

PER(SISTER) INCARCERATED WOMEN OF LOUISIANA

FEBRUARY 21 – MAY 9, 2020



FORD
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GALLERY

The best art elevates the beauty in a person's experience, inspiring empathy and connection. Our broken criminal justice system does the opposite, flattening individuals into a formless, quiet, nearly invisible mass. So, it is fitting that *Per(Sister)* uses the power of art to undo this flattening, and lift up the unique stories of currently and formerly incarcerated women from Louisiana. By uniting these women with virtuoso artists, *Per(Sister)* introduces us to the human faces of the prison system, replacing uniformity with dignity.

Together, the women featured in this exhibit—Andrea, Bobbie Jean, Carmen, Chasity, Danielle, Desiree', Dianne, Dolfinette, Dolita, Earlneishka, Fox, Gilda, Kimberly, Kiwanda, Kristina, Lea, Mary, Nicole, Ruby, Shai, Shondolyn, Syrita, Tonja, Tremica, Tywanda, Veronique, Wendi, Wilkeitha, Yolanda, and Zina—show strength and resilience, and shed light on so many of the root causes of injustice. *Per(Sister)* reminds us all that their stories deserve our attention—and demand our action.

~ **Darren Walker**
President, Ford Foundation

On the cover: Works by Amy Elkins: *Expectant Mother (Pink)*, *Expectant Mother (Blue)*, *Mother and Newborn*, *Mother and Son*, *Mother and Young Children*, 2019, digital chromogenic prints on paper, 25 ¼ x 21 ¼ inches each, installed on *Southern Magnolia*, 2019, artist-designed wallpaper, dimensions variable. Photo by Sebastian Bach.

PER(SISTER): INCARCERATED WOMEN OF LOUISIANA

February 21 – May 9, 2020

Ford Foundation Gallery

Per(Sister): Incarcerated Women of Louisiana shares the stories of currently and formerly incarcerated women in Louisiana and shines a light on myriad issues as identified and expressed by the women themselves. The exhibition presents works from more than 30 artists who created new works based on the personal stories of the “PerSisters.” Stories of loss, hope, despair, survival, triumph, and persistence demonstrate the universal struggles faced by communities impacted by incarceration and the personal resilience of each woman featured.

Per(Sister) originated at the Newcomb Art Museum of Tulane University under the direction of museum director Monica Ramirez-Montagut and curator Laura Blereau and was developed in equal partnership with Syrita Steib and Dolfinette Martin, with additional support provided by Operation Restoration and Women with a Vision.

For a more comprehensive look at the exhibition and the stories of the PerSisters, we invite you to go to **persister.info**.



By nature, we are storytellers. We tell stories to illustrate our lives. We heed the stories of our ancestors and document our own to pass on to future generations. This is the gift of humanity. This fundamental need to share and express our stories is a thread that weaves together all cultures, allowing us to imagine walking in another's shoes.

The objective of the Ford Foundation Gallery is to share the stories of those who are often left out of the spotlight. It is in seeking and sharing these stories that we are able to understand our successes—and failures—as a society. Though we are bombarded by a nonstop news cycle today, we do not often truly grasp the human cost of the issues making headlines until we have the opportunity to hear and learn from those directly affected.

I had the good fortune to experience the *Per(Sister)* exhibition in its original home at the Newcomb Art Museum in New Orleans. I was immediately taken by the wide range of works and the density of information about incarceration. As I walked through the exhibit, each artwork, each interview, each PerSister's story came to life. The power of the first-person voices of the women and the works they inspired offered me, an outsider, a firsthand view of the precarious circumstances of many of these women's lives.

It is in their stories that we begin to comprehend the abhorrent injustices of the carceral system and the compounded indignities that women suffer in prison. Yet through adversity, abuse, and overwhelming obstacles, we see the incredible redemption, resilience, and perseverance of these 30 women and the many more caught within America's criminal justice system.

We are honored to share the powerful stories of the PerSisters in our gallery. I am grateful to Monica Ramirez-Montagut for organizing this important and timely exhibition, to her incredible team and colleagues at Newcomb and Tulane University, and to her esteemed partners at Operation Restoration and Women with a Vision. Most of all, I am deeply indebted to all of the artists and PerSisters who shared their stories and talents with us. To you, mothers, daughters, and sisters, thank you.

~ Lisa Kim
Director, Ford Foundation Gallery

It's important that this show is focusing on women, because the role of a woman is not to just take care of everybody else. She has to first take care of herself, be her best self, and then she's highly functioning, and able to take care of everybody else. But if we never focus on just the woman, her as an individual, the problem is never solved. I find that a lot of times, women are often pushed to the wayside for every other entity that exists outside of themselves. Women make the world go round, women raise children, women change hearts, souls and minds with compassion and being caregivers. But nobody ever deals with them in that same manner. So that's why we're very intentional about focusing on the woman and what she needs. Because, it's so complex when it comes to women. Women are not individuals who are easily peeled back. The depths of trauma that women go through and just don't ever speak about it—it's amazing, it's crazy ... Women are raising kids and if you don't find a way to remove that energy or remove those issues or problems, they're just going to pass it on. Not intentionally, but because they don't know what else to do but pass it on. And then we find ourselves in a world where we exist today, where there's all kinds of things happening, and we don't know how to stop it, or how to combat it, how to fix it. But I think it just starts with fixing women, you know? *If you fix women, women will fix the world.*

~ Syrita Steib
PerSister and Co-executive Director, Operation Restoration

I want for everyone who comes to the exhibit to see us through the art and to understand what brought us here. We don't look for excuses, we just need you to understand—that I'm just like them. *I'm a human being and my crime isn't who I am.* It doesn't even begin to explain who I am. People need to know that one: women are in prison, two: we're not there because we want to be there, and three: every woman or girl that goes to prison has trauma ... We're human, and we're survivors.

~ Dolfinette Martin
PerSister and Operations Manager, Operation Restoration

“Silence equals death.”

I first read this sentence in Rebecca Solnit’s *The Mother of All Questions* as she argued for the liberating possibilities of women’s stories. I was struck by the simple, true, and deep manner in which it revealed the essential intention behind *Per(Sister): Incarcerated Women of Louisiana*. The exhibition features the intimate and personal stories of more than 30 currently and formerly incarcerated women of Louisiana—a state that incarcerates one in 75 of its own population and that until recently was dubbed “the incarceration capital of the world.”

“Being unable to tell your story is a living death.”

The “history of silence” is built, Solnit argues, when “no one listens when you say your ex-husband is trying to kill you, if no one believes you when you say you are in pain, if no one hears you when you say help, if you don’t dare say help, if you have been trained not to bother people by saying help ...” All of these occur in the stories of the women featured in *Per(Sister)* in addition to stories of addiction, poverty, neglect, juvenile mischief, and forced silence—stories of vulnerability.

Per(Sister) challenges head-on the dehumanization of formerly and currently incarcerated women rendered voiceless and invisible by facilitating their self-representation as they resist the “history of silence.” *Per(Sister)* deliberately yet delicately carves a safe space for the voices and stories of these women as defined by the women themselves. Through the partnership with two formerly incarcerated women, Syrta Steib and Dolfinette Martin, the exhibition enables the featured women, or PerSisters, as they’ve begun to call themselves, to enact their “right to self-determination, to participation, to consent or dissent, to live and participate, to interpret and narrate” within an artistic scope that now spins off and into their life.

“Stories save your life.”

Four simple words by Solnit that encapsulate the spirit of *Per(Sister)*. This exhibition, more than art on a wall, is a platform for civic dialogue and community healing that brings together the contributions of more than 100 individuals: the PerSisters with their heartfelt stories and lived experiences, their families with their support, the artists (visual artists, performing artists, filmmakers, singer-songwriters, and musicians) with their beauty and storytelling skills, the museum staff with their unmeasured dedication, the service-oriented nonprofit organizations with their relentless advocacy and network of solidarity, Tulane faculty with their unique perspectives, the students with their curiosity and impetus to change the world for the better, the Tulane architecture students with their thoughtful exhibition design, the lawyers with their grit, the advocates with their perseverance—all adding new voices to the connective story of our interdependent survival as a society.



“And stories are your life. We are our stories, stories that can be both prison and the crowbar to break open the door of that prison.”

For many PerSisters, this exhibition presents a first inquiry, ever, on their lived experiences, the first time they have been asked to break their silence and share. The process was of intense emotional labor and, on occasion, painful—yet, it is our hope that the resulting exhibition and its tour across our country is well worth the journey and that albeit the pain there is a new kind of freedom to be found.

“A free person tells her own story. A valued person lives in a society in which her story has a place.”

Per(Sister) is such a place—a dedicated space and time where PerSisters are seen, their stories are valued, shared, and given a chance to live beyond these gallery walls through the attention and care of those who visit. Thank you.

~ Monica Ramirez-Montagut
Director and Chief Curator, Newcomb Art Museum



Per(Sister): Incarcerated Women of Louisiana

an introduction



INTRODUCTION

Since 1986, Louisiana has ranked in the top ten states nationwide for the highest incarceration rates. From 2005 to 2018, Louisiana ranked first in the nation and the world in holding people captive.ⁱ Louisiana only lost its title of “incarceration capital of the world” to Oklahoma after state reforms enacted in 2017 lowered our rate. Yet Louisiana still far outpaces the nation, incarcerating 712 people per 100,000 compared to a national average of 450 people per 100,000.ⁱⁱ

Women are one of the fastest-growing state prison populations. The incarceration rate nationwide for women has grown 834% over the past 40 years, according to the Prison Policy Initiative.ⁱⁱⁱ In Louisiana, the incarceration rate for women is significantly higher than the national average.^{iv} The majority of women in Louisiana are incarcerated for lower-level crimes, such as drug or property offenses.^v About 80% of imprisoned women are mothers, of which the majority are the sole caregiver for their children;^{vi} one in 12 children in Louisiana have an incarcerated parent.^{vii} Women in jails are overwhelmingly survivors of reported abuse: 86% have experienced sexual violence; 77% have experienced partner violence, and 60% have experienced caregiver violence.^{viii} Nationwide, 60% of women imprisoned did not have full-time employment at the time of their arrest.^{ix}

Newcomb Art Museum partnered with formerly incarcerated women, community organizations, stakeholders, and others directly impacted by the prison system to create the exhibition *Per(Sister)* to share the stories of currently and formerly incarcerated women in Louisiana and shine a light on myriad issues identified and expressed by the women themselves. The experiences of incarcerated women are often unknown, overlooked, dismissed, or misunderstood. *Per(Sister)* presents the personal and intimate stories, in the women's own voices and on their own terms, of 30 women who persist in their drive for the integral survival of their mind, body, and soul.

Their stories come to life through the pairing of a *PerSister* and an artist who created a work inspired by her story. Other stories take the form of voice recordings from individual interviews conducted by museum staff and handwritten messages, all with the intention of challenging misconceptions and uninformed assumptions. By building awareness of the situations arising before, during, and after incarceration, the exhibition *Per(Sister)* seeks to find common ground and pathways for society to empathetically move forward together.

Per(Sister) examines themes such as the root causes of women's incarceration, the social impact of the long-term incarceration of mothers, the psychological and physical toll of incarceration, and the challenges and opportunities of reentry for formerly incarcerated women. ■

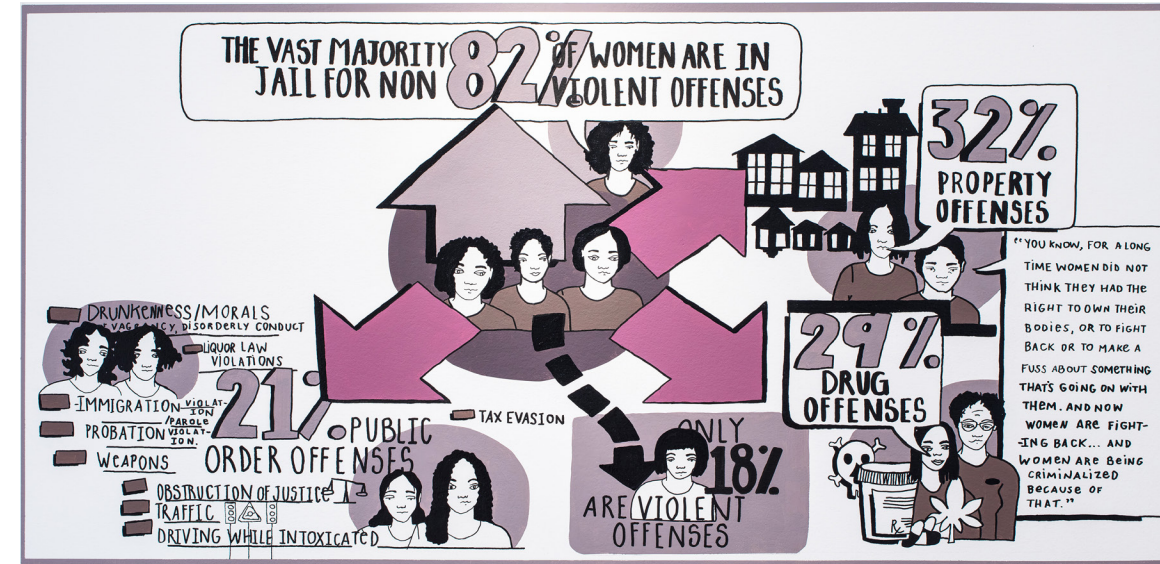


Illustration by Taslim van Hattum

A Note on Louisiana Law

A combination of laws contribute to the state's excessive incarceration rates. First, Louisiana's “habitual offender law,” which increases sentences for those with prior convictions (including nonviolent crimes), is among the harshest in the country. The threat of these serious penalties for low-level crimes often incentivizes people to accept plea deals, plead guilty and accept disproportionate prison sentences, even for crimes they didn't commit. Second, many crimes require a mandatory sentence of incarceration, even for first time offenses, removing discretion from judges to account for the actual circumstances of the crime. Third, Louisiana law generally does not allow the possibility of parole for anyone sentenced to life after 1979. Accordingly, Louisiana has one of the highest rates of people serving life or virtual life sentences nationwide and has more people serving life without parole sentences than Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Texas combined.¹

In 2017, a bipartisan coalition successfully urged the legislature to enact critical reforms to lower Louisiana's incarcerated population. The reforms included providing prison beds only to those considered a serious threat to public safety, strengthening community supervision, reducing barriers to reentry, and reinvesting savings into reducing recidivism and supporting crime victims.² In 2018, by constitutional amendment, Louisiana eliminated split juries and now requires a unanimous jury for all felony convictions. Prior to this reform, a person could be convicted of a serious felony crime, even when 2 out of 12 jurors voted not guilty.³

*Text citations can be found on page 124.



Syrita Steib, Portrait by Allison Beondé

I was incarcerated at the age of 19. I was a victim of physical abuse at a very early age and I think that changed the trajectory of my life and just set me on a different path. I had to grow up a lot faster.

I remember going to prison for the first time and I was sent to a medical facility—I really dealt with mental illness—and my first memory there was an ambulance parked outside of the gate, always. And I soon realized that people died there, daily. So really early on, I associated this place with “Nobody leaves out of here alive.”

I remember being in segregation for September 11th, and that was the most heartbreaking thing to just have to experience over the radio because not only was I in segregation, but I couldn’t use the phone. So not even being able to reach out and say, “Hey, Mom, I know you got friends in New

Syrita is the founder and executive director of Operation Restoration—an organization that supports women and girls impacted by incarceration to recognize their full potential, restore their lives, and discover new possibilities.

York, are they okay?” My sister was in DC, with all of that going on and it was just crazy. And then I experienced the same thing a few years later with Katrina ... none of us could get in touch with our family at all for two weeks.

I was released in New Orleans maybe three years, I guess, after Katrina. The city still wasn’t in great shape, a lot of things were missing. So all of the things that I thought would anchor me to society no longer existed.

There was no blueprint [for reentry]. So that’s one of the things that I’m really intentional about is to try to provide a blueprint for other women. Helping them figure out what their blueprint is.

People are not aware of like the monstrosities that women face, while they’re incarcerated, after they’re incarcerated, before they’re incarcerated, and just how the system continues to just victimize you over and over. Then you’re releasing these broken pieces of women and human beings out into society, and you’re like, “Okay, now go figure it out.” It’s just, it’s crazy, it’s not right, it’s inhumane.

If we never focus on just the woman, her as an individual, the problem is never solved, you know. And I just find that a lot of times, women are often pushed to the wayside for every other entity that exists outside of themselves. It’s like, women make the world go ‘round, women, raise children, women change hearts, souls and minds, you know, with compassion and being caregivers.

If you fix women, women will fix the world. ■



Anastasia Pelias, *Star (for Syrita)*, 2018
Courtesy of Jonathan Ferrara Gallery, New Orleans

■ A painting about Syrita, for Syrita. Listening to her sweet voice telling her story: past and present. Listening to the music she listened to on her Sony Walkman while she was incarcerated.

The dimensions of the canvas are 67 x 67 inches, the measurement of Syrita’s height and wingspan. My intention in making this painting was to express the essence of Syrita. Female. Fighter. A relentless advocate for women, an impassioned mother. An unstoppable force of nature.

~ Anastasia Pelias



Mary McLeod, Portrait by Allison Beondé

I got molested when I was five years old. I had some experiences then, but what got me incarcerated for prostitution is the point that I'd never known my mom. She couldn't really provide for me; she lost oxygen to her brain and she just never was right.

*So I just started having to take care of myself, you know, and that's what really brought me to prostitution and drugs. And that got me incarcerated. **I had to grow up too fast.***

I got arrested when I was 19, because they found a needle in my purse. I was actually sleeping and I got busted in my sleep with a paraphernalia charge and I got arrested in St. Charles Parish.

I really didn't feel like I needed to be [in jail] because I wasn't really doing nothing. I was not a murderer. ■

Lynn Drury, *Safe Space*, 2019

for Mary McLeod and all our (Per)Sisters

Mary can't stay he's always chomping at
the bit
The little present he gave her, she's not
holding on to it.
'Cuz it's just a walk in the park
Like the links in a chain
What separates the art from a low-down
dirty shame?

I just want to be a safe space
I'll be a safe space where we can go
I'll be a safe space where we can go
Where we can be

How did i get here, what have i done?
How do we get past the idea of only right
or wrong?
Well it's just a walk in the park
Like the bricks in the road
There's not a lot that separates us, except
a heavy heavy load.

I just want to be a safe space
I'll be a safe space where we can go
I'll be a safe space where we can go
Where we can be

I just want to be a safe space
I'll be a safe space where we can go
I'll be a safe space where we can go
Where we can be

Stitches and the train tracks will follow me
home
You think you can lock me out, but I got
chains of my own
You can't keep a ray of light from creeping
in your room
You can't fix a lie from shining down the
truth
I'm not invisible anymore

'Cause i got a safe space
I've found a safe space
A safe space you can't touch
You can't see

I just want to be a safe space
I'll be a safe space where we can go
I'll be a safe space where we can go
Where we can be
A safe space



Zina Mitchell, Portrait by Allison Beondé

My mom was the type of person, she didn't express feelings, and I didn't know nothing about sex. Due to no information and no talking with parents, I had a baby at the age of 14. **The first thing out of my mama's mouth, "You got a baby now. You need to start making money."**

So I started hanging out, running away from home, and hanging with people, and the more I hung with the different people the more I learned different hustles. By age 17 I was stripping. By age 18 I was selling drugs and that's when my incarceration started. Because I was the type of person, you took care your family, you did what you had to do, your children weren't supposed to work for nothing.

To me, the prison system, incarceration, it's not for humans. Because they treat you less than humane, you have no rights, they talk to you any kind of way they want. You know, if they feel like they don't like

you and you in there, they could take you off and beat you. They lock you up in lockdown. If you need medical attention, you're not going to get it.

Everybody in jail is not bad, like me. I wasn't really a bad person, I didn't come from a bad family, I came from a well to do family. It's just I wanted to be grown for my time. And then once I had a baby I turned to streets, I started hustling, started selling drugs, starting stripping, started escorting. Each time I got locked up it was something different, I learned those different hustles from meeting different people [in] prison, you know, and it just escalated.

I came home from prison one night at 12:01. My sister and my daughter came to pick me up, we stopped at Waffle House and ate. Then a few months after I was home they sent me a check for \$136. When that check came—I'll never forget—I said, "Mama these people sent me \$136 for four years of my life. I promise you from this day forward you will never have to see me behind prison walls again." And I try to keep that promise. I will do whatever type of job it takes, I don't care.

I try to get out and talk to the younger women and men that I see. Especially if I see them out there going down the wrong path, and I try to let them know that's not what you want to do. You know you need to rethink your life and your decisions. Because I know it all, I done been raped, I done been kidnapped, I done been shot at, I done been jugged at the neck left for dead, and you'd have thought all that would have taught me a lesson. But it didn't. It took for me to go to prison for four years of my life for my eyes to open up. ■

"Zina's Trials, Tribulations and Triumphs" is inspired by the distinct ceremonial attire created by people of African descent from New Orleans, debuted on carnival morning and worn during ritual neighborhood processions. Resistance and self-actualization are hallmarks of the tradition. The attire is characterized by narrative beaded images, feather design art and aurora borealis Swarovski rhinestone design embellishments.

The suit is the culmination of positive visioning, reflections and artistic brainstorming focused on experiences that include: rights-of-passage, loss, regret, triumph, redemption, sorrow and joy. In other words, the human experience.

The end result not only meets the tradition standard of being "pretty," it tells Zina's story through African symbolism, metaphors and narrative beadwork. The story is told primarily on the shoulder stole and the feathered headdress, referred to as a crown. Zina was involved in every aspect of the suit's creation. After all, it is her story. Initially, I was going to wear the suit. But, during the process, it was mutually decided Zina should wear the stole and crown because they depict her STORY. As Queen Cherice, I wore the dress and shoes which serve as the foundation for the suit and the collaboration between the three of us. Also, suits are created to be worn in the community and not debuted on a mannequin. Wearing it serves to put good medicine/Juju in it for Zina, but also for those who are fortunate enough to interact with it by viewing it during the exhibit run.

The suit includes ancient Adinkra symbolism, a butterfly beaded by the Flag Boy Isaac "Ike" Edward, a Christian Cross, a caged bird charm, cowrie shells, padlock, star, flame, and crystal teardrop, among other images of significance.

~ Cherice Harrison-Nelson



Cherice Harrison-Nelson, Herreast Harrison, and Zina Mitchell, *Zina's Trials, Tribulations and Triumphs*, 2018



Bobbie Jean Johnson, Portrait by Allison Beondé

As a child I was given up for adoption. While in a foster home I was molested, so I ran away. I went on the streets and I was just from here to there, just trying to find love in all the wrong places.

One night I was riding with these two dudes in the car and I never knew the car was stolen and I never knew that he had a knife and a gun on him but the police stopped us because something was wrong with the taillights. I didn't know that the dude had put a knife and a gun in my purse.

I'm 19 years old at this time and I'm terrified.

They took us all to the homicide division but they questioned us in different rooms. They threw these pictures in front of me of some man that had been stabbed. I said, "I don't know I have never seen that man before." They said, "Oh she

knows something."

There was three officers standing behind me and they handcuffed my hand behind my back and put a plastic bag over my head, and he said I could kill you right now and nobody would ever know what happened, not even your family. He said bring this b* to booking and book her for first degree murder.

The dude that put the gun and the knife in my purse when the police stopped us, he made a statement, it's all in my DA file. He made a statement that said, "When you stopped us, I put that knife and that gun in Bobbie's purse."

They ignored that whole thing, they didn't want to hear nothing about that. All they was doing was trying to close the case. So, I'm 19, so I just got caught up.

When I first got there I was so angry and hurt because I was in prison for something I know I didn't do. I said, "Lord, something's got to come through, don't nobody else know; you are my secret, you know I did not kill nobody."

So as time went by just tried to be a woman. I tried to do everything right. **As a woman, they try to strip you of your dignity because they tell you what to do, when to do it and how to do it.**

[With the help of Innocence Project] I was released February 8 of [2018]. I was locked up for 41 years. ■



In the American justice system, a confession is considered the queen of criminal evidence. The most powerful piece in the strategy-based board game of chess, holds the title of the "queen" and the objective of the game is to place the opponent's prized member, the "king," under an inescapable threat of capture.

There are many parallels to draw upon between chess and life. For example, the family dynamic where the man

is viewed as the head of the household, yet the woman often does the work of maintaining the family dynamic. Another example would be polar battles of race and class, policing strategies and in this case, a queen sacrifice, to gain a favorable tactical position.

At 19 years old, Bobbie Jean Johnson was suffocated and brutally assaulted in the inescapable confines of a New Orleans police station where they acquired the forced and coerced confession that lead to her life sentence in prison. Maintaining her innocence, for 40 years, she had borne the weight of that conviction to finally live as a free woman today.

~ Rontherin Ratliff

We dedicate this exhibition to the memory of Bobbie Jean Johnson who passed away from unattended health issues on October 25, 2019, just after 18 months of freedom.



Rontherin Ratliff, All Black & Blue, Bruises of a Queen's Crown, 2018



Danielle Metz, Portrait by Allison Beondé

I served 23 years and eight months, I was sentenced to three life sentences, plus 20 years. I was a first-time nonviolent offender. When I left, my kids was 7 and 3. And when I came home they were 26 and 30.

Since I've been home, I lost my mother. And that was very heart wrenching for me because I thought after serving all those years that I would be able to reconnect with her. And several months later she had passed. So it's been up and down like hills and valleys, and peaks and valleys. But I'm happy to be free.

And I'm thankful to our 44th president. He gave me clemency, and that's how I got out. Because I don't know if people are aware, but life means life with the federal government. There is no

chance for parole. You're just there. So the end of your term is basically when you expire.

It's an ongoing struggle just for someone to be inside. Because you have to be a parent; you have to be a daughter and you're still a mother to two young kids. When you're there, you know, and you can't put 15 minute calls to your kids and tell them everything that they need to know just about life.

They didn't have a federal prison in the state of Louisiana—the closest one was in California. Sometimes I had to keep my own sanity in believing that I would someday come home. You start to lose hope. You always have faith, but it's not unwavering, you just pray that you don't go under.

Not everybody in prison are bad people and sometimes you make bad decisions and that's the outcome of it. But I don't think nobody needs to be in jail for 20 and 30 years. And it's like a survivors guilt thing with me, because I'm home now.

*I have a lot of women that I left behind, and it's just a sad situation. I pray every day for them. So, I just encourage people on the outside to really reach out and get to know them—just write mail to somebody, and you'll find the most lovable person. **All they want is somebody to care about them, and not forget about them, you know, be their voice.** ■*

■

The portrait I painted of Danielle Metz for *Per(Sister)* is based on a recent photograph that she gave me to use for reference. I met Danielle when she was about 19 or 20 years old, before she went to prison. We reconnected earlier in 2018. Ever since President Barack Obama granted her clemency in 2016, I've wanted to paint her portrait. Danielle and I were both raised in the uptown Broadmoor neighborhood of New Orleans. She was one of my youngest sister's best friends. Years ago, we actually discussed me painting a portrait of her mother.

Sheila Phipps, *It's My Time and My Freedom*, 2018

This painting of Danielle is connected to a series of portraits I started in 2010 called the *Injustice Exhibition*, which features a collection of work focusing on the lives of people in Louisiana who have been wrongfully convicted or harshly sentenced. When I started that project, I wanted to use art to bring greater awareness to the abuses of the criminal justice system, as well as the story of my son, Mac, who is an innocent musician presently incarcerated at Hunt Correctional Facility.

"Steps to Freedom" is a related series I started in 2017, through the support of an artist residency with the organization Bar None. It uses the shoe as a symbol and that project has included workshops with incarcerated youth at various detention centers. I enjoy working with young people and anyone whose story needs to be heard.

~ Sheila Phipps



Andrea Martin, Portrait by Allison Beondé

How I came about being incarcerated was that I was a great big sinner. I was living the lifestyle of living the street life and that was caused by when my parents got killed. My mom got hit by a car and my daddy was struck driving down the mountain. It caused pain to come into my life as a child. I was about eight when my daddy got killed and all this pain was just thrown at me and I didn't know how to deal with pain at such a young age.

I was looking for love in all the wrong places.

I ran into some guys at home—I'm from Memphis, Tennessee—they were pimps and I had got brainwashed. I was 16 years old.

I start hanging with these guys and they start taking me out of town so I come here to New Orleans just to get paper. I got caught up in 2010 in a school zone selling drugs to an undercover cop because I was on drugs. I used to sell my body in order to get drugs.

I went in 2010, and I got out in 2016. Today I'm free.

I couldn't go home [immediately] because I didn't have \$150 for the interstate compact. You just can't go out and go home you have to do interstate compact because I'm not really from here. So they put me in a shelter where men and women was and I didn't like the area and stuff I was around.

I just didn't want to be in no shelter; I felt like I was still locked up. ■



Henrietta Mantooth, Andrea Martin, 2018

Andrea Martin is a poet of her own struggle, and her words and images jolted my art into new ways. How to map out the harsh facts of her life to be seen and felt by strangers on the wall of a museum? The leftovers from our combined search are piles of scratch paper and canvas strips, scattered words and spattered paint, and scraps of crocodiles and snakes still lurking in my studio. But culled from talks on the phone and videos and photos, our experiences have combined to make us friends for life, and include Marilyn Wilson who has rescued Andrea more than once from the rainy street corners of New Orleans. Seth Ludman's collaboration onsite made it possible for me to work on this piece from afar.

~ Henrietta Mantooth



Illustration by Taslim van Hattum

**the root
causes of female
incarceration**

HOW WE GOT HERE:
THE ROOT CAUSES OF FEMALE
INCARCERATION

These headlines, selected and crafted that they had the right to own their bodies or to fight back or to make a free choice of something that's going on with them. And now women are being told that domestic violence or sexual assault or pregnancy through last week, and 25% of the 12 women were sexually abused partners, and 25% of them were being pregnant the women for reporting up to their abuser. So the title, the title.

Across America, women's prison populations are growing, with rates doubling the pace of men. Women are held in jails for longer periods of time, and the total of women in jail nationwide has increased at least four-fold since 2000 to nearly 120,000. Nationally, one million women are under supervision, compared to 600,000 men. Double the number of women as in 1990.

One reason for the steep increase in the women's prison is the rise of drug use and drug-related crime. Today, the single biggest reason for women's incarceration is drug-related crimes. Women are being arrested and sentenced for drug-related crimes at a rate that is nearly double that of men. In Louisiana, women are held in jail for longer periods of time, and the total of women in jail nationwide has increased at least four-fold since 2000 to nearly 120,000. Nationally, one million women are under supervision, compared to 600,000 men. Double the number of women as in 1990.

In Louisiana, incarcerated women are being held in jail for longer periods of time, and the total of women in jail nationwide has increased at least four-fold since 2000 to nearly 120,000. Nationally, one million women are under supervision, compared to 600,000 men. Double the number of women as in 1990.



Lord, please don't let me have my baby like this.



I got shipped and moved throughout the prison system in Louisiana. It was like a slave in the night being stolen. They snatched you up, they were brutal, they were sending you to another plantation.

For a moment, you're totally off the radar and nobody knows what happened to you, or where you are.



Last night, he reached over and put his arm around me, I rolled over, and held him tight. It dawned on me that I was not alone!



Nationwide, women's state prison populations have grown 834% over the past 40 years—more than double the pace of the growth among men. In 1970, almost three-quarters of national counties did not hold a single woman in jail. Now, women are held in jails in nearly every county in the country, and the total number of women in jail nationwide has increased 14-fold—from under 8,000 to nearly 110,000.ⁱ Nationally, one million women are under supervision (probation or parole), almost double the number of women as in 1990.ⁱⁱ

One reason for the steep increase is states across the US continue to “widen the net” of what is considered “criminal.”ⁱⁱⁱ Policy changes requiring “dual arrests” for women reporting domestic violence;^{iv} “broken windows” policing that excessively focuses on misdemeanors and sex work,^v and over-intervention by courts and juvenile justice agencies^{vi} have all exposed women to increased incarceration. Women may also be arrested, prosecuted, and imprisoned due to their responses to poverty, significant mental and physical health challenges, and prior trauma—challenges that are more prevalent for women than men. At the time of their encounter with the justice system, both men and women have significantly lower incomes on average (\$13,890 for women, \$19,650 for men in 2014 dollars).^{vii} Similarly, approximately two-thirds of women in jail and prisons report ever having a chronic medical condition, significantly more than incarcerated men (~50%) and nonincarcerated men and women (27%).^{viii} Incarcerated women are also overwhelmingly survivors of sexual violence (86%), previous partner trauma (77%), and physical abuse by caregivers (60%).^{ix}

In Louisiana, incarcerated women are overwhelmingly imprisoned for **nonviolent first offenses**, with almost 64% sentenced to prison for 0-10 years.^x (Three out of 64 parishes, Orleans, Jefferson, and St. Tammany, account for almost 30% of convictions of women.^{xi}) Other more generally punitive policies have also contributed to the increased incarceration of women. Until recently, Louisiana imprisoned people for nonviolent crimes at 1.5 to 3 times the rates of other Southern states with similar crime rates.^{xii} Harsh supervision policies, including re-incarceration, even without new criminal activity, have fostered high recidivism rates, with 10% of Louisiana women likely to return within one year and 30% within five years.^{xiii} ■

**Text citations can be found on page 124.*

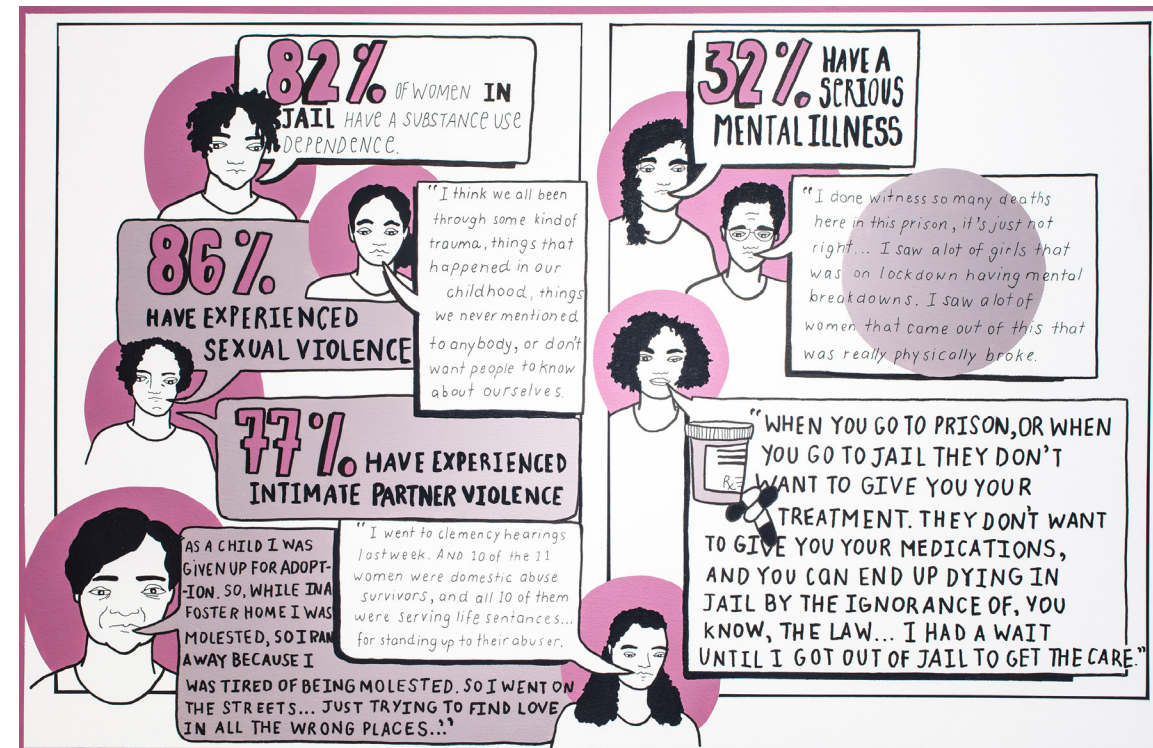


Illustration by Taslim van Hattum



Chasity Hunter, Portrait by Allison Beondé

I was in high school at the time I was arrested; it was my senior year. And it was the last month of school, I was very, very, very scared that I wasn't going to be able to finish high school. That was at the forefront of my mind: not being able to graduate high school.

I was riding in a car with my friend and he got pulled over for tinted windows and they didn't ask for his information at all, but I was sitting in the passenger seat and they asked for my ID. I didn't know my rights at the time and produced it. And they ran it. And they found four warrants, very, very exaggerated warrants. Like two felonies, two misdemeanors, and they took me away.

It felt like kidnapping.

Which it essentially is. Like the police kidnap you and bring you to this place where they have a bunch

of other people kidnapped. But they weren't trying to hear me out. It was weird. I was like, you know, in movies they tell you that you should ask for a lawyer. Be silent, or your words will be used against you. So I was like, "Where's my lawyer? Where's my lawyer?"

I was 18. Five days passed until I got an arraignment—I think that's what it's called—and posted bail, but I talked to my lawyer on the same day that I had the arraignment, which was ridiculous. Public defenders—it's been over a year since this has happened—but public defenders are so stressed out, overworked, and they are much less funded than the DA's office. There's an imbalance. I'm aware of that now. But at the time, it just felt very unfair that I had just like a couple of minutes to talk to my public defender.

The thing about jail or prison, or any kind of like governmental detainment, [is that] it's not meant to rehabilitate anybody. It's just something that the government uses to punish/profit, and extract resources out of people. So it doesn't really surprise me that even after this person gets out of jail, has served their time for whatever they did, that there will be laws to continue oppressing them and disenfranchising them. And you know, if a person can't go to school, if a person can't get a job, vote, or function like a normal citizen would be able to, even after serving their time or even after being innocent—like where are they going to go? They're more than likely going to end up right back in prison, just because this society is set up to put them right back where they were. And I've been fighting that as hard as I can. ■



Kira Akerman, *The Arrest*, 2018

■
 "The Arrest" is about a young woman's experience in the New Orleans criminal justice system. Before filming, I knew that I wanted to describe Chasity's experience of jail rather than answer everyone's automatic question: "Why were you in jail?" "Why" seemed superfluous—her jail experience was horrific, far from a vision of justice. Yet in the editing process, almost every viewer wondered about the "why." I added a title card. To me, the "why" matters only in so far as it begs another, bigger question: Does anyone, under any circumstances, deserve this kind of treatment?

~ Kira Akerman



Desiree' Morrison, Portrait by Allison Beondé

At the time Hurricane Katrina hit my three minor children were with me. The youngest was nine. My daughter was 14 and my other son was 16. I lived on the West Bank of New Orleans.

When it was safe to come back to the West Bank I maneuvered my way back. One day me and my oldest son decided to drive around and just assess you know, the areas. As we were riding down the driveway in my vehicle, me and my son, we saw a dumpster that had a lot of stuff in it. And so I said, well, let's see if anything is salvageable because you just never know. [My son stayed in the car.]

I might have been over there for maybe five minutes before I heard a policeman talking to my son. I asked him, "Is there a problem, officer?" And he said, "What are you doing around here?" And I said, "Looking in the dumpster," and he said, "No, you not looking

in the dumpster, you looting," and I say, "Looting? What do I have? I don't have anything." He said, "Well, you might not have anything, but that's what you're going to jail for." So he arrested me, he asked me how old my son was. My son was 16, so he called another unit to come get my son to bring him to the place where they bring the juveniles. My son couldn't understand what was going on because all he knew, he was just sitting in the car, now he's getting put in the back of a police car.

Now this was September of 2005, okay? I didn't get my day in court until August 2006, because they kept pushing it back.

So when I finally did get my day in court, August the 28th, I believe, 2006, I had just dropped my son off at school, my baby boy, the 9 year old. I told him I'd pick him up that evening to bring him to baseball practice ... I was reprimanded right then and there. I never had a chance to go back home, I never had a chance to do anything with my children, I never had a chance to even call them to tell anybody what was going on with me. **I left home that morning with the intentions of going back home, pick up my son, bring him to baseball practice. I never went home, I went straight to jail.**

Six years. Flat. That's what I was sentenced to. I came home August the 21st, 2012. ■

■

After reading about and then meeting Desiree' Morrison, the key words that resonated with me were, "Ain't No Pity Party Here." As tragic as her story was, she still maintained what she needed to do next to survive, and not to sit in anger or self-pity. After making attempts, we came to the following common understanding in the way Ms. Morrison sees the world, and how my work describes in general terms the world and how we are all a part of it, and how we see ourselves in it. The world is made of many simple elements, as complex as it appears; each element is a part of the whole. Black and white are simple yet complex in their stark contrast. Charcoal is a simple material made from the burnt branches of a tree. I make marks with it on another simple material, cotton, to make a drawing. The key part is a portrait of Ms. Morrison, being lifted up in full color. There are several hands—representing the many that have helped her survive. Although she had many reasons to be down on herself and the rest of the world, it struck me in her interview and her life she kept her positive nature. "The only one who goes to a pity party is you."

~ Ron Bechet



Ron Bechet, Troi Bechet and Desiree' Morrison, No Pity Party. Saved, Broken, Called, 2018



Earlneshka Johnson, *Portrait* by Allison Beondé

I was 19, and I was a senior in high school. I actually was arrested right after my season opener basketball game.

My original charge was principal attempt second degree murder, but I was convicted of aggravated battery, because it was hearsay. I took that plea. I could have continued to fight it, but I just felt like my life had a bigger meaning to it than just constantly sit in jail.

I kind of regret [taking the plea], but then I don't. Honestly, I'm kind of thankful for the experience. It's crazy—you thankful to be in jail, you think, no? It's what it taught me. It made me look at life and everything else in a whole different hindsight. So that's why I say that I'm a nurturer, by nature. I've always been like that, and if it was in my power to

help somebody any type of way—whether it's washing their hair for them and braiding down for them or, you know, giving them my last bag of chips—I would do that because I know what it's like to go without and I know what it's like to not have somebody to sit here quiet and cry to, or you know, a mentor.

What's going on in our lives, it doesn't matter to you because at the end of the day you don't stay here every day all day, you're not in here and hearing about your grandmother passing away or your cousin getting shot, or if a son is failing classes because his mom is not there. You're not thinking about all that, nor do y'all care cause y'all are just, "Oh they're criminals, they're animals." No, we're not. We're still human beings.

We're women. We're where you come from. ■

■ I was immediately struck by Earlneshka's empathy and her commitment to fairness. She wants to help other people, stand up, and speak for them when they can't be heard. She was a high school athlete; in many ways these are the values of sports teams and team captains. Her time incarcerated comprised 1/12 of her young life at the time. 21 months, and she turned 21 inside.

With this piece, I hope to pay tribute to her inner and outer beauty without muffling the harsh conditions she and others she described have endured. The central blood moon alludes to the passage of time: the measuring of sentences by months and women's menstrual cycles. It is a symbol of constancy. Earlneshka's image in the moon's shadows references her strength and hard-won wisdom as well as her potential. She reaches out to connect, to help. In her interview, she spoke movingly of women giving birth in the prison system, miscarriages, even after release, and lack of prenatal care while incarcerated, as well as giving babies up immediately after briefly holding them in handcuffs. The specific trials of women in incarceration are enormous bodily and emotional stresses and sources of PTSD and grief. She said, simply, "We [women] are where you come from," as she described gender-based excessive use of force and institutional failures of basic compassion. "Neisha" describes herself as a baby when she entered the system. Her figure curled in the moon's shadow represents her unfolding future as a person.

She explained what it's like to need basic things that must be purchased. If your family cannot get money to you, you look for ways to earn it. She cut off and sold her long hair, and braided other women's hair. Around the central moon, hair arranged like chain link fencing and molecular forms relating to the stress and fear of incarceration, and chronic shortage of menstrual supplies, which resemble hive and honeycomb or trellis-like networks. Adrenaline is part of the fear and flight response when under extreme duress. Connections with others keep us whole.

The paper petals and flowers are a collaboration made from Neisha's words and handwriting, torn into fragments in a companionable process of cathartic symbolic relief. The remnants became petals; together we made flowers.



Lee Deigaard, *Persister Moon*, 2018

~ Lee Deigaard



Carmen Holmes, Portrait by Allison Beondé

I was being abused, and raped, and I just stabbed somebody. And being honest, being real, I got into a fight and I needed the money.

They gave me, almost to five, but they gave me 3 years and I was scared, you know cause I knew what it was like, what the consequences were, not to do it anymore. I learned from them, you know?

They told me go to some kind of classes and I seen counselors. I got some counseling, and they talked to me, and everything. And, I was, I been good. They showed me how to control my anger and you know they talked to me.

Once I learned, now I teach my children how to control their anger. You know, if a person makes you angry then you walk away.

I love my family. They were out there waiting for me. They were so happy. ■

Keith Porteous, *My Life Has Value*, 2018

Verse 1

There is a menace above me, if I run,
he will tell
If I hide, he will find me
Using me
Still I say no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no
I won't stay
Motto 1: My life has value, my kids and me.
My life has value

Verse 2

To protect myself, I had to fight back
Trying to trap me
You would do the same
Still I say no, no, no, no, no, no, now they
Say I'm bad, and they send me back
Motto 2: My life has value, my kids and me.
My life has value, do you see me?

Chorus 1

Clean, I clean the house. I love to keep it
clean
Keep me busy!
Jesus you know I believe
Then he tricked me in the kitchen.
I had to fight back

You would do the same
Still I say no, no, no, no, no, no, now they
Sent me back, and they say I'm, bad

Motto 2: My life has value, my kids and me,
My life has value, do you see me?

Chorus 2

From 5 to 3, thank you Jesus. He came clean
I am just me
Now I lay me down, and I kill my time,
and I let my God
Promise: Make a plan of deliverance after
consequences

Chorus 3

Clean, I clean the house
I love to keep it clean
Keep me busy
Jesus you know I believe
They said I was good, and
They said I was needed
To teach my children to do the right thing
Clean, I clean the house
I love to keep it clean
Anger
You've been no friend to me
I learn to walk away and I pray everyday
Pray for me
I am just me
My life has value, my kids and me,
My life has value.

All lyrics are either drawn directly from Carmen Holmes's interview or excerpted with slight variations to fit the song format. May all beings be free. With gratitude for this opportunity.

~ Keith Porteous



Wendi Cooper, Portrait by Allison Beondé

My name is Wendi Cooper. My story is a little bit different.

I'm a transgender woman from the city of New Orleans. In 1999, I was charged with a crime that is very discriminatory against LGBT people in Louisiana. And this law is called the Crimes Against Nature Statute. New Orleans Police Department had transgender women on the list of extinction like they was utilizing this law to get rid of, you know, people like trans women and you know, the LGBTQ people itself.

How I got charged with a crime. In '99, I was on my way to the club and I was stopped by an officer in an unmarked car. He was just talking and we engaged in conversation, and the officer began to get a little affectionate and before you know it, he had just went into

his wallet. He tried to proposition me, and then he charging with the crime.

I went to court and the district attorneys in the city of New Orleans [said] that if you don't plead guilty as charged, that you're going to five years in prison? I was 19, very scared, you know, still questioning, like, what did I do?

So I plead guilty to the charge. And at that time, they put me on a year probation and also I had to pay fines, but I never knew, if you was convicted of that law that you was required to register as a sex offender. I was devastated.

Being transgender, I felt like a slave in my own city. I felt like a slave in my own state, knowing that if you was to walk the streets in the city of New Orleans, that you was going to get that charge.

I was beaten, I was choked. There was times that I was stopped by an officer and because of that charge itself, the officer realized that I was transgender, he cracked my teeth and took me to jail.

I still cry because I'm not where I want to be. But I can't give up. Louisiana is a state that is very archaic. As long as you in a state that is trying to harm people, they're not helping them, and then incarceration rates going to stay high.

And I just feel like this state needs to respect all their constituents regardless of race, creed, color, or orientation. ■

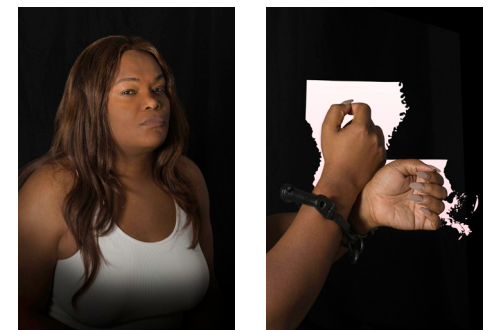
I was excited to work with Wendi on this project. I had met her briefly making photographs for Operation Restoration where she is the Programs Coordinator.

I listened to Wendi's interview and then spoke with her in person about making the artwork. She spoke about being a slave to the State of Louisiana because of the Crimes Against Nature law and how she would like to use the metaphor of slavery in America. She spoke specifically of shackles and, on several occasions, spoke about art that is raw and making an impact, work that represents horrific events.

I also wanted to show Wendi as the powerful force she is. During the photo shoot, she talked about being at a place in her life and at an age where she is ready to fight.

I am looking forward to continuing to be engaged with Wendi by providing photographs of her events as she continues her work. She was a key figure in lawsuit that removed 700 women from the sex offender registry and now, she is tackling getting the Crime Against Nature by Solicitation laws completely repealed.

~ Tammy Mercure



Tammy Mercure, Wendi, 2018



Wilkeitha Washington, Portrait by Allison Beondé

I am 31 years old right now. I've been in and out of jail since I was 15, just making bad decisions, being a product of my environment. It was very rough for me coming up as a girl. I'm from New Orleans, Louisiana and you know when I was younger we didn't have a lot of options that they have now to help better ourselves. At 19, I became a parent and went to selling drugs.

I didn't worry about school. I just didn't feel like there was time right there; have to worry about me and the baby. Katrina hit and made it more rough. I lost everything, you know, and then I'm raising a baby who's three months old, so that really put in my head that if I want to do right, I got to sell more drugs and make some money. Then I hit a brick wall and I wind

up going to jail. Every one they have in Orleans, I went to it, and it became a cycle.

My kids got to a point to where they won't even be surprised if I go, because I'm in and out. Don't get me wrong, I take care of them. I'm a great mom. They love me to death but when I go to jail, they in jail. Because nobody gonna treat your children like you treat your kids. So, I try my best to stay out of trouble and it's hard.

When I signed up for probation, it's like I'm still locked up because I'm ordered not to do what I want to do and I'm gonna get in trouble. It's hard because now I have to go to drug classes. I can't really start school. I can't do too much with my kids. I had went to St. Gabriel and did 18 months. When I came home, you know, I started a different path, like which I'm working on right now, but it's hard. It's very hard. Low, low paying job.

I got four kids, no dads, one incarcerated and one deceased. And it's like my kids are young, who else are they gonna depend on? So, then it got to the point to where I don't even want to be in New Orleans at all no more, cause the city just entrapped me. Either debt or the jails.

I'm not saying this is not no place for no man, but it's definitely not no place for no woman.

Especially with kids. ■

"I think that's why it's so imperative that we really, really delve deeper into a level of consideration before we move women-in particular Black women because we know that statistics and all studies have said that we are the primary caretakers of the family—before we remove them from the family—when the father's removed, it destabilizes the family. When the mother's removed, it decimates the family."



"And so, that, there has to be deeper consideration implemented in policies that before you send a person to prison that has minor children, that some forms, not just one, some forms of, of care have been put into place to sustain this child, if you're going to remove the parent and, and making that an absolute utter last resort. You know you got mothers being removed from the house, because it's their third time stealing \$175.00 item. So you take them out of the community and give them a 20 year sentence, because you choose to multi-bill them. You know these are the types of situations you hear over and over again."

Illustration by Taslim van Hattum

Wilkeitha Washington's story is being interpreted as a new piece of music by Victor Atkins of the New Orleans Jazz Orchestra.



Illustration by Taslim van Hattum

She's Somebody's Mother

**the impact of
incarcerating
mothers**



INCARCERATED MOTHERS

The impact of incarcerating women extends far beyond the more than 200,000 women in prisons and jails—it extends to their children and community in general. Nearly 80% of women in jails are mothers, many of them the sole caregiver of their minor children.ⁱ Five million children (7% of children nationwide) have had a parent incarcerated.ⁱⁱ Incarcerated parents are 29.6% more likely to lose their children to infant death than non-incarcerated parents,ⁱⁱⁱ and incarcerated mothers are more likely to have their children be kept back in school and/or drop out of school in the years immediately following their incarceration.^{iv} The long-term impact is also severe: Children of imprisoned mothers are more likely to experience arrest, conviction, and incarceration once they reach adulthood.^v

Prisons and jails often fail to provide basic prenatal and postpartum care to pregnant women. In 2015, 6% of incarcerated women in Louisiana prisons and jails were pregnant, consistent with national trends of 6-10% of women admitted to jails and prisons.^{vi} Nationally, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists estimates that 6-10% of imprisoned women are pregnant and, due to the prevalence of prior medical and mental health conditions, often experience high-risk pregnancies.^{vii} In Jefferson Parish in 2017, an incarcerated woman reports she was forced to give birth alone in her cell, and at least two women have miscarried without medical attention in the jail since 2014.^{viii} Louisiana is one of 22 states, as of early 2018, to prohibit the shackling of pregnant women during labor, except when ordered by a medical provider and security concerns are present.^{ix}

Parenting while an incarcerated mother is similarly difficult. Maintaining mother-child relationships entails high financial costs, from expensive transportation to geographically isolated prisons and jails to the high cost of collect phone calls (in some facilities it can cost up to \$10 for a few minutes). Despite the well-documented benefits of in-person visitation, Orleans and Jefferson Parishes, and increasingly nationwide, video visits are the only form of visitation offered.^x Incarcerated mothers have five times higher risk of their children ending up in foster care than children of incarcerated fathers.^{xi} Accordingly, mothers, as sole caregivers for their children, are also more likely to lose their parental rights under the Adoption and Safe Family Act of 1997 (ASFA). This federal law requires child welfare agencies to initiate parental termination proceedings for any child remaining in foster care for 15 out of 22 months.^{xii}

**Text citations can be found on page 124.*



Illustration by Taslim van Hattum



Fox Rich, Portrait by Allison Beondé

When I'm in jail arrested on these two counts of jury tampering, they finally take me to the doctor so that I can be seen for my ob-gyn appointment. And in the appointment they do the ultrasound. I'm in handcuffs and shackles with an armed guard on my side and an armed guard outside of my door, and the obstetrician comes over and moves the handcuffs out of the way, and does the sonogram and two hits pop up on the screen.

All I could do was burst out into this loud joyous cry. To be presented with two lives at the darkest moment of my life, to me, was a sign from God to say, "Look fool, I got you, we're going to be all right."

My first night in jail they put me on suicide watch—no windows, no sheets, no clock, no nothing, no sound on—it is in total isolation. Knowing I was facing 297 years, knowing that I was pregnant, that I had two children at home, that my husband

was in the midst of his trial, and I knew they were going to find him guilty—I just reached what some would consider the point of no return. And then I had to ask myself, "Is my life so bad that I'm ready to give it up?" And as I laid there in that cell in total solitude I heard something that I had never heard before: it was the pounding of my heart. And I thought to myself that as long as I got life in me then I'll deal with whatever I have to deal with.

I think it's so imperative that we really, really delve into a deeper level of consideration before we remove women—in particular, black women because we know that statistics and all the studies have said that we are the primary caretakers of the family—before we remove them from the family. **When the father's removed, it destabilizes the family. When the mother's removed, it decimates the family.**

There has to be deeper consideration implemented in policies that before you send a person to prison that has minor children, that some forms—not just one—of care are put into place to sustain the child, if you're going to remove the parent—and making that [removal] an absolute utter last resort.

You got mothers being removed from the house because it's their third time stealing a \$175 item. You take them out of the community and give them a 20 year sentence because you chose to multibill them—these are the types of situations you hear over and over again. For me, my mother retired from work. She was a schoolteacher and took an early retirement so that she can be home with my kids. ■

My artistic practice modulates among photojournalism, cultural documentation, personal and daily life, and constructed realities, all in an effort to tell stories of underrepresented communities in New Orleans and beyond.

To tell Fox Rich's story, I pulled from my fact-driven skill set that I learned as a journalist. After listening to one interview and then conducting another, I reinterpreted three of the most important events from Rich's experience with mass incarceration, a system she likens to slavery. My initial visualization was to stage an exact recreation of those moments. After deep consideration, I used constructed realities to more fully convey Rich's emotions over the duration of her family's combined two-plus decades of imprisonment, and reuniting with her husband, Rob Rich. For me, using constructed realities allowed a freedom to explore, investigate, and recreate factual events or issues that are not permissible in news.

Jessika Thibodeaux portrays Fox Rich, and Myron Thibodeaux as Rob Rich.

~ L. Kasimu Harris



L. Kasimu Harris, (top to bottom) *The Gift of Freedom* and *Justus*, *The Prison Transport Trade*, *Freedom Day: A Boundless Love*, 2018



Ruby Barnes, Portrait by Allison Beondé

I did time because of my drug addiction.

Through my adult life I was in and out of prison; federal prison, state prison. You know I lost my father in prison, and my nephew who was my godchild. I lost a lot of family members during my incarceration. But they never stopped my children from seeing me.

I had my baby boy, I had him inside the prison system.

That was hard. **That's the worst thing you could do, when you be in a hospital and then somebody come and take your child from you, you know?** Even though it's your family member. The only time you held the child you had to go in a certain room to hold your baby, and stay in there but two days, if

that at most. One Doctor extended my stay a couple of days so I could be with my baby. And then my sister came and got him.

We people, you know? We make mistakes, that is bound to happen. Some people aren't as forgiving as the others. So what I would say, tell them hey, say just open the doors, open your minds. You know, like, this could be you, you know?

I came from good families. Don't matter who you came from. I was in prison with judges and lawyers when I was in Fort Worth. ■

Making Money

Sarah Quintana, *Making Money*, 2019

Sarah Quintana

When I picked up the ha-bit I was work-ing all the time at

6 South, the te-le-phone com-pa-ny mak-ing mo-ney I'm mak-ing mo-ney and mak-ing it fast.

16 I met a man Be-came his wife.

20 He was an add-ict And a-da-ment I ne-ver try.

24 I fought for years and when he went off to sea I said

28 O-K, just once but it got the best of me all of my mo

This Could Be You, You Know?

Sarah Quintana, *This Could Be You, You Know?*, 2019

Sarah Quintana

It does'nt matt-er where you come from. I come from a good fa-mi-ly with doct-ors and law-yers I went to pri-son

18 with some who just need-ed a place to sleep. So

24 o-pen up the doors. So o-pen up your minds

31 you know. This could be you, you know?

This could be you, you know?

VERSE 2

I thank God he gave me a conscience
That I feel bad about what I did
Cause If I didn't care
I'd still be back there
Addicted all over again

VERSE 3

We make mistakes
It's bound to happen. Just look at them
Everyone's got something, who can you blame?
Because some of them really hurt

VERSE 4

The child and the addict I will be helping any minute
You know I'll be right there
Take a child to my heart
To love and protect indefinitely
CHORUS OUT

CHORUS

So open up the doors
So open up your minds
This could be you, you know?
This could be you, you know?



Tremica Henry, Portrait by Allison Beondé

I ended up in the prison system because of dealings my husband had with someone in payroll that ultimately resulted in payroll fraud of some kind. I was not directly involved, but I did accept responsibility for it because it was in my name. I was charged with 31 counts, and I beat 30, and I was charged with the least attempt, which is conspiracy.

My sentence was supposed to be a year and a day, and it ended up being longer because once I got there, I was angry. I was frustrated; I was misled, I was misguided. My attorney spoke to me about me being the person to accept responsibility for it—because I had never been in trouble. I was a teacher, you know, a woman. I ended up getting over a year in jail. I had a six week old baby. I was furious.

I found out I was pregnant during the process [of going to court]. And once I got into the situation, I was told that my daughter would be taken from me; she would be put into foster care. **I was induced early. I had the baby six weeks early to not have her be born in a federal prison.** I wanted to at least spend some time with my daughter.

I had a three year old daughter who had never left my side, not for a moment. And I remember her asking me, "Are you coming back?" And I told her, "No." And I was so hurt, I wanted it to take my baby and leave, and run. I didn't have a lot of support, so I was just afraid. I always wanted to be there for my children, like nobody had been there for me.

I was trying to do the right thing. I thought I was standing up for my family, and being that person, took all that away, in an instant. I left my babies here and didn't see them for 10 months. At all.

I was in Florida, and my daughters were here. Katrina came and my children were separated from each other, and my family was all over the place. It was a mess. I was emotionally a wreck. It could have destroyed me, and I was so angry with myself. I was so mad at myself for being so naive, for putting so many people in front of me when I thought I was doing the right thing, and I hurt the two most important people in my life: my babies.

Me taking the charges for my husband, for my father—they weren't worth it. ■



Butch Frosch, Tremica, 2018

■ This piece is inspired by the story of Tremica Henry. It is a symbol of her beauty, courage, and strength.

Because most Pop Art depicts stories of white suburbia life, I felt it was important to tell Tremica's story in a space where generally, women of color are not represented. When creating this piece, I used inspiration from Roy Lichtenstein.*

The child in the painting represents Tremica's children and the separation that mothers endure while being imprisoned. The cloud formation over the Superdome is a symbol of the devastation Hurricane Katrina brought at the time of Tremica's incarceration, and the use of teal color surrounding the dome represents the horrific flooding from the storm.

~ Butch Frosch

A note from the museum:
*Coincidentally, in 2017 renowned collector Agnes Gund sold her 1962 Roy Lichtenstein "Masterpiece" for approx \$150-165 million for the purpose of creating a fund that supports criminal justice reform and seeks to reduce mass incarceration in the United States called the "Art for Justice Fund."



Kiwanda Nelson, Portrait by Allison Beondé

I was in jail for like eight months but jail's no place for me, you know, for really nobody. I'm not used to waking up at 5:30 in the morning for roll call, eat breakfast with everybody. When I went to jail I didn't want to wake up. I didn't want to eat. I didn't want to mingle with nobody. I just wanted to be by myself and it was like I couldn't. It was like I go mingle or they're gonna throw me on lockdown, and for what? Why would you throw me on lockdown or whatever when I don't want to mingle?

I really think everybody should have a fair chance, you know, a second chance on getting jobs, a stable home, stuff like that.

You know, once you're in the system, it's like you've gone. They don't care, they don't show no love, and I really did miss

my children. *I couldn't see my children like I wanted to. I could talk to them on the phone, but it's not like seeing or being with them.*

Actually, I rather nobody go to jail. Everybody, you know, do the right things down a right track—and everything can be good. ■

Queen Kold Madina, *I'm No Victim*, 2019

Verse 1

Somebody called 911 and said I was the one
with the weed and the pills big ass gun

Hell to da yeah
I gotta feed my son out here hustling
till the morning come

Baby cry hungry
that shit blow my high concert jungle
where we better not die

No badge plain clothes
got \$20 get served kool hanging o' my lip
police pull up on the curve

Now! I can not move and I can not groove Big
pistol in my face gave me concrete shoes

I got drugs in my pocket and I got to piss
Take my children in the house they don't
need to see this.

COURSE:

I'm no victim I'm victorious
I'm the Queen Mother Warrior they better
check my Swag my bag toe tag
couldn't even much fit because I'm made
from this the victorious Queen
Blood paid for this

I'm no Victim I'm Victorious
I'm the Queen Mother Warrior No hell
No cell No Jail Or bail
can't hold me I'm free Unbreakable me
The Victorious Queen Is who I came to be!

VERSE 2

Lock me up won't stop me up
so they pop me up just to drop me up couldn't
box me up so they dot me up jail made shank

mop my blood

ain't no friends ain't no peeps stay to myself
like a bed and a sheet braid yo hair
it ain't cheap ain't no love shit ain't free

And I'm thinking bout my children
what they thinking of me I got a uncle in
Angola never seeing the streets I need me a
expunge
I gotta a 8 month run
then I'm back getting cheese like a
hamburger bun
I'M NO VICTIM!

COURSE REPEAT

VERSE 1

The wanna take my life and control my mind
so I can't give to my children there heart and
there spine
Oh no bitch!
your chains won't hold this!

They wanna lock me up in jail saying that I
was wrong
but I'll do it all again
to put food in my home Oh No Bitch!
yo plan won't work here!

Infest my neighborhood with failure and
defeat
Out here living in public housing children
dead in the street
But oh no Bitch
your chains can't hold this

They wanna take my life Scandalize my name
Lock the Queen away so I won't be the same
Oh No Bitch
Yo plan don't work here



Dolfinette Martin, Portrait by Allison Beondé

I was about 14 years old when I left home. There was no real peace at home. Watched my mom struggle when I was younger. My dad he left early on, I was about five. And really seeing my mom leave from that abusive relationship to another abusive relationship and just not really understanding why my father wasn't there.

So I just grew up missing something—not really sure what it was but just knowing something was missing. When I was old enough, thought I was old enough anyway, I turned to the streets.

I remember my very first time being arrested. I was arrested on a drug possession. And ironically I felt like I had arrived because, you know, I went to jail. I'm like sixteen years old.

When I came back home nothing about my

community had changed. It had actually gotten worse and I fell right back into it. Someone offered me some crack cocaine and it changed my life forever. Like, I was immediately hooked.

You know, I've learned a lot about what led me to prison. A lot. The trauma definitely led me to do the drugs, which led me to commit the crimes, which led me to the prison.

Being completely powerless over what happens with your children—I left five. My three sons all were brutally shot. I had a daughter who had run away—for me, that's the hardest piece of being imprisoned, if you're a parent. I mean if you're a mother like me. Like, every day, I worried about my kids. Every single day, every day. In prison they use everything to threaten you with. So they would use things like your visit and the phone calls and that type of stuff to keep you in line.

I'm a human being and my crime isn't who I am.

It doesn't even begin to explain who I am. I want for everyone who comes to the exhibit to see us through the art. Understand what brought us here. We don't look for excuses, we just need you to understand.

Society believes that women should be in the home, taking care of the family. Who takes care of the women? We carry it all and we, most times, we never complain.

Women are in prison and we're not there because we want to be there. Every woman or girl that goes to prison has trauma. We're human. And we're survivors. I am a survivor. I'm not a victim. ■



Carl Joe Williams,
Whispers to God, Being Here When Women Need Me to Be Here!, 2018

When I started this work series, I was interested in the exploration of ideas to create work about mass incarceration. I wanted to create work that could be broken down into components of video testimony and expression to create experiential pieces. In part, a portion of those components exist as an activist work in cyberspace. The pieces would allow formally incarcerated people to tell their own compelling stories. Prisoners of injustice could spark a movement of consciousness, raise awareness, and promote change. The process was filmed over four hours of interviews with five individuals.

Through a series of meetings, I had chance to interview Dolfinette Martin. I wanted her words to be featured as a larger installation piece. I wanted to create a piece that served as a portrait, as an activist message, as a document of the impact of this type of loss of freedom to women. Through the portrait of Ms. Martin's perspective and consequential work with women who have been incarcerated, the message of despair, injustice and deliverance is illuminated.

I was moved by Dolfinette's statement that all the risk factors—such as being poor, the lack of opportunity and lack of access to resources—were central to imprisonment; crimes had little to do with what was actually committed. This idea was profound, and it has stuck with me as a major social problem for us to resolve.

~ Carl Joe Williams



Shondolyn Murray, Portrait by Allison Beondé

My mother died when I was two and she was 18. My family gave me to the state. I had this foster mamma and, you know, it led me to the streets. I was rebellious, I didn't listen to anyone. I didn't want to listen to nobody, because I wanted love; I wanted my real mother. You know, that's the hard part. She's with me today, right now as I speak, while she's deceased.

But it was hard, so hard. Like no care and that led me to drugs, prostitution, jail. That's all it was. I was in jail all my life.

I hung with the wrong people. I was listening to the wrong things and that was it. You get tired. I hate to really talk about it, but it really raised me. It really brought me to where I'm at.

Now, today, I see it wasn't even working. And it won't happen again. If I can help someone that's what I want to do. I want to love on somebody else.

You miss a lot, I missed raising my children. I was in and out their lives. You know, I wouldn't be the mother that should have been; I was drugging. In prison, I had patience always to see my seed, to see my babies.

I always ask them to forgive me. I don't care, I could be in the kitchen cooking. They come, but I still be asking them, "Do you forgive me?" And my children asked me, "Stop doing that! Yes." But I, you know, I can't get over it. I mean, I can't believe that the life that I live—I shouldn't have did it to mine, but I wasn't taught right.

I want people to know [jail's] not a place for you. You don't need to be interested. Do the right thing, be loyal to yourself. You be mindful how you treat people and do the right thing.

I was incarcerated when I was given to the state. I've been locked up like that. You may not understand it. And when I look at it, I like where I'm living now, I'm happy I'm not locked up. I'm only locked up if I choose to be locked up. Nobody's gonna lock me up. ■

Victor Atkins of the New Orleans Jazz Orchestra, *Per(Sister)*: Shondolyn Murray, 2019

a song in four parts
1: For the Mercy of Mother Murray
2: State of Confusion
3: Rebellion
4: Cottonport, Simmesport, and St. Gabriel

A Place Not of Her Own

the physical
and behavioral
health toll of
incarceration

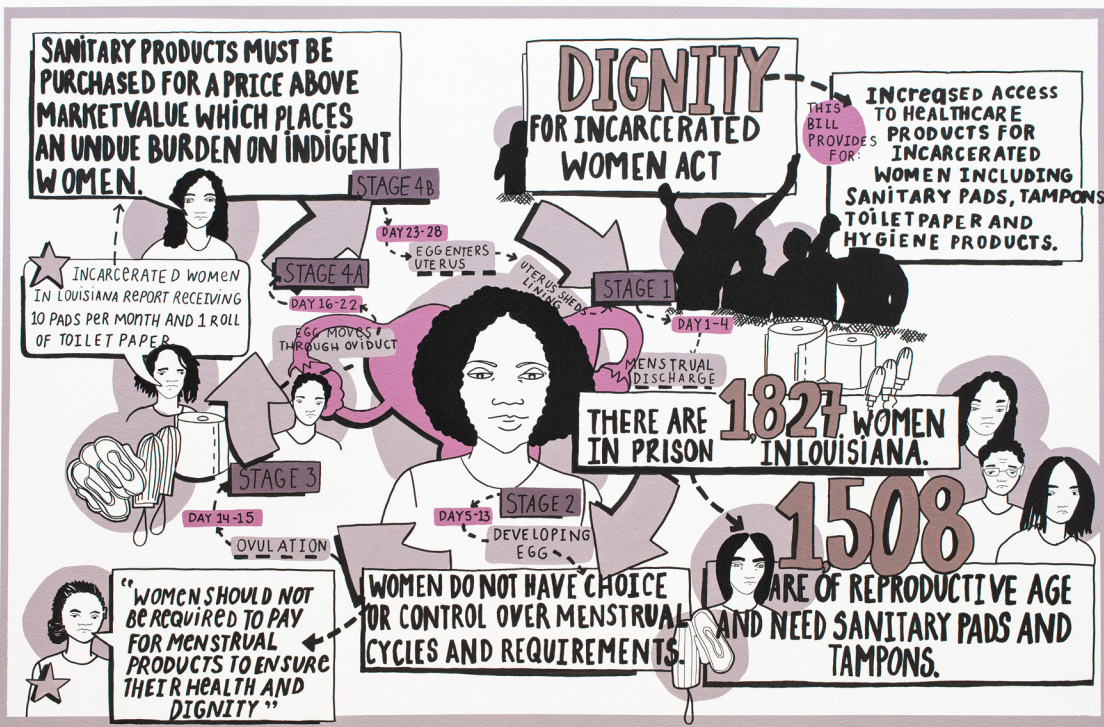
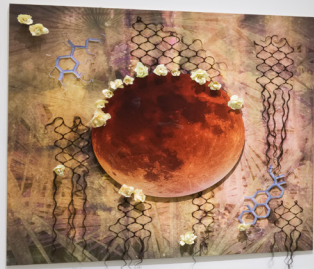


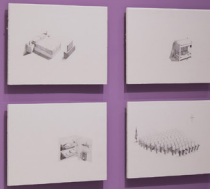
Illustration by Taslim van Hattum



ARTIST'S STATEMENT
This work is a response to the
question of what it means to be
human in a world that is
increasingly defined by
technology and artificial
intelligence. It explores the
relationship between the
human and the machine, and
the potential for both to
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A PLACE NOT HER OWN: THE PHYSICAL AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH TOLL OF INCARCERATION

To many visitors, the many deaths that have
occurred in the prison system have been a
wake-up call. But for many, the deaths have
been a wake-up call to the physical and
behavioral health toll of incarceration.

The conditions in prisons are often
described as inhumane. In many cases, the
conditions are so poor that the physical and
behavioral health of the inmates is
severely compromised. The conditions are
often described as "prison hell."

Prisoners are often subjected to
physical and sexual abuse, and the
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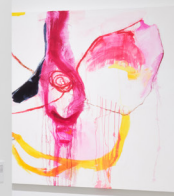
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The conditions in prisons and jails often create (and exacerbate) trauma in women held captive. On average, a woman in Louisiana serves a sentence of 6.24 yearsⁱ but the physical and mental effects of her imprisonment may last long after she completes her sentence. The US Constitution requires jails and prisons to provide adequate healthcare,ⁱⁱ yet Louisiana spends the least of all 50 states on healthcare for incarcerated people, averaging \$2,173 per person in fiscal year 2015.ⁱⁱⁱ Imprisoned women have distinct and unique healthcare needs that jails and prisons are ill-equipped to provide, from gynecological exams to mammograms to mental health treatment for prior trauma.^{iv} In Louisiana, 70% of women serve their sentence in a jail, instead of a prison.^v Jails are designed for short-term stays and therefore often don't offer the specific and long-term services imprisoned women need.

Incarcerated women are also more likely to experience sexual assault and disciplinary punishment by prison or jail staff than men. Of all reports of staff sexual assault against people incarcerated, three-fourths were from imprisoned women.^{vi} Women with prior histories of abuse (86% of incarcerated women) have a “heightened risk of sexual assault during incarceration.”^{vii} Moreover, correctional practices and environments—such as full-body searches and overcrowding—can revictimize incarcerated women. Responses to these threats, real or perceived, may lead to disciplinary punishments for incarcerated women.^{viii} A recent national study concluded that prison officials punish women more often and more harshly than men in prison for low-level disciplinary violations.^{ix}

In May 2018, at the urging of formerly incarcerated women included in this exhibition, Louisiana enacted the Dignity for Incarcerated Women’s Act, which provides hygiene/sanitary products free for imprisoned women and enacts portions of the Prisoner Rape Elimination Act’s guidelines on searches of women into Louisiana law.^x Similarly, the newly created Louisiana Women’s Incarceration Task Force was drafted by formerly incarcerated women, and is composed of government officials and experienced community members including Syrita Steib who is the vice chair. The Task Force will conduct a “comprehensive review of the state’s criminal justice system as it relates to women.”^{xi} The experiences and voices of formerly incarcerated women are enhancing transparency and are critical to improving conditions in these institutions.^{xii} ■

**Text citations can be found on page 124.*

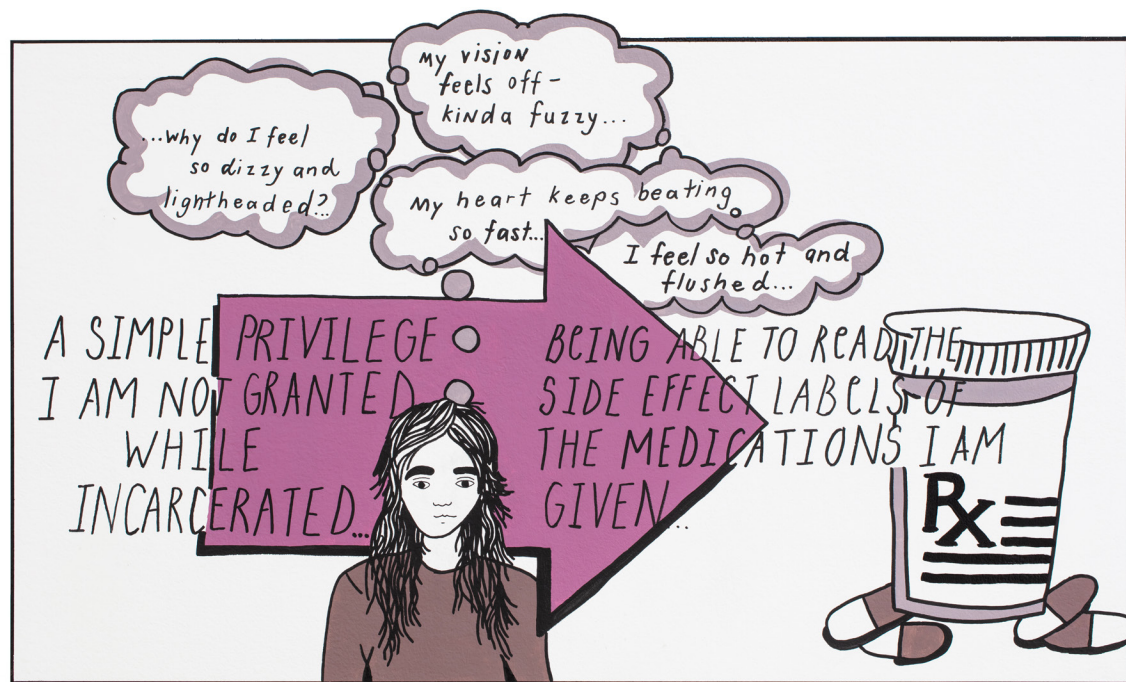


Illustration by Taslim van Hattum



Kristina Lopez, Portrait by Allison Beondé

I served time in OPP for prostitution, which I went in for three different times. The first time I was 21.

I was having some symptoms in jail. I really wasn't feeling good that day and they asked me if I ever took an HIV test. I told them no. They asked me if I would like one, and I told them, "Yes." And that is when I found out I was HIV positive, in 2013. And I have been living with HIV ever since then.

Being transgendered and going into there, they treat you like you're a man. They don't respect you. I was not able to be with women and that was traumatic.

In jail I was always by myself. They didn't want to have me around people. They didn't really want to put me in population with the males because they was afraid I was going to be raped or I was going to get beat up.

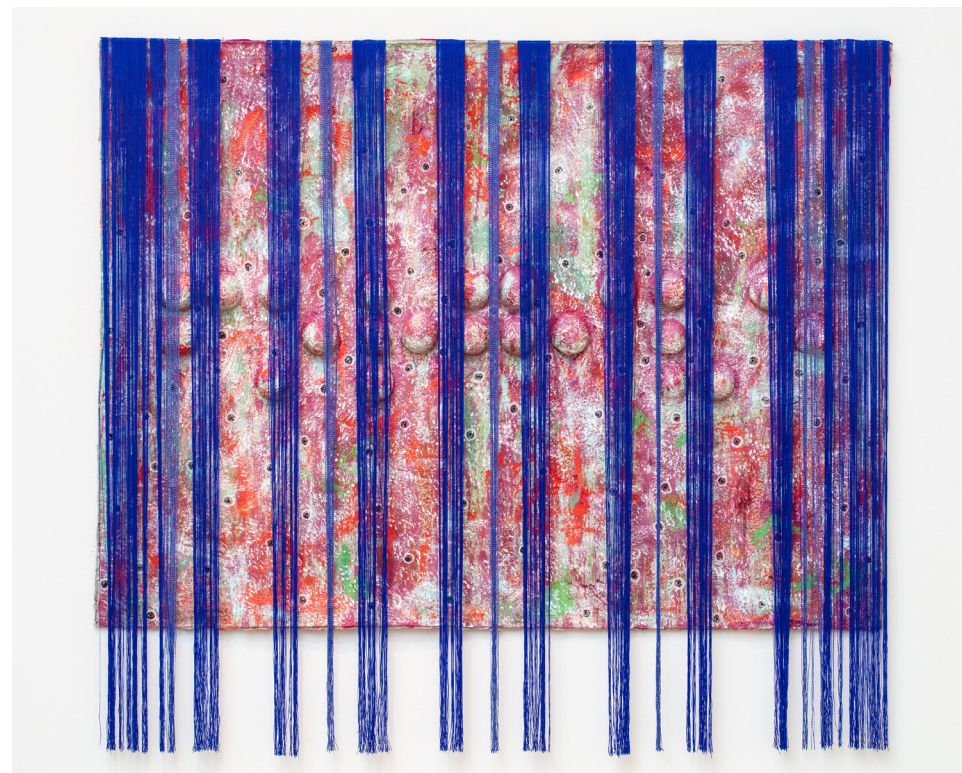
I think the worst thing is if a trans [woman] goes to jail. It's just, they're not gonna respect her. They're gonna disrespect her, they gonna treat her accordingly to a male. Just because she look like a female doesn't mean anything.

I had a friend who passed away in jail because she was not getting HIV treatment. *That is another thing when you go to prison or when you go to jail, they don't want to give you your treatment. They don't want to give you your medications, and you can end up dying in jail by the ignorance of the law.*

I had to wait until I got out of jail to get the care. They give you a paper letting you know that this is where you go to clinics and this is where you go for treatment. [They] don't have nothing else to do with it, just tell you you're [HIV] positive and send you on your merry old way.

I've learned a lot, going through this, my journey. I was here to be put on this earth to figure out life, to figure out what needs to be done and I figured it out, I had to navigate every situation by myself. But I learned right from from wrong. So whatever I did in the past, I try not to do it.

Now, in my present life, I try to help other people even if it's just giving \$1, you know what I'm saying? I am trying to help the youth. I'm learning. As the older I get, the more I learn. I had good sheltered life, but at some points in that life I was broken down, but I'm here now and I'm happy. ■



Ana Hernandez, *It has been said that, "to forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you,"* 2018

■ In many practices, it is believed that there are inherently therapeutic properties derived from the stages of breakdown to breakthrough. These periods, both internal and external and ranging from large to small components, are at their best transformative processes resulting in a release of emotional and physical confinement.

The feat of releasing pain, relieving trauma, and progressively healing in spite of ongoing institutional racism, systemic discrimination, and structural stigma is an impressive display of dignity and defiance. Furthermore, to reach a higher level of consciousness where one is capable of the advocacy of awareness and forgiveness, is perhaps the ultimate form of sight and vision.

~ Ana Hernandez



Tonja Isaac, Portrait by Allison Beondé

In 2010 my husband was diagnosed with cancer, and I lost him in '11. So that that left me to kind of struggle on my own and to make ends meet. But, you know, what's a girl to do when she is left alone, and you really don't have any funds? So I sold drugs to take care of myself and in the process of doing that got caught up and locked up. So that's how I wound up getting in contact with incarceration.

I like LCIW (Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women) better than OPP (Orleans Parish Prison) because they cage them behind bars. At LCIW you have opened doors. You're free to come in and out your door.

I feel like they don't give us adequate attention toward people's health, you know

what I'm saying? Because a lot of people has died because a lack of giving them adequate help and attention that they need dealing with their health. Like, my lady that was my bunkie, she died. And she was supposed to be coming home and right before she got ready to come home, she died.

Now up in LCIW, it was very moldy. There was a lot of mold issues. And even with me, I had issues with mold. And they had to start taking samples and whatnot and they started bleaching things down to try to cover things up but, you know, this is why they supposed to be tearing LCIW down. Just like even out in the field they had closed down the field because things out there in the field wasn't right neither.

But I did work the field when I first went out there and we planted squash, zucchini, potatoes, you know, a couple of things and you had to pick them and pull them. But something out there wasn't right, you know? That's why they closed it down. And I had a young lady that worked out there, and her fingers had gotten black and got infected. And see with things like that there, they wants to brush it off.

They need to be accountable as much as we are accountable for our actions as well. ■

■
For this site-specific installation I have drawn from several aspects of Tonja's story, including her descriptions of the unpaid garment work she did while incarcerated (ironically making prison uniforms for other prisons). In doing some further research I came to better understand Louisiana's long-standing history with convict leasing and unpaid labor within

the prison system. The idea of mass production through mass incarceration spun through my head as I decided to create an entire installation out of catalog photographs of prison uniforms, much like the ones Tonja had produced while in prison in a uniform of her own. I created a color palette to work from out of the plethora of color options available through "leading detention suppliers" online and set out to make work that looked into the realities women faced when serving time behind bars.

One fact I learned early on through research compiled for this exhibition is that an estimated 79% of incarcerated women in the state of Louisiana are the sole caretakers of children under the age of 18. While Tonja and her son were older when she was sent to prison, she shared that she and her son were both released from separate prison sentences at the same time. I was struck by the idea of familial incarceration. Using these ideas, I created five traditional family portraits of incarcerated mothers and their young or soon to be children, framing them and placing them on top of wallpaper depicting the state flower. Each portrait, constructed meticulously out of hundreds of prison uniforms, intentionally obscures facial features and places families in generic visitation rooms, making commentary on the struggle to maintain one's sense of identity and personal space while incarcerated and touch on the potential prescribed future of everyone depicted.

~ Amy Elkins



Amy Elkins, (left to right, top to bottom) *Expectant Mother (Pink)*, *Mother and Newborn*, *Expectant Mother (blue)*, *Mother and Son*, *Mother and Young Children*, 2019 (background wallpaper) *Southern Magnolia*, 2019



Veronique Williams, Portrait by Allison Beondé

It was horrible, horrible. They treat you like animals when you in there, you know? They act like you're not even human, and then the food they serve, most of that stuff isn't even edible so if you don't have family to send you money for commissary, you're basically just going to lose weight, and it's just so hard. If you're sick they don't believe you, they don't want to bring me to the doctor or nothing. They don't get you no pain medicines if you're hurting.

I went to jail in Gretna, stayed there a week for traffic and I didn't even understand that. A week for traffic? The guard was like, the judge was out sick so they had to wait for a replacement and whenever a replacement come in, then we can go to court and go home, and I just don't think that was fair.

The police is crooked. They really are. Not all of them but they have a lot of them that is. They don't protect and serve, they humiliate and discriminate. That's what they do. That's my life.

My oldest son did six years because this policeman didn't like me because he used to try to make sexual advances towards me. I made a report on him. A week later my door got kicked in, and guess what happened, who's the lead? The same cop.

My friend was there, you know and I'm gonna be honest, he had marijuana. But [the policeman] put my son in jail. He put me in jail, he said because we live there and that's all our weed, even though the guy told them, "No, that's not their weed. That's mine." My son did six years for nothing. They charged me with a misdemeanor.

They need to change these laws you know. If it's not a bad crime, why I gotta sit in jail for six months for a misdemeanor. That's crazy, something real minor, why? They giving out too much time for little crimes, and they don't care. Maybe if more black men were out here raising their kids, there wouldn't be these little boys; things wouldn't be so bad out here, you know? They've all got their daddies in jail, you know doing twenty years for, I'm just saying drugs. Really?

I just wish we could just change the legislation. That's it. Not just for my sons, but for other people's sons. ■

Spirit McIntyre, *Protect & Serve*, 2019

Original Language: Veronique Williams

Verse:

A roll of toilet paper and a little bar of soap
Rotten meat, some moldy bread and not
enough hope
Crooked cops, judge out sick
What can I do?
The system is broken and no one believes
you

Chorus:

When the police stop me, I go to stuttering
When the police stop me, I go to shaking
When the police stop me, I get nervous
and everything
I'm never going back there

Verse:

Little thing of deodorant and no central
heat
Lots of tears, hunger pains and you don't
get a sheet
Harassed my sons, who did nothing
What can I do?
The system is broken and no one believes
you

Chorus:

When the police stop me, I go to stuttering
When the police stop me, I go to shaking
When the police stop me, I get nervous
and everything
I'm never going back there

No protect and serve, they humiliate
Or honor the truth, they discriminate
They lie, harass and they devastate
No care for the chaos they orchestrate
There's gotta be something better we can
create

Chorus:

When the police stop me, I go to stuttering
When the police stop me, I go to shaking
When the police stop me, I get nervous
and everything
I'm never going back there, I'm just never
going back there
You'll never catch me back there



Gilda Caesar, Portrait by Allison Beondé

I was incarcerated and it didn't go very well in there. I didn't like the way I was treated. First of all, I shouldn't have been in there. I was released August 23, 2005.

I should have went home, I shouldn't have been caught in [Katrina] at all. I should have been reunited with my family rather than my family looking for me. We was on a bridge for two days from the 28th, 29th to 30th. I watched one lady on the bridge have a miscarriage. Nothing was done about it. It was a sight. Women passing out because they didn't have medication to give to people. We didn't have water; they wouldn't give us no water. They wouldn't give us nothing, not even a piece of bread.

August 31st, that's when I was [taken to] Angola. I got out right before Thanksgiving.

When I was in jail I couldn't watch TV because everything shown on TV was pertaining to Katrina. I couldn't watch that. I happen to see my mom sitting in front the Superdome, she's in a wheelchair, she has no legs, eating a hamburger. That just took it out me. That just totally tore me up. I couldn't watch TV. I didn't want to be bothered with nobody. I just basically stayed to myself until I was released from jail.

The hardest thing was for me to be separated from my family, my children, and my mom. That was the hardest part. Because before I went, I was living with my mom. She had no legs and I was taking care of my mom. I used to cook for her and everything. That left my 15 year old daughter here to do that.

When it was time for the evacuation for Katrina, my 15 year old daughter and my oldest son was the ones to evacuate my mama. Put my mama on a mattress and floated my mama to dry land.

I never had a visitor since I been in. I didn't want my children to come and see me like that. I didn't think that was no type of way for a child to see their mother. They didn't wash your clothes, but once a week and you didn't get the clothes that you gave them—you didn't get those clothes back, you got other people clothes. Only way you kept your clothes [was] if you wash your clothes with your hands. Other than that you didn't have clothes.

I don't wish jail on my worst enemy. ■

■

"Mass incarceration is, ultimately, a problem of troublesome entanglements. To war seriously against the disparity in unfreedom requires a war against a disparity in resources. And to war against a disparity in resources is to confront a history in which both the plunder and the mass incarceration of blacks are accepted commonplaces. Our current debate over criminal-justice reform pretends that it is possible to disentangle ourselves without significantly disturbing the other aspects of our lives, that one can extract the thread of mass incarceration from the larger tapestry of racist American policy."

~ Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Black Family in the Age of Mass Incarceration", 2015, *The Atlantic*



Keith Duncan, *Gilda's Story*, 2018

The patterned fabric in my paintings is used symbolically. For "Gilda's Story" I used a flower pattern with roses that feels very "downhome" and Southern. This is a politically poetic painting and it engages Gilda's real-life story in her own words, as she wrote them down for me during a recent visit to her house in November 2018.

The lettering at the top is in Old English font and stylistically the text has a dialog with the American flag bunting which frames the piece, as if it were stage curtains for a grand presentation. The paper calendar at the bottom marks the dates in 2005 when Gilda served time in Orleans Parish Prison, including when she was transported to Angola Prison on a bus following Hurricane Katrina. She waded through chest-level waters and witnessed terrible things.

Flying the flag upside down is signal of distress. Right now America is at time of crisis and war when it comes to discussing social-political issues. The upside-down flag in this painting symbolizes injustice in the penal system and carceral state. I learn more and more each day about how mass incarceration is a profit-making industry. A lot of the people incarcerated are no so-called "real criminals"; many have been dealing with drug use or drug abuse, not murder or robbery. No doubt, there are crimes committed, but mass incarceration is caused by taking the "let's lock them up" attitude, rather than rehabilitation and solving the underlying issues of systemic racism and poverty.

~ Keith Duncan



Dianne Jones, Portrait by Allison Beondé

I've been incarcerated since the age of 13 and at the age of 23, I was sentenced to 30 years in Orleans Parish prison for murder.

At the age of 14, I was sent to a place called LCIW and sat there for a year. And I was telling my family that they were trying to have sex with us in this place. And then I was placed in Tallulah. Tallulah was a juvenile facility for kids but we also was getting abused in Tallulah and molested from the guards. We were kids. We didn't know no better, you know? And my friend—she couldn't handle it so she tried to kill herself. I can just remember it. I actually witness my friend commit suicide in jail in the bed next to me and nobody ever said anything about it.

These are the things that's going on inside of the prison—none of our clothes are being washed,

and that's not right that women have to go to court with soiled underwear on. And mental health is a big issue here. I work outreach out to the streets now and there's a lot of women who don't understand what's going on outside this prison and they're not getting the help that they need. St. Gabriel's closed down. Tallulah is a private prison so they don't have psychiatric help for women. So what are we supposed to do?

I went to jail for murder, I need help. I need somebody to talk to sometimes, I have anger issues from being in these different places. I feel as if the entire world is against me sometimes and I'm angry that my kid is following the same footsteps as me. I have a lot of anger inside of me from being incarcerated at the age of 13 and them taking me away from my family like that.

I have been to seven prisons in Louisiana since the age of 13. I done been from this parish to across-the-river parish and I done been to LCIW, I done been to Tallulah, I been in St. Gabriel, I done been in Caddo jail, I been in Orleans Parish Prison, I done been to Shreveport jail and I've been in a Baton Rouge jail.

I saw a lot of women that came out of this place that was really physically broke down. Mass incarceration also focuses on women. Okay? It's just not about men. Because we suffer too—and as a black woman I suffer every day.

I had one guy tell me me I don't know what it feels like being a man being locked up, I say you don't know what it feels like being a woman. ■



Nubian OmiSayade Sun,
St. Dianne of the 6th Ward,
2018

■ "St. Dianne of the 6th Ward" is an Afri-Galactic-Womanist piece built around the truth that one can be both Black and holy transcending past, present, and future. Dianne's life is inherently valuable and sacred. She poses in a birthing position which is one of the most powerful positions of womanhood to be in—the position of creation. This is a prayer. We celebrate the sanctity of her life by intuitively infusing each glide of India ink with prayers and wishes over and into her life, her voice, her paths, her freedom, her womb, her presence, her desires of the heart, and her bold magic. Sainthood for Dianne is a continuous journey of becoming and unbecoming. May she continue to walk in assurance of her sanctity, grace and power from this day forward until the until.

~ Nubian OmiSayade Sun



Yolanda Ford, Portrait by Allison Beondé

I was into sports in school and I broke my leg. When I broke my leg, I couldn't play basketball and in the midst of that I started hanging with the wrong crowd and I got introduced to crack cocaine. And from there I needed to live a life of crime to support my habit.

One of those times during my incarceration, my only daughter wrote me a letter saying that if I come home, and don't do right by her and her brothers, that I will no longer have a daughter—and that hit, like “woah,” you know? Being incarcerated without family is the worst. It's the worst. It may be an act of tough love which ever it is not hearing your name call at Mail Call, not having a visitation, not being able to pick up the phone and somebody take the collect code—that hurts.

But when I lost my mother and I no longer had that backbone, I felt it. It made me want to do more with myself. It gave me more strive to do better, and to leave the drugs alone—and rekindle family atmosphere, love my kids, and have my kids love me back.

I mean I would advise anyone, any child, there's a better way. I want to be one whose voice is heard, someone that can go out to the prison system, to the correctional institute, to the juvie, to tell them I experienced enough for you, you, you and you! If I can do that and one person hears me? My mission is accomplished, and that's just how I feel through life.

Jail's just not a place that I will want my worst enemy to go to. You know, there were times when we was in intake and you might sleep in a holding cell for three days. You might get one roll of tissue paper for 30 women. You tell them you're on your cycle and it takes them hours to come. “Oh well, you knew that when you came.” It was just so much. I just don't want to have to endure that no more.

People with mental problems do not belong in the jail system. It's no one there to see, they can't send psychiatrists. They gonna send a psychiatrist to see them when they first come in. He gonna put them on something, but he don't even know the history—that's not getting them help. **A person with a mental disorder needs to be somewhere where they have people that are professionals that can address that situation. It's not in a jail system.** ■



Ryn Wilson, Still Human, Still Lives: Yolanda Ford, I and II, 2018

Image I (blue)

Response: shower and bathroom privacy, toilet paper, soap, pads, razors, personal hygiene products, perm, make-up

Image II (pink)

Response: family photos, hot food, clothes, TV show preference



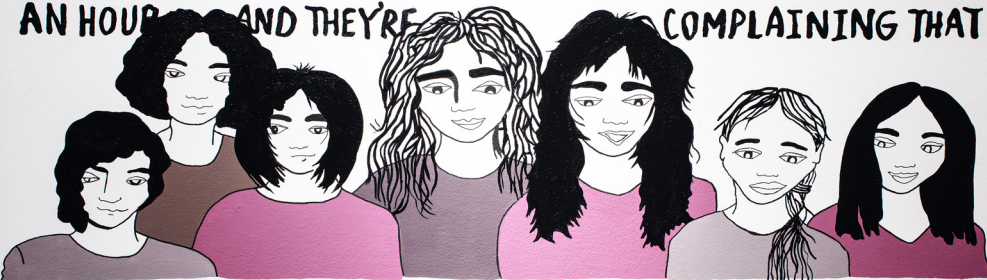
These photographs are part of an ongoing project that asks formerly incarcerated women the question, “What items did you miss most while incarcerated?” The responses are interpreted into still lifes. The goal of this project is to put forth the humanity of incarcerated women while highlighting the inhumanity of the system. Most of the responses are every day objects that we take for granted such as a glass of water when we want it, or enough toilet paper. The project focuses specifically on women because they have a set of issues that are too often overlooked in an already overlooked topic. The system disproportionally affects women of color, and they often receive harsher sentences and worse treatment because of the sentiment that women are breaking both the law and social norms. It has a massive impact on children and families, and sexual assault factors into the equation both inside and outside the prison walls. The hope is to bring attention and compassion to these issues through the creation of these images.

~ Ryn Wilson

What Comes Next

challenges and
opportunities
for reentry for
women

"THE ONE THING ABOUT COMING FROM PRISON IS YOU HAVE TO BE EXTRAORDINARY... WHY? BECAUSE YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO PROVE... PEOPLE WONDER WHY I'M SO HAPPY BECAUSE I'M MAKING \$13 AN HOUR... AND THEY'RE COMPLAINING THAT



THEY'RE NOT MAKING \$20. BECAUSE I COME FROM MAKING SIX CENTS AN HOUR. AND THAT'S WHY. I HAVE TO BE EXTRAORDINARY IN EVERYTHING THAT I DO AND THAT'S IT."

Illustration by Taslim van Hattum



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WHAT COMES NEXT: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR REENTRY FOR WOMEN

Each time I went to prison, I didn't bother to take my last shower up a different way to make a point from what I'm in there. They didn't let me go, so I didn't have that year of that just my car and then left me with the keys. Oh, you will be back. (Jana Michael, Prisoner)

Women have been incarcerated and often released to transition back into society. Though released, many are faced with a variety of challenges upon release, including a lack of housing, employment, and financial support. The societal stigma of incarceration, as well as the challenges of finding a place to live, can be overwhelming. In 2017, the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) in New York City launched the Women's Reentry Program, which aims to provide women with the resources and support they need to successfully reintegrate into society. The program includes a variety of services, including housing, employment, and financial support. It also provides women with the opportunity to participate in community-based programs and activities. The program has been successful in helping women to find housing, employment, and financial support, and it has also helped to reduce the rate of recidivism. The program is a model for other jurisdictions and it is hoped that it will be expanded to help more women successfully reintegrate into society.



OCCUPANCY
BY MORE THAN
130 PERSONS
IS DANGEROUS
AND UNLAWFUL

Women freed from incarceration are often ill-equipped to transition home. The secondary effects of their convictions, such as suspension or termination of public assistance, affordable housing, and Medicaid pose additional challenges to returning women. Though Louisiana is revising its approach to reentry after enacting reform legislation in 2017,ⁱ for decades imprisoned women left incarceration worse off than when they entered. Incarcerated women face significant barriers to returning home, including a lack of family support and great challenges to obtaining employment, appropriate post-release housing, and treatment.ⁱⁱ To fulfill its “rehabilitative” purpose, states offer a range of reentry programming, both within and outside of the prison or jail. Reentry programming may include education, employment training, housing, treatment for mental illness and substance abuse, and family support components.

Compared to incarcerated men, women in jails and prisons have fewer opportunities to participate in reentry programming. First, 70% of Louisiana women serve their state sentence in local jails, where there are fewer programs than in state prisons.ⁱⁱⁱ Second, women may be barred from program participation because correctional officials assign them a more restrictive custody status.^{iv} Experts in corrections have raised concerns that custody status determinations are not gender-informed and therefore may overestimate the disciplinary risk of incarcerated women.^v And third, historically, women’s correctional facilities are underresourced compared to male facilities, limiting women’s access to programming and treatment.^{vi}

The experiences of women and numerous studies confirm that reentry programming works. Women who receive educational, employment, housing, and treatment assistance are less likely to return to prison than those who do not.^{vii} But the studies also demonstrate that the levels of assistance provided do not meet the needs of women returning home.^{viii}

There are some recent developments in Louisiana. In 2017, Louisiana Act 265 lifted the ban on welfare benefits for people returning home from prison for drug offenses and Act 262 simplified the process for people with criminal convictions to obtain certain occupational licenses. In addition, Louisiana added computer-based testing and education to at least three local jails as well as the Louisiana Transition Center for Women. While there is currently no single, coordinated effort for reentry transitional housing for women in New Orleans, there are a number of community organizations that do offer assistance.

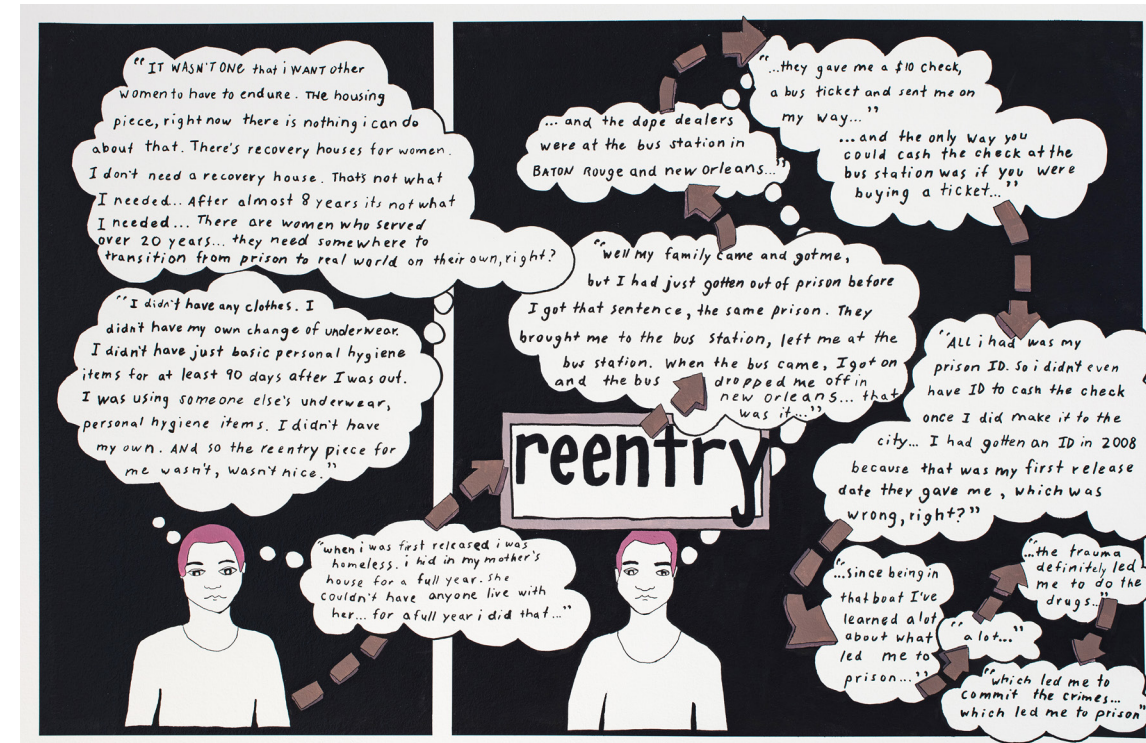


Illustration by Taslim van Hattum



Nicole Edwards, Portrait by Allison Beondé

I was actually a shelter child. I got out into the world and I was introduced to crack cocaine—after that not so long I started prostituting. There was a lot of other things that were going on in my life and I had to find my way.

The best thing I ever did was go to this rehab called The Cheyenne Center. I was scared to talk because it was me living the lifestyle that I live. It was so many men, so I was just nervous [that] I would just be hushed, but I had so much balled up down inside of me. I went to The Cheyenne Center, and gradually I started talking. I became a team leader over there, the motivation team. I start talking about problems that happened that I didn't think that bothered me, like my molestation.

I want [people] to know that people have struggles. People have problems that they are scared to face. It's really a struggle.

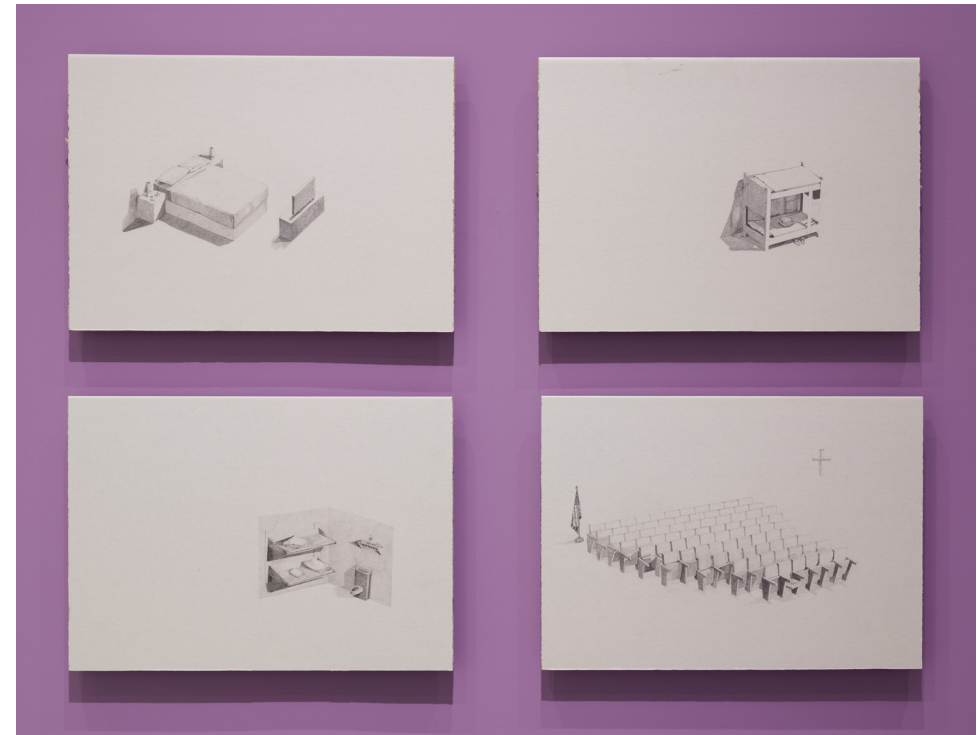
To this day I'm seven years clean but it's still a struggle.

I just have to ask people to understand and know what's going on behind that jail system. Women are being raped. It messes with their low self esteem. Like I say a lot of them are still don't know how to face the hurt. They don't want to face it and the best thing to do is face it.

I always tell people to try to have a better understanding of people that's been to jail because you have people that look down on people that been to jail, but that's not the way to do it, you know?

Listen to their story. They have a story.

Everybody has a story. Even a clean person that wants to be perfect has a story. Yeah, that's what I have to say. It's just have an open heart, open mind. Listen, listen to their story. ■



Maria Hinds, *The Perilous Fight*, 2018

“The Perilous Fight” invites the viewer to experience spaces in which Nicole Edwards lived and worked through the challenges of drug dependency. This piece offers a chronology of Nicole’s journey from addiction through rehabilitation including experiences of incarceration and reentry during which she drew strength from her religious faith. Nicole vividly describes rooms and furnishings that capture key moments of this journey. Based on these recollections, I made small scale paper models of these rooms, which I then used as references for these interpretative drawings.

The title draws from a lyric passage from the first verse of the Star Spangled Banner, evoking historical tensions between American ideals and Black realities.

~ Maria Hinds



Dolita Wilhike, Portrait by Allison Beondé

I was a single parent growing up in poverty. I have 10 kids. I had 5 kids by the age of 23. And by age 30, I had 10 kids. And that's what kind of started it for me. Just trying to take care of my family.

I started out as a petty thief, shoplifting, selling things to get money to pay for things, just things to survive, basic things. So by my 20s, I was already a habitual offender. So every time I got in trouble after that I always was multibilled to do [more] time. That's the thing about multibill, you do time all over for the previous thing you got time for.

I was the breadwinner in the family. I remember one particular time when I got out of jail, I went to my mother's house and she never told me they didn't have water in the house—running water. And my daughter—my eldest daughter was probably 9 or 10—told me they hadn't had water in months. To take a bath they would get buckets

of water from the neighbor. It instantly put me back in the same position I was in before I went. I immediately wanted to go shoplift so I can earn some money to get my mother's water turned on.

You can earn a few dollars [while incarcerated]. I worked in the infirmary as a nursing assistant and I made a little money. Not a lot of money, but it was enough to call home and talk to my kids. But some people have to choose between a call home and a bar of soap—you know?

They just take your dignity. I certainly understand that you're in prison and have to pay the price for what you've done. But, even something as simple as visitors. When you [go out to] visit they strip search you and, depending on who's there, they may strip search you in front of multiple women.

The one thing about coming from prison is you have to be extraordinary ... Why? Because I have something to prove. When you show people who you are, they believe you. I've shown people who I am ... I'm the person that's walking around my job and in office doing paperwork and talking to a kid. People wonder why I'm so happy because I'm making \$13 an hour and they're complaining that they're not making \$20. Because I came from making six cents an hour. And that's why. I have to be extraordinary in everything that I do and that's it ... My very first job, they let me go when my background check came back. And I was an extraordinary worker by my boss's own admission. I was feeling so down and I could have easily resorted to what I knew, but this time I changed my mindset ... we call it criminal menopause. ■



Epaul Julien, 13th, 2018

In 1865 when the 13th Amendment to the US Constitution was ratified, slavery was abolished; however, forced labor has remained legal under the circumstances of punishment for crimes. This artwork takes on the American flag as a compositional framework, and it brings a new interpretation to the stripes it bears by drawing visual associations to prison bars, chain gangs, and systems of confinement that have been in use since the middle passage and colonial era.

Historic imagery sourced from the Internet captures the movement of imprisoned bodies across the Americas, and serves as a background for Dolita Wilhike's portrait, in which she doubles as the political activist and scholar Angela Davis. "13th" attempts to express the raw determination, intelligence and strength of all women struggling for equality and freedom on American soil—particularly the generations of families who are suffering economically in Louisiana, seemingly with no end in sight. The linear brushwork suggests a compressed passage of time that functions as a loop.

~ Epaul Julien



Kimberly Shields, Portrait by Allison Beondé

It started out when I was 16. I was hanging around with my friends at home and I started stealing cars.

I went to jail for two years and I got out in 1998 and came home, and was with a friend, which was my girlfriend, and I liked her so much I started doing drugs. I wanted to do anything she did, cause that's how much I liked her.

So after that, I was already into the drug life. I was sellin' drugs, I was selling crack and weed. Wound up doing two years and coming home in 2010. Nine months later, [I was sentenced to 10 years and] was let out on an early parole with nine years.

So now I'm home. Living at Sister's Heart Program. I came home, I got my driver's license, my medicaid, my food stamps. So I'm doing everything that I am supposed to do this time, just to make a difference. I got two children—one's about to be 15 at the end of this month and the other one just turned 12 last month. So I'm thankful to be home. I missed nine years and I can't replace the time, but I can make up for better times and better moments.

It's hard in jail. I tell everybody "Push! Y'all gotta push until something happen. Keep your focus. Strive for what you want, Keep ya head up and put God first."

That's what I'm now doing, because a person is the product of their own thoughts. And right now, today, I just wanna be happy and hopeful. So today, I can say I have thoughts that are happy and hopeful. Because of getting out of there I say "Today I will make a difference." And I'm gonna make a difference. I got to be an inspiration for my children.

So I just ask that they stay safe and keep y'all head up and stay prayed up. ■

Margie Perez, *Keep Your Head Up and Stay Prayed Up*, 2018

Chorus

Keep Your Head Up And Stay Prayed Up
There's Nothing To Be Afraid Of
God Knows What You're Made Of
So Keep Your Head Up And Stay Prayed Up
And The Blessings Will Come To You

Verse 1

It all started at 16, she fell
And now she's back from a living hell
9 years thinking bout, thinkin bout life
God kept her every day in the rays of his light

Two young daughters, catching up to do
Faith and forgiveness will see them through
A person is a product of their own thoughts
So she's thinking happy and hopeful and
always saying

Chorus

Keep Your Head Up And Stay Prayed Up
There's Nothing To Be Afraid Of
God Knows What You're Made Of
So Keep Your Head Up And Stay Prayed Up
And The Blessings Will Come To You

Verse 2

She wants to be an inspiration, their favorite
song
To look them in the eyes and tell them right
from wrong
Better times and better moments ahead
Putting God first they will surely be led

Grandma says He watches over babies and
damn fools
She's no fool, she's keeping her cool
She's doing what she's supposed to do
And make a difference for her girls and her
spirit too

Keep Your Head Up And Stay Prayed Up
There's Nothing To Be Afraid Of
God Knows What You're Made Of
So Keep Your Head Up And Stay Prayed Up
And The Blessings Will Come To You
So Keep Your Head Up And Stay Prayed Up
And The Blessings Will Come To You
And The Blessings Will Come To You

Kimberly mentioned she was 16 years old when she first got into trouble. Her daughters who have been growing up without her for 9 years are approaching that same age. I asked Kim, knowing what she knows now, to tell me what she would say to her 16 year old self now and in that same vein, what advice would she give her daughters as she is trying to reconnect with them. She said something in the interview that has stayed with me, so I want to include it: "Keep your head up and stay Prayed up".

~ Margie Perez



Shai Parker, Portrait by Allison Beondé

A few months before I was incarcerated, I just made 18 years old, just graduated from high school. Before I got to graduate my mom passed away due to diabetes.

A couple of weeks before the incident my best friend introduced me to a guy. So we went to go pick them up. My friend was the driver, I was in the passenger seat and the two guys were in the backseat. They saw somebody that they had beef with and [they] just kept saying let us out the car and my friend stopped at the stop sign. He jumped out the car and his friend jumped out the car with him, so we pulled away. Five minutes later we were on our way into our house and a police car pulled us over. He was like, "y'all under investigation" and we were like, "for what?" He was like, "because witnesses are saying that two guys just got out of your car and shot somebody."

They charged us with accessory to second degree

attempted murder, gave us \$100,000 bond. That was my first time going to jail. It felt like I was never going to get out. You're like, "How did I get here? How, you know, how do I get out?" I just felt trapped. I didn't feel like I belonged [or] deserved to be there—but I made the mistake of carrying the wrong people in my company.

I'm just trying to figure out my next steps into getting my record expunged, because I can't really find a job that's going to, you know, trust me... people are not gonna want to hire me with type of, you know, background. But that's still a problem, because when you get your record expunged, that doesn't expunge it from the system like the judicial system. You know, police might still treat me harsh because they feel like I'm a bad person when they pull my name up. They could feel like they're in danger, or they have to treat me a certain way because this is the type of person I'm portrayed to be. And that might be for life.

I'm worried about my future, I'm worried about getting my name straight as far as jobs and all of that. Because I'm not gonna be doing nothing to get in trouble with the cops no more. I learned my lesson I can't...no...that's not the life for me, and never was. I just made a big mistake.

[I'm going to] get my record expunged and get my name clean. **I gotta do what I gotta do to better my future. That's it, point blank. Period. And I got to pave a better way for my daughter.**

I don't want her to grow up around them who I grew up around, because at the end of the day, that's just going to make her vulnerable to the situation that I was in. ■

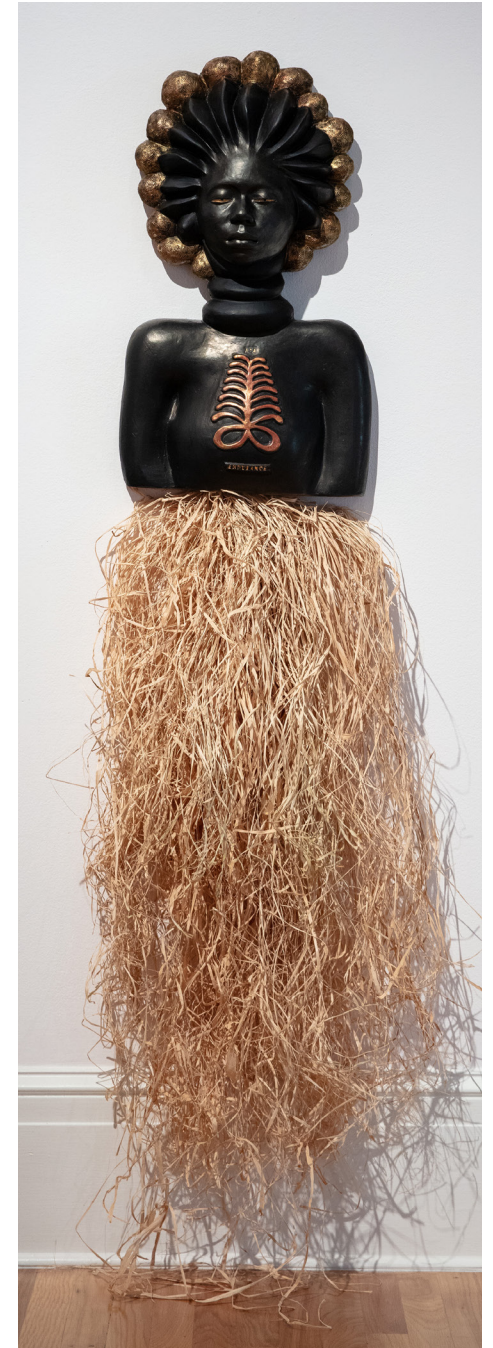
■
AYA is a Ghanaian Adinkra symbol of Endurance.

Shai Parker is rendered as a Soweï spirit mask used by the Sande Society of Sierra Leon in West Africa. These masks are used "during rites-of-passage" ceremonies that signify a girl's transition to adulthood. These masks are commissioned and performed by the elder women of the Sande society.

The endurance of pain as an element in rites-of-passage is a concept embraced by many cultural traditions. For this sculptural work, culturally enforced female circumcision is conceptually being replaced by incarceration. For all the women who have endured these transformative life events and have "reentered society" there is an uncelebrated healing journey each woman will not face alone.

This exhibition has granted me the opportunity to make connections in my role as an artist to the spirit of a Soweï, who dances out an acknowledgement of newly gained power through endurance.

~ MaPó Kinnord



MaPó Kinnord, AYA - Endurance, 2018



Lea Stern, Portrait by Allison Beondé

I sat in jail for six months. And they had no reason. They couldn't find any discovery. They couldn't find anything. They came in my house, and they weren't even there for me. They came for somebody that I was seeing at the time, and the only reason why this person was in my house, was because I had a lump in my chest, and I couldn't stand up.

I was clean, I was in good standing with the probation and parole. And this person had a warrant. And when they came in, they busted this person. That person had drugs on them, but they ended up taking everybody in the house, and end up charging everybody in the house.

When they went to take us to court, there was nothing. There was no evidence, nothing, and they sat us in jail for six, almost seven months. And the DA finally was like, enough.

So, basically I'm getting jerked around by probation and parole for the last, I don't know how many years of my life, and it's been a nonstop issue. Like messed over by probation and parole—and it's affecting my children. It's affecting my life. It's affecting everything that I do. And it is becoming to a point where it is just unbearably trapping me. It's unbearable.

I was also pregnant. And in the system, that was really rough, too, to be in there and to be pregnant. You go through all these invasive things and you have all this stuff going on and it's just really, really tough. And another thing is, is that I got out and I had nowhere to go.

That's the worst when you get out of prison and you have nowhere to go. That is the absolute worst. Because you've been in prison for how long? So you lost everything. You have no clothes; you have nothing ... You're starting to try and start life over, and you have to live exactly how they want you to live.

They technically will not release you from prison if you don't have somewhere to go. So, you have to have somewhere to go to and they try to put you in these programs. And then you get there and you find out, oh, well, it's not like the best program—or someone in the program is a creep ... and they're making sexual advances at you and you're stuck at these places and you can't leave because you're there by probation ... and then you're in a bigger mess than you ever imagined. ■

When I listened to Lea's interview, what resonated with me was her sense of personal responsibility—especially in the account of her reentry into society. Upon release, she was hosted at a mission and didn't necessarily agree with the church's advice. In her words, "You can't pray about my problems. I have to fix my problems. I have to be able to live and work and fix my problems ... And I did, and I stayed clean, and I did everything I needed to do, and I got my kid back ... I got myself a house, and I did everything I needed to do." She took full responsibility for her own actions.

What keeps people out of jail and prison is money, a good lawyer, a network, and maybe having some luck with the right judge who happened to eat lunch that day. When you get up to the stand, they make the decision. Prayer doesn't have to do with it. No disrespect to anybody who's religious, but like Lea said, she had to get up and work. She had to get her feet moving. A prayer wasn't what got her a new spot or a job. It was simply her hard work.

~ Devin Reynolds



Devin Reynolds, Untitled, 2018



Tywanda Major, Portrait by Allison Beondé

My dad's been in jail since '80 or '81. It's been rough because every girl needs their father. Not having him in my life has been a real void. Trying to make the best of our visit when I go and see him, but it's been really hard being raised without a father, because my mom passed when I was nine. He's been in there since. I never had a male role model in my life. So, of course, it led me down the path of destruction. Not having a mom, not having a father, nobody to teach me guidance. So I had to grow up on my own. I had to live and learn on my own.

As far as my situation, I put my trust in my uncle. I let him use my vehicle. He told me he was going to find jobs while I was at work, but he was going to Best Buy stealing the people's laptops. So they got my license plate and came to my house looking for him. He wasn't

there, they thought I was lying so they put a warrant out for me. So they took me. I had to sit there three days until they transferred me to St. Tammany Parish, the parish where he was stealing them from.

Once I got over there it was horrible. The jail was unsanitized like you got twelve to fifteen women piled up in one room, with one toilet, and you have to sit there all day. It was just horrible. Horrible experience.

I had to pay parole fees, probation fees, restitution fees off of something that I didn't do. I had to pay \$750 to sign up for the diversion program so that it don't go on my record. I had to pay \$1,900 in restitution. I have to pay \$60 every three months for drug tests and \$75 for the theft class and it was just different things that didn't, you know, that I don't think fit the crime. Especially for somebody who didn't do it. They really didn't want to hear anything. It was just all about money.

Me and my sister and my cousins, we make sure our kids don't have to experience what we went through. Y'all will not go to jail. Y'all will not be going through what we went through. Y'all got a home cooked meal. Y'all clean up every day. You don't got to go steal water from the next-door neighbor to survive. You don't have to steal electricity you know. Our generation, we make sure that we are making a family together. **We breaking cycles that shouldn't have been ground breaking for us. ■**

Lynn Drury, St. Tammany, 2019

for Tywanda Major

All the way from St. Tammany, you could not believe the things I've seen
Once they get their hooks in you, and you've been colored by the man in blue
you sing another protest song
go tell it on the mountain

I am just a woman breaking free
you can watch me,
you can watch me break free
watch me break free

Mama died when i was just a little girl,
Daddy still a prisoner of time
Uncle going in again, sister's going down for ten and I become a mother of two
Steady and true

I am more than what you see or what you've been taught to believe
and I will break free, you can watch me

I'm gonna hold my babies tight tonight
give them all the love i know is right
and though their Mama's gone, I hold them tight just like a drum
Steady and strong
steady and strong

I am more than what you see or what you've been taught to believe

In Addition

moth-er /mōThēr/

noun

1. a woman in relation to her child or children.

verb

1. bring up (a child) with care and affection.

2. give birth to.

Did you know?

Only 5% of the world's female population lives in the US, but the US accounts for nearly 30% of the world's incarcerated women.

Commemorate the bonds of motherhood by planting a seed here or at home.

Activity 1 Planting outside near the sculpture

Visitors interested in tending "A Solitary Garden for Incarcerated Moms" are invited to plant three seeds in front of the museum, within a defined zone of the sculpture. The seeds inside this bowl are for visitor use, and signs outside indicate where the new seeds may be planted. Please inquire at the museum's front desk for more information.

Activity 2 Taking seed packets home

Register at the museum's front desk and please limit one seed packet per household, group, or workplace.

Direct photos documenting the plant's status and location to Moms@SolitaryGardens.org. A postcard will be printed and mailed to the incarcerated mothers who chose that specific flower.

"Solitary Gardens utilizes the tools of prison abolition, permaculture, and creative practices to facilitate unexpected exchanges between incarcerated people in solitary confinement and folks on the 'outside.' In this project, garden beds are designed and remotely 'gardened' by incarcerated collaborators, known as Solitary Gardeners, through written and photographic exchanges with volunteers.

A Solitary Garden for Incarcerated Moms, on view outside at the museum entrance, is a collaboration with dozens of presently incarcerated women in Louisiana who identify as mothers. Plants nurtured here represent specific people introduced to the project via formerly incarcerated community members. The central 6'x9' aluminum frame of this sculpture maintains the blueprint of a standard U.S. solitary confinement cell.

The twelve flowers in this project were chosen for their hardiness in our region's growing zones. Incarcerated mothers were encouraged to each choose one flower meaningful to them. Many shared their reasons with us, an exchange we treasure deeply." - jackie sumell

| herbage | alysium | snap dragon | echinacea |
|--|--|---|---|
| Herbage is a general term for plants that have leaves and stems that are used for medicinal purposes. It can refer to a wide variety of plants, including herbs, shrubs, and trees. In this project, herbage is used to represent the resilience and strength of incarcerated mothers. | Alysium is a genus of plants in the Malvaceae family. They are known for their delicate, five-petaled flowers. In this project, alysium is used to represent the beauty and grace of incarcerated mothers. | Snap dragons are a genus of plants in the Scrophulariaceae family. They are known for their bright, tubular flowers. In this project, snap dragons are used to represent the strength and resilience of incarcerated mothers. | Echinacea is a genus of plants in the Asteraceae family. They are known for their large, daisy-like flowers. In this project, echinacea is used to represent the healing and nurturing qualities of incarcerated mothers. |
| impatiens | geranium | marigold | zinnia |
| Impatiens are a genus of plants in the Balsaminaceae family. They are known for their delicate, two-lipped flowers. In this project, impatiens are used to represent the vulnerability and compassion of incarcerated mothers. | Geraniums are a genus of plants in the Geraniaceae family. They are known for their long, upright stems and clusters of small flowers. In this project, geraniums are used to represent the resilience and strength of incarcerated mothers. | Marigolds are a genus of plants in the Asteraceae family. They are known for their bright, daisy-like flowers. In this project, marigolds are used to represent the healing and nurturing qualities of incarcerated mothers. | Zinnias are a genus of plants in the Asteraceae family. They are known for their large, daisy-like flowers. In this project, zinnias are used to represent the beauty and grace of incarcerated mothers. |



additional artworks,
artist bios,
timeline, glossary,
acknowledgments,
& citations



jackie sumell, *A Solitary Garden for Incarcerated Moms*, 2018
(The above photograph was taken on a community planting day at the Newcomb Art Museum. Image by Ashley Lorraine)

Solitary Gardens utilizes the tools of prison abolition, permaculture, and creative practices to facilitate unexpected exchanges between incarcerated people in solitary confinement and folks on the “outside.” In this project, garden beds are designed and remotely “gardened” by incarcerated collaborators, known as Solitary Gardeners, through written and photographic exchanges with volunteers.

A Solitary Garden for Incarcerated Moms, on view outside at the museum entrance, is a collaboration with dozens of presently incarcerated women in Louisiana who identify as mothers. Plants nurtured here represent specific people introduced to the project via formerly incarcerated community members. The central 6-inch-by-9-inch aluminum frame of this sculpture maintains the blueprint of a standard US solitary confinement cell.

The 12 flowers in this project were chosen for their hardiness in our region's growing zones. Incarcerated mothers were encouraged to each choose one flower meaningful to them. Many shared their reasons with us, an exchange we treasure deeply.

~ jackie sumell

A Solitary Garden for Incarcerated Moms is installed in front of the Newcomb Art Museum Pottery Garden and dedicated in memory of Judith Henkin.



The Graduates, The Life Quilt, 2018

In the summer of 2016, the Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women (LCIW) was flooded and the women residents were evacuated to facilities all over the state. At the same time, *The Graduates*, a performance ensemble of formerly incarcerated women that had grown out of the LCIW Drama Club, received a fellowship from the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation to support a state tour of their new performance, “Won’t Bow Down!”, and to create a large visual gesture that would bring attention to the issues surrounding the mass incarceration of women in Louisiana. Drama Club and *The Graduates* Directors Ausetua AmorAmenkum and Kathy Randels were unable to see the women (whom they had taught once a week since 1996) because of the displacement.

Finally in September 2017, AmorAmenkum and Randels were able to enter Hunt Correctional Facility, next door to LCIW, where approximately one fourth of the population had landed. *The Graduates* had begun to envision *The Life Quilt*, an honoring of all the women serving life sentences by hand sewing their names into a quilt. The women on the inside loved the idea, and Drama Club Inside-Director, Selina Anderson, gathered the names of each woman, as well as asking them to answer this question: “What do you want the world to know about your freedom?”

Each woman’s name was hand-sewn with love and a prayer for her release by Golden Feather Hunters, Creole Osceola, Washitaw Nation, Wild Magnolias, Cheyenne Hunters, Young Masai Hunters and Kathy Randels. Some of these women have already been released including Ivy Matthis and Bobbie Jean Johnson.

WHAT DO YOU WANT THE WORLD
TO KNOW ABOUT YOUR FREEDOM?

It was never a joke.
- Kathleen Ervin
“Lifer”

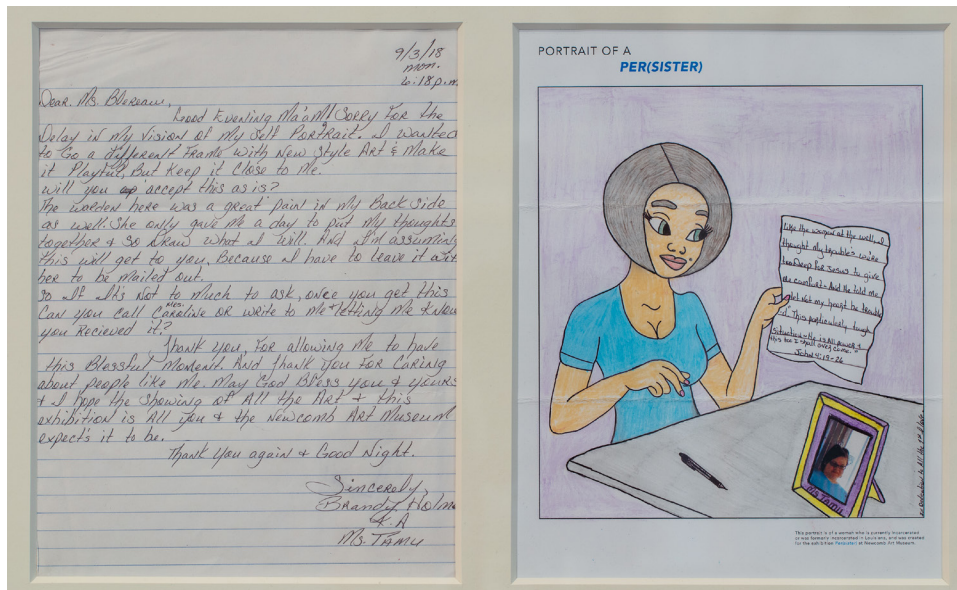
WHAT DO YOU WANT THE WORLD
TO KNOW ABOUT YOUR FREEDOM?

It’s been a long journey.
- Angelon Pardon
“Lifer”

WHAT DO YOU WANT THE WORLD
TO KNOW ABOUT YOUR FREEDOM?

*That it is important . . .
to my family.*
- Tarika Wilson
“Lifer”

The Life Quilt represents women who were put together not by their own choice, but by circumstance. In spite of this, they have developed their own sense of community and family on the inside. The quilt invites you to celebrate this family.



Brandy Holmes, *Portrait of a Per(Sister)*, 2018

Brandy Holmes is presently serving a life sentence at the Plaquemines Parish Detention Center.

Transcription, Drawing from Brandy Holmes

Portrait of a Per(Sister)
In dedication to all the 1s I love.

Like the woman at the well, I thought my troubles were too deep for Jesus to give me comfort. And he told me let not my heart be troubled.

"This particularly tough situation – He is all power and this too I shall overcome."
John 4:19-26

Transcription, Letter from Brandy Holmes

September 3, 2018
Monday, 6:18 pm

Dear Ms. Blereau,

Good Evening Ma'am! Sorry for the delay in my vision of my self-portrait. I wanted to go a different frame with New Style Art and make it playful, but keep it close to me.

Will you accept this as is?

The warden here was a great pain in my backside as well. She only gave me a day to put my thoughts together and to draw what I will. And I'm assuming this will get to you, because I have to leave it with her to be mailed out.

So if it's not too much to ask, once you get this can you call Mrs. Caroline or write to me, letting me know you received it?

Thank you, for allowing me to have this Blessful Moment. And thank you for caring about people like me. May God bless you and yours. And I hope the showing of all the art and this exhibition is all you and the Newcomb Art Museum expects it to be.

Thank you again and good night.
Sincerely,
Brandy Holmes
and A
Ms. Tamu

Based in New Orleans since 2011, **Kira Akerman** is a documentary filmmaker whose widely circulated 2017 short film exploring New Orleans's water management system, "Station 15," also featured Chasity Hunter. Screened in multiple venues, its tour included PBS, DOCNYC, the Climate Museum, and a Smithsonian sponsored exhibition that traveled across Louisiana. She is an artist-in-residence with Ripple Effect, a New Orleans nonprofit pioneering water literacy education. Additionally, her past work has been presented by the International Film Festival Rotterdam, the Prospect New Orleans art triennial, and the Clermont-Ferrand Short Film Festival, among others.

Victor "Red" Atkins' style of piano has been described as "infectious, unconventional, tasteful, and powerful" all at the same time. Hailing from Selma, Alabama, he began playing with NEA Jazz Master Delfeayo Marsalis in 1989 and was an integral part of the seminal work "Pontius Pilate's Decision." After receiving a BA from Berklee College of Music in Boston and an MFA from the Manhattan School of Music, Victor has toured and performed with an impressive list of artists including Elvin Jones, Freddie Hubbard, Aaron Neville, Nnenna Freelon, Brian Blade, Lalah Hathaway, and Nicholas Payton. A performer with the New Orleans Jazz Orchestra (NOJO) Victor Atkins has also received numerous commissions from NOJO and collaborates with other groups such as performing with Delfeayo Marsalis on his re-working of Duke Ellington's "Such Sweet Thunder," a tribute to William Shakespeare. He is also well-known for his work with the Grammy-winning, New Orleans-based Los Hombres Calientes, which produced an innovative brand of Latin jazz. His adaptations of works by Bach and other classical composers have been called "brilliant examples of the fluidity of jazz and the breaking down of musical barriers." Victor Atkins teaches theory and composition, jazz keyboard, and applied piano at the University of New Orleans.

Artist **Ron Bechet** is a native of New Orleans. He studied art at the University of New Orleans where he earned a BA degree and went on to earn an MFA degree from Yale University. Since then he has exhibited his work nationally and internationally. He is known for intimate drawings and paintings inspired by the land and circumstances of Southern Louisiana, knotted and matted and within the African Diaspora tradition of trees connecting earth and sky, the realms of the ancestors and the living. They tell a personal and communal metaphoric story of cultural hybridity. He is currently the Victor H. Labat Professor of Art at Xavier University of Louisiana and has been teaching for over 20 years.

Allison Beondé is a visual artist living in New Orleans and currently an MFA candidate in photography at Tulane University. She holds a BFA from the School of the Museum

of Fine Arts in Boston in partnership with Tufts University. Support for Beondé's past work includes fellowships from the Constance Saltonstall Foundation for the Arts and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, as well as grants from Light Work and The Canary Lab at Syracuse University.

Multimedia artist **Lee Deigaard** lives and works in New Orleans and rural Georgia. Her work investigates sensory processing, nonverbal communication, and the ways our bodies intersect with our environment, as well as the boundaries and thresholds of shared experience. She attended undergraduate at Yale University, and holds graduate degrees from the University of Texas at Austin and the University of Michigan. A member of the New Orleans artist collective The Front since 2010, Deigaard exhibits her work nationally and has also been recognized with an artist residency at the Joan Mitchell Center.

Based in New Orleans since the mid-90s, singer-songwriter **Lynn Drury** was raised in Mississippi and has been a performer since childhood. Over the past two decades, she has cultivated her own unique style of roots rock music, a style she calls "Nolamericana", music rooted in the groove. Her catalogue includes "Crossing Frequencies" (2001), "Blackberry Winter" (2002 with Bad Mayo), "Spun" (2003 with Bad Mayo), "All You Need" (2006), "Dal Vivo (2009), "Sugar on the Floor " (2011), "Come to My House" (2014), and 2017's critically acclaimed "Rise of the Fall." She has earned multiple nominations and awards from New Orleans' most prominent publications. She currently hosts her own "Nolamericana" Music radio show on WHIVfm, Mondays 3-5pm.

Keith Duncan is a painter and educator based in New Orleans. Inspired by the stories told by African American quilts in the South, Duncan's work embraces a distinct heritage and vernacular also signified by the people, patterns, and flags appearing in his work. He received a BFA from Louisiana State University and an MFA from Hunter College in New York. His work has been recognized by residencies at the Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture and the Joan Mitchell Center, as well as a Camille Cosby Fellowship and solo exhibitions at the Cue Art Foundation, the Studio Museum in Harlem, Ohr-O'Keefe Museum, and the Prospect.2 New Orleans triennial, among others.

Based in Los Angeles, **Amy Elkins** is a visual artist primarily working in photography. She has spent the past decade researching, creating, and exhibiting work that explores the multifaceted nature of masculine identity as well as the psychological and

sociological impacts of incarceration. Her approach is series-based, steeped in research and oscillates between formal, conceptual and documentary. Winner of the 2017 Lucie Independent Book Award, Elkins has exhibited and published internationally, including displays at the Kunsthalle Wein in Austria, the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, and Minneapolis Institute of the Arts, among others. She holds a BFA in photography from the School of Visual Arts in New York.

Butch Frosch is a native New Orleans artist who works in the streets to capture the contemporary stories of people living and working in the American South. Inspired by journalistic photography and the Pop Art movement, he is interested in challenging the boundaries of visual representation as it relates to sensory observation and portraiture. Using a camera and paint, he crafts compositions that speak to the texture and feel of personal experience.

The Graduates grew out of the LCIW Drama Club, which was founded in 1996 by Kathy Randels and 16 women who were then incarcerated women at the Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women. Ausetua AmorAmenkum became co-director of the Drama Club in 2000. Three of the original members have passed: Mary Riley and Mary Turner died while still incarcerated and serving life sentences; Sherral Kahey was released from her life sentence in 2009 and became a founding member of The Graduates (2012) and the Executive Director of Miracles Manor. She passed in 2015, one year before The Graduates were awarded the Robert Rauschenberg Racial Justice Fellowship. Current members of The Graduates include: Taece Defillo, Carry Emerson and Fox Rich. Past Graduates' members include Antoinette Holmes, Rhonda Oliver, and Shantell Turner.

New Orleans native **L. Kasimu Harris** is a storyteller who uses writing, photography, and video to push narratives. Published and exhibited internationally, his work has been seen at the Museum of Contemporary Photography in Chicago, New Orleans Museum of Art and Ogden Museum of Southern Art in New Orleans, the Lowe Art Museum in Miami, and Museum of the African Diaspora in San Francisco, among other art spaces. Awarded a residency at the Center for Photography in Woodstock, Harris was also named one of eight "Louisianians of the Year" by Louisiana Life magazine in 2017. He holds a masters in journalism from the University of Mississippi and has also participated in the Oxford American Summit for Ambitious Writers and the Poynter Institute's Fellowship for Young Journalists.

A creator of installations and performances that challenge the hierarchies of gender

and class, **Cherice Harrison-Nelson** is a leader of the African-American Carnival dress art tradition which uses narrative beadwork, dance, featherwork and chanting with percussive instrumentation. She is the third of five generations in her family to participate in this authentic New Orleans art form, a ritual handed down from her late father, Big Chief Donald Harrison Sr. She is perhaps best known locally as Maroon Queen “Reesie” of the Mardi Gras Indian Tribe Guardians of the Flame. A co-founder and curator of the Mardi Gras Indian Hall of Fame, Harrison-Nelson has published four books and coordinated numerous exhibitions focused on our region’s West African-inspired cultural expressions. As an artist, she has exhibited and performed internationally and has produced multiple films. Her work is part of the Smithsonian’s Anacostia Museum and has also been recognized by a 2016 USA Artist Fellowship, a Fulbright scholarship and an award from the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities. Queen Mother Supreme Herreast J. Harrison of the Mardi Gras Indian Tribe Guardians of the Flame (Cherice’s Mother) is an accomplished artist, the co-founder of the Guardians Institute and director of the Donald Harrison, Sr. Museum. She is a fifth-generation quilter known for incorporating intricate beaded motifs and symbols into her works. Harrison has presented quilting workshops to elementary, high school, and college students throughout the United States and internationally, to share her understanding of the origins and traditions of African-American cultural art forms. After Hurricane Katrina, she served as artist-in-residence at McMain Secondary School and Joseph Maggiore Elementary School. An advocate of literacy and of indigenous cultural traditions, she served as a 2009 visiting artist and scholar at the Tulane University’s Newcomb College. Her works are held in multiple collections including the National Civil Rights Museum and the Preamble Center for Public Policy as well as the private collection of Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka. She holds a masters in museum studies from Southern University at New Orleans.

Ana Hernandez is a New Orleans-based painter and sculptor. In her work, she assembles codes of communication using signs, symbols, and text; language is transformed into a visual vocabulary that emotionally probes the climate of our natural, built, and social environments. A founding member of Level Artist Collective in New Orleans, Hernandez has exhibited widely in the US, including the Schuylkill Center in Philadelphia, the New Orleans Museum of Art, Ulrich Museum of Art in Kansas, and the Mexican Cultural Institute in New Orleans, among other art spaces. Her work has also been recognized by residencies at the Crystal Bridges Museum, the Joan Mitchell Center and Tulane’s A Studio in the Woods.

Maria Hinds is a New Orleans-based artist, activist, and designer who has worked

with multiple organizations advocating for prison reform, including the International Coalition to Free the Angola 3, Innocence Project New Orleans, Abolitionist Law Center, Voice of the Experienced, and Orleans Parish Prison Reform Coalition. Her work as an artist and community organizer has been featured internationally at museums and galleries such as the Royal College of Art in London, Southern University Law Library in Baton Rouge, Photo Ireland in Dublin, at Café Istanbul, Level Art Collective, and Resurrection After Exoneration in New Orleans. Hinds holds a BA in visual communication from the National College of Art and Design in Dublin.

A native of New Orleans, **Epaul Julien** began his career as a fine art photographer in 1995 when a near-death experience changed his life. He is self-taught, and creating art for him is a necessity that is vitally linked to his existence. In his work, Julien crafts new critical perspectives on the global histories of Southeastern Louisiana using photo montages and painting, often repurposing imagery sourced from the internet, mass media, public archives, and other works of art. As a solo artist and as part of the collaborative duo E2 with Elizabeth Kleinveld, Julien has exhibited internationally at public and private institutions, including the Royal Academy of Art in London, Gemeentemuseum in the Netherlands, the New Orleans Museum of Art, and Palazzo Fortuny in Venice.

Raised in Cleveland, **MaPó Kinnord** is a ceramicist and sculptor who has been based in Louisiana since 1995. Her work explores both form and function, and it is driven by a physical interaction with the material as well as what she describes “the hard-won creative freedom that clay allows.” Exhibited widely in the US, Kinnord has also taught at the Penland School of Crafts in North Carolina and the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts in Maine. She first began working with ceramics through a Quaker high school arts program in 1975 and apprenticed with several production potters before receiving a BFA from the Massachusetts College of Art in Boston. After living briefly in Berkeley, Kinnord earned an MFA from Ohio State University in 1994. She is presently an associate professor of art at Xavier University of Louisiana.

Queen Black Kold Madina (also known as Kim Rivers-Roberts) is a hip-hop and R&B artist perhaps best known as one of the filmmakers and for her leading role in “Trouble the Water,” a 2009 Academy Award-nominated feature documentary. A native of New Orleans, she manages her own indie label, Born Hustler Records. As an actor Kold Madina has also appeared in HBO’s “Treme.” Celebrated for her feminine vocal power, Queen Kold Madina’s music has been covered by Rolling Stone, Vibe, Essence, Ebony, Jet, the New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, and other publications.

Based in New York, nonagenarian **Henrietta Mantooth** is a painter and installation artist who has also worked in theater as an actor and designer. Using art as a site of visual storytelling, Mantooth's work is centered on issues of mass incarceration, racial discrimination and segregation, migrants and refugees—the “displaced”—whether individual or collective. Her development as an artist has been shaped by multidisciplinary and language studies at the University of Mexico City, University of Caracas, and The Art Students League, among other schools. Recognized by an artist residency at the Joan Mitchell Center, Mantooth has exhibited internationally, including the Queens Museum of Art and Artists Space in New York, the 1963 São Paulo Biennial in Brazil, and the Kleinert James Art Center, among other alternative spaces.

Spirit McIntyre (pronouns: spirit/they/them) is a cellist, vocalist, lyricist, wellness advocate, sound healer, reiki practitioner, and compassionate facilitator—promoting empowerment and healing by any medium necessary. Spirit believes in the power of breath, creating healing and reciprocal relationships, honoring lovability, being seen/seeing, and growing compassionately through tight places to find authentic connection. As a gender-non-conforming transgender person, they use their identity and community building practices to intentionally uplift TGNCNB12-S (trans, gender-non-conforming, nonbinary, intersex, two-spirit), black, indigenous, and POC communities. Spirit's reputation for honesty, compassion, and accountability allows for deeply transformative healing to be a through line in all of their performance and community building work. Healing affirmations, meticulous storytelling, and metaphor saturate their lyrics. They use their voice and cello to seamlessly blend: blues, soul, folk, classical, reggae, and Middle Eastern sounds into an unforgettable musical landscape. Since the transitioning of their father, Paris McIntyre on January 16, 2017, Spirit has been exploring the divinity of grief.

Based in Violet, just outside of New Orleans, photographer **Tammy Mercure** often works in book form and creates images that concern the rites and rituals of the American South, and the relationship one has to the land. In 2012, Mercure was named one of the “100 under 100: The New Superstars of Southern Art” by Oxford American magazine. A member of the artist collective Antenna in New Orleans, she exhibits and publishes her work internationally, including displays at the Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art in Charleston, the Atlanta Contemporary Art Center, and the Ogden Museum of Southern Art in New Orleans, among others. She holds a BA from Columbia College Chicago and MFA from East Tennessee State University.

Anastasia Pelias is a painter and New Orleans native. Her work draws upon relationships between people, their narratives, and their environments while also

exploring the complexities and absurdities of these connections—between man and woman, between mother and daughter, and between friends. Deep ancestral connections are ever-present in Pelias's works, weaving their way through and in between her exploration of these relationships. Her work is collected internationally and exhibited widely, including displays at the McNay Art Museum in San Antonio, American University in Washington, DC, and the CAC and Ogden Museum of Southern Art in New Orleans. Pelias holds a BFA from Newcomb College of Tulane University and an MFA from the University of New Orleans.

Margie Perez is a singer and songwriter specializing in blues, pop, and Latin with a New Orleans funky touch. Dubbed by Offbeat Magazine as “One of the hardest working musicians in New Orleans,” she leads her own band which performs her original music. She is co-leader of Muevelo, a hot Latin big band with which Margie celebrates her Cuban roots. She also sings for the Afro-Cuban sacred music band Moyuba and with West African percussionist Seguenon Kone in Ensemble Fatien, among many other notable groups—including two vocalist collectives, The Honeypots and The New Orleans Nightingales.

Sheila Phipps is a self-taught artist and activist based in Meraux, Louisiana. In her work, she addresses issues of justice and engages visual strategies that raise consciousness, empower, and educate. In 2017, Phipps became the first artist in residence at Bar None, a multidisciplinary initiative that aims to transcend incarceration by offering opportunities for healing through the arts to people who are directly impacted by the carceral system. Exhibited internationally, her work was featured in “States of Incarceration,” a traveling project of the Humanities Action Lab. She is the recipient of numerous awards, including prizes from the National Conference of Artists and the National Arts Program in New Orleans.

Keith Porteous is a New Orleans-based musician, teacher, and healer with an advanced yoga training and background in music. Her practice is grounded at intersection of movement, song, humor, and stories in her public classes at Swan River Yoga, which bring people together. As a singer, Porteous has performed in New Orleans on WWOZ, WTUL, at Bayou Boogaloo, and as a choir member at Christ Church Cathedral. A graduate of Princeton University and New York University, she also recently started Loyola University's Music Therapy program.

New Orleans native **Sarah Quintana** is a singer-songwriter with a background rich in jazz, folk and popular music. The recipient of a 2012 artist residency at A Studio in the

Woods, Quintana has also performed with the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, at Lincoln Center with swing band The New Orleans Moonshiners, and on the streets of Provence with a traveling circus. Quintana attended the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts and received a CODOFIL heritage scholarship. She is also a member of Pantheatre (Linda Wise and Enrique Pardo) as well as a hatha yoga instructor.

New Orleans native **Rontherin Ratliff** is a conceptual artist who creates mixed-media assemblages, art installations, and sculptures. His work directly responds to everyday experience and the surrounding environment. A founding member of the Level Artist Collective, Ratliff is also a member of the Antenna artist collective (both in New Orleans) and was trained at Delgado Community College. His past projects have been supported by residencies at the Joan Mitchell Center, the National Performance Network, and Court 13 as well as grants from the New Orleans Arts Council, Blights Out, Adeline Edwards Foundation, and Joan Mitchell Foundation. Exhibitions of Ratliff's work have been held at the New Orleans Museum of Art, Guggenheim Museum in New York, Sculptors Guild of New York at Governor's Island, DiverseWorks in Houston, and "ExhibitBE" at Crescent City Gates in New Orleans, among other venues.

Devin Reynolds is a New Orleans-based painter originally from Venice Beach, California, where he grew up working as a deckhand on *The Betty O*, a local sport-fishing boat. He received a BA in architecture from Tulane University in 2017. Raised between flea markets, yard sales, and the beach, his early childhood memories are filled with times setting up his mother's booths at antique shows, surfing, and fishing up and down the coast. Reynolds's first encounters with art-making came in his early 20s in the form of graffiti. His obsession for graffiti took off when he began painting his assumed alias on the sides of freight cars that traverse the railroads of North America. Reynolds's art practice finds itself at the intersection of graffiti and his love for nostalgic Americana design and sign painting, through the lens of his biracial upbringing in Los Angeles.

Based in New Orleans, **jackie sumell** is a multidisciplinary artist and prison abolitionist inspired most by the lives of everyday people. Her work has been successfully anchored at the intersection of activism, education, and art for over a decade, and it has been exhibited extensively throughout the US and Europe. sumell's work with Herman Wallace, a prisoner-of-consciousness and member of the "Angola 3," has positioned her at the forefront of the public campaign to end solitary confinement in the United States. Her practice explores the intersection of social sculpture, mindfulness practices, and prison abolition. She continues to work on "Herman's

House," "Solitary Gardens," and several other community-generated, advocacy-based projects. Holding a bachelors from the College of Charleston and an MFA from Stanford University, sumell is also the recipient of multiple residencies and fellowships, including A Blade of Grass Fellowship, Robert Rauschenberg Artist as Activist Fellowship, Soros Justice Fellowship, Eyebeam Project Fellowship, and a Schloss Solitude Residency Fellowship, among others.

A native of Memphis, **Nubian OmiSayade Sun** has been based in New Orleans since 2018. She is an artist and spiritual practitioner who strives for openness and divine understanding. In her "Goddess" drawing series, viewers are invited to intuitively locate prophetic messages, stories, connections, feelings, dreams, and beginnings. She describes the process of creating this work as starting "from the universe, and then flowing through my body and out of my fingertips." Born to a family of artists, she cites Uncle David Green as her greatest inspiration, as they frequently communicate about their visions and messages from the universe, which transform themselves into artwork. Dr. Sun is presently on faculty at the Tulane University School of Social Work.

Based in New Orleans, **Taslim van Hattum** is a multidisciplinary artist and graphic documentarian. She creates art that adorns walls, studios, bodies and internet spaces with a multitude of inspirations and creative confrontations. She strives to imagine works that create conversations that need to be had and heard. Van Hattum's work primarily focuses on how contemporary society intersects with sociopolitical and religious identities, representations and women—challenging and exposing the way in which space, personhood, beliefs, and popular culture are connected and imagined by the viewer. She holds a masters in public health from the Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine.

Multimedia artist **Carl Joe Williams** is a New Orleans native who creates large scale installations and narrative-driven work that speaks to our collective human condition. His upcycled assemblages, vibrant color combinations and rhythmic geometric patterns echo African diasporic memory as well as natural systems. Transportive visual experiences are crafted through Williams' use of reflective, kinetic, sonic and textured elements. A founding member of Level Artist Collective in New Orleans, Williams has exhibited his work nationally, including the Crystal Bridges Museum, The Frist Art Museum, McKenna Museum of African American Art, Telfair Museum, and Hammonds House Galleries, among other institutions. He has also been awarded a residency at the Joan Mitchell Center. Williams studied at the Atlanta College of Art after attending the New Orleans Center for Creative Art (NOCCA).



Mass Incarceration

Whether called mass incarceration, mass imprisonment, the prison boom, the carceral state, or hyper-incarceration, this phenomenon refers to the current American experiment in incarceration, which is defined by comparatively and historically extreme rates of imprisonment. (The US incarcerates 737 people per 100,000; Russia incarcerates 615 per 100,000; China incarcerates 118 per 100,000 and Louisiana incarcerates 1,052 per 100,000.)

Jail

Also known as a “detention facilities,” jails are operated by a county (parishes in Louisiana) or city government or private detention facilities. A jail is a secure facility that holds three main types of people:

1. People who have been arrested and are held pending a plea agreement, trial, or sentencing
2. People who have been convicted of a misdemeanor criminal offense and are serving a sentence of (typically) less than one year
3. People who have been sentenced to prison and are about to be transferred to another facility.

In Louisiana the Department of Corrections has contracted with local parish jails to house some people who have been convicted of felonies and sentenced to less than 13 years.

(In the state of Louisiana, the limits for spending time in jail without actually being charged with a crime are: 45 days for a misdemeanor, 60 days for a felony, and 120 days for any offense that would result in automatic life in prison or death, which under Louisiana law is reserved for murder and aggravated rape and aggravated kidnapping. After those time limits, an accused person is supposed to be released without bail to await the results of his case from outside a jail cell, unless prosecutors can show “just cause” for the delay. But there is no sole agency responsible for tracking defendants once they are booked.)

Prison

Compared to jails, prisons are longer-term facilities owned by a state or by the federal government or run privately. Prisons typically hold those convicted of felonies and persons with sentences of more than a year; however, the sentence length may vary by state.

Federal Prison

Federal prison facilities are operated under the jurisdiction of a federal government, as opposed to a state or provincial body. Federal prisons are used for incarcerating those who violate federal law.

State Prison

State prison facilities are run by state correctional authorities. Incarcerated people housed in these facilities are under the legal authority of the state government and generally serving a term of more than one year.

Private Prison

Also known as a “for-profit prison,” a private prison is a place in which individuals are physically confined or incarcerated by a third party that is contracted by a government agency. Private prison companies typically enter into contractual agreements with governments that commit incarcerated people and then pay a per diem or monthly rate, either for each incarcerated person in the facility, or for each place available, whether occupied or not. Private prisons are not held to the same standards and are regulated differently than a state or federal facility.

Juvenile Detention Center

A juvenile detention center is a prison for people under the age of majority who are waiting pretrial or have been sentenced to prison time. Juveniles go through a separate court system, the juvenile court, which sentences or commits juveniles to a certain program or facility.

Prison Industrial Complex

The prison industrial complex is a term that attributes the rapid expansion of the US incarcerated population to business profit. Private prisons supply goods and services to government prison agencies for profit. The most common agents in this industry are corporations that contract cheap prison labor, construction companies, surveillance technology vendors, companies that operate prison food services and medical facilities, prison guard unions, private probation companies, lawyers, and the lobby groups that represent these entities.

Criminal Justice System

The criminal justice system encompasses a network directly involved in apprehending, prosecuting, defending, sentencing, and punishing those who are suspected or convicted of criminal offences. It includes police and other branches of law enforcement, attorneys (prosecutors as well as defense attorneys), judges, courts, and government agencies, parole and probation officers.

Prosecutor

A prosecutor is a lawyer or official, such as a district attorney or a US attorney, who initiates and pursues criminal charges against a person, including during plea bargaining or trial.

Overcharging

Overcharging refers to a prosecutorial practice that involves charging a person with a higher offense or “tacking on” additional charges that the prosecutor knows they cannot prove. This is used to put the prosecutor in a better plea-bargaining position. Overcharging gives leverage to prosecutors to get individuals to accept plea-bargain deals.

Plea Bargain

A plea or sentence bargain is an agreement between the prosecutor and the defendant where the defendant agrees to plead guilty rather than go to trial in order to obtain a more lenient sentence and/or so as to be convicted of a less serious charge. A very high percentage of individuals (95%) go to prison through plea deals.

Crime

A crime is an action or omission that constitutes an offense that may be prosecuted by the state, and is punishable by law.

Infraction

In general, infractions are the least serious type of crime. Typically, a police officer will see someone doing something wrong, write a ticket, and hand it to the person. The person then has to pay a fine. Infractions usually involve little to no time in court (in Louisiana it may imply jail time) and include things like traffic tickets, jaywalking, and some minor drug possession charges in some states. However, if infractions remain unaddressed or unpaid, the law typically provides for an increasing range of fines and potential penalties. In Louisiana, the courts are run with the money made from fines and fees.

Misdemeanor

Misdemeanors are more serious than infractions. They are usually defined as a crime that is punishable by up to a year of jail time. Sometimes that jail time is served in a local county jail instead of a high-security prison. Other states define a misdemeanor as a crime that is not a felony or an infraction. Prosecutors generally have a great degree of flexibility in deciding what crimes to charge, how to punish them, and what kinds of plea bargains to negotiate.

Felony

Felonies are the most serious type of crime. They are usually defined by the fact that they are punishable by prison sentences of more than one year. Since the punishment can be so severe, court room procedure must be strictly observed in felony cases so that the defendants' rights stay protected.

Punishment

Punishment is the infliction or imposition of a penalty as deterrence, retribution, rehabilitation, and incapacitation.

Probation / Supervised Release

In criminal law, probation is a period of supervision over a convicted person, ordered by the court

instead of serving time in prison or in addition to the time served and upon release. If probation or supervised release is violated and individual may go back to prison.

Parole

Parole is the conditional release of incarcerated people before they complete their sentence. Paroled people are supervised by a public official, usually called a parole officer. If paroled people violate the conditions of their release, they may be returned to prison. The federal system does not have parole.

Reentry

Reentry is a process by which incarcerated people who've been released return to the community.

Recidivism

Recidivism relates to people who return to prison, to a previous condition or mode of behavior, particularly criminal behavior. Recidivism rates for formerly incarcerated people are impacted by a wide number of factors.

Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women

Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women (LCIW) is a prison for women located in St. Gabriel, Louisiana. It is the only female correctional facility of the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections. Elayn Hunt Correctional Center is immediately west of LCIW. LCIW includes the state's female death row. As of 2017, the prison is temporarily closed due to flooding that occurred in August 2016, and the incarcerated women formerly housed at LCIW are currently housed in other prisons.

In August 2016 the facility, which had 985 incarcerated women, experienced flooding, ranging from 8 inches to 3 feet. LCIW, the only state-operated prison to receive flooding during that incident, temporarily closed. It was the first time in state history that the whole population of a particular prison was evacuated to other facilities.

LCIW's incarcerated women were immediately transferred to the former **C. Paul Phelps**

Correctional Center a facility near DeQuincy, which received 678 women; the private **Louisiana Transitional Center for Women** in Tallulah, which received 221 women; **Avoyelles Parish Jail** in Marksville, which received 47 women; and the **Louisiana State Penitentiary (Angola)**, which received 39 women. By September, the incarcerated women housed near DeQuincy were transferred to the former **Jetson Youth Center**, a youth prison near Baker that closed in 2014. As of 2017, the incarcerated women are divided between **Jetson**, where the administration of LCIW is temporarily located; **Angola**; and **Elayn Hunt**.



Illustration by Taslim van Hattum

US PRISONS: A TIMELINE

- 1829 – Eastern State Penitentiary, the first modern prison in the US, opens in Philadelphia. The prison introduces solitary confinement to American prisons.
- 1833 – Debtors' prisons, where people can be incarcerated for failing to pay their debts, are banned under federal law. Bankruptcy law subsequently replaces debtors' prisons.
- 1835 – A Louisiana state penitentiary, called "The Walls," opens in downtown Baton Rouge.
- 1844 – Louisiana leases the state penitentiary (including the labor of the people incarcerated) to McHatton, Pratt & Co. Louisiana continued to lease incarcerated people to private companies for the next 56 years.
- 1848 – Louisiana passes a law making all children the legal property of the state if born to enslaved African American women incarcerated for life. Eleven of these children are later sold at auctions for anywhere from \$226 to \$1,010 per child.
- 1860 – Louisiana incarcerated women before and during the Civil War. The majority of incarcerated women had been enslaved.
- 1865 – Civil War ends. The Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution abolishes slavery and involuntary servitude, except as punishment for a crime.
- 1870 – Louisiana law allows judges to impose longer sentences on people with prior convictions, including "perpetual imprisonment" for fourth offenses.
- 1871 – In *Ruffins v. Commonwealth*, the Virginia Supreme Court declares that a person sentenced to incarceration becomes a "slave of the State."
- 1880 – Samuel L. James purchases an 8,000-acre Angola plantation to operate as the state penitentiary.
- 1898 – Louisiana holds a constitutional convention, where lawmakers declare a mission to "perpetuate the supremacy of the Anglo-Saxon race in Louisiana." The convention amends the state constitution to prohibit private leasing of incarcerated people and to allow criminal convictions by split juries if 9 out of 12 jurors vote guilty.
- 1900 – Louisiana state purchases Angola and assumes operational control of the state penitentiary.
- 1910 – Women were 5.5% of the incarcerated population in the US.
- 1922 – Louisiana state purchases additional 10,000 acres to expand Angola penitentiary.
- 1927 – The first federal women's prison opens in Alderson, West Virginia.
- 1928 – Louisiana passes Act No.15, requiring judges to impose longer prison sentences for people with prior convictions.
- 1955 – Deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill begins; closing of mental hospitals and reduction in overall state care for people with serious mental illness. Jails and prisons eventually absorb these populations.
- 1960 – The US has 45 federal prisons, 1,027 state prisons, and 2,969 local jails and workhouses to hold people captive.
- 1961 – Incarcerated women moved from Angola to the new Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women at St. Gabriel.
- 1964 – Goldwater campaign uses explicitly racial language to discuss crime. Conservatives conflate riots, street crime, and political activism.
- 1965 – President Johnson creates Office of Law Enforcement Assistance to provide funding and programs to expand state and local criminal justice systems.
- 1970s – Rebellions and strikes in prisons and jails nationwide bring renewed attention to living conditions for incarcerated people.
- 1971 – President Nixon declares War on Drugs.
- 1973 – New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller enacts toughest drug laws in the nation, punishing possession of even small amounts of drugs with 15 years to life.
- 1974 – Louisiana constitution amended to require 10 out of 12 jurors for conviction.
- 1976 – US Supreme Court decides in *Estelle v. Gamble* that deliberate indifference to medical needs in prison violates the Eighth Amendment to the US Constitution, which prohibits "cruel and unusual punishment."
- 1978 – Congress passes law to limit and regulate medical and research experimentation on incarcerated people.
- 1983 – Supreme Court affirms that people cannot be incarcerated for failing to pay debts in *Bearden v. Georgia*.
- 1983 – Corrections Corporation of America, the first and largest of contemporary private prison corporations, founded.
- 1984 – Sentencing Reform Act prescribes mandatory minimums and eliminates judicial discretion for federal crimes.
- 1986 – Federal Anti-Drug Abuse Act institutes 100:1 disparity—a minimum sentence of five years without parole for possessing five grams of crack cocaine (mostly used by black people), and the same punishment for 500 grams of powder cocaine (used mainly by white people).
- 1993 – States increasing use of mandatory "three-strikes" laws for sentencing. Washington State requires life in prison for third offenses. California follows in 1994 with the nation's toughest and most-used "three strikes" law.
- 1994 – The US Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act declares incarcerated people ineligible for college Pell Grants. Once released, formerly incarcerated people regain eligibility for Pell Grants and federal financial aid if they have not been convicted of a drug-related offense.
- 1995 – The term "prison-industrial complex" is coined by urban theorist Mike Davis to denote economic, social, and political interests (public and private) that expand imprisonment, regardless of need.
- 1996 – The US Welfare Reform Act imposes unduly harsh punishments on people convicted of felony drug crimes by permanently denying them welfare benefits and food stamps.
- 1996 – The Housing Opportunity Program Extension Act is passed, under which Public Housing Authorities may request criminal conviction information from law enforcement to screen applicants for housing or tenants for eviction.

- 1996 – Congress also passes the Prison Litigation Reform Act to limit civil rights litigation challenging prison and jail conditions.
- 1997 – President Clinton signed the Adoption and Safe Families Act. The Act requires states to start termination proceedings for children in foster care for 15 out of 21 months.
- 2003 – Congress passes the Prison Rape Elimination Act in 2003, which includes zero tolerance towards sexual assault and harassment in any detention or correctional facility.
- 2003 – US Supreme Court upholds prison restrictions on visitation for people imprisoned in *Overton v. Bazzetta* and restrictions do not violate the Constitution or constitute a “cruel and usual punishment.”
- 2010 – US Fair Sentencing Act reduced the disparity between penalties for possession of crack v. powder cocaine and eliminated the mandatory five-year minimum sentence for simple possession of crack cocaine.
- 2010 – Michelle Alexander publishes *The New Jim Crow*.
- 2012 – US Supreme Court rules in *Miller v. Alabama* that mandatory life-without-parole sentences for children 17 and under are unconstitutional.
- 2012 – Louisiana enacts the Safe Pregnancy for Incarcerated Women Act, prohibiting the shackling of pregnant women in most circumstances.
- 2013 – Attorney General Eric Holder launches the Smart on Crime initiative encouraging prosecutors to ensure just punishment for nonviolent offences and to direct finite resources toward the “most important law enforcement priorities”
- 2016 – The US has 102 federal prisons, 1,719 state prisons, 942 juvenile correctional facilities, 3,283 local jails, and 79 Indian Country jails.
- 2016 – The Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women, the state’s only prison for women, is heavily flooded and all of the women are evacuated to other prisons and jails.
- 2017 – Governor John Bel-Edwards signs bipartisan legislation to significantly reform Louisiana’s criminal laws and lower the state’s high incarceration rate. Seventy percent of savings from these reforms must be spent on programs to reduce recidivism and support victims of crime.
- 2018 – Women are 9.5% of the incarcerated population in the US.
- 2018 – Louisiana passes the Dignity for Incarcerated Women Act, which ensures that incarcerated women have access to women’s healthcare products and upholds women’s privacy from male correctional officers.
- 2018 – Louisiana, after a two-thirds vote in the legislature and a broad majority of statewide voters, amends the state constitution to require unanimous juries for all felony convictions.
- 2018 – Louisiana restores the right to vote to people who have been convicted of a felony, but have not been incarcerated for that felony for the previous five years.

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experimentation, contemplation, and conversation. Located at the Ford Foundation
Center for Social Justice in New York City, near the United Nations, the space is
situated to draw visitors from around the world—and address questions that cross
borders and speak to the universal struggle for human dignity.

ABOUT THE FORD FOUNDATION Across eight decades, the Ford Foundation’s
mission has been to reduce poverty and injustice, strengthen democratic values,
promote international cooperation, and advance human achievement. We believe
that social movements are built upon individual leadership, strong institutions,
and innovative, often high-risk ideas. While the specifics of what we work on
have evolved over the years, investments in these three areas have remained the
touchstones of everything we do and are central to our theory of how change
happens in the world. These approaches have been longstanding signatures of the
Ford Foundation, and they have had a profound cumulative impact.

