

Marius Mason continues transgender struggle in prison

Still painting while in solitary

anon.

2016

I want to throw up because we're supposed to quietly and politely make house in this killing machine called America.

—David Wojnarowicz, *Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration*

I think of Wojnarowicz's disgust as I sit across from my friend, Marius Mason, in this maximum-security prison visitor's room. We are allowed one embrace before we seat ourselves. A surveillance camera looms over head. A guard is posted a few feet away in this sterile cement room. The echo is oppressive as our thoughts and feelings spill out, hurried by the time allotted to us. No paper, no pens or photos of home; only our voices.

Marius says that the echo alone can drive the other prisoners on his unit to acts of violence on themselves or others, as they strive for some kind of emotional release from the madness of this place buried in the heart of Texas.

It is Marius's fifth year in Carswell federal women's prison in Fort Worth inside a highly restrictive unit. He has served seven years of a 22-year sentence for committing two acts of eco-sabotage.

Marius has begun the seemingly impossible process of coming out as trans while incarcerated. Formerly known as Marie Mason, an environmental activist and Fifth Estate writer, Marius has unceasingly fought the prison and the federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) to be granted acknowledgment of his chosen name, as well as full access to hormone treatment and further gender reassignment.

Marius was arrested in 2008 for two acts of property destruction that occurred eight years earlier and were claimed by the Earth Liberation Front. The arrest came at the height of the Green Scare, a targeted FBI campaign to capture animal liberation and environmental advocates.

Although no one was harmed in Marius's actions, they were designated as terrorism by the sentencing judge and he received the longest sentence of any Green Scare prisoner. Because of the terrorism designation, he is not eligible for parole or probation and will serve his entire sentence unless a campaign to release him is successful.

Marius spent nearly two months between June 18-Aug. 1 in Carswell's Special Housing Unit (SHU), a sanitized phrase for solitary, for a prison rule violation. For much of this confinement, Marius's family, support group, and attorney were unable to obtain the specifics of his offense and communication with him was limited.

Following a visit by his lawyer, it was learned that Marius was accused of misusing legal mail by sending a June 11 support statement to his attorney who, after reviewing it, sent it out to the group organizing the day of solidarity with anarchist prisoners. The violation stemmed from a technicality. The statement should have been mailed back to Marius for him to send out.

For the infraction, Marius lost access to the prison e-mail system, phone calls home and all his property was confiscated. This meant Marius was not allowed to call his daughter on her birthday.



Marius proved his unwavering commitment to never back down no matter what is thrown at him. His art supplies were seized with everything else when he was sent to the SHU, but he continued to send out his art work to supporters and family.

Instead of acrylics and craft paper he normally uses for his amazing paintings, he improvised supplies using a deodorant stick, toothpaste, and scratched images onto magazine clippings, in an attempt to never stop expressing himself. One of these is displayed in the Fifth Estate exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit.

With every book he reads, Marius plans to write a review to be posted to his website managed by his support group (SupportMariusMason.org). He mails back books when finished, 40 of which form the new Marius Mason Library located at The Base in Brooklyn, a project he has been orchestrating for months. Other books can be donated to the info shop at 1302 Myrtle Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11221.

Marius continues to collaborate with projects on the outside including joining the Steering Committee/Advisory board of the Prison Ecology Project, which “[maps] the intersections of mass incarceration and environmental degradation, and [creates] action plans to address the multitude of problems found there.” (nationinside.org/campaign/prison-ecology/)

Marius is also planning an event of his own, an international day of solidarity with queer and trans prisoners to take place January 22, 2016. Details will appear on his web site.

Marius was granted permission by prison authorities to receive mail under his chosen name, but suddenly, “due to shifting policies,” correspondence bearing that name was refused and returned to the sender. This means Marius has arbitrarily been cut off from friends and comrades by postal mail.

He needs letters! Write about your trip to the woods or the ocean; about your hopes and dreams for your community, your garden, or current events. They should be addressed to:

Marie (Marius) Mason #04672-061, FMC Carswell, P.O. Box 27137, Fort Worth, TX 76127.

fifth Estate

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<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/395-winter-2016-50th-anniversary/marius-mason-continues-transgender-struggle-in-prison>
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