

# Listen & Be Heard

## Arts, Culture & Entertainment News

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### Redemption in Contemplation

by paula mcconnell

Upwards of seventy-five people attended the reception for the current exhibit at the Vallejo Artists' Guild entitled: "Redemption" featuring the works of one artist, William A. Noguera. Noguera lives in a four by ten cell; San Quentin, Cell #77, 3<sup>rd</sup> Tier, East Block. He has been sitting there since 1983 on what he terms "condemned row."

In the early 1980's Noguera and his sixteen year old girlfriend had conceived a child. He was elated about the news, and vowed to get a job to support his new family. Fate intercepted. His future mother-in-law had other plans and boastfully explained to Noguera that she had arranged to have their baby aborted. Noguera became enraged. Gravely disappointed and in a steroid-induced haze, his anger and angst manifested in a murderous rage. His girlfriend's mother quickly joined his aborted child.

This is a sad story, a story too often heard. But in William A. Noguera's case, a small cell has allowed him to have a spiritual voice. And many people around the world are helping him to make that voice heard. "I couldn't describe how difficult it is to deal with the everyday process of being behind bars, so I started putting it on paper," Noguera once told a reporter during a phone interview. His work is a neo-pointillist style using pen and ink. His drawings are quite literally a record of time, often taking over three-hundred hours per piece.

He describes his work as "monochromatic-metaphoric-surrealism done in ink stippings." Each of his efforts is thought provoking. The subjects include self-portraits and men with infants with such titles as "Last Words," "He Who I Once Was," and "A Father's Rage." Noguera creates his pen-and-ink on a makeshift easel which he assembles daily from his steel bed frame by flipping over the bed to make a table. In addition to the artist's ability to create visual wonders, his prose are deeply thought-provoking. "No excellent soul is exempt from a mixture of madness," he writes on once piece for example.

The show and reception are sponsored by Hadi Reinhertz, a member of the Sufi Order Internal Vallejo Center. "Sufi is a form of Islam," said Reinhertz. "It consists of mystics who explore the intimate relationships with God and the Divine mysteries of faith," he explains. "I believe that William A. Noguera has spiritually grown from his prison experience. Had he not been sent to jail, he probably would not have awakened the spiritual artist within him." Reinhertz said. "We all grow spiritually and learn by every experience we have, both good and bad. It is obvious to me that Bill would not be what he is today had he not gone to jail..." Reinhertz reflected.

Noguera's work has obtained international acclaim. French collector Bernard Renaud believes that Noguera's work should be seen. He and his partner Linda have acquired many of his works already, and plan to purchase more. "I will then take it on an international tour." said Renaud. He has a working relationship with Noguera. For many years Renaud sold Noguera's work in his Palo Alto Gallery, La Galerie. Prints sold on average for \$500. He gave much of his proceeds to children's causes. Originals today are valued at thousands of dollars. According to Renaud they have been purchased by professionals in Silicon Valley and by "high members of the legal profession."

Most recently, the Institute For Unpopular Culture has expressed interest in showing Noguera's work. "We are very excited about this artist, and about featuring the first San Francisco major show," said Cassandra Richardson, Associate Director of the Institute located on Stockton Street in downtown San Francisco.

"Redemption" is an inspiring exhibit. It is a rare opportunity to see first hand the work of a man about to be thrust on the international world stage of art, while awaiting execution on death row.

## William Noguera

*Stormbringer (1992)*

*"...She is filled with beauty. She is strong and confident. My interpretation of this Penni Ann Cross work was created for an attorney who I feel is strong. I wanted to create a piece that captured the essence of this attorney's personality. This drawing took approximately 275 hours to complete..."*

*William Noguera*

