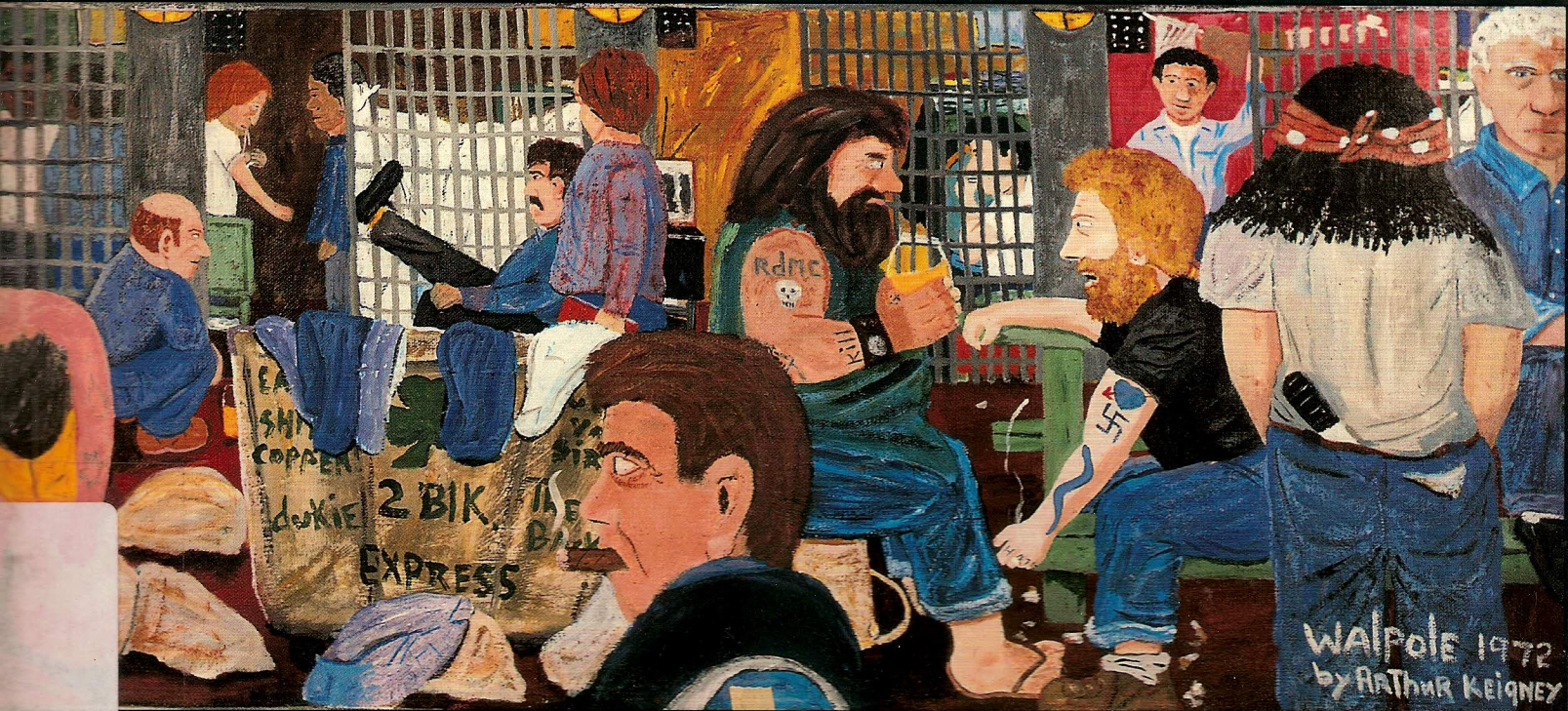


CELLBLOCK VISIONS



PRISON ART IN AMERICA



PHYLLIS KORNFIELD

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CELLBLOCK VISIONS

PRISON ART IN AMERICA

PHYLLIS KORNFELD

With a foreword by Roger Cardinal

"Almost everyone in prison is either making art or buying it," notes Phyllis Kornfeld as she uncovers the alternative artworld flourishing today in American prisons. Her book, **CELLBLOCK VISIONS**, not only presents some of the most inventive and gripping examples of outsider art, but also offers an unprecedented account of prison art in particular as a subject worthy of serious consideration. Having worked for many years as an art facilitator in jails and penitentiaries, Kornfeld is in a unique position to explain how art emerges in the most restrictive of environments and what gives inmate art its distinctive character. From painting to toilet-paper sculpture, the works of prisoners range from awkward attempts to amazing displays of virtuosity. In this book, Kornfeld presents the artists whose works offer freshness and surprise and tells the moving stories behind them.

Filled with quotes from men and women prisoners and Kornfeld's own anecdotes, **CELLBLOCK VISIONS** shows how these artists, most of them having no previous training, turn to their work for a sense of self-worth, an opportunity to vent rage, or a way to find peace. We see how the artists deal with the cramped space, limited light, and narrow vistas of their prison studios, and how the security bans on many art supplies lead them to ingenious resourcefulness, as in extracting color from shampoo and weaving with cigarette wrappers.

(continued on back flap)

(continued from front flap)

Kornfeld covers the traditional prison arts, such as soap carving and tattoo, and devotes a major section to painting, where we see miniatures depicting themes of alienation and escape, idyllic landscapes framed by bars, portraits of women living in a fantasy world, large canvasses filled with erotic and religious symbolism and violent action. The brief, vivid biographies of each artist portray that individual's experience of crime, prison, and art itself.

There is a growing movement to bring the best of prison art to the public's attention—for the dynamic immediacy of its form and for the power of its messages. This book is a contribution to that movement and a tribute to the humanity of the artists.

Phyllis Kornfeld has been a painter and a teacher for many years, working with special populations in nontraditional settings. In 1983, she began conducting visual arts activities with prison inmates and has since worked with men and women incarcerated in eighteen institutions, from county jail to death row. Kornfeld writes and lectures on prison art and curates exhibitions of the work. Roger Cardinal is Professor of Literary and Visual Studies at the University of Kent and the author of several books on outsider art.

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"Walpole, 1972." From the collection
of Herbert Waide Hemphill, Jr.
Photo courtesy of Phyllis Kind
Gallery.

A D V A N C E P R A I S E F O R
C E L L B L O C K V I S I O N S



"Some of the best prison art I've ever seen."

—Norman Mailer

"Art is what human beings do—Stone Age cave dwellers in Altamira and 20th Century prison dwellers in the United States of America. Stripped of freedom, beautiful surroundings, and supportive community, these convicts draw pictures of what their souls see. They sketch their way past despair. They give us insight into what it means to be a Thrown-Away-One. Their pictures cry out: 'I, too, can see. I, too, can create. I, too, am a human being.'"

—Sister Helen Prejean, CSJ, author of *Dead Man Walking*

"Powerful and beautiful stuff that, once again, makes us question our sometimes stupid definitions of art. . . . In an America that is in the process of returning to the medieval idea of prisons as a place of punishment and revenge, as opposed to places of rehabilitation and healing, here is a tiny ray of hope. Here is art that evidences deep and personal healing and lasting change."

—David Byrne

"Phyllis Kornfeld has very extensive experience in the field of prison art. Her book makes that very apparent, providing the general reader with a powerful introduction to the role of art in prison life, and answering questions that the general reader will have about prisoners and their involvement with art and creativity. Her writing has a ring of truth about it, and she obviously writes, with real knowledge and liking, about the prisoners she has known. . . . Kornfeld has found astonishingly fine examples of important art being done in prisons, some of which falls into the area of Outsider Art, in which there is presently so much interest. The color reproductions make evident the high quality of the very rare and unusual material she has found."

—John MacGregor, author of *Discovery of the Art of the Insane*

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