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PHOTO BY ZACHARY SENN/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Artist and retired attorney David Slader promotes a new art show that shines a light on the humanity behind the state's prison population, standing in front of works created by incarcerated inmates. The exhibit at the Pearl District's Gallery 114 runs through July 28.

# Human Beings, Not Numbers

## Shining light on the humanity of the incarcerated

BY ZACHARY SENN  
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

A new art show at the Pearl District's Gallery 114 invites attendees to confront the humanity of the Oregon state prison system.

David Slader, the show's lead artist and a former attorney, says that the "Human Being," exhibition will challenge you to think about the 14,000 people who are imprisoned through the Oregon Department of Corrections.

"Once those doors clank shut, no one knows that they're there," Slader told the Portland Observer. "It helps us to see that these are human beings, they are not just numbers."

The idea for the show came after Slader began researching prison-made art in Oregon. He was inspired

after viewing an image which was also titled, "Human Being," created by an incarcerated artist known as B. Pat, who asked that his full name not be revealed.

The show includes original works by B. Pat and two other incarcerated artists, Jerome Sloan and David Drenth. The unique experiences of incarcerated individuals allow them to express themselves in truly unique ways.

"There's an emotional intensity that I will never have in my work for the simple reason that I have never had a life of that much pain," said Slader. "I wouldn't wish it on anyone, but it is the essence of what great art is."

Slader says that the featured artists rely on rudimentary art supplies to accomplish their creative feats. Drenth, for example, uses pencils from the prison commissary.

"He works with stubby little colored pencils," Slader said. "He has to get them short, so that someone can't use them as a weapon."

The inmate, who has spent the past 35 years at the Oregon State Prison in Salem, also uses makeshift canvas for

his pieces, which feature sweeping panoramas of surreal-ist scenes.

"He works on a little board on his lap on his cell because there's no art program," Slader explained. "He creates a scroll using this thin brown paper that he gets from the prison laundry."

B. Pat is even more limited in his resources.

"He uses whatever supplies he can get," said Slader. "He makes glue out of toothpaste. He cuts things out of magazines. He draws with ball point pens and pencils."

Slader, who spent the early years of his law career working with the criminal justice system, says that most people would rather not acknowledge the scope of the state's prison population.

"We don't want to think that we have 14,000 people locked up," Slader said.

Slader says that the Snake River Correctional Insti-

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