



Unlocked

Art and Experiences from Inside Virginia's Prisons

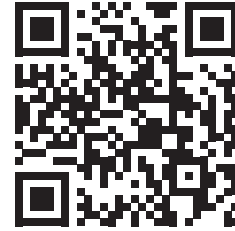


Volume 5 | Fall 2025

A Weekend of Displacement

Anthony Winn

To hear Anthony Winn's interview and reading of "A Weekend of Displacement", [click here](#) or scan the QR code.



The lady walks across the room.
with dignity boasting on her shoulders
like a crown of locs
fashioned by the nurturing hands
of a thousand mothers
ancestral roots of royal eloquence
that extend longer than immemorial
skies.

She floats in between prodigal sons
eclipsed from the urban wild
growing, uprooted men
as maternal instincts gravitate
her towards her own

son tries to sit motionless
but emotions flame
unfamiliar syllables in his body
language.
Curiosity forms long creases
on his forehead that draw deeper
than someone's last breath spoken in a
parable
because nostalgia clouds his sight
of a little boy of his likeness
walking beside his mother
a reflection in the mirror to the past
when life meant video games and
sleepovers.

Tight, he embraces his mother
losing himself in an earthly warmth
a place where their souls first met.

Tears, a therapeutic cleansing
loosens and undresses
the penal years of
an abnormal cost of living
as the child stares with wistful eyes
and a closed mouth full of:

Are you my dad?

When will I get tall?

Why can't you leave with us...?

Their eyes dance in a tongue too
emotional for words.
So he hugs his son, his heir
like a wedding band holds a promise:
never to unlock his bond.

Sitting at a table
that is small as their talk
short as their minutes allowed,
an officer makes it his duty
to undermine their visit
like missing teeth ruin a smile.

With a blank finish, sadness
renders his face
and displays a growing man
who has misplaced his responsibility.

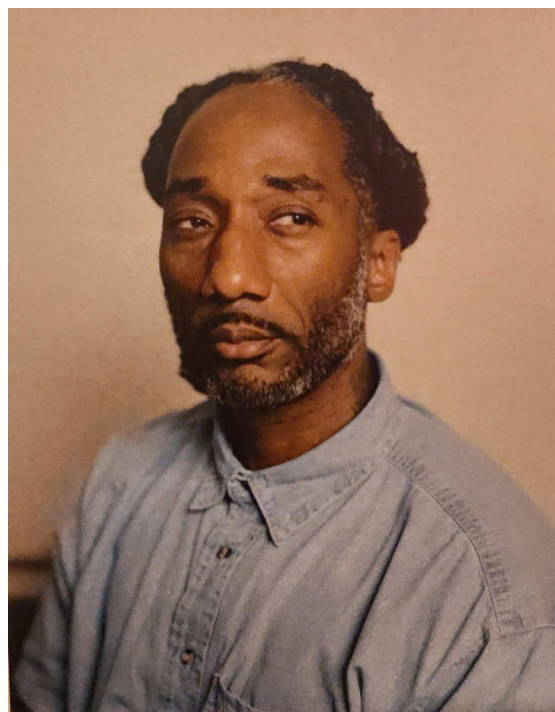
it doesn't matter!

Anthony Winn



Artist's note

Not to expose too much about the allusions and interpretations of this artwork, this piece illustrates the principle of economy, meaning it was composed with the least number of lines. I wanted to capture the fact that most of the time, my right will be wrong against oppression. Inspiration came from the artist Titus Kaphar.



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[*Listen to the interview here*](#)

Taj Mahon-Haft

I'm here with Anthony Winn about to share with us his poem, "A Weekend of Displacement." Anthony, will you go ahead and introduce your poem and perform it for us, please?

Anthony Winn

Okay. So, this is one of my favorite poems. I would like to share with you. It is called "A Weekend of Displacement." I hope people enjoy this:

The lady walks across the room.
with dignity boasting on her shoulders
like a crown of locs
fashioned by the nurturing hands
of a thousand mothers
ancestral roots of royal eloquence
that extend longer than immemorial skies.
She floats in between prodigal sons
eclipsed from the urban wild
growing, uprooted men
as maternal instincts gravitate
her towards her own
son tries to sit motionless
but emotions flame
unfamiliar syllables in his body language.
Curiosity forms long creases
on his forehead that draw deeper
than someone's last breath spoken in a parable
because nostalgia clouds his sight
of a little boy of his likeness
walking beside his mother
a reflection in the mirror to the past
when life meant video games and sleepovers.
Tight, he embraces his mother
losing himself in an earthly warmth
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Tears, a therapeutic cleansing
loosens and undresses
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as the child stares with wistful eyes.
and a closed mouth full of:
Are you my dad?
When will I get tall?

Why can't you be with us...?
Their eyes dance in a tongue too emotional for words.
So he hugs his son, his heir
like a wedding band holds a promise:
never to unlock his bond.
Sitting at a table

that is small as their talk
short as their minutes allowed,
an officer makes it his duty
to undermine their visit
like missing teeth ruin a smile.
With a blank finish, sadness
renders his face
and displays a growing man.
who has misplaced his responsibility.

Thank you.

Mahon-Haft

Man, thank you. I actually got shivers with that, hearing you recite this poem—I've read it—there's so much more in your voice, even, and it's an incredible poem. I told you before we started, it's intense. As a father who spent some time behind bars, that was the toughest thing of the whole thing, was being a parent behind bars.

Winn

Right.

Mahon-Haft

This really resonates with me, man. I don't want to put my meaning on it, so I guess I'm going to ask, will you kind of let readers, listeners—because it's got so much beautiful imagery in here. And I think the story tells itself, but I think people would like to understand where you came from, what you were coming from when you wrote this.

Winn

Yeah, because, you know, you have to think, like, when I got incarcerated, my son was like, one-and-a-half years old. So, when I came in here, it's like I was disconnected from him, as well. It's like, I didn't get to see him for, I'm going to say, fifteen years later. Physically, I didn't get to see him until fifteen years later. That event happened in the visiting room, you know. My mother, she was able to bring him in, you know, that's the three people that's involved that's in this poem that I wrote, you know, because by me seeing him for the first time as a teenager, you know, it became surreal.

It's like, the meaning of life just changed for me, you know. And it was, like, a lot of regrets,

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a lot of missed out time, a lot of first this, a lot of first that, you know. But yet, at the same time, he was able to come into the visitor's room, it was like seeing myself. You know what I'm saying? It was like I was just trying to put those emotions in words, right? And that's why I was using that rhythm, you know, to try to put it in an artistic way to really capture a person—to draw him in. But that's mainly the story behind that.

Mahon-Haft

Yeah, it obviously made an impression on you. You just said it changed your life, and this is something that this was some years ago now, and you're still writing this beautiful, very evocative, but very, like, these are specific moments that seem to have resonated and stayed with you. You're right, you did put it in a very poetic way. "Unfamiliar syllables in his body language" is a line that I just—stands with me just powerfully. "A child stares with wistful eyes and a closed mouth full of," and then a series of questions, like, it haunts me. And so how do you pick the language? I mean, who knows, right? But explain to everybody your writing process, I guess, to find such beautiful language for such an intense feeling that you've captured.

Winn

Alright, well, you know, I'm a creative person, right, and I say this to individuals a lot, but I don't think they really understand when I tell them this, is that, you know, I'm going on thirty years in prison, but I have yet to be bored, right? Because my imagination won't allow me to be bored, and my creativity will not allow me to be bored. So, if I know how to say something one particular way, I try to figure out at least three or four ways of saying the same thing, right, in a creative way, you know. I think that played a part in me expressing myself, you know, in an effective manner.

Like also, you were just talking about, you know, "the child stares with wistful eyes and closed mouth." Those questions he asked me, so you kinda, you know, it's like, it hit me, you know, because like, all of them, it just hit me. I wasn't prepared for that, you know? I really wasn't prepared for that. So, you know, just thinking back on that was like, okay, I'm going to really make this poem, you know. I'm going to put a lot into this poem because it meant a lot to me, and I'm searching for these feelings and these emotions and I'm trying to put them in words, alright? And hopefully, I did a good job at it. It can last for, you know—it can be a classic. People can read it for years down the road, or even when I'm gone, they can be able to relate to it, seeing your child for the first time in this type of setting.

Mahon-Haft

As somebody who went through a lot of these feelings, I think you wrote the best poem I've ever read to capture them, so I think you did a good job.

Winn

Appreciate that.

Mahon-Haft

I think the natural follow-up, you said it changed your life. Where has this taken you?

Winn

Okay. First, it had taken me to mature, to actually look at the big picture of life, what it is to be a father, right? What it is to be a man, you know, what is your priorities? You know, how do you want your legacy to stand the test of time? So, by me asking those questions, it forced me to be more serious in my decision-making, right, because either you can grow in here, excel, or you can wither away and rot, you know?

So, I told you—I told you, you know, I wanted to grow and I wanted to be a better person. I created fatherhood programs, you know, I've been a mentor, so it touched me in a way—you know what I'm saying—that it was very transformative. And like I said, you know, that was my experience and that was my truth. Like I said, it's resonating to this day from the decisions that I made in the past.

Mahon-Haft

Yeah. Fatherhood and the tangibility of fatherhood can be a real motivating factor.

Winn

Right.

Mahon-Haft

I can relate.

Winn

Right.

Mahon-Haft

And so, what else—to follow up, you talked about the fatherhood program as one of the things that this has inspired in you. Where has—what is a lesson that you would offer to other parents behind bars or to an understanding to the world about this from that perspective?

Winn

So, I would say, never stop trying to reach out, alright? I mean, you know, what people don't know is communication, social distancing is real in prison, but there is more than one way in order to get your communication out, alright? If it's writing a letter, if it's making a phone call, establishing contacts and building meaningful relationships so that way you can stay in contact with your kids, right. You know, that's one thing that hurt me because, you know, when you're young, when I came in as a teenager, I didn't think about parenthood, I was immature, you know. But as you're growing up through that and maturing, you start to

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realize you got to do better, I got to do better. So, you know, my point is always stay reaching out and speaking and all of it. And I think mainly, this poem is to be, like, my letter to him to let him know that he was always on my mind when I was doing this thirty-six years. I think that's pretty much it.

Mahon-Haft

It's a letter to him. Yeah, that's beautiful, man.

Winn

Yeah, right.

Mahon-Haft

That's beautiful. Hopefully, he'll get to hear this, as well as read it. So, any last thoughts before we—for readers or, you know, about the poem, about your art in general, about anything before we say goodbye?

Winn

I just want to say, I appreciate the Humanization Project. I want to appreciate you. I want to appreciate Virginia Tech for offering, you know, this medium for us to grow. And I hope other writers will be willing to participate and share their work because there's a lot of talent in here, a lot. I'm telling you, like, the artwork, you know, the crochet work, and the stuff in here, man, that society don't—they can't even imagine what guys are doing creatively in here. You know what I'm saying? So, hopefully, you know, we can expand to something else where people can actually see a little bit more of what we got going on in here. Thank you, everybody. Thank you for your time, too.

Mahon-Haft

Yeah, no, it's my pleasure. Actually, got to make sure we add in, thank you for recognizing us. I'm just a small part of this particular thing. Virginia Tech and actually our efforts on it are all shout-out to Coalition for Justice and Margaret, who made this, created this whole thing in the first place also. So, I'm gonna—I don't want to misplace that at all, but I do appreciate you and you sharing your voice. Thank you, Anthony. You have a good one, man.

Mahon-Haft

Alright. You too, man.

