

apexart

2015-16 Unsolicited Program Proposal by
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Life After Death and Elsewhere

During the past year, the state of Tennessee has staged a nearly unprecedented offensive against those individuals it has sentenced to die. A state that has executed only six people since 1960 has recently scheduled ten executions. As prisoners on death row, and imminent victims of that state-sponsored violence, we represent the “bare life” described so powerfully by historians and philosophers. During the past two years, however, through an unusual partnership with artists, writers, and educators in Nashville, we have endeavored to make our circumstances visible to those beyond the walls of prison. Through published writings and art exhibitions, we have addressed a public that knows as little of our lives as they do of the indignities of belly chains or the menacing shimmer of razor wire.

Our past exhibitions have often included collaborations with artists and art students on the outside. We have created “add-on” drawings (exquisite corpses, more or less) with people beyond the prison, and we have started sketchbooks before sending them out for strangers to finish. We have composed “surrogate” assignments for outsiders to realize (photographs of the stars, for instance, which some of us haven’t seen in 25 years, or the libraries in cities that we will never visit). We have made gifts of our art works and offered them to visitors to the opening of an exhibition in exchange for their photographic portraits. In one show, we exhibited a diorama that traces the all-too-common path from poverty to prison, and in other, we exhibited our personal snapshots and family photos to offer the world a glimpse of our social lives and to show that we are more than prisoners and men condemned to death

In response to your call, we propose an exhibition that will feature designs for our own memorials alongside our representations of the lives we would pursue if we were free. We have all been condemned to death, and the state of Tennessee intends to kill us, but some of are innocent, and we all hope to demonstrate that we are more than the sum of our worst deeds—or that we might be.

The works we will submit will include drawings, paintings, photographs, models, and text-based pieces. Some of us will submit statements outlining their reasons for refusing to design their own memorials.

Artists: Abu Ali Abdur’Rahman, G'dongalay Berry, Tyrone Chalmers, Gary Cone, John Freeland, Kennath Artez Henderson, Nikolaus Johnson, Donald Middlebrooks, Harold Wayne Nichols, and Derrick Quintero.