

## Educator Guide

# WALLS TURNED SIDEWAYS

## ARTISTS CONFRONT THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

23 January – 19 April 2020

### EXHIBITION OVERVIEW

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*Walls Turned Sideways: Artists Confront the Justice System* features work made by artists in response to the state of our criminal justice system, mass incarceration, the prison industrial complex, and other related phenomena. It includes work by over 30 artists and collectives who use sculpture, video, photography, installation, and social practice. The exhibition is organized to mirror the path one takes through the United States criminal justice system, with two overarching themes. The first, “Figure,” examines how individuals are affected by the state of incarceration in the U.S. The second, “Ground” serves to remind us of how prisons mirror institutions that order our society, communicating that incarceration is a constant presence in our landscape. Artworks are then grouped into more specific categories focusing on profile, arrest, process, incarceration, and exit.

The exhibition prompts thought and questioning around complex, powerful, and wide-reaching issues that have historically affected and are presently affecting many Americans’ lives. Police violence, executions, firearms, solitary confinement, gender dynamics in prison, sex crimes, racial inequities in the criminal justice system, and youth in prison are some such concepts directly referenced in *Walls Turned Sideways*. The galleries recognize that some

audiences may be entering the exhibition with direct, personal experiences and for some these issues may be entirely new. To that end, we would like students from across the Tufts community to feel adequately prepared by knowing that there will be difficult content addressed from a range of perspectives, and encourage you to reach out to [Liz Canter](#), Manager of Academic Programs, to discuss your plans for curricular use and/or to arrange a class session. There will be space in the galleries for reflection, engagement with further resources about mass incarceration and the criminal justice system, and communication through comment cards. We at the galleries would also like to be a resource to you if so needed, and welcome feedback on classroom experiences. Please share your responses with [Liz Canter](#) and [Abigail Satinsky](#), Curator of Exhibitions and Programs.

**Certain works on view might be especially challenging for some viewers.** Michelle Handelman’s video *Beware the Lily Law* (2011) presents stories of trans men in women’s prisons, and trans women in men’s prisons following the Stonewall Riots in 1969 that are based on the experiences of actual inmates. Visitors should be aware that the video addresses rape and sexual assault. Other works on view address gun violence and police brutality, including Chris Burden’s *L.A.P.D. Uniform* (1993) which displays a real non-functioning gun, as well as live police recordings and sounds of gunshots in Danny Giles’ *dead(air)* (2015), and references to guns and police violence in Sable Elyse Smith’s *Men Who Swallow Themselves in Mirrors* (2017). If you would like to pre-screen any of these pieces, contact [Liz Canter](#) to request links.

On the reverse are key terms and facts relevant to the exhibition that could be helpful for students to discuss in advance of their gallery visit, or to consider within the galleries.

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## KEY TERMS

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*Mass Incarceration:* Refers to the phenomenon in which the United States imprisons more people than any other country on earth.<sup>1</sup>

*Criminal Justice System:* A complex network of institutions and individuals, generally separated into processing/pretrial services, determination of punishment, sentencing, and corrections.<sup>2</sup>

*Jail:* Jails are typically local facilities under the jurisdiction of a municipality or county that often hold incarcerated people for short-term sentences, those awaiting trial, or sentencing.<sup>3</sup>

*Prison:* Prisons fall under the authority of state and federal governments, and house people who have long-term sentences. Some prisons are run privately by a corporation.<sup>4</sup>

*Detention Center:* A facility where people, usually refugees, those seeking asylum, and juveniles, are meant to be held for short periods.<sup>5</sup>

*Prison Industrial Complex:* The network of individuals and corporations that financially benefit from the existence of private prisons and the increase in prison population in the US.<sup>6</sup>

*Restorative Justice:* An alternative to existing criminal justice practices (that can also be used in tandem with criminal justice) which encourages repair of the harm caused by crime through interactions between the perpetrator(s), victim(s), and other community stakeholders.<sup>7</sup>

## KEY FACTS ABOUT MASS INCARCERATION AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

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- There are approximately 2.3 million incarcerated people in the US,<sup>8</sup> 8,292 of whom are in Massachusetts (as of 1/1/2020).<sup>9</sup>

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- There are 1,719 state prisons, 109 federal prisons, 1,772 juvenile correctional facilities, 3,163 local jails, and 80 Indian Country jails in the US.<sup>10</sup> 16 of these institutions are in MA, and the one closest to Tufts' campus is in Jamaica Plain.<sup>11</sup>
- The US prison population has increased by 500% in the last 40 years, due not to significant changes in crime rates, but to changes in law and policy.<sup>12</sup>
- MA has the lowest rate of prison incarceration in the US, but has among the highest rates of racial disparity in its prisons in the country.<sup>13</sup> Including the population of people in local jails, MA has a rate of incarceration higher than that of many countries.<sup>14</sup>
- Disparate policing of people of color and biased criminal justice policies cause them to be disproportionately represented in all stages of the criminal justice system. For example, Latino men are nearly 3 times as likely to be incarcerated as white men. Black men are more than 5 times as likely to be incarcerated as white men.<sup>15</sup>
- Incarcerated men far outnumber incarcerated women, but the population of women in prison has increased at a rate 50% higher than that of men since 1980.<sup>16</sup>
- Bias by law enforcement and high rates of poverty, homelessness, and discrimination of LGBTQIA+ people have led to their increased contact with the criminal justice system. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual people are 3 times as likely to be incarcerated as non-LGBT people. Trans people are twice as likely to be incarcerated. These rates increase for trans people of color and low-income trans people.<sup>17</sup>