage in artistic activities give prisoners a vested interest in conforming to rules and developing good relationships with staff (Baroody–Hart and Farrell 1987). The necessity for disciplinary control measures may be reduced when artistic activities are available as options for emotional ventilation (Day and Onorato 1989). As a management tool then, art programs can reduce stress and violent behavior, and the financial costs of responding to such matters (Schoonover 1986; Williams 2003).

Finally, prison art programs can be of value to local communities and society at large. Incarcerated artists make valuable aesthetic contributions, for example, when their work is put on display in museums, galleries, and other venues for the public to enjoy (Aylott 2002; Wisker 1997). When the artists sell their work on the outside, they earn a legitimate income (Riches 1994b; Williams 2003), engage in productive exchanges with the community, and can help fund the art programs (Williams 2003). With guidance, education, and training, some participants in prison art programs could find a career in art (Schoonover 1986). Another potential benefit is reduced recidivism (Gussak and Ploumis–Devick 2004; Schoonover 1986; Williams 2003). Artistic activities may be used be to counter criminality. For example, art may motivate prisoners to become more engaged with therapy programs intended to promote desistance through attitudinal and situational transformation (Teasdale 1995).

Art Programs in Jail

The literature contains a great deal of work favoring the use of artistic activities in prison. Arts in corrections are strongly supported by theoretical arguments, anecdotal testimony from practitioners, and a small amount of empirical research. However, although it may be implied, the literature scarcely discusses the value of artistic activities specifically to the more temporary holding environment of jail. There should be reason to expect that the potential to nurture constructive creativity also exists in jails. Prison and jail are both secure, punitive confinement settings, so many of the uses of art programming in prisons would apply to jails as well. In his analysis of jail wall art, Hanes (2005) identifies several functions of illicit art creation, including fulfilling the need for self-directed expression, adapting to and enduring the circumstances of incarceration, filling idle time and dealing with boredom, providing a temporary escape or imaginary retreat, and providing a safer and more benign outlet for expressing thoughts, feelings, and aggressive impulses. These resemble some of the important functions of formal prison art programs.

Jails are more temporary holding facilities than prisons and typically do not have as many amenities and programs. Their lack of mention in the literature makes one wonder if there are many art programs that exist in jails. Day and Onorato (1989) wrote about one interesting jail art program, but it was primarily therapeutic and only served patients incarcerated in the psychiatric wing of a large metropolitan county jail. Also, Overhultz (2001) reports on an annual exhibit and sale of artwork created by inmates in the Broward County, Florida jail system that raises money for local charities. The shorter stays could still be valuable time for therapeutic and rehabilitative activities. (What good does it do to make detainees idle during this time?) Further, one may spend a significant amount of time in jail awaiting trial or transfer, or may serve a short sentence in jail instead of prison. Some jail stays amount to a year or more—plenty of time to be active in an art program.
While short stays and limited resources may render elaborate, costly jail art programs unfeasible, modest programs could be sufficient to provide opportunities for constructive activities that assist in rehabilitation. Day and Onorato (1989) do not feel that limited materials, for instance, handicap art therapy: “creative expression is never contingent upon the availability of elaborate art supplies” (p. 133). Perhaps jail art programs can give jail detainees a good start in orienting themselves to art programs in other settings (in the community, or in prison). Perhaps some of those who drew on the jail’s walls would not have done so if they had something else on which to draw. The Anthology of Inmate Art, available in the project staff’s report, (Hawk, Bohna Jr., Riddell and Stark 1993) shows just how inmates’ creative energies can be channeled through conventional outlets.

Also, as with prisons, art programming may be a good jail management tool, promoting the safety and quality of life for both inmates and staff. Jail conditions are often harsher than those of prison, and can therefore be more physically and psychologically stressful (Irwin, 1985). These harsh conditions are counter-rehabilitative. Prisoners who become distressed by, or adapt to, this environment are not being equipped for cooperative relationships and achieving personal growth during the stay, or for re-entry and re-integration into the community. Humanizing the prison environment would reduce the “prisonization” of incarcerated persons, reducing potential barriers to rehabilitation. Art programs help humanize the prison environment.

As an example, a particular suggestion for the use of art in multiple approaches to rehabilitation can be made: artistic activities could be incorporated into jail drug offender treatment. As a therapeutic tool, participants in the drug treatment program offered at the new county jail facility in Indiana are routinely asked to write letters saying “goodbye to their drug of choice” upon graduating from the program. (The drawings featured in the previous section are from the county’s old jail.) Figures 11-13 display one of these letters and its accompanying drawing, created by an anonymous participant from the summer 2004 cohort.

It is interesting that the author took it upon himself to include a drawing—he did not simply complete the assignment as directed by the counselor. Apparently, he had a great deal to say and felt a desire to express his hopes and fears visually. The author may have received a greater therapeutic release by going beyond the assignment and creating the drawing. Perhaps he was seeking autonomy, a more active role, a broader outlet for expression in his treatment, and perhaps this kind of involvement should be encouraged.

As with any correctional program, a jail art program will have to be properly constructed and implemented to be effective. First, the use of artistic activities in corrections will likely be ineffective as an isolated tool. They must be part of a broader treatment “package” consisting of several components tailored to individuals’ needs. Integrated, or, “multi-modal” programs that address the multiple needs of offenders, including personal development, are being recognized as more effective rehabilitation strategies in corrections (Harper, Man, Taylor and Niven 2005; MacKenzie 2006). Second, a treatment program must be carried out with intelligence, diligence, and honesty. Many correctional programs fail because they are not properly implemented, not necessarily because they are based on weak theories (Bonta 1996; Gendreau 1996; Harper et al 2005; Palmer 1994; MacKenzie 2006). To be properly implemented, correctional art programs need cooperation from everyone working in the correctional setting (Day and Onorato 1989; Grace 1993; Riches 1994a; Mackie 1994), and art professionals need proper support and training (Schoonover 1986).
GOOD BYE MR ALCOHOL

Saying good-by to my drug of choice is like saying
an eulogy at a funeral. Alcohol was such a
good friend of mine. I can remember all the
good times we had together and tried to forget
most of the bad ones. The ballgames, picnics,
camping trips, everything I did centered around
you. If there wasn’t alcohol there I wouldn’t go
or brought my own.

Then why am I so happy to say good-bye to one
of my closest and dearest friend? Why has it
caused so much pain and sorrow in my life?
I wouldn’t or couldn’t do anything without you.
I even would take showers with you.

Now that you are gone out of my life. I feel like
partying again. But will I know how to party with
out you by my side? This is the question. Can I
function without you there? Yes I can!! You
have destroyed so many things in my life.
I take that back. We have destroyed so much
because alcohol can’t do it alone without my
help. Each time I tried to kick you out of
life, you just came back again and again.

You have been my down fall since that first time
when you were a teen-ager. I should of learned
when I got into trouble way back then. But no,
some of us just never seem to catch on.
OF THE DUMBEST THINGS IS, GETTING THROWN IN JAIL, HAVING TO BAIL OUT, PAYING ATTORNEY FEES. THEN GO TO COURT. POSSIBLY DO SOME TIME IN JAIL. LOSE YOUR JOB, FAMILY, HOUSE, RESPECT, AND SO MUCH MORE. THEN YOU GET OUT. A FRIEND HAS TO PICK YOU UP, BECAUSE YOU EITHER LOST YOUR LICENSE OR VEHICLE. THE FIRST THING YOU DO IS GO TO THE BAR AND HAVE A DRINK. A DRINK THAT STARTED THIS WHOLE MESS IN THE FIRST PLACE. NOW TELL ME WHERE IS THE SAVANITY IN ALL OF THIS?

SO THIS IS WHY I MUST BID YOU A FOND FAIRWELL. FOR OUR PATHS SHOULDN'T HAVE MET THE FIRST TIME. THIS WILL BE ONE OF THE HARDEST THINGS I HAVE EVER DONE IN MY LIFE BEFORE. WE HAVE BEEN TOGETHER FOR OVER THIRTY YEARS NOW. TO SHUT YOU OUT NOW AND KNOW YOU CAN NEVER RETURN. FOR IF I LET YOU COME BACK EVEN ONCE, THEN I KNOW YOU WILL START ALL THE OLD FEELINGS AND WAYS AGAIN. GOOD-BYE OLD FRIEND I CAN'T SAY IT HAS BEEN NICE TO KNOW YOU, BUT I CAN SAY IT WILL BE NICE TO GET RID OF YOU. NOW WITH ALL THE GOOD-BYES SAID AND DONE, MAY MY LIFE TAKE ON A NEW MEANING. CLEAN, CLEAR, AND SIMPER. PEOPLE ARE NEVER TOO OLD OR SET IN THEIR WAYS TO CHANGE. SOMETIMES YOU MUST SAY GOOD-BYE BEFORE YOU CAN SAY HELLO. GOOD-BYE MR. ALCOHOL MAY YOU NEVER CAUSE ANY MORE PAIN OR SORROW IN MY LIFE!
Censorship is one potential threat to the success of a correctional art program. Censorship’s suppression of creative expression can interfere with the therapeutic, educational, and socially interactive processes that lead to rehabilitation (Mullen 1999). Factors such as institutional and program rules, political ideology, and the personal opinions of employees can suppress artistic creation and self-exploration (Kornfeld 1997; Mullen, 1999), but so too can the prisoner subculture of toughness and the reluctance by prisoners to explore and expose their inner thoughts and feelings (Kornfeld 1997). Prisoner artwork is highly subject to misinterpretation and may often be perceived as a threat to rehabilitation and institutional control. Gussak (1997b) points out a contradiction inherent in prison art: the prison is punitive, but creative activities are rewarding. Incarceration is intended to strip power and deliver pain; art empowers and delivers happiness. Individuals who adhere strongly to the punitive ideology are more likely to be suspicious of creative activities and view prisoner art as a threat or problem—to have a “paranoid reaction” to it (Gussak, 1997b). Hopefully, correctional administrators and staff can be assured that art programs do not threaten processes aimed at security and offender accountability (Gussak 1997b) and will support art programs that grant prisoners a high degree of freedom of expression.

Hanes (2005) pointed out the high degree of self-directedness, resourcefulness, and adaptability made evident by the presence of jail wall art. The jailhouse artwork presented in this essay is expression provided autonomously by incarcerated individuals. The artists
produced it on their own terms, without instruction or assistance from some kind of formal art program, even against rules. Their work suggests that they want to be productive and have a strong desire for creative autonomy and outlets for expression. Aesthetics-enhanced rehabilitation programs provide such outlets for creative expression. Perhaps then, incarcerated individuals will become more seriously involved in rehabilitation programs if opportunities for creative expression are provided, which in turn should boost the programs’ potential to enhance reform and reduce re-offending. Also, it seems quite apparent that art programs can contribute to institutional management and help create a safer environment for both prisoners and staff.

Acknowledgements

The photo project was funded by an Expense Grant from the Valparaiso University Committee on Creative Work and Research. All photographs were taken by Amy McFadden, BA Sociology & Art-Photography Valparaiso University. Thanks to Chief Dave Lain for initiating this project, to Sergeant Mike Krawczyk for getting us into and throughout the jail, and to Drs. Daniel S. Murphy, Nathan W. Pino, Stephen C. Richards, Jeffrey Ian Ross, and Charles S. Suchar for their helpful comments on earlier drafts.

References


