

Having spent a lot of time in isolation armed with little more than a pencil, a good eye for detail and the imagination born of bare stone walls, I have had to think outside the box (quite literally). I have always tried to approach my work from a position of individuality and my attitude towards art is a fearless one of trial and error. If I do not or cannot achieve what I am after, I absorb the learning curve and move onto something new. The ‘something new’ always fills me with a sense of excitement and nothing ever gets truly left behind. During these long years of confinement, art has been my one constant companion. Without its loyalty I would experience more of the pain and fear that shaped my life from a young age. I am no longer the product of my crime, but of my creativity. I survived the past, I am thankful for the present, and I now have a future. Fortunately, with the permission of the Governor, I have been afforded the opportunity to build a website (see <https://steeldoorstudios.com>). It is our desire that this project becomes a beneficial platform for myself and other imprisoned people to find their creative voices, be able to share, connect and maybe one day return to the outside world, not as a tainted outcast but as a useful and valued member of society with something to offer.

“Blue Boy” (front cover)

*Steel Door Studios*

2024

The years I spent in therapy evoked many nights of internal angst. It became my practice to keep a pencil near at hand even whilst in bed I needed only to reach out in order to either write or sketch out an idea. This particular piece began life as an ink drawing titled “It’s an Inside Job”. Alongside the work our artist in residence was doing in relation to masks and toxic masculinity I was thinking about how much of my life consisted of avoiding what lies beneath the multitude of masks I felt the need to wear. Am I brave enough to not only scrutinise, but actually share with the wider world that scared little boy who spent as lifetime incarcerated? Even as I look upon the image whilst writing this, I feel a whole host of emotions ranging from sadness and shame to anger and resentment. The difference today is I am no longer beholden to the core belief that I should not feel this way and certainly must not let anybody know I might experience emotions. I feel what I feel and that is okay with me. Embracing vulnerability has given me a newfound strength in both my life and my artwork.

“Blue Boy 4” (back cover)

*Steel Door Studios*

2024

Conceptualising and executing this series has had quite a cathartic effect upon me, so the more I share of myself and the angst ridden history I have experienced the much greater the identification with vulnerability being strength rather than a weakness I come to acknowledge. This painting is much more than an individual's desire to escape his carceral surroundings. It represents a yearning, a need, to break out of that pigeonhole they had been boxed into by years of oppressive voices reiterating the defects of character they pertain to witness in you. Given enough time a person will eventually come to believe this is an absolute truth. You 'aren't worthy', 'you are bad'. The cloak of shame I have worn throughout my life weighed heavy upon my soul until I learnt one simple lesson, the difference between guilt and shame. Guilt... I have done something bad. Shame... I am bad. Nobody can live a healthy fulfilling life believing they are defective. No matter what label somebody insists on applying to you, remember you are a human being. You can make mistakes and you can make amends, but never make yourself a prisoner.