

MURAL ARTS PHILADELPHIA ANNOUNCES *VOICES* *Art and Writing Come Together to Shed Spotlight on Prison Reform*

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PHILADELPHIA – November 17, 2016 –Mural Arts Philadelphia announces a new project in its Restorative Justice program, *Voices*, created by lead artists Hank Willis Thomas and Jesse Krimes, and writer and professor Dr. Baz Dreisinger. The project gives voice to the voiceless individuals who are affected by mass incarceration. *Voices* provides a platform for people in the criminal justice system to reflect on and engage in a city-wide dialogue about practices and policies that impact their lives and the lives of those around them. Over the next seven months, Mural Arts will conduct activist-oriented events and discussions; curate a pop-up exhibit, *Writings on the Wall*, hosted by docents who were formerly incarcerated; and create a culminating mural, calling attention to and mobilizing people around issues within the criminal justice system. Dreisinger, writer and professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, and the two nationally-recognized artists, Thomas and Krimes, will exhibit artwork that builds upon on themes expressed through workshops with incarcerated and formerly-incarcerated men and women.

Voices will kick off on Wednesday, November 30, with a livestream event inside Pennsylvania State Correctional Institute at Graterford from 1:30 – 3:30 p.m. [NEED LINK TO LIVESTREAM HERE] The November 30 kickoff event will feature voices of incarcerated individuals, live readings from **Dr. Baz Dreisinger** and **Shaka Senghor**, a former convict, college lecturer, author, and director's fellow of the MIT Media Lab. Dreisinger is the author of *Incarceration Nations*, a first-person odyssey through the prison systems of the world. Senghor's book, *Writing My Wrongs*, is the story of his 19-

year incarceration, five of which were spent in solitary confinement. He confronts his demons, forgives those who hurt him as well as atoning for the wrongs he committed. Readings from both books will be performed by noted hip hop artists **Freeway** and **Prodigy**.

Jane Golden, Executive Director of Mural Arts Philadelphia said, “Mural Arts Philadelphia has been probing issues around restorative justice for 15 years. We are really excited about this new *Voices* project, which will use stimulating discussion and engaging activities along with beautiful public art to further the discussion around mass incarceration, highlighting concrete issues and policies identified by individuals most affected.”

The pop-up exhibit will feature writing by people imprisoned around the world, and a number of citywide cultural events will take place between March and June 2017, including community discussions, book readings, film screenings, and more. The schedule of future events includes:

- March 7, 2017: The documentary *Solitary* will be presented at The Wilma Theater with the filmmaker. <http://deadline.com/2016/04/solitary-supermax-prison-documentary-tribeca-film-festival-hbo-video-1201736496/>
- April 20, 2017: *Voices* will partner with Eastern State Penitentiary to present a panel on art and prison reform featuring Maria Gaspar, a noted artist and social justice activist.
- June 2, 2017: The project will conclude with a mural dedication at 407 North 8th Street and a *Voices* art exhibit at the Painted Bride, with an opening reception on First Friday.

Hank Willis Thomas is a photo conceptual artist working primarily with themes related to identity, history, and popular culture. Thomas’ monograph, *Pitch Blackness*, was published by Aperture. He has exhibited throughout the U.S. and abroad including, The International Center of Photography, Public Art Fund, The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, Studio Museum in Harlem, Musée du quai Branly, and the Cleveland Museum of Art

among others. Thomas' work is in numerous public collections including The Museum of Modern Art New York, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, The Whitney Museum of American Art, The Brooklyn Museum, The High Museum of Art and the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC. Collaborative projects include *Question Bridge: Black Males and In Search of the Truth*, Cause Collective. In 2015, Thomas cofounded For Freedoms, the first artist-run super PAC. Thomas is a member of the Public Design Commission for the City of New York. He received a BFA in Photography and Africana studies from New York University and his MFA/MA in Photography and Visual Criticism from the California College of Arts. Thomas is represented by Jack Shainman Gallery in New York City and Goodman Gallery in South Africa.

Formerly incarcerated artist **Jesse Krimes** (b. 1982, Lancaster, PA) lives and works in Philadelphia. His work has been exhibited at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, Zimmerli Art at Museum of Rutgers University, and Leonard Pearlstein Gallery of Drexel University among other venues. Krimes is currently represented by Burning In Water Gallery in Chelsea, New York. He has also worked closely with social justice organizations such as Amnesty International, The Open Society Foundation, Open Philanthropy, and the Mural Arts Philadelphia's Restorative Justice program to create participatory public art projects. In addition to his independent work, Krimes successfully led a class-action lawsuit against JPMorgan Chase for their predatory practice of charging ex-offenders exorbitant debit card fees. Krimes obtained a Bachelor of Art in Studio Art (Cum Laude) from Millersville University of Pennsylvania.

Professor Baz Dreisinger earned her Ph.D. in English from Columbia University, where she specialized in American and African-American studies. Her book *Near Black: White-to-Black Passing in American Culture* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2008) was featured in the *New York Times Book Review* and on National Public Radio. She is the founder and Academic Director of John Jay's Prison-to-College Pipeline program, which offers college courses and reentry planning to incarcerated men at Otisville Correctional Facility, and broadly works to increase access to higher education for incarcerated and

formerly incarcerated individuals. Professor Dreisinger moonlights as a journalist and critic, writing about Caribbean culture, race-related issues, travel, music and pop culture for such outlets as the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times* and *Wall Street Journal*, and producing on-air segments about music and global culture for National Public Radio (NPR). Together with Oscar-nominated filmmaker Peter Spierer, Professor Dreisinger produced and wrote the documentaries *Black & Blue: Legends of the Hip-Hop Cop*, which investigates the New York Police Department's monitoring of the hip-hop industry, and *Rhyme & Punishment*, about hip-hop and the prison industrial complex. Professor Dreisinger's book *Incarceration Nations: A Journey to Justice in Prisons Around the World* was published in February 2016.

Voices is made possible by the generous support of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Ford Foundation. Mural Arts Philadelphia is pleased to partner with the following organizations for the *Voices* project: The Reentry Think Tank, Home for Good Reentry Coalition, SCI Graterford, and Eastern State Penitentiary.

Mural Arts Philadelphia is the nation's largest public art program, dedicated to the belief that art ignites change. For over 30 years, Mural Arts has united artists and communities through a collaborative and equitable process, creating nearly 4,000 artworks that have transformed public spaces and individual lives. Mural Arts aims to empower people, stimulate dialogue, and build bridges to understanding with projects that attract artists from Philadelphia and around the world, and programs that focus on youth education, restorative justice, mental health and wellness, and public art and its preservation. Popular mural tours offer a firsthand glimpse into the inspiring stories behind Mural Arts' iconic and unparalleled collection, which has earned Philadelphia worldwide recognition as the "City of Murals." For more information, call 215-685-0750 or visit muralarts.org. Follow us on social media: @muralarts on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and Snapchat, [MuralArtsPhiladelphia](#) on Facebook, and [phillymuralarts](#) on YouTube.

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