

THE ART OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

BY ALEX NOTMAN

Eugene conference illustrates how the arts can teach and heal

More than 130 years after Fyodor Dostoyevsky wrote *The Brothers Karamazov*, UO professor and UNESCO chair Steven Shankman explored the meaning of the Russian novelist's text within the walls of Salem's Oregon State Penitentiary. Shankman describes it as "one of the extraordinary moments in class," or the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, in which Shankman brought students from the UO to discuss literature and ethics with Salem inmates. One passage in particular left a lasting impression on the students:

"Remember especially that you cannot be the judge of anyone. For there can be no judge of a criminal on earth until the judge knows that he, too, is a criminal, exactly the same as the one who stands before him, and that he is perhaps most guilty of all for the crime of the one standing before him."

After studying the quote, Shankman says one of the inmates, or "inside" students, told the class: "I can't go

along with what Dostoyevsky was saying because I'm responsible for the suffering brought to my victims." Later in private, Shankman discussed the inmate's own victimization with him, and how the student-inmate had endured years of physical abuse at the hands of his parents.

"I'm willing to grant the guy next to me a break," the inmate said, tears streaming down his face. "But when it comes to me, I did it, I'm responsible."

The Inside-Out Prison Exchange is part of a three-year UO and UNESCO initiative "Prisons and Peace" that culminates with "Prisons, Compassion, and Peace," a citywide conference that begins this month and ends with the Pacific Northwest March premiere of Jake Heggie's opera, *Dead Man Walking*, preceded by a meet-and-greet with Heggie and with author and restorative justice advocate Sister Helen Prejean, who wrote the book *Dead Man Walking* about her firsthand account of being a spiritual adviser to inmates on death row. The conference, which features over 20 events, is an unprecedented town-

and-gown collaboration including the Eugene Opera, Sponsors, Inc., Downtown Initiative for the Visual Arts (DIVA) and the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art.

The sentiment from *The Brothers Karamazov* strikes at the heart of restorative justice. In a state whose prisons and jails are overflowing, many want an alternative to the current U.S. penal system, which focuses on the crime, the criminal and a punishment. Restorative justice focuses on the healing of victims, offenders and the community and their common agreement on how all parties can move forward in the aftermath of an offense. Beyond collaboration, this conference illustrates how the arts via exhibits like *Visions from Within*, featuring artwork from prisoners or former prisoners, *The Last Supper*, a painted study of death row inmates' last meal requests, and the opera *Dead Man Walking* itself, can inform and heal a community more than criminal justice.

Visions from Within

Joey Hampton wraps his hands around a cup of coffee at Noisette Pastry Kitchen on a blustery winter morning. "I've been doing artwork for most of my life," he says. Hampton was released from the Deer Ridge Correctional Institute on July 18 after spending two and a half years in prison for possessing and delivering heroin. Since his release, Hampton has been living at Sponsors' Roosevelt Crossing transitional housing location. Sponsors provides re-entry and transitional services to people released from Lane County jails and prisons.

Hampton is participating in Sponsors' *Visions from Within* exhibit that will show artwork by incarcerated or formerly incarcerated artists at DIVA, the Eugene Library and the Eugene Airport's Gallery at the Airport. "It was a way to have this population be represented in our 40th, to have this demographic be there when they really can't be there," Sponsors Executive Assistant Trish DeJohn says, sitting next to Hampton. *Visions from Within* is also a celebration of Sponsors' 40th anniversary this March. The only requirement for contributing artists was that their work expresses their experience in prison.

"If one person walks by a painting at any of the three galleries and has some sort of new awareness about Sponsors or a conversion in their heart ... that this is not an 'other,' this is someone like me who appreciates something beautiful. That could do a lot to healing some of the wounds in our community," DeJohn says. "These people who come back to Sponsors are coming home. It's actually a law; they have to be released to the county where their crime happened. These people are not other, they are us!" DeJohn goes on to say these offenders have victims, but "they, too, were victimized."

Hampton nods. He grew up in Eugene, off River Road in a "hippie" neighborhood where he was exposed to drugs and alcohol by age 11. His mother, who was addicted to diet pills, and his stepfather, who was an abusive alcoholic, raised Hampton. As a child, he witnessed his stepfather molest his sister and then his sister molested him. "After a while, when you're told that you're a piece of shit so many times, you start to believe it," Hampton says. He turned to drugs to escape how he was feeling. And while drugs helped him escape the pain, art helped escape the prison of his own experience.

"Art can be a real positive outlet for me, especially dealing with my disease," Hampton says. Hampton, 48, is a longtime survivor of HIV, diagnosed in 1998. "It's a way for me to get away from everything, focus on something, and not have to worry about that for a little while" Hampton says he's been in and out of prison his whole life, and sharpened his hyper-realist graphite drawing techniques while behind bars. "That's why prison produces such amazing artists," he says, "because you have all that time to hone your skills."

"Art is one of the few things that people can engage in, in prison, that's constructive," Sponsors Executive Director Paul Solomon adds. He hopes the exhibit and conference will break down barriers between Eugene citizens and re-entry participants through the lens of art. "Re-entry is critical. Without support, it makes it difficult."

Hampton, who can no longer work due to his health, is



JOEY HAMPTON

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