

**CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
CITY HALL, CONFERENCE ROOM 2A, 420 N. POKEGAMA AVE.
DATE: WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 26, 2020
TIME: 4:00 P.M.**

MISSION STATEMENT

The Mission of the Grand Rapids Human Rights Commission is to promote a community of harmony and respect for the rights and dignity of all.

BE ADVISED: Pursuant to Minnesota Statute 13D.021, Subdivision 1, some or all members may appear by telephone or other electronic means.

4:00 CALL TO ORDER:

CALL OF ROLL:

Commissioner Connelly: Council Representative	Commissioner Learmont: 3/19-3/22
Commissioner Erickson: 6/20-3/23	Commissioner Lopez-Cortes: 3/19-3/22
Commissioner Ensley, Vice Chair: 3/18-3/21	Commissioner Moren, Chair: 3/18-3/21
Commissioner Friesen: 3/18-3/21	Commissioner Leann Stoll: 6/20-3/23
Commissioner Hodgson: 6/20-3/23	

NEW BUSINESS:

- Consider financial support for the “We Are All Criminals – SEEN” exhibit in partnership with MacRostie Art Center.

ADJOURNMENT:

Human Rights Commission – Community Exhibit Proposal



What: SEEN: a prison portrait and poetry exhibit (watch: <https://youtu.be/5IYF3tENOeU>)

When: October 2020

Where: Proposed for the MacRostie Art Center gallery and front windows, with satellite locations around the community. Window displays are an alternative to lobbies and gathering areas if businesses and organizations that would host parts of the exhibit are closed to the public.

More Information:

SEEN is a prison portrait and poetry project. But more importantly, it's a *Minnesota* portrait and poetry project. It is an initiative of [We Are All Criminals](#) (WAAC), a nonprofit organization dedicated to challenging society's perceptions of what it means to be "criminal" and seeks to erase the barriers that separate us.

Through photography, video, and written word, SEEN shares the poignant brilliance of poets and prose writers in Minnesota state prisons, and works to make the invisible visible, the unheard heard, and the unseen seen. Mass incarceration is dependent upon the ignoring and erasure of the human beings we cage. In collaboration with the [Minnesota Prison Writing Workshop](#) (MPWW) and the thoughtful, intelligent, humble, and deeply gifted writers on the inside, WAAC challenges and disrupts mass incarceration by clearing the pathways for people behind bars to have their voices heard, faces seen, and humanity recognized—and for people on the outside to reckon with the inhumanity of our country's mass incarceration mass disaster.

Or, in the words of B, the poet: *This is about being seen (not looked at: truly seen)—but also about seeing yourself, or a piece of yourself, or a piece of someone you love, in me.*

The project is supported by Saint Paul and Minnesota Foundations and created in continued partnership between WAAC, MPWW, and the Minnesota Department of Corrections.

(see pages 3-6 for examples of exhibit content)

Proposed Components:

Exhibit

- Main exhibit at MacRostie Art Center, MacRostie Gallery
- Satellite displays at high visibility community locations: lobbies, windows, etc.
Potential sites: Grand Rapids Area Library, Itasca YMCA, Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation, Central Square Mall, and more

Virtual speakers

- Emily Baxter, Executive Director of We Are All Criminals
- Louise Waakaa’igan (Lac Courte Orielles), poet

Budget:

Exhibit Rental Fee	\$3,000	- HRC
Speaker Honoraria	\$1,500	- HRC
Printing, Design, Promotion	\$750	- MAC
Exhibit Transport	\$200	- MAC

Total \$5,450*

HRC Request \$4,500

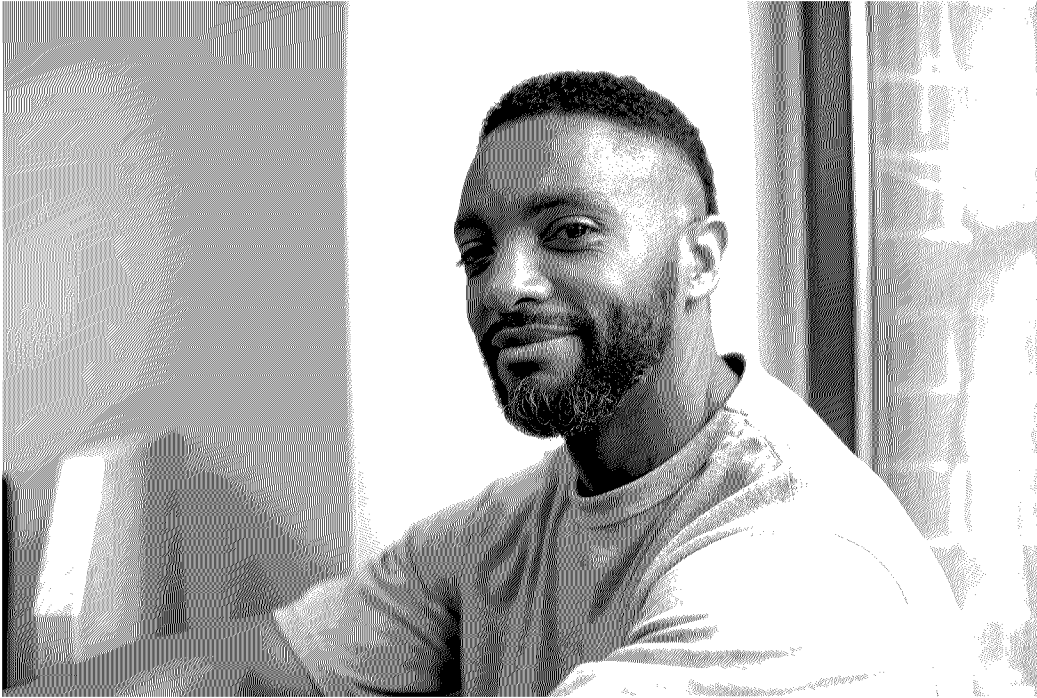
*In addition to cash expenses related to exhibit transport and promotion, MAC would contribute staff time to exhibit installation and deinstallation at MAC and any satellite locations, take the lead on press and media outreach, and – if desired by HRC – administration of virtual speaking event(s).



PRISON PASTORAL

By B

I once mistook a gray moth
lying at my feet on faded grass
for a blanched butterfly.
Its casual stillness,
wings curved hieroglyphs
steely against the bronzed lawn,
startled me;
everything in prison moves in hunched caution,
flightless but bent on flying.
Did it know this wasn't pasture meant
to land on? Did it know my pale shadow
wasn't an elm, and never could be? Did it know,
no matter how much pretending,
it was a moth? I tried to find
answers woven in fine silk
on its quiet wings.
The language was dust.



Excerpt from "Rant"

By Bino

While I was conversating with a scholar I said the word conversating and they said to me, "You know that's not a word." I said "Yeah. That's too bad."

I was typing a poem in Microsoft office and used the word unhospitable, Microsoft placed a red squiggly line under it, informing me that unhospitable is not a word. I right clicked it and added it to my computer's dictionary. Now it's a word.

One day I was conversating with an intelligent thug and he assumed I mistakenly misused a word, which he took upon himself to correct me on. I said to him "People misuse the N-Word every day-all day." But, then again, maybe they're not misusing it at all.

On a different day while a group of intellectuals were conversating I referred to white people as Caucasians. They told me, "That's a made up word." I said, "All words are made up."

There wasn't much disagreement after that.



This is Where

By Louise

I'm from Bineshi's bloodline.
That's Bill Baker if you don't speak Ojibwemowin¹.
Ni migizi dodem².

I'm from sitting on green boxes on
6-mile corner, watching cars go by.
Sometimes their four doors didn't match.

I'm from Packer games on Sundays, Greyhound trips for the
holidays, and Easter baskets with Karla.

I'm from women with the same last name and a father
none of us knew.

I'm from the woods; northern.
Where pines and birch bark blanket
both bends of tribal roads,
paved and gravel.

I'm from a single-parent household.
Michael Jackson cassette tapes, Purple Rain posters, and latchkey kids.
I'm from Title V programs. Commods on pantry shelves,
cucumbers grown in
grandpa Jake's garden, and a
mean ol' dog named Turkey.

I'm from "crying won't change anything" and you
"should've known better."

I'm from where silence is normal and
punitive.
Hugs are warm and forced Catholicism still
weighs heavy on my mother's shoulders.
At 73—the burden has lightened.

This is where I'll always return.

—

1. Ojibwemowin: Ojibwe language.

2. Ni migizi dodem: I am eagle clan.