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## ***Life After Death and Elsewhere***

Organized by Robin Paris and Tom Williams  
September 10 – October 24, 2015

Please also consult the binder of the prisoners' writings at the front desk.

### **Counterclockwise from right**

Ron Cauthern (photograph by Robin Paris).  
*New Monument for Nashville*, 2015  
Acrylic and ink on pigment print  
24 x 18 inches

For this image, Ron Cauthern painted over a photograph of the Tennessee State Capitol, making the statue of Senator Edward Carmack that stands before it appear to wear the uniform of a prisoner on death row. He has added a goatee to transform this image into a self-portrait.

Dennis Suttles (photograph by Tom Williams)  
*Flowers from Death Row I: The Tennessee Capitol*, 2015  
Pigment print  
13 x 16 inches

Dennis Suttles (photograph by Micah Mathewson and Tom Williams)  
*Flowers from Death Row II: The Tennessee Supreme Court*, 2015  
Pigment print  
21 x 16 inches

Dennis Suttles  
*13 Roses*, 2015  
Acrylic on bread, glue, and wood  
Dimensions variable

Dennis Suttles (built by Robin Paris and Tom Williams)  
*Flowers from Death Row*, 2015  
Cardboard, canvas, tarps, latex paint  
18.5 feet

Dennis Suttles often creates small flowers using putty he makes from discarded scraps of bread, glue, and dowel rods before coating them with brightly colored acrylic paint. In his proposal, displayed on the pedestal with a vase of his flowers, he suggests that these be realized on a large scale from materials that would otherwise be discarded. They should be placed in public places as a reminder of the beauty of those things—and people—that we throw away. The flower that appears on the floor of the gallery is one of a pair that the curators photographed in front of the Tennessee Supreme Court and the Tennessee State Capitol.

Harold Wayne Nichols  
*A World Without Prisons*, 2015  
Ink and colored pencil on paper  
32 x 22 inches

Harold Wayne Nichols  
*Perspective*, 2015  
Acrylic on canvas board  
17.75 x 23.5 inches

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Harold Wayne Nichols  
*Random Choices*, 2015  
Acrylic on canvas board  
17.75 x 23.5 inches

Harold Wayne Nichols  
*Viewpoint*, 2015  
Acrylic on canvas board  
17.75 x 23.5 inches

Harold Wayne Nichols  
*Windows in Chaos*, 2015  
Acrylic on canvas board  
17.75 x 23.5 inches

This work offers both a memorial project and a series of paintings designed to offer it some personal and social context. For Nichols' memorial, featured in a large drawing to the right, he has designed an arena where communities might practice restorative justice rather than retribution. In his account, this tribunal would be made from the stones of the prisons it would replace.

The paintings that accompany it present different aspects of the prison-industrial complex and the society that feeds it. For the painting on the farthest left, entitled *Windows in Chaos*, he encourages viewers to consider themselves in relation to their backgrounds and the circumstances that put some on the path to prison in the first place. To its right is a painting entitled *Viewpoint* that juxtaposes the view from his cell and the landscape he would see if the prison did not exist. The third painting in the series is called *Random Choices*, and it presents an allegory for the randomness of the death penalty convictions (which often have less to do with the crime than the defendants' backgrounds, resources, and access to defense). The last painting is entitled *Perspective*, and it shows the shadow of death that haunts Nichols throughout his life. As he writes in the document that accompanies his contribution, "I can keep myself busy for a while doing things like painting.... I can keep my mind occupied by reading but the specter of death is always there."

The prisoners offer candy to their visitors. He asked that we extend their hospitality to the visitors of this exhibition. *Please feel free to take candy.*

Please see Nichols' more detailed statement in the binder at the gallery desk.

Abu Ali Abdur'Rahman, GDongalay Berry, Ron Cauthern, Gary Cone, John Freeland, Harold Wayne Nichols, Derrick Quintero, and Declicho Besh ("Ironhawk")  
*Model for a Monument to the Executed and to Those Who Died Awaiting Execution (for Legislative Plaza in Nashville)*, 2015  
Photograph  
19.25 x 14.25 inches

This photograph features a ceramic sculpture made by a number of the men on death row. They created this as a design for a monument to men who have been executed or who died on death row. Their names are inscribed on the "stones" that would make up this unlikely memorial. In their account, this construction would be realized on a large scale and installed before the Tennessee Capitol.

As we were realizing this show, Declicho Besh ("Ironhawk") died. As a group, the curators and prisoners conceived a larger "stone" for him. It appears with his tree on the gallery floor.

Declicho Besh ("Ironhawk")  
*Drawing for a Tree*, 2015  
Pencil on paper  
12.5 x 15.75 inches

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This drawing represents one of Ironhawk's early designs for the tree that stands as his memorial. See the more detailed description that accompanies his ceramic tree.

Declichio Besh ("Ironhawk")  
Realized in collaboration with artist Sophia Stevenson  
*Tree*, 2015  
Clay and painted feathers  
Dimensions variable

This ceramic tree is a memorial for Declichio Besh (known to everyone as "Ironhawk" or "Chief"). He was working diligently on a model for this monument when he suffered a heart attack and died. Sadly, his contribution stands as an actual memorial.

His original idea was inspired by his Apache heritage. He designed a terra-cotta tree with elaborately beaded feathers instead of leaves. Each feather was to represent an aspect of his character and identity, but he completed only a small number of them before he died and most of them were lost. One of his hand-made feathers is on display, while plain white feathers mark the intended locations of others.

Group Project  
*Stone for Chief*, 2015  
Clay  
9 x 5 x 5 inches

This monument echoes the blocks in *Model for a Monument to the Executed and to Those Who Died Awaiting Execution*. The lettering is by Harold Wayne Nichols.

GDongalay Berry  
*Untitled*, 2015  
Acrylic on canvas board  
12 x 16 inches

GDongalay Berry  
*Untitled*, 2015  
Pigment print  
40 x 39 inches

Rather than submitting a memorial, GDongalay Berry has submitted a poem describing his refusal to memorialize. He asked the curators to include the background image of a flower and the colored text. He also included a painting that addresses the shadow of death that haunts him.

Billy Irick  
*Landscape*, 2015  
Acrylic on canvas board  
16 x 19.5 inches

Rather than submitting a memorial, Billy Irick has asked to show a painting that depicts a landscape he dreams of visiting.

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Derrick Quintero

*If My Journey Were a Book Title*, 2012

Mixed Media

Left box: 17 x 16.75 x 12 inches

Right box: 17.5 x 16.25 x 11.5 inches (closed); 24.5 x 16.25 x 11.5 inches (open)

Derrick Quintero

*In My Mind's Eye*, 2015

Oil on canvas

28 x 28 inches

For his contribution, Derrick Quintero has included a diorama of his cell. This not only chronicles his current situation, but it also tells the story of how he got here and his hope for a freedom to come. His painting addresses his struggles against imprisonment and his dreams for the future.

Ron Cauthern (with assistance from Harold Wayne Nichols)

*Airplane*, 2015

Mixed media

Dimensions variable

This cardboard airplane was made entirely in the prison by Ron Cauthern (with Nichols' assistance). As his memorial, he hopes that planes like this could fly around the nation's capitols until executions are ended. In this scenario, the planes would trail banners with anti-death penalty slogans such as "Legal Murder Is Murder" or "Don't Kill for Us."

Cauthern included the motor from a music box, so if properly cranked, the propeller will spin and play the song "Somewhere Out There." *Please do not touch the airplane; ask a staff member for help with the music box.*

Abu Ali Abdur'Rahman

*Landscape*, 2015

Mixed media

Dimensions variable inches

In this diorama, Abu Ali Abdur'Rahman addresses his conception of the afterlife. For him, a memorial has to address his belief that death is an illusion. Much of the imagery in this work is informed by his experiences as a child when he retreated to the woods to escape his father's abuse and his mother's neglect. During those years, he came to believe that the animals were his only friends. His memorial combines aspects of Native American spirituality, Buddhism, Christian theology, and other religious traditions.

The painting of an eagle is acrylic on handkerchief and it is part of the larger ensemble. This piece is also accompanied by an audio component in which his spiritual adviser explains his conception of the work while he imitates the sounds of animals and sings "How Great Thou Art."

Kennath Artez Henderson

*Self-Portrait as a Young Man*, 2015

Mixed media on paper

13 x 16 inches

Kennath Artez Henderson (drawing by Holly Carden over a photograph by Robin Paris)

*Proposal for a Recreation Center*, 2015

Photograph and drawing on paper

16 x 16 inches

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Kennath Artez Henderson has included two memorials. The self-portrait recalls the photographs and paintings that his family displays to keep him in their life. The landscape is a design for a recreation center. This design reflects his hope for institutions that might offer alternatives to prison for young people living in the most disadvantaged areas.

Gary Cone (built by Robin Paris and Tom Williams)

*Reading Has Been My Way to Exit*, 2015

Mixed media

10.5 feet high

Gary Cone (designed by artist Britt Stadig)

*Gary Cone: I Am a Reader of Books*, 2015

Book

9 x 11 inches

This tower of books is a memorial for Gary Cone. He is a voracious reader, and until recently, he was the prison librarian for the death row unit. The books presented here appear on a list of the ones that he has most loved during his years of confinement. As he notes in a text he wrote that accompanied the proposal for this tower, "My actions throughout my adult life have led me to prison and reading has been my way to exit."

This tower is accompanied by a book that features his writings and paintings alongside photographs of libraries by Robin Paris. It includes his lists of his favorite books.

He has been unable to see this project to fruition. Earlier this year, an infection in his back spread to his spine and left him paraplegic. He currently lives in a special needs facility in Nashville where he has no access to visitors and educational programs. He also has very little access to books.

Akil Jahi (photograph by Robin Paris)

*Proposal for a Monument*, 2015

Acrylic on pigment print

27.25 x 20.75 inches

Akil Jahi (photograph by Robin Paris)

*Proposal for a Monument*, 2015

pigment print

21.75 x 15.25 inches

Akil Jahi

*Model for a Monument*, 2015

mixed media

27.5 x 20 x 30 inches

For this memorial, Akil Jahi has designed a large shoe as a way of addressing the deprivations of prison. Most of the men on death row have not set foot on grass or soil in years, and this work reflects their longing to step out of the artificial and antiseptic spaces of prison. He inscribed the shoe with the names of men who died on death row since the 1960s. They are also honored by the crosses in the grass below the shoe. Many of the men on death row today also signed it.

Donald Middlebrooks

*The Letter*, 2015

Acrylic and stamp on canvas board

14 x 11 inches

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Donald Middlebrooks (photograph by Seyma Bayram)  
*Hand Print: Memorial for Donald Middlebrooks*, 2015  
acrylic on Plexiglass over pigment print  
10.5 x 15.4 inches

Donald Middlebrooks (photograph by Seyma Bayram)  
*A Rainbow Over the State of Texas*, 2015  
colored pencil and ink on pigment print  
16 x 16 inches

Donald Middlebrooks  
*The Blue Vase*, 2015  
Tempera on matboard  
Each panel 6 x 9 inches

Donald Middlebrooks has conceived of two personal and ephemeral memorials.

In one, he imagines a memorial in the form of a rainbow over the landscape over the region of Texas where he grew up. As a child, he hid under the bridge in this photograph to escape the physical and sexual abuse he was experiencing at home. The bridge was a refuge, and he commemorates this by mirroring its shadow with the arc of a rainbow.

In the other, he simply applies his handprint to a clear pane of acrylic. This kind of mark making is the most elemental form of a memorial, but for him, this gesture has personal meaning. When he was a young boy, he intentionally left his handprints on the glass windows of a neighbor's house after breaking in. He did this in the hope the police would arrest him and rescue him from his mother's abuse. He wanted this mark to stand as a monument to his attempts to find a life beyond the nightmare of his childhood. We have placed this over another photograph of the region of Texas where he grew up.

Also on view are two other works. In one, he recounts a particularly traumatic moment in his childhood, and in another, he describes a letter he attempted to mail to the relatives of the victim.

Brittney DeNigris and Moses Williams  
*Telling Our Story*, 2015

Video  
15:42

For this video, DeNigris and Williams have juxtaposed the prisoners' perspectives with footage of locales of their choosing. Through friends or visitors, the men tell stories that they want to share with the world, addressing their pasts or describing their experiences in prison.

Derrick Quintero tells his own story. His voice was recorded over the phone.