

# Incarceration, Liberation, Imagination

## Artist's Statement

I am a believer that ART saved my life and in doing so saved my family. I am a believer in the Lord and that HIS guidance and love led me away from a life that would have harmed all those I love and love me. My artwork in this exhibition shows my life in the "hood" and when confined to a jail cell spending long lonely hours away from my family and home. Through those seemingly endless hours, I found hope and faith through my family and the Lord. When a man finds himself alone behind bars, there is plenty of time to reflect on what is important and has meaning. Being in the cell with other inmates also showed me how their lives turned out and impacted my way of thinking. Life had so much more to offer. Therefore, it is the way that I am guided to the light instead of the darkness that ensures that I continue expressing myself and helping others through the ARTS, giving me a real reason to survive.

I am often surrounded by young angry men and women; those who suffered like me. But it seems that the language of love comes from deep inside has touched my heart and my brain and without bitterness from my past, I am able to express myself and mentor others on canvas. I do not claim to be a professional artist and feel fortunate that I have had some wonderful people who believed in me, gave me a chance, including Gangland Ministries and the Art Miles Mural Project to show me another path. I merely lived day by day putting all the hopes and dreams I had about family, especially my wife Sonia, who, along with the Holy Spirit showed me the true meaning of life, love and hope.

And now by memorializing the events of my life through INCARCERATION, my LIBERATION unleashed my IMAGINATION. I now have, with a newfound DETERMINATION to share what I have seen and done that otherwise might have killed me. Together and with my five young sons, and with the help of people who really understand and care about how good can prevail, I am committed to develop and dedicate myself to ART in order that the message of PEACE and LOVE prevail throughout my life. I am proud of my friends and neighbors and my Latino cultural heritage, and vow to help as many that I can by example and through the images that are a result of what comes from my heart.

Saul Figueroa

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## About the exhibit

*Incarceration, Liberation, Imagination* by local artist Saul Figueroa features colorful, detailed mixed media artwork. The exhibit tells a compelling story of gang violence, prison life, and ultimately a story of faith and second chances. *Incarceration, Liberation, Imagination* provides CSUSM students and community an unflinching and intimate look into one man's perseverance through poverty, crime, and imprisonment.

Only three weeks out of prison, former street gang member Saul Figueroa was recognized by Gangland Ministries of Oceanside as an artist in the "hood" to participate in a community Art Miles Mural Project. The theme of the mural was "stop the violence," to memorialize the killing of a local teen as a result of gang violence. Since then, Figueroa has dedicated himself to share his story of gang violence, prison life, faith, and second chances through his artwork and mentoring. Figueroa is married and is the father of five young sons.

Figueroa's mentoring of youth to build a stronger, safer, more inclusive community resonates with the ideas behind the CSUSM Civility Campaign. University students, faculty, staff, administration and the public are invited to view a compelling story of how art and community support became a life changing influence for Figueroa. Twenty-five sketches and paintings reflect Saul Figueroa's life in prison, redemption, and a new way forward.

The exhibit opens at noon, Tuesday, February 12th, on the Library Plaza outside our 3rd floor main entrance. Meet and greet artist Saul Figueroa in conjunction with CSUSM's 2nd Annual Civility Showcase. An Art Miles Mural will be created and displayed on site. A staff member from Assemblyman Rocky Chavez' office will be present during the opening to recognize Saul Figueroa's accomplishments. The exhibit will be on display through May 10, 2013, free and open to the public during all library hours.

## Partners

This exhibit is made possible by the CSUSM Civility Campaign, Instructionally Related Activities (IRA) funds, the Arts & Lectures Series, ArtMiles, and Charity Wings.