

ART, NEO JIM CROW, UNCATEGORIZED

# THE KING OF PRISON HIP HOP

IMAGE JULY 22, 2017 DAREALPRISONART LEAVE A COMMENT



By Maurice Washington

A poet, playwright, painter, musician, and America's most prolific prisoner artist, ask Google search, "Who is the world's most prolific prisoner-artist?", and Donald "C-Note" Hooker is ranked #1. In the sweltering sands of the Mojave Desert lies Los Angeles's only prison, and behind those walls lies an artist they call the American Ai Weiwei. This title, given when Google Search was asked, "Who is America's most prolific prisoner-artist?", and C-Note was ranked #2 behind China's Ai Weiwei, the Chinese artist, prisoner, activist, and dissident. For a foreign national to be number one on a question about American prisoners was disconcerting. So if the number one ranking is from China, who would be his American counterpart? That would be the first American name on the list. "They started calling me that cause these guys sure took pride in knowing someone who was being listed in the same category as Ai Weiwei," says C-Note. While C-Note awaits for his works to sell in the six-figures and seven figures that Ai Weiwei's works sell for, he has mimicked Ai Weiwei in another way. In 2014, Ai Weiwei had an exhibition inside the federal prison on Alcatraz. In 2017, having already passed Ai Weiwei as America's most prolific prisoner-artist, C-Note was a part of a major American prisoner art exhibition, also on Alcatraz, Art Escape at Alcatraz. May-June 2017.

If the 2.3 million American prison population were a city, it would be the fourth largest behind New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago, all known for very vibrant art scenes. Behind the prison wall there is a vibrant art culture, and Hip Hop plays a vital role. "Prison culture and Street culture have always played a vital role in Hip Hop," says C-Note.

"One of Hip Hop's founding art forms, graffiti, was started in prison. I call my work Hip Hop because in the early days of rap, rappers were called news reporters. The American mainstream press did not cover the plight of the inner city, so our stories reached the public through rap. Photojournalism can show you what it looks like to be locked up, but only the artist can tell you

what it feels like to be locked up, and it's hell. What mainstream media outlet is reporting these stories? With so many people in our communities locked up, predominantly for quality of life crimes, a real Hip Hop consciousness is right here in prison. So the next time you hear about the death nails of Hip Hop, tell'em nah, 'Hip Hop ain't dead; it went to prison. "'

*[Maurice Washington is the author of My Life, My Awakening, and is a regular contributor to Advertisements.]*