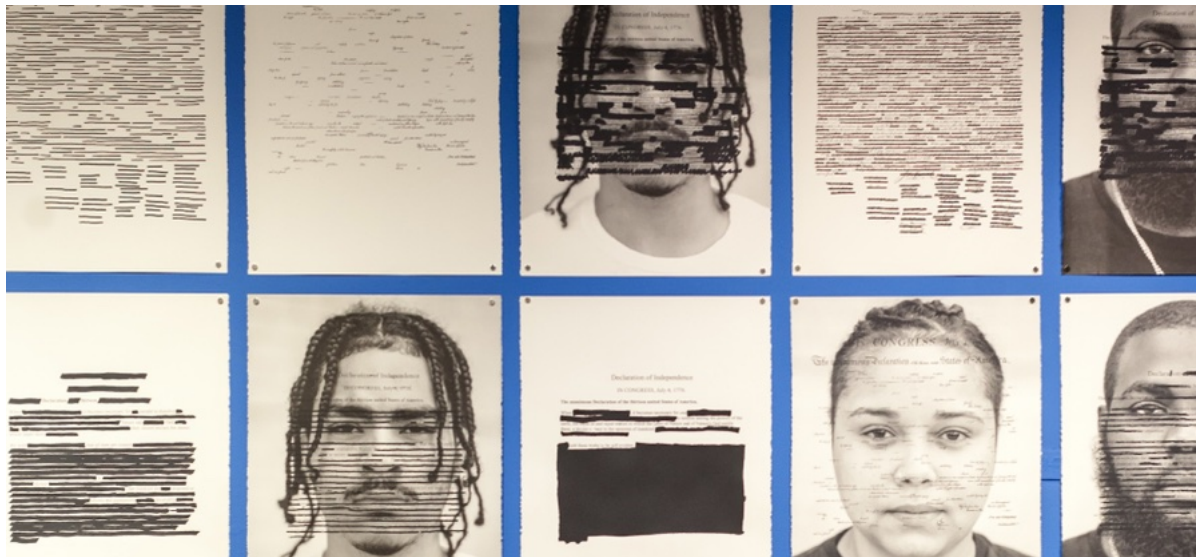


Reimagining Reentry Fellowship: Promising Practices in Restorative Justice

Mural Arts Institute

Project Spotlight



Reginald Dwayne Betts and Titus Kaphar, *Declaration Redaction* series, 2020, Print, pulped paper made of prison uniforms and towels, 22" x 30" each. Portraits by Steve Weinik. Photo by Steve Weinik.

REPORT BY:

Caitlin Butler

CO-CREATORS:

Brian Campbell,
Mary Enoch Elizabeth
Baxter, Michelle
Daniel (Jones), James
"Yaya" Hough, Jesse
Krimes, Jared Owens,
Kali Silverman

EDITORIAL SUPPORT:

Genny Buccardo-
Dubey

LAYOUT & DESIGN:

Norah Langweiler

FUNDERS & PARTNERS:

Art for Justice Fund, a
sponsored project of
Rockefeller
Philanthropy
Advisors, The City of
Philadelphia, and
National Endowment
for the Arts.

Abstract

The Reimagining Reentry Fellowship (RRF) is one of a growing national ecosystem of fellowships, residencies, and grants that support the work of artists impacted by incarceration. Mural Arts Philadelphia launched the program at a small scale in 2018, followed by a larger iteration in 2019. The RRF was conceived in collaboration with Artists Jesse Krimes and Russell Craig. Through the RRF, Mural Arts builds relationships with impacted artists, partnering with them to create participatory public artworks examining aspects of the justice system. The 2019-2021 RRF culminated in a series of new public installations and an exhibition, *Rendering Justice*, hosted in partnership with the African American Museum of Philadelphia (AAMP).

For Krimes and the fellows, artmaking functions as a form of resistance against the destructive and dehumanizing intentions of the carceral system. Although the individual projects explore a wide range of themes, there are some common ideas woven throughout, in particular: the brutal racism embedded in our society and its relationship to mass incarceration; the role of community and mentorship in building resilience; and the truth that every human being is complex and ever-evolving. The fellows' blend of lived experience, courage, and creative talent positions them as powerful storytellers and advocates for change.

The RRF - and similar programs - provide critical infrastructure to impacted artists willing to serve as leaders in the movement to end mass incarceration. This case study documents the RRF's structure and resulting artwork, explores the experience of the artists, and offers feedback on what was especially successful and what might be improved in future iterations.



OUTLINE



Case Study Method	p. 3
Context	p. 4
Project Descriptions	p. 7
Signs of Success	p. 15
Lessons Learned	p. 17
Final Words	p. 20
References	p. 21

Case Study Method

I was hired by Mural Arts to produce this case study during fall 2020, not long after departing a full-time role at the organization to pursue independent work in research and consultation. I was tasked with documenting the model, examining impact, and exploring lessons learned. I began my research as artworks resulting from the RRF began to enter the public sphere. These included the *Rendering Justice* exhibition and new public installations. They were accompanied by a series of virtual artist talks.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with those closest to the program. Of the nine artists featured in the exhibition, four agreed to participate, including Mary Enoch Elizabeth Baxter, Michelle Daniel (Jones), James “Yaya” Hough, and Jared Owens. I also spoke with Jesse Krimes, who functioned as the RRF’s curator, and Mural Arts Project Managers Brian Campbell and Kali Silverman.

In addition to conducting interviews, I viewed the *Rendering Justice* digital exhibition, watched

promotional and programmatic content, and read proposals and reports written for funders. I collaborated with Mural Arts’ Communications team to devise a survey issued to registered viewers of the virtual artist talks. Relevant findings from the survey responses informed the Signs of Success section.

I bring a participatory framework to qualitative research, which means that I understand those who consent to participate as co-creators of the knowledge produced and that I acknowledge my subjectivity in the construction of the work. Steps I took to implement this framework in this case study include: encouraging those I interviewed to guide me to what they think is most important; transcribing and coding the interviews to identify themes; centering the voices of people directly connected to the work through extensive quotes; inviting input on the text from those I interviewed before sharing it with others; and humanizing my authorship through the use of first person voice.



Rendering Justice exhibition at the African American Museum in Philadelphia, Michelle Daniel (Jones) & Deborah Willis Gallery. Photo by Daniel Jackson.

Context

The RRF was conceived by Artists Jesse Krimes and Russell Craig in collaboration with Mural Arts in 2018. It was devised in response to a new funding opportunity, the Art for Justice Fund, which was launched by Agnes Gund in 2017. Art for Justice, administered in partnership with the Ford Foundation and Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, seeks to “disrupt the very processes and policies that lead to high prison populations in the first place”. Specifically, Art for Justice hopes their support will drive measures that reduce prison populations in priority states by 20% by 2022 (Art for Justice Fund, 2021).

The RRF grew out of Krimes and Craig’s work on the national Right of Return USA Fellowship, which they co-founded in 2016 to support impacted artists; and from Mural Arts’ decades of experience connecting artists to the criminal justice system, most notably through a muralism program at SCI-Graterford (now SCI-Phoenix); an arts-based re-entry program; and major public art projects. Mural Arts refers to this body of work as its Restorative Justice program. The program, which receives a blend of public and private support, is staffed by a director, a program coordinator, a project manager, a social worker, and additional contract and part-time support roles.

Krimes and Craig observed that most of the artists selected to devise and lead Restorative Justice’s projects were not directly impacted by the carceral system. They saw an opportunity for Mural Arts to position impacted individuals in lead artist roles, not only as collaborators or assistants to projects. Krimes and Craig are part of a growing network of impacted artists, people they met while incarcerated and that they developed relationships with since their releases. They knew that with support, artists in this network could lead participatory public art projects in Philadelphia and beyond.

Centering impacted artists in participatory public artmaking focused on criminal justice reform is important for several reasons. First, impacted artists are uniquely positioned to represent the carceral system’s horrors, examine alternatives, and propose solutions. Second, they bring sensitivity and responsibility to engaging people who also have experiences with the carceral system. And finally, they need and merit support in doing this challenging work, through equitable compensation, career development opportunities, and visibility.

Art for Justice supported Mural Arts to design a programmatic strategy around this particular group of artists. The RRF began as a one-year series of mini-projects - mostly performative - presented as part of a larger project led by Krimes and Craig. This first iteration was small but illuminated the possibility of creating something larger.

In early 2019, Krimes invited eight artists to work with Mural Arts on participatory public art projects. This second iteration involved considerably larger project budgets for the fellows, the opportunity to connect as a cohort and learn from one another, and the chance to participate in an exhibition of their processes and work. Over 18 months, fellows selected a specific issue related to the criminal justice system and developed, with Mural Arts, a process for exploring it.

The full list of fellows included:

- Mary Enoch Elizabeth Baxter
- Reginald Dwayne Betts (collaborating with Titus Kaphar)
- Russell Craig
- Michelle Daniel (Jones) (collaborating with Deborah Willis, PhD)
- James “Yaya” Hough
- Titus Kaphar (collaborating with Reginald Dwayne Betts)
- Michael “O.G. Law” Ta’bon
- Jared Owens
- Deborah Willis, PhD (collaborating with Michelle Daniel [Jones])

Hough joined the cohort as the ninth artist in fall 2019. After receiving support for the RRF, Mural Arts partnered with Fair and Just Prosecution to secure additional funding to pilot an artist-in-residency model with the Philadelphia District Attorney’s Office. Krimes supported the artist selection for this additional project, and connected Hough to the opportunity. Given the timing and topic alignment, Hough became an unofficial ninth fellow and his personal artwork was included in the *Rendering Justice* exhibition. The District Attorney Artist-in-Residence is chronicled in depth in its own case study (Butler, 2021).

Mural Arts, Krimes, and the fellows shared the

following objectives for the work:

- Create a platform for individuals and communities impacted by crime and incarceration to better inform and influence the City of Philadelphia's reform process.
- Expand public awareness of the complexity and far-reaching repercussions of mass incarceration, increase exposure to policies and alternatives, and inspire greater engagement and action among citizens.
- Reduce stigma and bias that hinders successful re-entry into communities and workplaces.

Roles & Responsibilities

Fellows

The primary responsibility of the fellows is to conceptualize and produce new works of public art addressing issues of mass incarceration. In the process, several took on roles as teaching artists, researchers, and facilitators. For example, Mary Enoch Elizabeth Baxter led a writing workshop with women incarcerated at Riverside Correctional Facility. Jared Owens worked with youth under court supervision already connected to Mural Arts through ongoing art education programming. Michelle Daniel (Jones) created oral histories with her participants, in addition to creating a series of portraits with her collaborator, Deborah Willis. This diversity of opportunity for engagement was one of the unique dimensions of the RRF, and a criterion for selection. Artists invited to participate were those Krimes knew would be interested in developing their skills and projects in collaboration with people in Mural Arts' vast network. In addition to showcasing new projects produced for the RRF, artists were invited to exhibit artwork created independently prior to or during their fellowships in *Rendering Justice*. Through artist talks, they discussed their public art projects and broader bodies of work. Finally, as a cohort-style fellowship, the RRF artists functioned as peer supports and mentors to one another.

Project Manager

The project manager serves as the administrative heart of a project, liaising between all of the individuals and organizations essential to realizing the work. Dominant aspects of the job include creating and managing a detailed timeline, drafting memoranda-of-understanding and contracts, overseeing the project budget, supporting artistic production and project installation, attending to the needs of participants and partners, and navigating operational systems at Mural Arts to ensure timely outputs, ranging from payments to press releases. The RRF was supported by multiple project managers over its 18 month timeframe, all of whom served in contracted roles. The organization initially estimated that the program would require one day per week of support. During its first six months, the RRF was managed by Phoebe Bachman. She transitioned the role to Brian Campbell in August 2019 when she departed for graduate school. Managing six public art projects and the exhibition ended up requiring more than one day per week, leading Campbell to expand the time devoted to the RRF and Mural Arts to hire an additional project manager, Kali Silverman, who specifically oversaw Russell Craig's installation on the exterior of AAMP. The project managers reported to Mural Arts' Director of Restorative Justice Greg Corbin.

Curator

The curator is an essential role for a multi-artist opportunity that has a collective aim around its themes, messaging, and impact. As one fellow shared, "The curator is great, to help synthesize ideas and get everybody on one page for a theme" (M. Baxter, personal communication, December 4, 2020). Krimes worked with Mural Arts to determine the parameters for the RRF, to develop criteria for artist invitations, and to conduct outreach to impacted artists in his network who were a fit for the opportunity. Krimes' experiences as an artist impacted by incarceration with a history of collaboration with Mural Arts informed his conceptualization of the RRF. Once the cohort was selected, Krimes worked with the artists to develop their projects, in particular supporting the translation of their ideas and methods to public space. Krimes curated *Rendering Justice*, including placing the work and producing

cultivated partnerships and relationships necessary to realizing the exhibition and individual projects, gave final approval to artistic and programmatic decisions, and served as a spokesperson for the RRF and *Rendering Justice*.

Mural Arts and Krimes decided that they wanted to include an exhibition in the RRF structure and later connected with AAMP to explore its fit to this role. AAMP offered a venue and a partnership, which is most visible in the virtual programming featuring AAMP's staff in facilitative and guest speaker roles.

The executive director is responsible for providing high-level support and direction at every stage. Mural Arts Executive Director Jane Golden co-conceptualized the RRF, prioritized it for funding,

In addition to the roles outlined here, Mural Arts' development, communications, finance, tours, and operations teams supported grant writing and reporting, project communications, press relations, public event logistics, fiscal management, contracts, and project installation.



Project Descriptions

Within the broad frame of ending mass incarceration, the fellows introduced widely varying topics and methods. Yet the final exhibition and production of work is powerfully connected and coherent in its assertion of art as a form of resistance, an insistence on the right to be human. Looking across the work, Krimes offers the following statement:

The core theme that is apparent is the ways that each artist has struggled with this dehumanizing force, with this system that is designed to destroy them as a positive person,

as someone who is hopeful and valuable. And so much of the work is pushing back against that. And it's saying, "no we don't buy into this idea that you're trying to make us think that we're something other or different, or don't have value. We are loved. We are family members. We are a part of this community." It's just such a powerful way of resistance by showcasing your existence (*Rendering Justice* Virtual Tour, 2020, 2:10-3:02).

The specific focus of each fellow's project is shared here, as well as a description of their processes.



Jared Owens, *bête noire*, 2012, Prison-yard dirt, gravel, acrylic paint, 120" x 60"

Mary Enoch Elizabeth Baxter

The Fall of America

Baxter initially proposed a documentary, podcast, and series of public events featuring writing produced in workshops with women incarcerated at Riverside Correctional Facility. She intended to link the project to advocacy efforts led by the Dignity Act Now Collective, of which she is a member. The Dignity Act Now Collective hosted a bail out for Black caregivers on Mother's Day. Afterwards, they had planned to lead a playborhood at LOVE Park where caregivers could reconnect with their families while accessing resources on jobs, housing, and other services. Baxter was able to lead the workshops at Riverside prior to the onset of COVID-19, but the rest of the project was not possible once Philadelphia entered a stay-at-home order (M. Baxter, personal communication, December 4, 2020).

Baxter, who still plans to complete the original project at some point, changed her focus to racism

in America, responding to a surge in social justice protests. The piece, titled *The Fall of America*, layers images and words to construct a window into the historical context for the moment the country finds itself in. In her virtual artist talk, in which Baxter is interviewed by BlackStar Executive Director Maori Karmael Holmes, she describes a lack of historicity in how incidences of White supremacist violence are presented by the media, as if they are isolated moments rather than being part of a long continuum. She states, "A lot of people in mainstream culture seem to be shocked that racism and systemic oppression and police brutality exist in this country. In my mind, counternarratives are extremely important to combat that dissonance and that arbitrary ignorance that a lot of us seem to continue to wrestle with" (*The Fall of America* and *Ain't I a Woman Film Screening and Conversation with Artist Mary Baxter*, 2021, 31:00-31:22).



Prophesied dedication, and *Rendering Justice* opening event the African American Museum in Philadelphia, 701 Arch Street, October 28, 2020. Photo by Steve Weinik.

Reginald Dwayne Betts & Titus Kaphar

Redaction

Redaction is an ongoing partnership between Betts and Kaphar in which expanded meanings or truths are brought to the fore through redaction of text and image. As fellows, they worked with participants in Mural Arts' Guild Reentry Program to create portraits in which the faces are obscured with various redactions of the Declaration of Independence. The redactions amend the original text to elevate the experience and interpretation of each person doing the redaction. The portraits and text are printed on pulped paper made of prison uniforms and towels. The work will result in a permanent public installation.

In the artist talk about the project, which features a conversation between Betts and Kaphar, Betts states, "The notion of redaction isn't just about revision. It is about the effort to make things

seen that have long been invisible." (*Redaction: A Conversation with Titus Kaphar and Reginald Dwayne Betts*, 2020, 9:40-9:49). Kaphar shares a story about one of his works, a painting of George Washington obscured by a document listing the names of the people he enslaved at Mount Vernon. He draws a parallel to this work: "In the same way, the redaction of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, these kinds of documents, become their own kinds of amendments. We have to amend these documents if we want to include ourselves, because these documents, historically, have forgotten about us" (34:00-35:03). Betts adds, referring to the portrait of Washington, "some people will read it saying, are you trying to erase Washington? And it's like, no that's not the point. The point is to reveal different levels of it" (35:29-35:39).



Reginald Dwayne Betts and Titus Kaphar, *Declaration Redaction* series, 2020, Print, pulped paper made of prison uniforms and towels, 22" x 30" each. Portraits by Steve Weinik. Photo by Steve Weinik.

Russell Craig

Prophesied

Prophesied is an exterior installation on AAMP. It is a portrait on assembled leather bags depicting Craig's mentor James "Yaya" Hough, also part of the RRF. The piece is a powerful meditation on connection and friendship as a form of resistance and future-thinking. Russell shares, "Me and James Hough visualized what's happening now while we was inside of prison. We got out, and we making it happen" (*Rendering Justice*: Russell Craig, 2020, 0:35-0:53). Though *Prophesied* stands on its own, it is also part of a larger series of portraits by Craig exhibited inside the museum, some on leather bags and others on canvas. Some of his other subjects include George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Nipsey Hussle.



Prophesied © 2020 City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program / Russell Craig, the African American Museum in Philadelphia, 701 Arch Street. Photo by Steve Weinik.

Michelle Daniel (Jones) & Deb Willis, PhD

Point of Triangulation: Intersections of Identity

Point of Triangulation is a series of paired portraits hinged on a 90-degree angle, extending around the viewer. On one side, individuals wear carceral clothing - white t-shirts and grey recreational pants. On the other, they wear the attire of their choosing. When stepping on a red line on the floor to complete the triangle, the viewer is challenged to explore their biases and assumptions, in particular the tendency to weaponize stigma and oversimplify identity, distilling a complex being to a single part of their lives. Daniel (Jones) collaborated with participants to capture oral histories, parts of which are shared in the exhibit along with images of the project's process.

The concept grew out of a class Daniel (Jones) took with Willis as a PhD student at NYU. In the class,

titled Black Body and the Lens, students explored Frederick Douglass' interest in photography as a means by which to shift narratives and alter viewpoints. Daniel (Jones) began to think about applying this approach to formerly incarcerated individuals (*Point of Triangulation: Intersections of Identity*, with Michelle Daniel [Jones] and Deb Willis, 2020, 5:34-8:10). Daniel (Jones) sought out Professor Willis, a photographer, curator and historian to collaborate. In addition to the full scale portraits, Willis produced a series of intimate close-ups of details like clasped hands, apparel, jewelry, and tattoos. Michael Koehler, the assistant photographer, captured the process photos. *Point of Triangulation* will also exist as a two-wall mural in one of Philadelphia's business districts.



Rendering Justice exhibition at the African American Museum in Philadelphia, Michelle Daniel (Jones) & Deborah Willis Gallery. Photo by Daniel Jackson.

James “Yaya” Hough *Points of Connection*

As described earlier, Hough was added to the RRF at a later point when Mural Arts released a call for an inaugural artist-in-residence at the Philadelphia District Attorney’s Office. *Points of Connection* consisted of a series of conversations exploring “what is justice?” The conversations included people working at the DA’s Office, community leaders that were at one time incarcerated, and victim’s advocates. Hough generated portraits of the participants, which were temporarily displayed in October 2020 at several arts and justice-related sites in Philadelphia. The residency involved a partnership with Fair and Just Prosecution, a separate project manager, and additional curatorial support. More detail about Hough’s residency can be found in a separate case study commissioned by Mural Arts (Butler, 2021).

Rendering Justice includes several of Hough’s independent works. Most prominent is a new series of 40 small watercolors titled *Ahmaud Arbery*. The watercolors depict, frame-by-frame, Arbery’s murder. Krimes explains that Hough created the piece as a response to the “visual bombardment” in the media of police brutality and White supremacist violence towards Black people. The speed and volume of these images is, for Hough, disorienting. In response, Hough is “taking this video and really slowing it down into stills to get the viewer to sit with some of these horrific events that are happening instead of consuming and moving” (*Rendering Justice* Virtual Tour, 2020, 6:48-7:41).



Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kenney poses with James “Yaya” Hough’s portraits of Carolyn Temin and Dorothy Johnson-Speight installed outside of his City Hall office. Photo by Steve Weinik.

Michael “O.G. Law” Ta’bon *Hard Knock University*

Ta’bon’s project, *Hard Knock University*, is a mobile care unit that engages communities through positive creative experiences. It includes a stage on the roof, two basketball hoops, a recording studio, a t-shirt factory, DJ booth, and a music and video editing center. For Ta’bon, creativity is a powerful connector and means of communication. He sees his work as a platform for others to develop themselves as artists. *Rendering Justice* features images of public artwork Ta’bon co-created with communities over a several-year period. Ta’bon has been working independently in Philadelphia for a long time. The RRF provided resources and visibility, moving Ta’bon’s practice forward: “Mural Arts bridged the gap for me” (*Rendering Justice: Michael “O.G. Law” Ta’Bon*, 2020).



Prophesied dedication, and Rendering Justice opening event the African American Museum in Philadelphia, 701 Arch Street, October 28, 2020. Photo by Steve Weinik.

Jared Owens

PhilaGuernica

For Owens, the RRF was an opportunity to realize two aspirations: working with youth on a public art piece, and creating a work inspired by Pablo Picasso's 1937 painting *Guernica* (J. Owens, personal communication, December 1, 2020). Owens describes *Guernica* as one of his favorite pieces, lauding its style and expressing his interest in artwork created under duress. For his project with Mural Arts, he adapted the classic image to include Philadelphia symbols, creating an uplifting landscape intended to resonate broadly with city residents. He created the work in collaboration with youth in Mural Arts' ongoing art education program, specifically a group under court supervision at an NET Center. Many of the images in the mural originated as line drawings produced by the students (Inspiration Behind the Art: A Workshop with Jared Owens, 2020).

Owens describes his studio practice as challenging systemic oppression, contrasting that to his intention with *PhilaGuernica* to make people stop and smile when they see the project (J. Owens, personal communication, December 1, 2020). His independent work is on display as part of *Rendering Justice*. Krimes describes the work as a series of abstracted images portraying atrocities that occurred in Parchman Farm-Mississippi State Prison. Owens integrated materials from prison yards - gravel and dirt - bringing the prison site literally into his paintings. Krimes states, "A lot of his work is revolving around how the body overcomes these physical environments of incarceration" (*Rendering Justice* Virtual Tour, 2020, 9:34-11:01).



PhilaGuernica © 2020 City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program / Jared Owens, 1131 Callowhill Street. Photo by Steve Weinik.

SIGNS OF SUCCESS



It is early to evaluate the success of the RRF as its objectives involve inspiring changes to enduring systems. Even so, there are preliminary indications of its impact, detectable among the people closest to the program: the fellows, their collaborators, and public event attendees.

Positive Experience of the Fellows

One of the RRF's most significant objectives was to advance opportunities for impacted artists. Mural Arts theorized that financial resources, opportunities to create participatory public art, and heightened visibility resulting from the exhibition and virtual programming would position the artists for new opportunities in their careers. Several of the artists are already finding success, critically and financially, with their work. For some of the artists, increased opportunities to work with Mural Arts - on projects connected to the justice system and projects exploring a broader array of topics - is a desired outcome from the RRF. But it is difficult to assess that possibility at present. Rather, what is most evident right now is the way the RRF supported artists' personal growth objectives, roughly categorized as follows: 1) to act on a sense of responsibility to others who are incarcerated or at risk of incarceration; 2) to advocate, through their work, for changes to practice and policy and to give a platform to community leaders; and 3) to build new connections. Building new connections, while referenced as a positive aspect of the program, was also cited as an area for growth, which is detailed in the Lessons Learned section.

A selection of excerpts from interviews and public videos are shared below to illustrate these themes:

Responsibility

I always wanted to involve children somehow...I got the opportunity to have kids that were under court supervision help me with the design elements to my mural (J. Owens,

personal communication, December 1, 2020).

I was presented with an opportunity to go back to the facility where I had been in prison, and speak directly with women that had faced the same thing that I had faced and were looking for inspiration, hope, and ways to use the trauma and their negative experiences for something that was more positive (M. Baxter, personal communication, December 4, 2020).

This is for all them young guys out there that are struggling, coming from the streets and things like that, coming from a prison situation. It's never too late you can definitely change things around (*Rendering Justice*: Russell Craig, 2020, 2:10-2:23).

Advocacy

Every single one of [the people featured in the portraits] are leaders of organizations that serve formerly incarcerated people or are trying to change the dominant narrative of what a formerly incarcerated person is (M. Daniel [Jones], personal communication, December 8, 2020).

One of the main reasons I wanted to be involved was to make sure that someone that is impacted is creating art and advocacy campaigns around incarceration (M. Baxter, personal communication, December 4, 2020).

I wanted to highlight particular individuals who do some amazing work on a daily basis, that don't seek recognition, but at the same time, need a platform, need to enhance what they do, and need to be highlighted, not for celebration, but to broadcast to others that this is behavior that should be modeled (J. Hough, personal communication, December 8, 2020).

Community

We all came together to be thought partners with each other. One of the things that I hoped to get out of, and I really gained, was a larger networking community of formerly incarcerated artists who are doing this work around the country (M. Daniel [Jones], personal communication, December 8, 2020).

Just from one project, which Michelle proposed, and Deb, it created a network of 12 people who are now very intimately connected, and who have a shared experience but are also advocating in very different ways. So I think that's a really powerful example of the mutual benefit and network that can develop out of these projects (J. Krimes, personal communication, December 22, 2020).

Positive Experience of Participants

While not widely surveyed across all projects, participants were given a platform to speak about their experiences in *Point of Triangulation: Intersections of Identity*, with Michelle Daniel (Jones) and Deb Willis (2020). Excerpts pointing to impact include:

Prison by its very nature is meant to strip away many things, not just freedom. But it also strips away self-identity, it strips away dignity, it strips away the freedom of expression. So what this project does, in effect, is help to restore those things from which we have been stripped of and that is the primary reason for why I agreed to participate in this project (Ab'd-Allah Lateef, 12:35-13:15).

I am not my experiences. I am not what I went through...I'm super excited about who I am,

and to be able to be part of this exhibit and this program gave me the opportunity to show that. And to be a beacon of hope to women and sisters coming behind me that they too could change (Reverend Michelle Ann Simmons, 17:00-17:21).

[The project] gave me an opportunity to show that, yes, I was in prison, I did 37 years in prison. Now I'm in society and not only am I a law-abiding citizen in society, but I am one of the leaders in my community. So it was a great opportunity (John Thompson, 15:05-15:25).

The separate case study created for Hough's residency in the DA's Office also explores the experiences of participants. Those interviewed spoke to a range of impacts, including feeling seen, appreciating the opportunity to be in constructive dialogue across entrenched boundaries, and experiencing new channels of communication with colleagues in the DA's Office (Butler, 2021).

Positive Experience of Public Program Attendees

Mural Arts issued a survey to 391 registered event attendees in December 2020, at the conclusion of five virtual artist talks. A total of 23 people responded (6% response rate), with 92% indicating that the events met or exceeded their expectations. Asked to rate their familiarity with issues around mass incarceration on a scale from one to 10, with one indicating no knowledge and 10 indicating significant knowledge, respondents averaged a seven. The dominant takeaway, referenced in 39% of responses, is the potential for art to support criminal justice reform. The dominant piece of advice offered to Mural Arts, stated in 52% of responses, is to continue delivering similar virtual content.

LESSONS LEARNED



In this section, I identify four areas key to the design and impact of the RRF and rich with learnings. For each, I aggregate feedback on what worked well with suggestions for growth.

Build a Cohort

What Worked Well

Two of the four artists I interviewed highlighted the cohort model as a key benefit of the experience. One of the fellows reflected especially positively on the group orientation, where all the fellows gathered in Philadelphia in spring 2019 to learn more about Mural Arts, the fellowship, and each other. Another benefit of the cohort model was the way it highlighted a plurality of artists working on issues related to mass incarceration, the diversity of their approaches, and the range of specific topics under exploration. *Rendering Justice*, even in its more limited virtual form, brought this complex narrative together into a single space and the series of artist talks added further depth and insight. Finally, the cohort model allowed Krimes to bring together artists in different stages of career development, cultivating mentorship and positioning the more established artists to draw press and audience attention to the more emerging artists.

Growth Opportunity

COVID-19 impeded in-person gatherings of the cohort, but even so, more time to connect was highlighted by four of the seven people I interviewed as an area of growth. Building this into the work of the project manager, or identifying a separate program manager may have provided additional capacity to it. These sessions need not be elaborate in terms of content and curriculum. The primary feedback was simply that it would be nice to have more time to talk, share work, and get to know one another. The project manager also noted that regular gatherings could have simplified communication for him, allowing him to deliver the same information to all the artists simultaneously and enlist the full group in problem-solving around certain challenges. Another approach to supporting relationship-building could be to allocate resources to supporting ideas for collaboration between the artists, either within their planned projects or for new opportunities dreamed up during the fellowship. Finally, one fellow indicated that more interactions with and connections to established artists would be a welcome addition to the fellowship experience.

Amplifying Issues, Creating Pathways

What Worked Well

Everyone I spoke with acknowledged the catalytic potential embedded in the RRF - for the issues they work on and for their growth as artists - and offered positive feedback about this feature of Mural Arts' intentions. The RRF's focus on creating space for impacted artists to work on issues related to mass incarceration was valued, as is Mural Arts' sustained public commitment to supporting alternatives to mass incarceration. One artist commented that this positionality is not always so clear from arts institutions, and expressed that Mural Arts' transparency makes it a trusted partner to artists working to end mass incarceration. Several of the people I interviewed appreciated the access Mural Arts provided to different types of partners and participants, from City agencies to youth under supervision. This made it possible for them to develop new approaches to engagement in their work and forge relationships that will endure into the future.



Deborah Willis, PhD, Jondhi Harrell and Philadelphia, 2020, Photograph, 20" x 24"

Growth Opportunity

Two recommendations were raised for how organizers might leverage the catalytic potential of a program like the RRF even further. First, for artists trying to use their work to shift policy and build movements, organizers could consider investing in targeted supports that amplify specific projects' impacts, build capacity for the artist, and situate the project in a longer continuum of action. Types of support might include bringing filmmakers, social media experts, issue advisors, and community organizers onto the project. Second, organizers should view specialized fellowships, like the RRF, as a pipeline to future partnerships with these artists, whether in the same area of focus or outside of it. Although all of the RRF artists are deeply committed to the issues they work on around the justice system, several voiced their interest in being considered for project opportunities with a diverse array of objectives and themes. One fellow shared, contemplating their future, "You can get caught up in this thing where you become the criminal justice reform go-to person, and you can't grow as an artist."



James "Yaya" Hough, *Untitled*, 2015, Paper collage, 8.5" x 11"

Supporting the Fellows

What Worked Well

For a group of artists with varying degrees of familiarity with participatory public art, varying degrees of familiarity with Philadelphia, and varying degrees of familiarity with Mural Arts, project management was essential. Most of the artists offered positive feedback on the level of support they received, and were able to achieve their visions. One fellow also commented that the level of compensation and project support was good, though more resources would of course broaden the possibilities for the work.

Growth Opportunity

The RRF demanded more significant project management support than originally planned. Despite shifts made to accommodate this realization, there was an awareness on everyone's part that capacity was limited. Future organizers should plan for a larger investment of time by a single project manager, or consider a team approach, with multiple project managers working together. One of the RRF project managers recommended planning for a minimum of 20 to 30 hours of project management per week for an initiative of comparable scale. This will also reduce pressure on other roles - like the curator - to take on project management work. The curator noted that one of his tasks included creating renderings of the artists' concepts for Mural Arts, and suggested in the future that this be a dedicated support role. One of the artists I spoke with indicated that they would have preferred to have greater control over management of their budget. This may or may not be possible depending on the policies of the organizers, but if there is flexibility, this too may be a way to expand capacity and support artist preferences.

Staying Flexible

What Worked Well

The onset of COVID-19 in March 2020 impacted the fellows in varying ways, depending on how far along they were in implementing their projects. In the end, they were all able to produce significant works. The largest consequence of the pandemic was on the presentation of the work, which was intended to include an in-person exhibition at AAMP, an in-person symposium, and installation of all public artworks in fall 2020. For a while, it seemed like a possibility that some in-person access to *Rendering Justice* would be possible, but shortly before the opening AAMP closed to support the health and safety of its community. Mural Arts and AAMP worked together to move the exhibition to an online platform, a rapid pivot that garnered praise from one of the fellows with whom I spoke. Eventually, AAMP and Mural Arts decided to extend the exhibition so that a limited number of viewers could engage with it in-person.

Growth Opportunity

When experimenting with digital dissemination, especially on a short timeline, organizers may benefit from the assistance of a dedicated digital strategist to help drive audiences to the work. Training and support to artists on using social media to push digital content may also be a valuable approach.

Final Words

The artwork developed and presented as a result of the RRF is one step forward in an effort that will require significant cooperation across a wide range of people and organizations. In fact, the RRF is designed to be a catalytic step, positioning impacted artists to expand their networks, build alliances, and build knowledge and awareness through their work. For that reason, it is critical that the RRF be treated as the start of something bigger; something more than seven thought-provoking projects. What might that look like? The answer lies in further dialogue with and learning from impacted artists prepared to lead the way.

Susannah Laramee Kidd's Learning From the Process: Promising Practices From Mural Arts' Work in Communities (2020) offers a comprehensive inventory of practices critical to ethical and impactful participatory public art. My conversations reinforced Laramee Kidd's findings and I advise reviewing Learning From the Process as a more general companion to this case study.



Reimagining Reentry: On Mentorship with artists Russell Craig, and James “Yaya” Hough at The African American Museum in Philadelphia. Moderated by Professor Nicole R. Fleetwood, October 30, 2019. Photo by Steve Weinik.

REFERENCES



Art for Justice Fund. (2021, March 24). *About. Art for Justice*.
<https://artforjusticefund.org/about/>

Art for Justice Fund. (2021, May 4). *Our Strategy. Art for Justice*.
<https://artforjusticefund.org/strategy/>

Butler, C. (2021). *Practice Spotlight: District Attorney Artist-in-Residence*. Mural Arts Philadelphia.

Laramée Kidd, S. (2020). *Learning From the Process: Promising Practices From Mural Arts' Work in Communities*. Mural Arts Philadelphia. https://www.muralarts.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Promising-Practices-122220_pages.pdf

Mural Arts Philadelphia. (2020, October 27). *Rendering Justice: Michael "O.G. Law" Ta'Bon* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uzUqJiymEE>

Mural Arts Philadelphia. (2020, October 27). *Rendering Justice: Russell Craig* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7tRyAr1cT30&t=31s>

Mural Arts Philadelphia. (2020, November 10). *Rendering Justice Virtual Tour* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TagFBr5ksY>

Mural Arts Philadelphia. (2020, November 19). *Point of Triangulation: Intersections of Identity, with Michelle Daniel (Jones) and Deb Willis* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8RELk9qtYOI&t=1051s>

Mural Arts Philadelphia. (2020, November 24). *Inspiration Behind the Art: A Workshop with Jared Owens* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICilq-m0TJY>

Mural Arts Philadelphia. (2020, December 10). *Redaction: A Conversation with Titus Kaphar and Reginald Dwayne Betts* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GtqD_kM19qQ&t=2139s

Mural Arts Philadelphia. (2021, January 4). *The Fall of America and Ain't I a Woman Film Screening and Conversation with Artist Mary Baxter* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NNrI3ADEQt4&t=1882s>

SUGGESTED CITATION

Butler, C. (2021). *Practice Spotlight: Reimagining Reentry Fellowship*. Mural Arts Philadelphia.



*Prophesied dedication, and *Rendering Justice* opening event the African American Museum in Philadelphia, 701 Arch Street, October 28, 2020. Photo by Steve Weinik.*



**Mural Arts
Institute**

#muralarts
f muralartsphiladelphia
@muralarts

muralarts.org/institute

**ART
IGNITES
CHANGE**