

# Art in Support of Political Prisoners

Marie Mason and Kelly Poe Exhibit: "What keeps you sane?"

Fifth Estate Collective

2013

When you receive a phone call or a letter from Marie Mason, the Green Scare prisoner serving the longest sentence for eco-sabotage, one is almost startled at how buoyant she is, filled with questions about what you're doing and wanting to give her opinion on what is happening in the world.

It's hard to imagine her strength and resolve given her daily circumstances

and the future the state intends for her.

Marie is in her third year of a 22-year sentence following her guilty plea to two acts of property damage in which no one was hurt. For this, she is being held in a high security federal facility in Fort Worth, Texas under harsh conditions.

A recent visitor to her at Federal Medical Center Carswell reported, "I just can't fathom what life is like every day in that facility." Marie's unit is the size of a gymnasium, which initially had individual cells along the walls. However, after a period of construction, the cells have been made into two-person units, squeezing the inmates even more.

There is a small outdoor exercise cage, but even that has a concrete floor and wire on the top, so the prisoners never have an unobstructed view of the sky.

Since being pulled out of a large general population prison in Minnesota in 2010 and transferred to Carswell, she has been outside her building only once when she went for an eye exam. Other than that, she has been in that same building since she arrived.

Marie's deep love of the natural world is what impelled her actions both inside and outside the law, and now she hasn't set foot on even a patch of earth in two years.

Carswell describes itself as "a federal prison for female inmates of all security levels with special medical and mental health needs." Marie has neither of these issues but is kept there for punitive and surveillance reasons.

In spite of all of this, her visitor reports, "She is very strong and very committed."

A major reason Marie remains resolute and doesn't fall into the despair as do so many other Carswell's inmates which are acted out in depression and sometimes violence, is the amount of support she receives from friends, family, comrades, and supporters.

This is manifested by large support actions such as the now annual June 11<sup>th</sup> Day of Solidarity with Marie and another long-term Green Scare prisoner, Eric McDavid. Actions across the world ranged from small letter writ-



Kelly Poe's photo of Marie Mason's image of sanity and chair, table, and book.

ing parties to banner drops, a punk rock karaoke event in New York City, to more militant actions, all expressing support for Eric and Marie and other Green Scare prisoners.

Opposition to the repression and demonizing of Marie and other Green Scare government targets has gained support in a multitude of ways.

A recent one was an installation organized by photographer Kelly Poe at Chicago's The Suburban gallery of her work and Marie's jailhouse paintings which ran from September 23 to October 28.

In 2006, Poe began corresponding with several incarcerated environmental activists imprisoned as a result of Operation Backfire, the federal government's program targeting animal and environmental liberation groups, and later, Marie.

She asked each the question: "What are the places that you return to inside your mind's eye; the sacred places that you visualize to help keep you sane? I'll go there and make a picture for you."

Poe traveled across the country to the areas cited by those in prison as far apart as the Oregon coast, South Dakota Badlands, the Arizona desert, and the shore of Lake Michigan to find and photograph the wild landscapes mentioned by prisoners Rod Coronado, Jake Conroy, Jeffrey Luers, Marie Mason, Daniel McGowan, Jonathan Paul, and Peter Young.

Seven photographs captured by Poe were first shown at Los Angeles' LA>

She also created an accompanying handmade, oversized book, *For the Wild*, printed on rag paper, weighing 30 pounds, containing her years of correspondence, photographs, drawings and letters between the artist and activists. Poe also printed 120 of a smaller version of the book for the Los Angeles and recent exhibits.

For The Suburban show, Poe assembled 30 original artworks by Marie mailed from prison to friends, family, and outside supporters painted on the back of letters. Poe had Marie's image, a magnificent sunset with a green flash over Lake Michigan seen from Empire, Michigan, enlarged to wall size in front of the original *For the Wild* book with a table and chair designed by Poe. Marie's paintings were displayed on a rack specially constructed for the exhibit.

The opening reception was well attended and quite lively. It was exactly what Marie would have wanted [undoubtedly, though, not focused on her]; people brought together in solidarity and committed to protecting the earth.

Marie appreciates letters, although she can only write back to a restricted number of people.

Write her at: Marie Mason #04672-061, FMC Carswell, P.O. Box 27137, Fort Worth TX 76127.

Info at [SupportMariusMason.org](http://SupportMariusMason.org). Funds for [their] support and legal matters are always needed. [Web archive updated September 2022]

# fifth Estate

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