

RENOWN PHILADELPHIA ARTIST RUSSELL CRAIG JOINS BOARD OF THE CRIMINAL RECORDS EXPUNGEMENT PROJECT

March 5, 2018. Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity (PLSE) announced today that nationally known painter and Philadelphia native Russell Craig has joined its Board of Directors.

In making the announcement, PLSE’s Board Chair Ryan Hancock said, “From its earliest days, PLSE has always understood that art can play a role in starting conversations, changing perspectives and inspiring action around the complicated human and social issues those artists portray. Russell’s leadership will take [PLSE’s art & advocacy work](#) to a new level, as we expand our efforts to organize communities around the the harms that criminal record histories cause long after the sentence is served, not just to the individuals, but to their families and communities for generations.”

The power of Craig’s art has been recognized by the Barnes Foundation under whose auspices Craig is now teaching art to formerly incarcerated men and women as part of new collaboration between the Barnes and Mural Arts Philadelphia’s ["Restorative Justice"](#) program. His artistic style and stirring imagery were developed during his seven-year incarceration. With little art materials available to him, he utilized his court papers to make his canvas. The large scale of his art is deliberate, forcing the viewer be confronted by Craig’s portraits upon entering the gallery. Through confrontation and contemplation, Craig's pieces offer an opportunity to talk about the justice system in the United States, help unify all who have struggled through trauma, and advocate for positive change within ourselves and our communities. His work is currently being exhibited as [“Blood, Sweat & Tears”](#) at Philadelphia’s Magic Gardens, 1020 South Street, through April 29, and will be included in “State Goods: Art in the Era of Mass Incarceration,” a show beginning May 19 at the Andrew Freedman House in New York City.

“Having been personally helped by PLSE, I am really happy to be asked to help PLSE help others,” said Craig. “I am not defined by my criminal record. People change. PLSE is all about making society see people for what they are today, and giving everyone the chance to live to their potential. Everybody ought to be in favor of that.”

Craig is an alumnus of the Mural Arts Guild program who taught himself to read, write, and draw while incarcerated. He was one of the inaugural fellows for “Right of Return,” a program of [the Open Philanthropy Foundation](#) awarding formerly incarcerated artists \$20,000 for a project addressing mass incarceration. He has also worked on “Voices,” a mural arts project within the Restorative Justice Program of the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections that humanizes and empowers the voices of those who are or were recently jailed on criminal justice issues through creative expression.

ABOUT PLSE: Founded in 2010, PLSE provides free legal representation to lower income residents of Philadelphia whose criminal records are holding them back from achieving their potential as productive, contributing citizens. The services include seeking expungements in criminal court and pardons from the Governor, educating elected and community leaders, and empowering under-resourced communities to seek a greater voice and needed legislative reforms. PLSE was twice recognized in 2017 as an exemplary non-profit, with both a 2018-19 Barra Award, and the Pennsylvania Bar Foundation’s Goffman Award. For more information about PLSE, visit www.plsephilly.org or contact info@plsephilly.org.