Summary

- Abondans: Afrofuturist Visions of a Liberatory Future is a two-part project (a 7-week workshop series and a culminating exhibition) that uses art to provide education to incarcerated individuals. Students collectively utilized Afrofuturism as a vehicle for discussing contemporary politics and expressing their commentary through visual, musical, and written art.

Project Description

- How did you decide what issue(s) you wanted to address and what approach(es) or strategies you chose to implement in your project? My decision to develop an Afrofuturist course and culminating exhibition stems from my personal relationship to the carceral system, as two of my immediate family members have been heavily affected by incarceration and policing. Because of this, my career is oriented toward art and higher education for individuals who are currently and formerly incarcerated. My decision to curate an exhibition alongside incarcerated artists was supported by my supervisor, Timmy Chau, the managing director of the Prison + Neighborhood Education Project (PNAP). I also spoke with numerous teaching artists, professors, curators, and formerly incarcerated students/artists, to gain insight and provide feedback on our vision.

- Why did you choose your host site? In what ways did local relationships support you or contribute to the project? I chose my host site due to my longstanding relationship with PNAP, as I have worked with them for 2.5 years. This was a space in which I knew I would have sustainable intellectual, emotional, and logistical support as I saw this project through. Additionally, I had already built relationships with many of the artists who would be a part of the project, so it made curating an exhibition together more community-centric.

- What changes or adjustments did you make to your original plans, and why? Originally, I intended to hire a teaching facilitator for the course; however, due to instructor unavailability, I prepped myself, along with Timmy Chau, to co-teach the course. This was incredibly challenging, as I have only facilitated one course before, which was highly structured and prepped by a university writing program. For Abondans, I developed the course curricula myself, which was incredibly difficult, but allowed me to choose the creative and pedagogical direction.

- Did other fundraising efforts contribute to your project? What were they? There were no other funding efforts that supported Abondans: Afrofuturist Visions of a Liberatory Future outside of Davis Projects for Peace.

- Are there opportunities for continuing your work on this issue? If so, please describe. While there is no intention to pursue this specific exhibition again, I do hope that this project will be a segue into a lifelong commitment to providing educational spaces for incarcerated individuals, specifically with PNAP.

Reflection

- How do you define peace? I define peace as the state in which all individuals, regardless of status (or lack thereof), are granted the material, emotional, and physical resources not only needed for survival but to live an abundant life. Collectively, I believe we come together to create a world in which peace is possible by discussing the lived realities of the most marginalized populations,
reimagining systemic structures, and actualizing those visions in the here and now. Afrofuturism is a fantastic lens through which to imagine social change and create the tools necessary to execute these visions.

- In what ways might your project contribute to peace? What changes occurred? Short-term? Long-term? Abondans: Afrofuturist Visions of a Liberatory Future contributes to this definition of peace by equipping incarcerated students with the artistic resources and educational knowledge necessary to define their own lived experiences and collectively create sustainable possibilities to create change. The project was impacted by many logistical and artistic changes throughout its span of creation. For instance, working within the prison system is an ever-changing, challenging process, which made acquiring and distributing supplies to students a difficult task. In addition, administrative changes prolonged processing times for materials and required course curricula to remain adaptive and continuously creative. Nevertheless, despite its challenges, the project culminated in a beautifully curated exhibition.

- What did you learn about the dilemmas, challenges, or conflicts that underlie the targeted issues or utilized approaches/strategies? I learned how to provide higher education within a prison system, how to reconstruct the classroom space to work within the confines of a prison and its limited possibilities, and how to adapt my pedagogical approach to different intellectual and artistic levels within the same classroom space.

- Has your project changed the way you think about the world? How has the project changed, challenged, or inspired you? This project has consistently reinforced my previous perspective of the world; however, working with individuals inside the prison has taught me the power of building relationships with them, especially when doing work that addresses their lived experiences. Additionally, it has illustrated to me how art and education can serve both as an instrument for social change and a challenge to it. I have been incredibly inspired by the minds of my students in Abondans, and their Afrofuturist visions for a liberatory future grant me hope for the future of organizing work.

**Personal Statement**

- It is the work of abolitionists to not only build a movement, but to build worlds. The intention of this exhibition is to engage in the work of freedom dreaming, through the genre of Afrofuturism. Through Afrofuturist workshops, organized programming, and a final exhibition, this project hopes to not only imagine the world we want to see, but to create spaces for it in the present. Recognizing how the Prison Industrial Complex has denied people their youth, if not their very lives, this exhibition offers currently incarcerated individuals an opportunity to hold space to contemplate lost adolescence and imagine collective futures. These artists imagine a world one century after the abolition of mass incarceration, white supremacy, and capitalism; in doing so, they creatively and collectively become world builders. The art featured in this exhibit transcends time and space, binaries and bars.

-Indigo Wright