



Closer Inspection

A note that accompanied a **leather coin pouch** by Robert Lay, at a Pennsylvania state prison, says the pouch is made from softball leather sewn with broom bristles and shoelaces.



Vincent Camacho, in a central Michigan prison, created **sculptures** from soap. Sobin says prisoners heat bars until they form a sort of clay. "His mother sent this to us," Sobin says.



Georgia state prisoner Curtis Anthony Dye created "**Morning Blooms**" in 2007 out of such materials as cardboard, Wite-Out, creamer, toothpaste, coffee and wax. He has submitted almost 100 works over the years, Sobin says.

This **rosary**, made from coffee beans, was one of six donated three years ago by a warden in Colombia as an example of the work his prisoners do, Sobin says.



Envelopes are a common vehicle of artist expression, Sobin says, including a watercolor landscape by paroled New Jersey state prisoner Larry Walker.



Tennessee state prisoner Shug Robinson creates **eggshell artworks**, one of which is on display at the Museum of Crime & Punishment. Sobin says Robinson makes some of the most atypical — and delicate — pieces Sobin has seen.



Artistic inmates

D.C. group showcases works by prisoners

BY KRIS CORONADO
"The biggest misconception people have is that prisoners don't need any help at all, or support," says Dennis Sobin, managing director of the Prisons Foundation, a Washington nonprofit that has promoted the arts and education in prisons nationwide since 2003.

Having an artistic outlet, he says, can be a key part of rehabilitation and can offer prisoners a sense of hope: "If they accomplish art, they can get the

feeling that they can accomplish anything."

The 68-year-old D.C. resident, who served about 10 years in prison for racketeering, leads a small staff and volunteers who correspond with inmates in several states.

Many of the prisoners — serving time on a wide range of charges, including armed robbery and kidnapping — send works of art to be displayed or sold. Most original pieces sell for between \$100 and \$500; profits are split evenly between

the organization and the artist.

Although the foundation has no gallery space, Washingtonians can see works on display at the National Museum of Crime & Punishment and online at www.safestreetarts.org. Sobin estimates the group's database holds information about 700 artists and more than 2,000 pieces, including sculptures made of bread and paintings incorporating ground coffee. "We accept everything," Sobin says.

Here, a sampling of the collection.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BENJAMIN C. TANKERSLEY