

Cactus Flower Art Zine



Art created by youth in Iris Garrett Juvenile
Justice Correctional Complex



YOUTH LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE
Use Your Voice

Note from the editor

My name is Jesse Ornelas and I am the Director of Programs at Youth Leadership Institute.

I had the opportunity to take the Cactus Flower program alongside local esteemed artist Eddie Rodriguez.

The Cactus Flower program was a year-long project that gave us access to facilitate art lessons inside the Iris Garrett Juvenile Justice Correctional Complex.

The youth there went through a six month course of lessons that introduced them to several different types of creative arts. They learned about the different aspects of photography, the many components of drawing, muralism , all components of painting, spoken word & poetry , and even stand up comedy as an art form.

Being able to witness the youth there get excited about being creators of beauty was inspiring.

In November of 2024, we had an art show that was well attended by several local agencies and lovers of art. All would agree that many of these youth have the natural skill to seek a profession in art. We have also been able to display this art inside Merced City Hall as well as Los Banos City Hall. We believe access to art should be a priority in our community and should be included in spaces where our most vulnerable people are at.

Just how a Cactus Flower blooms in the worlds harshest environments , art and its creators do as well.

Enjoy the Zine

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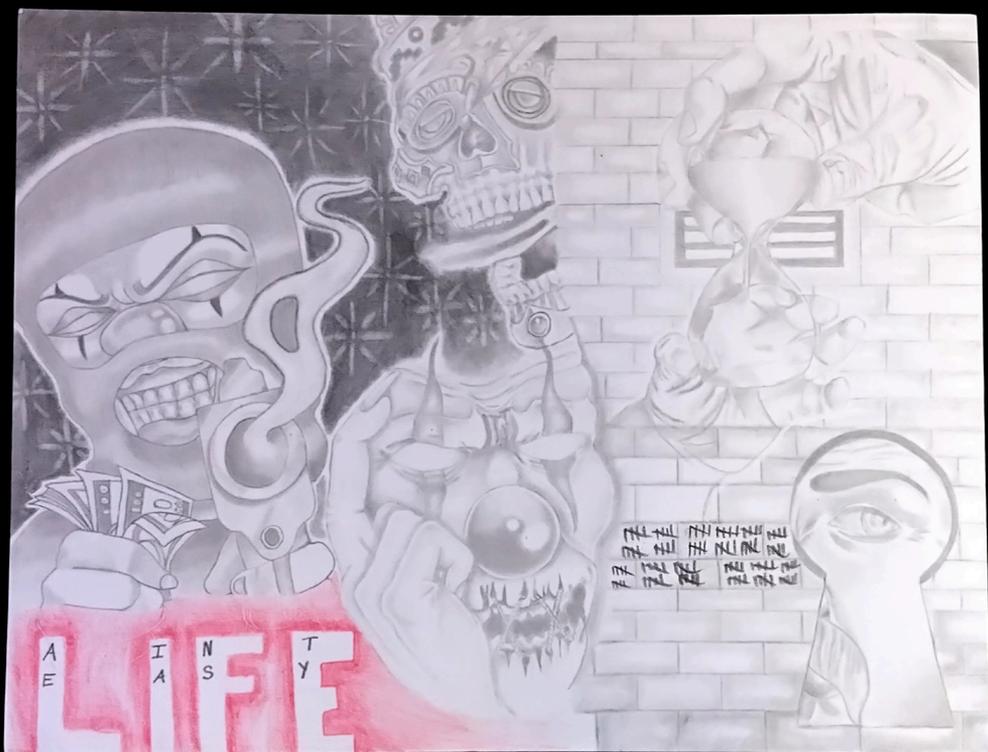
Note from the lead artist

Having come from a similar background, I have spent a lifetime trying to deconstruct the reasons for choices I made in my youth, and now in hindsight they seem obvious and inevitable. Not finding safety in or out of my home, art allowed me a pathway inward and then a fortification outward. Art not only helped save my life, it helped save my sanity, and gave me a way to give back to others, and build up my community. This group of students surprised me at every corner, constantly thinking outside of the box, innovating, and using the limitations of their circumstance to their advantage. Most of the time I forgot our setting, the walls melted away as we laughed and created. Their drive and ingenuity was notable, some of the most impressive I have seen.





This artist took inspiration from previous YouTube art tutorials he had seen. Now equipped with the tools, he pushed to master a new skill. And in turn taught others.



Taking a traditional style to a personal place, this artist did not shy away from depicting his feelings on life



Playing around with new materials and stencils, this artist utilized their own innate design sense.



Having struggled to find his voice, this artist had a breakthrough, managing to arrive at his own pathway to Jackson Pollock's aesthetics, despite ever having seen Pollock's work prior to the session.



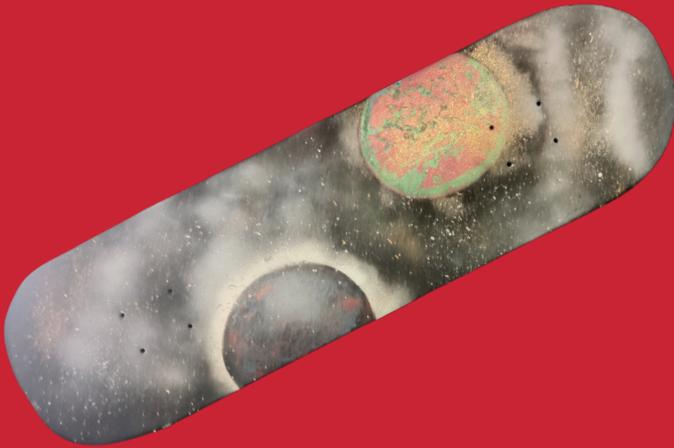
Eager to see past his current environment, this artist sought to stretch his gaze to one of the farthest regions imaginable, in his interpretation of the Aurora Borealis.



With a natural gift for smooth gradations, this artist set his skills to creating a tranquil nocturne, a beckoning landscape only reachable through the artist's mind.



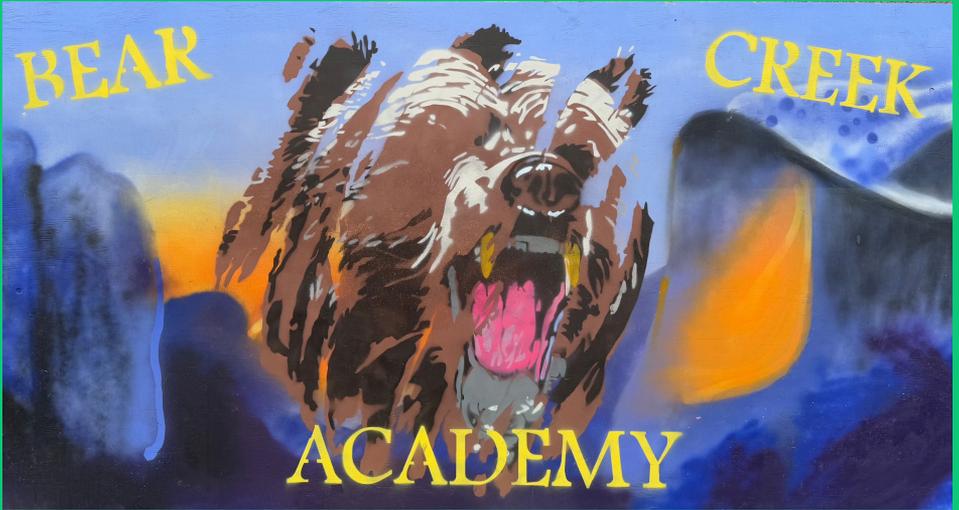
Exploring the depths of the oceans and one's self, this artist portrayed an anglerfish, foreboding, yet poised on adaptation to survive.



Seeking to reach the cosmos, this artist imagined his own planets, painting them on a surface grounding them to his experience.



Working seamlessly as a team, this group of young artists sought to combine the serenity of a landscape with the staunch feeling of iconography, intertwining place and symbol.



The entire cohort worked through the design process, choosing between mockups, and executing the new Bear Creek Academy mural sign.



OUR MISSION

Youth Leadership Institute builds communities where young people and their adult allies come together to create positive community change that promotes social justice and racial equity.

Our Core Values

INCLUSION

Young people are profoundly impacted by policies affecting their communities. yli brings youth to the table and works to institutionalize youth voice in the decision-making process.

INNOVATION

A wellspring of fresh perspectives and ideas, youth can often see a way forward where adults cannot. yli's youth development strategy encourages youth to identify and implement their own solutions to the issues their communities face.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

Throughout history, young people have ignited and led social justice movements to create a better world for everyone. yli helps them to focus their attention on the root causes of injustice, and sharpen the skills they need to tackle them.

COMMUNITY

Nobody can do it alone! Through relationship and coalition-building, yli feeds the connective tissue within our communities to power our movements with the brilliance, resourcefulness, and wisdom of our partners.