



One of several prisoners at the Nebraska Penal complex passes the time with art.

Prisoner's art work on display

The building is a dull silver barn. Inside the colors in the paintings are bright—purples, oranges, and reds. The lines and colors are bold.

It is a collection of penal art being displayed and sold at the Trustee Visiting Room at the Nebraska Penal and Correctional Complex. The free show runs from 4:30-9:30 p.m. through Sunday and Dec. 18 to 22.

On exhibit are paintings, matchstick sculptures, pastels, and wood sculptures done by the Penal Complex Art Club.

The Art Club, the only self-sponsored club at the penitentiary according to club president Ben Halsey, receives funding from the Lincoln Art Foundation.

Commission to artists

Inmates who cannot afford the initial expense of materials are advanced the money. As soon as they have sold some of their work, they repay the loan. The artists receive a 95 per cent commission with only 5 per cent going to the hobby center Halsey said.

The club, organized in 1971, has held several shows at the penitentiary, Haymarket Gallery, and State Fair.

Halsey noted that previous sale shows have been more successful due to more publicity and prison administrative support.

"One Sunday show was cancelled since no one had scheduled a guard for the building. In past years we didn't even have guards during our art

shows," Halsey said.

'More support'

"People don't know what is happening at the penitentiary. We need more outside support, more people asking questions and visiting," he said.

Of the 35-40 members of the club, about five are trustees who can work in the trustee hobby room. Four trustee inmates set up the show and talk to visitors.

The other artists, "inside the walls", must work in their cells. They cannot attend the show.

The paintings range from nudes copied from "Playboy" magazine, to Beardsley-like portraits and scenes of Nebraska football games.

Prison feelings

Some of the drawings depict scenes far from the pen. Others capture the feelings of prison life—"Someplace we have not yet been."

The inmates work heavily from photographs and magazines Halsey said. "Arizona Highways," "Playboy," "Oui," and "Nebraskland" are favorites.

Halsey said that, like many of the inmates, he has just recently discovered painting.

"It has opened up a world to me and helps pass the time," he said.

"With encouragement, like teachers from the outside and real classes, we feel that we could do much more. Now we must teach everything to ourselves," Halsey said.

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