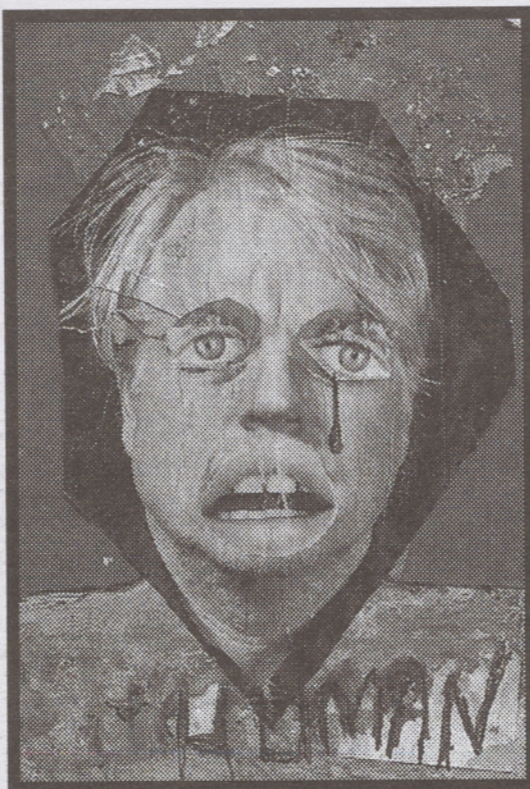
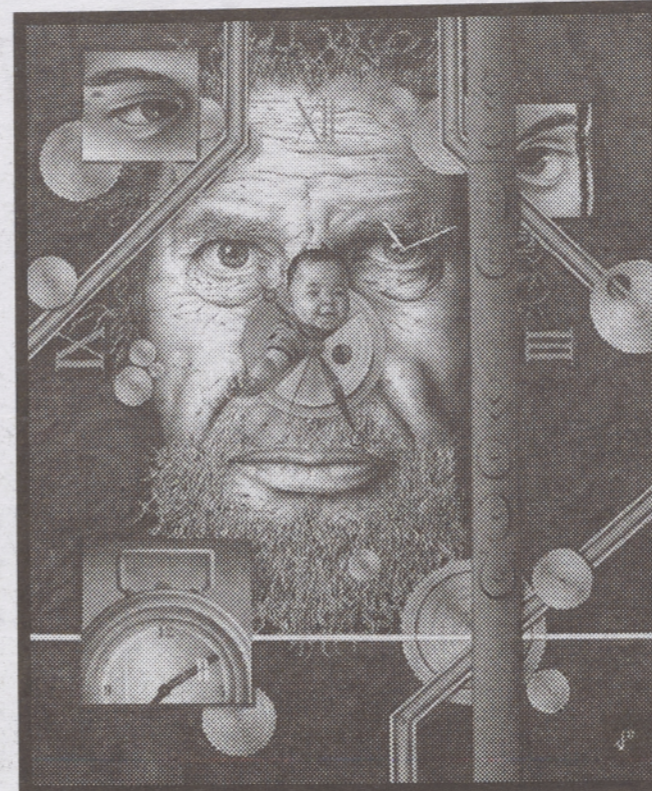


# 'They are human beings'



Mixed media by B. Pat



Drawing by Jerome Sloan

*A new gallery show serves as a glimpse into the minds of Oregon state prisoners.*

**BY EMILY GREEN**  
STAFF WRITER

David Slader first laid his hands on a painting signed "B. Pat" inside a decommissioned jail, located in the cellar of Coquille's old city hall building.

The clown-like face painted with crushed-candy pigment was as raw as it was disturbing.

"It's a window into a very troubled mind," Slader said. "And that's what makes it so powerful."

Across the self-portrait was scrawled the phrase "Human Being."

It reminded Slader of an exhibit he'd seen about three years earlier in New York City at a folk art museum. It was a collection created by the French artist Jean Dubuffet, whose style was modeled after the works of mental hospital patients and children.

Dubuffet coined the phrase "art brut" to describe art created outside of cultural norms and untethered by formal training.

"Much of the art brut work is from mental patients," Slader said. As he pointed to B. Pat's self-portrait, now lying on his dining room table, he said, "As you can see, this probably fits that criteria in some way."

Slader had found the piece while rifling through the remains of an inmate art show called "Cries from the Cage," which toured Oregon in 2011.

He was looking for artists to showcase in July alongside his latest collection of oil paintings at Gallery 114 in the Pearl District, and he thought Oregon's prisons might hold some promising talent.

An attorney-turned-artist, Slader spent the last decade of his legal career suing the Archdiocese of Portland on behalf of sex abuse victims. But he remembered how in his earlier days as a criminal defense lawyer, an incarcerated client had paid him with paintings of iconic African-Americans.

He Googled "Oregon prison art," and it led him to a website of the same name.

Bandon resident Victoria Tierney had created the site to showcase and help sell the work of incarcerated artists she'd featured in an exhibit several years earlier. She sent Slader to the old city hall building in Coquille to select some items for the show.

Tierney had suggested that Slader consider artists Jerome Sloan and David Drenth.

Sloan, an inmate at Snake River Correctional Institution in Eastern Oregon, skillfully draws photo-realistic portraits

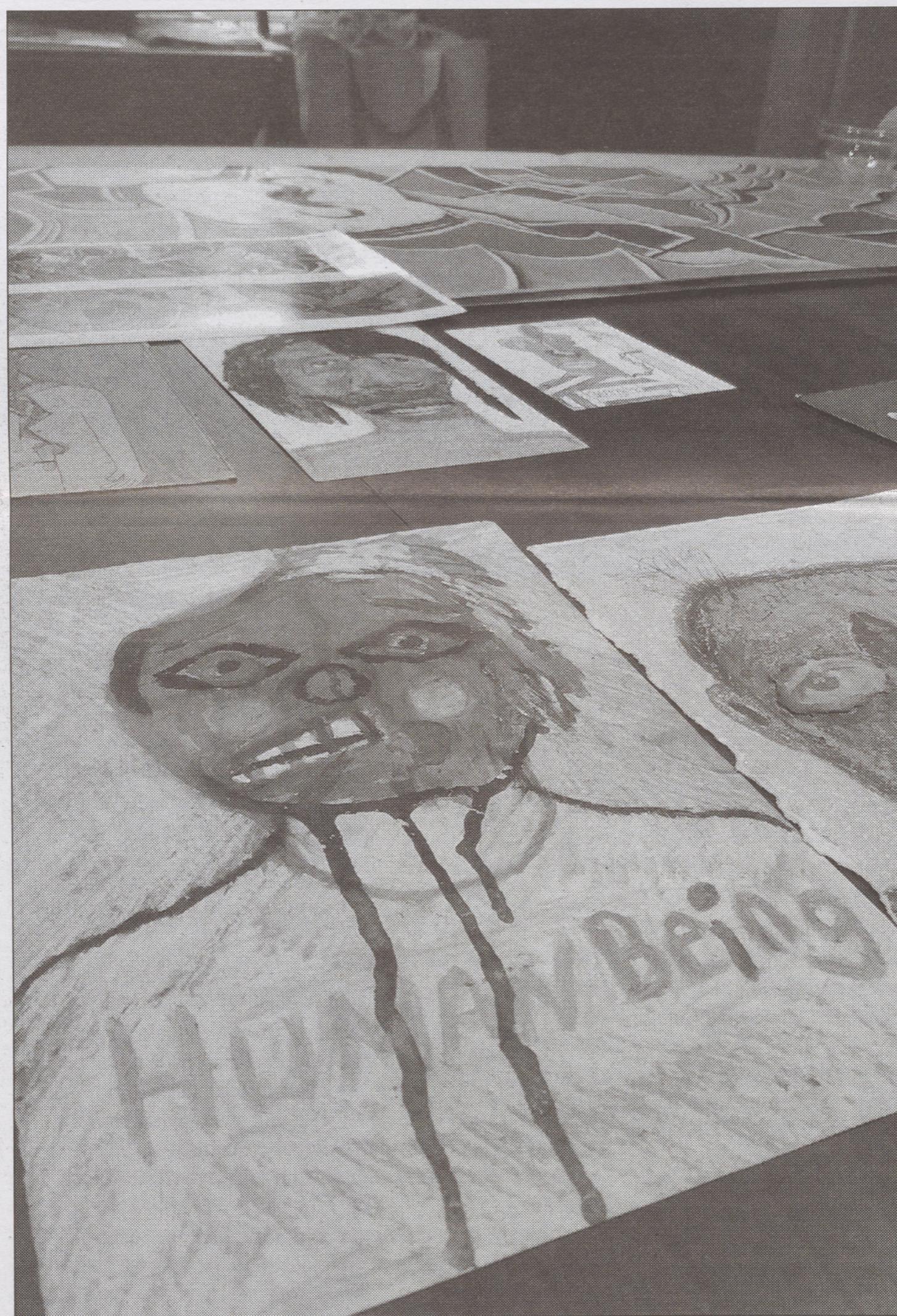


PHOTO BY EMILY GREEN

*The name of David Slader's inmate art show, "Human Being," is inspired by a painting by B. Pat, one of the inmates whose art is featured in the show.*

interwoven with objects, often clock parts, and his own alphabet of symbols. His "Time Series" will be featured at the gallery.

He uses proceeds from his art sales to help support his son, who was born after he was incarcerated. He described his series as: "about how I look at time now. I now see that time is about my family and how the next generation will be better than me."

Drenth is an Oregon State Penitentiary inmate whose 5-foot long, brightly colored murals incorporate cubism and metaphoric surrealism.

The show, aptly titled "Human Being," kicks off July 5 with an auction from 6 to 8 p.m. to benefit the Oregon Justice Resource Center, followed by its official opening on First Thursday from 6 to 9 p.m.

Drenth spoke to Street Roots from Oregon State Penitentiary in Salem, where he earned an associate degree in art through Chemeketa Community College.

"Look at the art – look at how much hope it's given me," he said. "I wouldn't even be talking to you if it wasn't for the art."

Drenth said he works about 40 hours each week cleaning up the prison yard, for which he earns \$40 a month. It's about the same amount he spends on the art supplies for each piece that he creates within the walls of his 6-foot by 7 1/2-foot cell.

"A bag of coffee is \$10, and pencils are \$1.39 each," he said. "I have to make a choice between my art supplies and if I want to drink coffee."

"One of the reasons I started doing the art," he said, "is because I realized that prison jobs don't pay that much, so I am going to have to somehow make more than I am able to make in here to be able to survive in here."

Both Sloan and Drenth are serving life sentences for their roles in murders that occurred decades ago.

Drenth, 58, was 27 when he was sentenced, and Sloan, 42, was 20. Neither man pulled the trigger himself, but in Oregon, anyone in a group that commits a felony that results in a loss of life is guilty of murder.

Time is a common theme in both their work, whether an hourglass or ticking hands of a clock.

"Sometimes it seems like time gets skewed or distorted," Drenth said. "I'm in the same place for 34 years, and time isn't even real to me anymore."

Tierney has met all three of the inmate artists, and she said while Sloan and Drenth "are more socially conscious," B. Pat was more inwardly focused.

"He's a very troubled soul – he knows he's a very troubled soul. He's done things that he's not proud of, and nobody would be," she said. "He is a man so extremely in touch with his angst, with his suffering – like he's living in hell. And he expresses that in such a way that it can be very moving."

"Strangely enough, he's the one that's out of prison," she said.

Alongside Sloan's beautifully intricate pencil portraiture and Drenth's clean lines and well-composed panoramas, B. Pat's creations, composed from shampoo, coffee, toothpaste and whatever else he could get his hands on, have a childlike quality.

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