



# WALLS TURNED SIDEWAYS

ARTISTS CONFRONT THE JUSTICE SYSTEM





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Funeral for Emmett Till: Mother of Emmett Till, Mamie Mobley pauses at the casket at A.A.Raynor funeral home, September 6, 1955

# INTRODUCTION

## OPENING THE DOOR

Mamie Till-Mobley recognized the importance of the image to testify to latent violence when she asked *Jet* magazine to publish a photograph of the brutalized body of her son Emmett (1941–1955), a 14-year-old black boy who was murdered by two white men upholding the values of racial segregation in 1955 Jim Crow Mississippi, as it lay in its coffin. A lesser-known photograph shows Till-Mobley grieving over her son’s open casket at his funeral in Chicago, where she presented his body for viewing as evidence of the hatred that destroyed it.<sup>1</sup> In the picture, three portraits of Emmett Till pinned to the casket’s satin lining depict him as a healthy and handsome young man. In the first, he leans on a box television set, one leg crossed in front of the other in a pose of nonchalance. The second is more poignant, with the young man wearing a hat and gazing at something outside of the frame. In the last, he looks directly at the camera, smiling; it is his mother who looks at someone or something outside of the scene, while wrapping her arm around the boy’s shoulder. In all three images, Emmett Till wears the same tie with a central white stripe framed by two darker edges, suggesting that the outfit was his Sunday best or that the photographs were taken on the same day, or both. Hung on the lining of his coffin, the portraits emphasize Till’s humanity, in contrast to the evidence of violence inflicted on the object that was his body. Together, object and image testify to how deeply his body was wrenched from his person.

Conversely, Till’s widely seen casket photograph is indexical to the boy’s destruction, reading not as a portrait but instead as what Hortense Spillers calls “a hieroglyphics of the flesh.” Making a distinction between the “body,” a physical form that liberated subjects inhabit, and “flesh,” the material constitution of the captive, Spillers writes:

The anatomical specifications of rupture, of altered human tissue, take on the objective description of laboratory prose—eyes beaten out, arms, backs, skulls branded, a left jaw, a right ankle, punctured; teeth missing, as the calculated work of iron, whips, chains, knives, the canine patrol, the bullet.

These undecipherable markings on the captive body render a kind of hieroglyphics of the flesh whose severe disjunctures come to be hidden to the cultural seeing by skin color.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, the “seared, divided, ripped-apartness” of Till’s body was proof of his entrapment by and captivity in an purposely hidden and deeply embedded system of

<sup>1</sup> According to the front page of the Sept. 9, 1955, issue of the *St. Louis Argus*, over 40,000 people viewed Till’s body in person. Countless more would see it through its disseminated image.

<sup>2</sup> Hortense Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 67, <http://doi.org/10.2307/464747>





racial hierarchization at the core of American culture and its justice system.<sup>3</sup> Till's killers, Roy Bryant and J. W. Milam, were acquitted of all charges for the murder they would later take responsibility for publicly. In 2017, 62 years after the fact, Carolyn Bryant Donham would admit that she fabricated the charge—whistling at her—that made the young Emmett the target of such brutality. But in the moment, the nationwide circulation of the photograph of the boy's violently disfigured body would spark national interest in the Civil Rights movement.

I proposed *Walls Turned Sideways: Artists Confront the Justice System* to the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston in 2013. That was the year that the murder of another black boy, Trayvon Martin (1995–2012), was also not met with justice. Martin, age 17, had been visiting relatives in a gated community in Sanford, Florida, when George Zimmerman, a resident in the same community, fatally shot him; Zimmerman claimed he thought that Martin had been robbing the house where, in fact, the boy was staying. In the five years between when this exhibition was proposed and when it materialized in the fall of 2018, Michael Brown (d. 2014, Ferguson, MO, age 18), Jamar Clark (d. 2015, Minneapolis, MN, age 24), Terence Crutcher (d. 2016, Tulsa, OK, age 40), Jonathan Ferrell (d. 2013, Charlotte, NC, age 24), Ezell Ford (d. 2014, Los Angeles, CA, age 25), Korryn Gaines (d. 2016, Randallstown, MD, age 23), Freddie Gray (d. 2015, Baltimore, MD, age 25), Brendon Glenn (d. 2015, Los Angeles, CA, age 29), Gregory Gunn (d. 2016, Birmingham, AL, age 58), Akai Gurley (d. 2014, Brooklyn, NY, age 28), Dontre Hamilton (d. 2014, Milwaukee, WI, age 31), Jason Harrison (d. 2015, Dallas, TX, age 45), Tyre King (d. 2016, Columbus, OH, age 13), Alex Nieto (d. 2014, San Francisco, CA, age 28), Alfred Olango (d. 2016, El Cajon, CA, age 38), Antwon Rose (d. 2018, East Pittsburgh, PA, age 17), Kajieme Powell (d. 2014, St. Louis, MO, age 25), Keith Lamont Scott (d. 2016, Charlotte, NC, age 43), and many others were killed during the often unwarranted process of being stopped by police or while in custody. In that same time, cellular phones with video-recording capacities and cameras on the dashboards of cop cars documented and made visible to the public the deaths at the hands of police of Philando Castile (d. 2016, St. Paul, MN, age 32), Stephon Clark (d. 2018, Sacramento, CA, age 22), John Crawford III (d. 2014, Beavercreek, OH, age 22), Samuel DuBose (d. 2015, Cincinnati, OH, age 43), Eric Garner (d. 2014, Staten Island, NY, age 42), Eric Harris (d. 2015, Tulsa, OK, age 44), Laquan McDonald (d. 2014, Chicago, IL, age 17), Luis Góngora Pat (d. 2016, San Francisco, CA, age 45), Jerame Reid (d. 2014, Bridgeton, NJ, age 36), Tamir Rice (2014, Cleveland, OH, age 12), Walter Scott (d. 2014, North Charleston, SC, age 50), Alton Sterling (d. 2016, Baton Rouge, LA, age 36), Christian Taylor (d. 2015, Arlington, TX, age 19), Mario Woods (d. 2015, San Francisco, CA, age 26), and Saheed Vassell (d. 2018, Brooklyn, NY, age 34). Sandra Bland's 2015 arrest for a traffic violation was recorded by a dash cam and a bystander's cell phone; she died three days later in a jail cell in Waller County, Texas, under suspicious circumstances. Bland was 28 years old.

Few police officers were charged for any of these murders, if they were indicted at all. Many more men and women, cis and trans, have died at the hands of cops or other individuals, like Bryant, Milam, and Zimmerman, who have been acquitted of their extrajudicial murders. Without the aid of contemporary image-making technology and the circulation

<sup>3</sup> Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 67.

channels of social media, these deaths by systemic violence, like the innumerable others that took place in the years before and between Emmett Till and Trayvon Martin, that have been erased from the annals of U.S. history may have also gone unnoticed. Martin's murder, like Till's, made visible the racialized violence underpinning the justice system in the United States and ushered in a new era of protest and community activism, mobilized by grief and emblemized by the organized and peaceful outrage of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Also in 2013, a group of artists and activists led by Laurie Jo Reynolds and men incarcerated at Tamms Correctional Center, as well as their families, succeeded in closing the super-maximum-security prison located in southern Illinois. Employing aesthetics, performance tactics, and the power of images, alongside lobbying and other strategic interventions in government structures, Tamms Year Ten successfully made the case to the governor of Illinois that keeping all inmates in indefinite solitary confinement is an arcane and dehumanizing method of punishment. That same year, a coalition of artists, educators, activists, and victims of police abuse led by human rights lawyer Joey Mogul, collectively working under the name Chicago Torture Justice Memorials, presented an ordinance to Chicago's City Council requesting reparations for survivors of physical torture inflicted by former police officer Jon Burge and those under his command. Mogul, one of the lawyers representing the victims in Burge's civil trials, recognized the need to bring literal visibility and material form to the over one hundred cases of police brutality withheld from public view. Mogul also recognized that artists were the people to help do so. On May 6, 2015, after a two-year campaign that included a call for proposals for a monument that could memorialize and visualize this history, the City of Chicago agreed on a resolution and offered a reparations package to the victims. It included monetary compensation, specialized counseling, a permanent monument, and a public school curriculum, ensuring that the episode would be taught and not forgotten in future generations. The reparations also included a formal apology—the first issued on behalf of any municipality in the United States to its citizens acknowledging abuse.

When a member of my own family became entangled in the justice system in my home state of Texas in the summer of 2013, I turned my attention to the artists of Chicago, because they were achieving results unlike any other group in the country. The particular strain of social practice I found in the city was born from studies of figures such as peace leader and immigrant advocate Jane Addams and Fred Hampton and the Black Panthers, as well as a long history of union and labor organizing to confront a longer history of civil corruption. Skeptical of art's ability to "change hearts and minds" in an era of armchair activism, to make *Walls Turned Sideways* I sought out artists across the nation who were using their practices to make strategic interventions in the justice system. Two questions guided my search and selection: What functions can only art and artists fulfill in the social and political landscape? What can the mediums of artmaking show and the processes of artists do that those in no other discipline or field can?

Many of the artists I found pinpoint their political awakening to their time spent in Chicago, having been trained in the practice of interrogating the ground upon which they stand and the position they hold in the world by artists like Mary Patten and others at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Maria Gaspar, Laurie Jo Reynolds, and Sarah Ross in Chicago, Suzanne Lacy working in Oakland and Los Angeles, Chandra





McCormick and Keith Calhoun in New Orleans, Gregory Sale in Phoenix, Sam Gould in Minneapolis, Carl Pope in Indianapolis, and Titus Kaphar in New Haven are nexuses between communities affected by the police and neighboring prisons—including incarcerated people and their families—and a larger public, to which they disseminate information, analysis, and resolutions mediated through art. When the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston generously invited me to curate an exhibition, I proposed *Walls Turned Sideways*, wanting to give a platform to these artists alongside those in and from Texas, such as Mark Menjivar, Autumn Knight, and Jamal Cyrus (independently and with the collaborative Otabenga Jones & Associates), all of whom were working in a state known for its contentious immigration policies and detention centers, substandard care of inmates, and of course, the death penalty.

Representing the full range of contemporary art production in the studio and the social realm, *Walls Turned Sideways* includes works that take social justice issues as subject matter for objects and still and moving images; position the prison and court systems as structures for dismantling through institutional critique; and aim to change laws as a goal of social practice. Methods of artmaking are often combined with experiences in activism and organizing to engage audiences in coalition building around specific issues. To quote the artist Ashley Hunt: “Activism/organizing and artmaking are both spaces in which we fight for our right—assert our right, exercise our right—to participate in the making and re-making of the world through the objects and images that form it. There’s something about understanding our role in participating in the making of the world that points to that larger thing—I’m not just speaking because I feel like it, I’m in the midst of a fabric that I’m a part of.”<sup>4</sup>

Like Hunt, the artists in *Walls Turned Sideways* come to their practices fully embodying their citizenship and orienting themselves toward civic spaces rather than the market, theory, or history. They are extraordinary for the scale and level of their ambitions to untangle the problems of the criminal justice system, mass incarceration, and the prison-industrial complex and to effect lasting change. This exhibition recognizes the artist as a key figure for making visible issues of social concern that are withheld from public view.

The exhibition is grounded on the premise that art and questions of the image and visibility have been and continue to be constitutive to social movements. Like Mamie Till-Mobley, Martin Luther King, Jr. knew that making images of hidden brutality available to the public would force a reconciliation with that brutality. As Leigh Raiford writes in her book *Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare: Photography and the African American Freedom Struggle*, “For King, the visual media proved a crucial component in capturing ‘fugitive’ brutality, holding it still for scrutiny and transmitting this ‘naked truth’ to watching and judging audiences. King praises photography and film for their work of exposure, revealing through mechanical reproduction facts that had remained hidden and therefore difficult to prove.”<sup>5</sup> King also recognized that changing the white public’s perception of black Americans meant literally changing their portrayal in photographs. As Raiford recounts, during the Civil Rights movement, black Americans were perceived to be the cause of the

<sup>4</sup> Jamila Reddy, “Ashley Hunt’s Photos Explore the Aesthetics of Mass Incarceration,” *24700*, April 21, 2016, <http://blog.calarts.edu/2016/04/21/ashley-hunts-photos-explore-the-aesthetics-of-mass-incarceration/>.

<sup>5</sup> Leigh Raiford, *Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare: Photography and the African American Freedom Struggle* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 1.

violences and injustices perpetrated against them. For instance, when Charles Moore’s 1963 photographs of Birmingham protesters being attacked by police dogs and sprayed with fire hoses at full force were published in *Life*, “the magazine described the protesters as inciters of ‘simmering racial hatred,’ bringing violence upon themselves in order to manipulate the press.”<sup>6</sup> As such, Civil Rights movement photography can be understood as documenting the reorientation of both a socially marginalized people within civic space and the public perception of images as they become temporal markers on the timeline of history.

After the release of photographs showing the effects of napalm raids on Vietnamese women and children, King drew a connection between the Civil Rights movement at home and the war abroad, while the arguments of antiwar protesters shifted to issues of human rights.<sup>7</sup> Pictures of the casualties of napalm were frequently used to incite an emotional response and provoke action, as at Angry Arts Week in January 1967. The aesthetic was dominated by images of fire and char, as detailed in Leon Golub’s article “The Artist as an Angry Artist: The Obsession with Napalm,” written as a summation of the event.<sup>8</sup> With over six hundred artist participants, Angry Arts Week was meant to be “a real artistic protest rather than a political protest of artists,” implying that politics would be attended to through aesthetics, in visual statements and material gestures.<sup>9</sup> Protests took place in art venues, and exhibition display tactics shaped demonstrations in the street. Some participants in the New York event had been involved in the Los Angeles–based Artists’ Protest Committee and its production of the *Artists’ Tower of Protest*, also known as the *Peace Tower*, in 1966. The 58-foot-tall steel structure, designed by Mark di Suvero, featured placards with written and visual statements of dissent against the Vietnam War submitted by over four hundred international artists and was a model for the *Collage of Indignation* in New York City. Over 62,000 people attended Angry Arts Week, according to its organizers.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, activism around the AIDS crisis in the 1980s and ’90s cannot be disentangled from the graphics that accompanied it, such as ACT UP’s *Silence=Death* poster and Gran Fury’s *Kissing Doesn’t Kill* project. As Gregg Bordowitz has argued, artists took up

<sup>6</sup> Raiford, *Imprisoned in Luminous Glare*, 6.

<sup>7</sup> “The Children of Vietnam” by human rights lawyer William F. Pepper was published in the January 1967 issue of *Ramparts* and also inspired artists in New York to produce Angry Arts Week, which ran between January 29 and February 5, 1967.

<sup>8</sup> Leon Golub, “The Artist as an Angry Artist: The Obsession with Napalm,” *Arts Magazine* 41, no. 6 (April 1967): 48–49.

<sup>9</sup> Don McNeill, “Week of the Angry Arts: Protests of the Artists,” *The Village Voice*, January 26, 1967, 13; cited in Francis Frascina, *Art, Politics and Dissent: Aspects of the Art Left in Sixties America* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 117.

<sup>10</sup> This figure is compiled from multiple sources including Rudolf Baranik and Dore Ashton’s files in the Museum of Modern Art’s archive. I was directed to those sources through a footnote in Frascina’s *Art, Politics and Dissent*, which provided me with the most comprehensive narration of Angry Arts Week. The biography of May Stevens, Baranik’s wife, who, along with him and Ashton, was one of the principal participants in Artists and Writers Protest against the War in Vietnam, was also useful: Patricia Hills, *May Stevens* (Warwick, UK: Pomegranate, 2005), 32. See also the entry for “Artists and Writers Protest against the War in Vietnam, 1965” in *Alternative Art New York: 1965–1985*, ed. Julie Ault (Minneapolis: The Drawing Center and University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 17–19; and Francis Frascina, “The Politics of Representation,” in *Modernism in Dispute: Art Since the Forties*, ed. Paul Wood (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 125.



posters and broadsheets as mediums because they moved through the world virally in an era before the internet; they had the potential to infect viewers with their messages of prevention and education when wheat-pasted in the subway systems and on the streets of major metropolitan areas.<sup>11</sup> Artist Theodore (ted) Kerr elaborates: “Visual culture has been a vital tool in saving the lives and increasing life chances of people living with and impacted by HIV/AIDS and has served as a rallying cry and means for mass education.” Simultaneously informing and building an archive that stands as a testament to life and loss, artists and activists organizing around HIV and AIDS mobilized images to, in Kerr’s words, “provide liminal spaces in which beauty, rage, and healing can commingle, even as the fight continues.”<sup>12</sup> As Kerr relates in an essay commissioned for this publication, that fight has adapted to address new laws that make not disclosing one’s HIV status a crime.

In 1961, when Frantz Fanon wrote that “every onlooker is either a coward or a traitor,” he figured looking as a failure to act.<sup>13</sup> His statement would become the rallying cry of liberatory movements around the world. As Ariella Azoulay notes, since the 1990s, concurrent with the historicization of such events, “a new spectatorial position has emerged within the museum, a position from which responsibility to the sense of the image has coalesced with the responsibility toward the photographed.”<sup>14</sup> This new responsibility has engendered the rise of the civil spectator. Azoulay elaborates upon Fanon: “The spectator is called to take part, to move from the addressee’s position to the addresser’s position to take responsibility for the sense of such photographs by addressing them even further, turning them into signals of emergency, signals of danger or warning—transforming them into emergency claims.”<sup>15</sup> Heeding Fanon’s and Azoulay’s charges, the artists included in *Walls Turned Sideways* employ the tools of artmaking as mechanisms for action and call upon spectators to embody their citizenship and take part.

*Walls Turned Sideways* recognizes that images and visibility are inherent to the process of social mobilization, and that artists are particularly adept at visualizing, materializing, and deploying purposefully veiled histories. But the exhibition also questions the new role that the museum has taken up in this conversation. Since the inception of Black Lives Matter as a response to the extrajudicial killings of black people in the United States, art museums around the country have increasingly fashioned themselves as public forums for engaging communities in conversations about social justice. In their attempts to do this, museums have benefitted from a certain definition of art as a site of freedom, including the freedom of speech, and the empty progressive, liberal claims of art’s radical and transformative potential. As many controversial exhibitions and artworks in this same period have shown, the terms of aesthetics are not sufficient to assess, evaluate, and critique problems of ethics. Free speech does not mean ethical speech, productive and useful speech, or even thoughtful speech, especially when lives are at stake. As a result, the museum and artistic practice have been freed from ethics and responsibility. Mike Kelley suggested as much in *Pay for Your Pleasure* (1988), an

<sup>11</sup> Gregg Bordowitz, *General Idea: Imagevirus* (London: MIT Press, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> Theodore Kerr, unpublished conversation with the author, February 22, 2018.

<sup>13</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 199.

<sup>14</sup> Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, trans. Relä Mazali and Ruvik Danieli (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 167.

<sup>15</sup> Azoulay, *Civil Contract of Photography*, 169.

installation that pairs portraits of celebrated makers and thinkers with quotations in which they conceptualize themselves and their practices as being beyond the bounds of law, civil structures, and ethical consideration. To further make his case, Kelley stipulated that the installation include a painting made by a murderer—John Wayne Gacy in its first iteration and Anthony Papa in a 1993 exhibition at the Whitney Museum of Art—among the pantheon of geniuses. In an essay commissioned for this publication, Papa describes how he claimed to be a murderer and leveraged the invitation to exhibit his art to gain his release from Sing Sing prison.

To think about justice in the context of the museum would require an acknowledgement that the museum has historically enacted and perpetuated violences of its own, and would require museums to address and take responsibility for the ways in which their imperial foundations affect their making of decisions large and small in the present. To brings questions of justice into the museum necessitates, at the very least, taking into account the historical role such institutions have played in colonial processes, if not the enactment of reparation, restitution, and repatriation of the spoils of colonialism, including human remains, to their cultures and countries of origin. If conversations about justice are to take place within the museum, they must start by interrogating the ground upon which the museum is built.

The bodies of living and dead people and their cultural accoutrements have been collected and displayed as objects of curiosity, wonder, spectacle, scrutiny, and study since the inception of Western cultural institutions, from the 16th-century *Wunderkammern* (cabinets of curiosity) to the 19th-century world’s fairs, through human zoos, anthropological museums, and museums of natural history, art, and culture of the 20th century.<sup>16</sup> The display in public institutions of trophies—either objects or bodies conceptualized as such—looted from other places has been a key component in assembling and pronouncing the power of the nation-state. Notably, exhibitions of colonized people gained popularity in the end days of slavery and after abolition. The display of Saartjie Baartman—perhaps the best-known person whose life was defined by a phenomenon that affected thousands, if not more, over the centuries—happened in London in 1810, only three years after the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act of 1807, a bill that outlawed the capture and sale of additional slaves in British colonies but did not legislate the freedom of existing slaves. Human zoos and exhibitions of living people began appearing across the West in the 1870s, after slavery was banned in the United States, Europe, and most European colonies.

While she was alive, Baartman was shown in England as the Hottentot Venus, until she was sold to a French animal trainer who exhibited her alongside a baby rhinoceros in a cage in Paris.<sup>17</sup> In the essay “Venus in Two Acts,” Saidiya Hartman writes of how the

<sup>16</sup> My art historical life is focused on those whose living and dead bodies were collected and displayed as objects because they fell outside of Western definitions of normalcy, beginning with Habsburg collections of people considered “monstrous.” Monstrosity and criminality have long functioned as categories in which those whose existences challenge the logic of an artificial classification system are placed. See Coco Fusco, “The Other History of Intercultural Performance,” *TDR: The Drama Review* 38, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 146–47, for a short list of people whose bodies have been staged as spectacles of otherness.

<sup>17</sup> In “Display of the Body Hottentot,” Z. S. Strother outlines how the Hottentot as an exotic category was projected onto Baartman’s body. Z. S. Strother, “Display of the Body Hottentot,” in *Africans on Stage: Studies in Ethnological Show Business*, ed. Bernth Lindfors (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 1–61.





moniker “Venus” operated as a branding mark on the bodies of black women in the textual record of the transatlantic slave trade, designating them as objects of sexual use and erasing their personhood. Hartmann writes that “Venus” can be found in “the barracoon, the hollow of the slave ship, the pest-house, the brothel, the cage, the surgeon’s laboratory, the prison, the cane-field, the kitchen, the master’s bedroom.”<sup>18</sup> Baartman lived on the stage and in the cage, before being forced into prostitution when the exhibition of her body declined in popularity. After her death at age 26, her body was dissected into parts. Henri de Blainville, who conducted Baartman’s autopsy in 1816, and Georges Cuvier, the zoologist who did the dissection in 1817, intended to compare a “female of the ‘lowest’ human species with the highest ape (the orangutan).”<sup>19</sup> Baartman’s brain, labia, and buttocks were exhibited first at the French Academy for study, before going on permanent display in the Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro (now the Musée de l’Homme) in Paris, where Picasso is believed to have confronted the African masks he incorporated into paintings and sculptures during his “African period.” Baartman’s skeleton and a plaster cast of her body were displayed there until 1982. For over 165 years, they were figured as a missing link in a perverse display whose scientific racism was supported by the authority of institutions like the museum, the zoo, and the university. Baartman’s remains were stored in the Musée de l’Homme’s archives for nearly three decades while poets, scholars, and politicians pleaded for their repatriation. In 2002, Baartman’s body was returned to South Africa, her home country.<sup>20</sup> Only within the past thirty years, with the passage of laws such as the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (1990), have museums in the U.S. and Europe begun honoring the appeals of indigenous groups in the Americas, Africa, and Australia and repatriating human remains in their collections.<sup>21</sup>

When violence turns a person into an object that is the body and representations translate that body into evidence, curatorial questions about the display of objects and images intersect with ethical considerations of the site and modes of presentation. I used Spillers’s words at the beginning of this essay in lieu of reproducing Emmett Till’s casket photograph and chose again not to show an image of the display of Baartman’s body at the Musée de l’Homme because of a particular trap of visibility. While affirming the importance of representations of violence for bringing issues of injustice into public consciousness, *Walls Turned Sideways* aims to avoid the moment when the evidentiary function of representation becomes a spectacle of death re-presented on a public stage. Mechanisms of display such as the exhibition, publication, and social media promote this process. The tension between re-presentation as evidence and re-presentation as death spectacle is present in the example of lynching photographs, which were used by anti-lynching activists to gain support for their cause and were also popular souvenirs strategically released to the public by white supremacy groups as a mode of

<sup>18</sup> Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (June 2008): 1, <http://doi.org/10.1215/-12-2-1>.  
<sup>19</sup> Sander L. Gilman, “Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine and Literature,” *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (Autumn 1985): 231, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1343468>.  
<sup>20</sup> Diana Ferrus’s poem “I’ve come to take you home” was instrumental to the process of returning Saartjie Baartman’s remains to South Africa. Diana Ferrus, “I’ve come to take you home,” in *I’ve Come to Take You Home* (Kuils River, South Africa: Diana Ferrus Publishers, 2011), 15–16.  
<sup>21</sup> See Tiffany Jenkins, *Contesting Human Remains in Museum Collections: The Crisis of Cultural Authority* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

terrorism, timed to moments of social advancement for black Americans.<sup>22</sup> Participants in contemporary social media platforms understand how the saturation of mediated images of death in an era of digital reproduction makes them a spectacle that desensitizes us to and, in the worst case, celebrates death, rather than contributing to the achievement of justice. Monetized by the online platforms on which they circulate, videos of black people being murdered by the state or their proxies increase traffic and the return of analytic data to advertisers.

The prisoner’s body has also begun to enter art spaces through photographic and painted representations and exhibitions about issues of social justice. By focusing on prisoners as subject or their work as object, these modes of documentation aim to present incarcerated people as human in a dehumanizing system. Such projects function as exposés of a kind, providing a peek inside prison walls and using the camera to reveal the injustice of incarceration. Frequently, however, these forms also make a spectacle of the prisoner and replicate the surveillance of the criminal justice system. When images of prisoners circulate through the channels of contemporary art but they themselves remain immobilized and contained, their bodies are made available for viewing while foreclosing the possibility of returning the gaze. As such, the contemporary art world, like the criminal justice system, controls acquisition, movement, and visibility. And the preponderance of white and male artists whose work makes up most modern and contemporary museum collections is matched by the predominance of black and brown men, and increasingly women, who form the majority demographics of the prison population.<sup>23</sup> One’s ability to enter the museum or the prison as a subject or an object is governed by social designs that funnel and segregate certain groups into different institutions.

If collections of people—through their bodies or their representation in images and objects—have been foundational to the formation of the museum, how is the contemporary prison also a collection of people? *Walls Turned Sideways* presents the museum as one in a campus of institutions that includes the prison, the library, the hospital, the zoo, and the university, all of which were built to consolidate the power of the nation-state and administer to its citizens. The reader with a knowledge of theory and philosophy will be reminded of the work of Michel Foucault, whose bibliography is a systematic journey through a series of state-maintained institutions: the asylum, the hospital, and the prison, as well as fields of study within the academy.<sup>24</sup> The reader with firsthand experiences of racialized state violence will have felt it in all of those places.

<sup>22</sup> As Jacqueline Goldsby writes, “Rather than flooding the visual landscape, then, lynching photographs seeped into and out of the public sphere irregularly, which endowed them with their power to shore up white supremacist fantasies of dominance and to terrorize those who believed the violence was an unjust, indefensible practice. Understood doubly as a form of hidden knowledge and as an ‘enzyme’ released to foster growth, the ‘secretion’ of lynching photographs therefore details how the images were produced and released into the world at specific times, in particular forms, and in selected venues to produce certain kinds of political effects.” Jacqueline Goldsby, *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 218–38, 246–49.  
<sup>23</sup> Chad M. Topal et. al, “Diversity of Artists in Major U.S. Museums” (unpublished manuscript, June 25, 2018), [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1EvOzCL7WnJ7u\\_whhBZfqw2T7Ez9OtdZH/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1EvOzCL7WnJ7u_whhBZfqw2T7Ez9OtdZH/view).  
<sup>24</sup> See, respectively, Michel Foucault’s *Madness and Civilization*, *Birth of the Clinic*, *Discipline and Punish*, and *The Order of Things*.



In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault writes, “Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?”<sup>25</sup> One could easily imagine “museums” next on this list. Though Foucault never directly interrogated the museum as an institution, the cultural historian Tony Bennett, in his book *The Birth of the Museum*, and artists engaged in institutional critique such as Andrea Fraser have followed his thinking in this direction. *Walls Turned Sideways* builds on those approaches to propose a new method for looking across institutions. Learning from the artists in the exhibition, who all apply their disciplinary knowledge towards untangling the problems of the criminal justice system, my approach is specific to the exhibition format and employs a cross-institutional analysis. How can looking at the prison through the lens of museology aid in its dismantling? Considering the museum and the prison as sibling institutions born of colonialism and imperialism, *Walls Turned Sideways* argues that the museum has historically operated through capture and the prison through collection. The museum is a repository for all that a society values, and the prison a site for storing all that the same society seeks to disavow and discard. Indeed, the two institutions are inextricably entangled.

Within the footnotes of the script of her pioneering performance *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* (1989), Andrea Fraser writes a treatise that unravels how the museum is itself a disciplinary institution. In the performance, Fraser assumes the role of a docent who takes the Philadelphia Museum of Art as the object of her interpolation, and in doing so reveals the logic by which the museum is enmeshed with a host of public institutions that serve the different strata of a raced, gendered, and class-divided society:

With the idea that material relief caused the problems of unemployment and poverty by indulging the character defects of the poor, late nineteenth-century bourgeois charity organizers and “scientific philanthropists” argued that the proper aim of public assistance was to build character. While some scientific philanthropists lobbied to limit direct material assistance to the punitive and disciplinary poorhouse, others complemented the antiwelfare effort by establishing a new kind of public institution. Like charity organization societies, these libraries, colleges, and museums would work to “regenerate character, which involved the direct influence of the kind and concerned, successful and cultured, middle- and upper-class people” on the masses. In opposition to the poorhouse, they would provide only things of the mind and spirit, not things of the body. (Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State*, p. 97.)

While subsidized directly or indirectly with public funds, the publicity of these new institutions, and particularly art museums, would be concealed by the much more highly publicized privacy of the bankers and industrialists who held them in trust. Their status as public institutions would not be a function of their identification with the public sector. Rather, it would be a function of public address. Their publicity would work to create a public for them; to oblige this public to enter them; to identify this public with the culture they contain and the interests they represent—not as its own, but as that to which it should aspire.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 228.

<sup>26</sup> Andrea Fraser, “Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk,” *October* 57 (Summer 1991): 109–10, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/778874>.

Supporting Fraser's claim that “for those who have not yet cultivated taste, the museum will provide ‘a training in taste,’” Tony Bennett enters into evidence the instruction booklets given to lower- and working-class visitors in the 19th century.<sup>27</sup> The tutelage of the museum included directions on how to dress and behave “partly so as not to soil the exhibits, but also so as not to detract from the pleasures of the overall spectacle; indeed, to become parts of it.”<sup>28</sup> This comportment was formed in opposition to displays such as Saartjie Baartman's body at the Musée de l'Homme—the “uncivilized” counterpoint of a classed society unified against the exhibited other by race. In other words, the museum has always been as engaged in the process of disciplining as the prison; through discourses of civilizing, the museum instills the limits of acceptable behavior and establishes social values.

In this catalogue, the word “prison” refers to different iterations of penal institutions that Foucault calls the “carceral archipelago”—prisons, jails, penitentiaries, and detention centers—but specific types are identified as needed.<sup>29</sup> Since Michelle Alexander's important book *The New Jim Crow*, discourse about the “prison-industrial complex” has shifted to prioritize the term “mass incarceration.” I argue that the two cannot be disentangled from each other. Both *Walls Turned Sideways* exhibition and this catalogue are organized according to a figure-ground analogy. A fundamental principle principle of visual design, the relationship between foreground and background becomes a tool for thinking about how the individual is framed by an institution. The figure-ground metaphor shows how the prison-industrial complex is the institutional frame that surrounds the figure, who is classified as a criminal and moves through the criminal justice system towards incarceration.

The *Walls Turned Sideways* catalogue, like the exhibition, is divided into three thematic parts. Each part is shaped by the work of artists and supplemented by commissioned or reprinted essays written by curators, art historians, critics, or artists themselves that dive deeper into a given issue. In the first section, “Ground,” I attempt to lay the historical groundwork for a method of cross-institutional analysis that connects the prison to the museum, as well as the library, the university, the hospital, the asylum, the school, the church, and the zoo. In comparing these institutions, five shared functions, frequently glossed over and called “surveillance,” became apparent and worthy of individual attention. Each section expands on one of these functions through a set of artworks that creates a comparison between the prison and one of its sibling institutions. Capture is the means by which a body—human, animal, or a human regarded as an animal or object—is brought into an institution. Here, the zoo is offered as a point of comparison to the prison. Once inside, the body is staged to be viewed, displayed so that it may be surveilled. How bodies have been staged in museums and prisons is explored in this section. Once the body is displayed, the process of evaluating what or who has entered the system begins. The asylum and the hospital are the institutions in which this process is most dominant. Once evaluated, the body is classified and indexed. Where else but the library is classification best exemplified as an institutional function? Once inside, a body is made to labor in service to the institution through a process of value extraction. The disciplinary aspects of the school help make this point. The body of the prisoner as

<sup>27</sup> Fraser, “Museum Highlights,” 109.

<sup>28</sup> Tony Bennett, “The Exhibitionary Complex,” *New Formations*, no. 4 (Spring 1988): 85, [http://banmarchive.org.uk/collections/newformations/04\\_73.pdf](http://banmarchive.org.uk/collections/newformations/04_73.pdf).

<sup>29</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 297–98, 301.



well as their personhood are surplus to the process of extracting value from them. The church and the graveyard figure into this discussion, attending to questions of spirit and body in a prison that is ultimately a storage facility. Though Foucault points to each of these functions throughout his work, my analysis was derived equally from looking closely at the work of artists. The correspondence between the two suggests the endurance of Foucault’s theories as artists push against the same power structures that his work was instrumental in articulating, as well as the validity of artists’ work as a site of research.

While “Ground” is composed primarily of works of institutional critique directed towards the prison-industrial complex or the museum, “Figure” is concerned with questions of mass incarceration and the criminal justice system as imaged by artists working in all mediums. Because the justice system in the United States is so complex and circuitous, what I found in my search was that artists are generally only able to tackle one aspect at a time. As such, I could construct the trajectory by which someone is profiled, making them more susceptible to being arrested. Next, the same figure moves through due process, which includes the courtroom and trial, and onward to the daily reality of incarceration. Artists have also been deeply engaged in the three potential ways that one can exit the prison: a life sentence that guarantees death inside the institution, the death penalty, or reentry into society. Each artist in the exhibition and catalogue has focused on one aspect of this system in order to make a strategic intervention.

Artists have been most galvanized to intervene in this path through the criminal justice system at the stages where life is most tenuous in its confrontation with the law, specifically when arrest results in death at the hands of the police and the moment of execution in prison. Richard Kamler began addressing the death penalty in his work as early as 1979, and in 1981 began working as an artist at San Quentin State Prison. Though *Walls Turned Sideways* is not organized chronologically, one of the the earliest works considered in this catalogue is Jean-Michel Basquiat’s painting *Defacement* (1983), made in response to the police beating of Michael Stewart. Stewart’s death happened just before the implementation of a graffiti-eradication program in New York City’s subways by David Gunn, then president of the New York City Transit Authority. Gunn was an early supporter of the “broken windows” theory of policing introduced in the March 1982 issue of *The Atlantic* that would be wholeheartedly adopted by New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani in 1993.<sup>30</sup> The theory’s authors, George Kelling and James Wilson, argued that any sign of disorder was a slippery slope to greater crimes and advocated the enforcement of order at the first sign of disarray: a paint mark on a subway wall or a broken window on a car or house. Broken windows helped usher in the “tough on crime” era of the ’80s and ’90s, during which the national discourse surrounding the causes of crime changed, as did the role of the prison and the state’s responsibility to rehabilitate the incarcerated person. With a neoliberal turn, the onus of responsibility fell on individuals instead of systemic structures of poverty and deprivation that circulated a person through the criminal justice system. This book contains case studies of specific artworks, like Basquiat’s painting as considered by Chaédria LaBouvier, as a means of reconstructing the circumstances that have motivated artists to act.

<sup>30</sup> One of the article’s authors, George Keeling, was hired by the New York City Transit Authority as a consultant in 1985. James Quinn Wilson and George L. Kelling, “Broken Windows,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, March 1982, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1982/03/broken-windows/304465/>. See also Jordan T. Camp and Christina Heatherton, *Policing the Planet: Why the Policing Crisis Led to Black Lives Matter* (London: Verso, 2016).

The last section is called “Bridges,” after the quotation in Angela Davis’s autobiography from which the exhibition derives its title: “Walls turned sideways are bridges.”<sup>31</sup> Connecting a method of institutional critique to abolitionist aims, I chose this title for the way in which Davis’s metaphor figures the wall as something tippable, moveable, and malleable. “Bridges” also introduces a tertiary term, and with it an opportunity to begin thinking about how to break the binary opposition of figure and ground, mass incarceration and prison-industrial complex. The artists included in the “Bridges” section similarly seek to transgress the boundaries of the prison wall by connecting those inside to people on the outside, or audiences, including the formerly incarcerated, to resources.

Davis’s statement applies to both the museum wall and the prison wall. Whereas the latter is designed to keep prisoners in, the former has historically operated to keep some artists out, while bolstering a definition of art and a demographic of artist that are unachievable for many. In an attempt to be true to the breadth of contemporary art production and the different kinds of artists engaging in social justice conversations, “Bridges” includes works that are not easily presented in exhibition spaces outside of documentation. The projects discussed in this section mostly exist in the ephemeral mediums of performance, social practice, and pedagogically driven events, or as the work of teaching artists who collaborate with incarcerated people.

In the process of looking across the country for artists, I also looked across different realms of the art world for practitioners not often considered together. The categories of artists I found include those who participate equally in art spaces and activist forums, putting art in service to social justice causes; activists who use aesthetics and images, objects, and materials to achieve their goals in the public realm but not the art world; artists who have experiences in the criminal justice system or have been incarcerated; artists who work with incarcerated people by teaching in prisons; and artists whose primary forum is the museum and gallery, yet who offer new ways of thinking about the justice system in the United States. Artists who have tested the boundaries of the legal system come up in passing, but those whose primary forum is the art world and do not engage in social justice outside of the subject of an artwork are not included.

In the introduction to the first edition of George Jackson’s *Soledad Brother*, Jean Genet warns:

A book written in prison—in any place of confinement—is addressed chiefly to perhaps readers who are not outcasts, who have never been to jail and who will never go there. That is why in some sense such a book proceeds obliquely. . . . It is therefore prudent than any text which reaches us from this infernal place should reach us as though mutilated, pruned of its overly tumultuous adornments. It is thus behind bars, bars accepted by them alone, that its readers, if they dare, will discover the infamy of a situation which a respectable vocabulary cannot reinstate but behind the permitted words, listen for the others!<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Angela Davis, *An Autobiography* (New York: International Publishers, 1988), 347.

<sup>32</sup> Jean Genet, introduction to *Soledad Brothers*, by George Jackson (New York: Coward-McCann, 1970), 335–36.



In my attempt to make sense of what artists are doing to advance the efforts of justice across the country, I have constructed a framework that surveys those working in major urban centers as well as in remote rural areas to construct a portrait of the criminal justice system that is reflective of location-specific problems. But this book is not comprehensive or representative of all the work being done by artists, nor would I want it to be considered definitive. A reader looking for legal analysis or the perspectives of those working in the fields of criminal justice or statistics won't find them here. Throughout the course of organizing this exhibition, it has been important for me to maintain my position as a curator, and my contributions to this book are presented through that lens. I am neither an activist nor an authority on the prison-industrial complex, the criminal justice system, or mass incarceration. (What does it mean to occupy or replicate a position of "authority" in a conversation about a system in which legal, judicial, and carceral authorities are implicated in abuse?) Instead of attempting to consolidate a range of perspectives from across many disciplines—law, sociology, criminology, public policy, economics, etc.—my methods are curatorial, art historical, and museological. I deploy the work of artists as valid research, as capable of shifting perspectives on a problem in innovative ways, and as an agent in change making itself. I repurpose the museum and its galleries, turning them from sites of colonial articulations of power into spaces for testing and enacting different strategies of resistance.

*Walls Turned Sideways: Artists Confront the Justice System* is the result of learning from artists. It is an attempt to make sense of what they are doing at the intersection between art and justice and how it coincides with my own research into the link between museums and prisons. What is presented here is a primer, a sketch of a methodology, an attempt to open a door. I hope others will find it a useful place to begin to interrogate the ground upon which we stand, the first step in unraveling our individual, social, and institutional complicity as a precursor to action.

Risa Puleo  
CURATOR





Tirtza Even, *Natural Life* (video still), 2014–15







It would not be true to say that the prison was born with the new codes. The prison form antedates its systematic use in the penal system. It had already been constituted outside the legal apparatus when, throughout the social body, procedures were being elaborated for distributing individuals, fixing them in space, classifying them, extracting from them the maximum in time and forces, training their bodies, coding their continuous behaviour, maintaining them in perfect visibility, forming around them an apparatus of operation, registration and recording, constituting on them a body of knowledge that is accumulated and centralized.

—Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*

# GROUND



# CAPTURE

Technologies of capture, the means by which one enters an institution of confinement, are especially visible in the borderlands. The line that divides Aguas Prieta, in Sonora, Mexico, from Douglas, Arizona, in the United States is policed by a range of human and mechanical technologies that keep the surrounding area under a constant state of surveillance. Border patrol agents drive the paved and dirt roads on vigilant watch for Mexican migrants crossing through the desert, rather than on the designated passageway connecting the towns. Video, radar, and infrared cameras topping the eighty-foot-tall steel towers positioned along the border record what cannot be seen from the road: the image, speed, and heat of the body of a migrant who hides in the folds and furrows of the earth's surface. Ground sensors monitor foot traffic by sensing vibrations. Helicopters and drones fly across the sky—a vast, blue mirage of the water that is not found in the desert, making the crossing particularly treacherous for those on foot. The lack of water, in combination with a lack of food, extreme heat during the day and extreme cold at night, and other harsh elements in the nearly one hundred thousand square miles of desert in this region are environmental barriers that aid the many human-made obstacles. At night, the markings on the lenses of night-vision goggles divide the terrain into a trackable grid. The Cartesian grid become an apparatus of capture. In this technological minefield, the human voice remains the most powerful weapon for ensnaring Mexican migrants in the trap that the U.S. government has made of the desert.

To create the immersive sonic and sculptural installation *Coyotaje* (2017), the collaborative Postcommodity (Raven Chacon, Cristóbal Martínez, and Kade L. Twist) interviewed U.S.-American border patrol agents of Mexican or Mexican-American descent about their tactics of capture. The agents, who identify with their U.S.-American nationality, negate a shared indigenous ancestry with the migrants while also relying heavily on the cultural mythologies and the Spanish language they hold in common with those they entrap. As such, they make the perfect psychological operatives for triggering the fears of the already physically and emotionally vulnerable crossers set up to traverse a paramilitary obstacle course. One way border patrol agents weaponize shared culture is by drawing on folk myths of the chupacabra, the imaginary creature that sucks the blood of farm animals and whose eyes, like the agents themselves wearing night-vision goggles, glow green in the dark. Another way is by trapping migrants and forcing them to call out to others as decoys.

As the sculptural component of *Coyotaje*, the inflatable chupacabra emerges from the darkness of a gallery wearing night-vision goggles to confront viewers in a sickly, phosphorescent green light.<sup>1</sup> Its magnified eyes reflect the viewer's image as captured in a closed-circuit surveillance video that temporarily casts her in the role of the exposed migrant. For the migrant, the legend of the chupacabra becomes a way to rationalize the danger of the unknown border patrol agents hiding in the desert. The agent who conceptualizes himself as the chupacabra envisions himself as the predator who preys

<sup>1</sup> *Coyotaje* was commissioned and curated by Kristen Chappa for Art in General in New York City. The exhibition was on view March 25–June 3, 2017.

on and consumes the migrant. For Postcommodity, the chupacabra is an allegory that points to the entanglement of two identities—Mexican-American and Mexican immigrants, who hold each other in opposition through national difference while sharing the same cultural, ethnic, and genetic backgrounds. *Coyotaje* places viewers in a simulation of this entanglement. The ominous green light emitted from the sculptural chupacabra pierces the darkness of the room only enough for one to see their image reflected in the night-vision goggles. Usually, surveillance disrupts the reciprocity of seeing and being seen, but the methods of the border patrol agent, camouflaged as an embodiment of fear, allow them to be visible while remaining unseen. As visitors' ears strain to hear the whispered words of the accompanying soundtrack, the experience of looking and listening heightens the senses and contributes to the overall feeling of anxiety and disorientation, which is only a fragment of what may be felt in the desert.



Postcommodity  
*Coyotaje* (detail), 2017

In addition to weaponizing the folk mythologies they share with Mexican migrants, U.S.-American border patrol agents use the crossers against each other. Once caught in the tangle of sensorial and environmental snares, a migrant will be forced to aid in the capture of others hiding in the dark by calling out to them: “*Oyes vengán acá . . . andale*” (Hey! Come over here . . . hurry).<sup>2</sup> These baiting invitations, which form the soundtrack to the installation, are camouflaged by accents, turns of phrase that signal familiarity, and words

<sup>2</sup> Postcommodity, Skype conversation with the author, April 3, 2017.



of concern—*Cuidado, puedes morir aquí*—and warning—*Mira, la policía*. . . . *Andale, aquí vienen la migra*. The captured migrant is set up to operate as a decoy. Originating in the mid-16th century, the word “decoy” derives from the Old Dutch word for “cage,” an etymology that makes apparent its lineage in hunting and trapping practices.<sup>3</sup> In those contexts, the decoy is a manufactured replica or a living example of the animal being stalked. Hunters use the decoy against its kind to lure others out into an open field, where they are shot or trapped under the pretense of safety. What Postcommodity’s installation shows is how the U.S.-American side of the Mexican border has been constructed as a ground for hunting and trapping immigrants. Implicit in the technological reconfiguration of the landscape is the animalization of the migrant, underscored by the title Postcommodity chose for their work: “Coyote” is the moniker for a smuggler who moves Mexican migrants, called *pollos*, or chickens, across the border. “Coyotaje,” then, is the act of deception of the coyote duplicated by the U.S. border patrol agent.

Postcommodity’s *Coyotaje* casts into sharp relief how animalization is an underlying tactic employed by the border patrol and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Such animalization has historical roots. Arturo J. Aldama writes of signs that read “No Dogs, Mexicans, or Indians” on display in contemporary frontier-themed amusement parks in Arizona as the vestiges of settler-colonial ideology. The line that divides the United States from Mexico also divides U.S.-American settlers, figured as humans, from the former occupants of the same lands, conceptualized as invasive pests since the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo renamed Mexican territory the United States in 1848.<sup>4</sup> Aldama writes that the animalization of the Mexican migrant creates “an ellipse in denial of acts of violence.” He continues: “Members of a dominant culture can commit ‘unchecked’ atrocities without moral conscience or, even more frightening, with the ‘moral’ imperative of racial betterment, a patriotism of doing one’s share for the country. The actor/violator is momentarily transported to a space that resembles a void: a moral ellipsis that is repetitive and temporarily transcendent. This ‘negative’ space endorses the mechanical metonymy of literally pulling a trigger without any real body sensation: an act that is subconsciously and overtly patriotic.”<sup>5</sup>

Animalization becomes the rationalization for hunting, caging, and killing migrants, and also explains the fervency with which Mexican-American border patrol agents identity as U.S.-American, a sign of their humanity and status as predators, not prey. At the

<sup>3</sup> According to Merriam-Webster, the first known usage of the Old Dutch word *de kooi* (the cage) was in 1630. “Decoy,” Merriam-Webster online, accessed March 20, 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/decoy>.

<sup>4</sup> For more on the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and how it wrested Mexicans from their land, see my introduction to the exhibition catalogue *Monarchs: Brown and Native Contemporary Artists in the Path of the Butterfly* (Miami: [NAME], 2018): “The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo established the border between Texas and Mexico at the Rio Grande and ceded half of Mexican territory, including lands that would become the states of Texas, California, Arizona, Utah, and Nevada, as well as parts of Colorado, New Mexico, and Wyoming, to the United States. The treaty also promised U.S.-American citizenship to some Mexicans still living in the newly acquired territory: those of Spanish, mixed Spanish and indigenous, Asian, and African lineage. The term ‘Mexican-American’ was coined to describe these citizens as distinct from U.S.-Americans. . . . Untethered from their historical rights to the land, Mexican-Americans were reconceptualized as foreigners, and as such, they were assimilated into U.S.-American language and culture, deported from the United States, forced to work as laborers on lands they once owned, or killed.”

<sup>5</sup> Arturo J. Aldama, *Disrupting Savagism: Intersecting Chicana/o, Mexican Immigrant, and Native American Struggles for Self-Representation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 60–61.

height of World War II, the U.S. government likened Japanese soldiers to monkeys and a variety of pests, including rats, cockroaches, and lice; these comparisons that were not extended to the German or Italian soldiers with which the Japanese were allied. Simon Harrison investigates the practices of U.S.-American soldiers in World War II who collected the skulls, teeth, and other body parts of dead Japanese soldiers or specifically killed for such trophies, keeping them as personal mementos or gifts for loved ones back home. Harrison notes that such trophies were not taken from Italian or German bodies, arguing that “the special fetishizing of Japanese remains as desirable acquisitions was permitted or encouraged by the way in which the different enemy peoples were classified racially by degrees of humanness.” As Harrison writes, “Even the setting of the fighting—remote islands and jungles in New Guinea and elsewhere, evocative of headhunting and cannibalism in the public imagination—may have tended to reinforce this image of a war being waged at the frontier between culture and nature, civilization and the wild.”<sup>6</sup>

In his letter “I Become a Nisei,” reprinted in this section, artist and architect Isamu Noguchi poignantly presents his take on hyphenated identity, isolated as he was in unbelonging during this time of the animalization of Japanese people. The letter was written for but never published in *Reader’s Digest* to explain his decision to voluntarily enter an internment camp for Japanese Americans in Arizona. Noguchi went into the Poston War Relocation Center in May 1942, six months after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. In his letter, he describes the conditions of hybridity, of feeling American and yet being rejected as such. That was his experience as a Nisei, a first-generation American born to immigrant parents from Japan: “a generation of transition accepted neither by the Japanese nor by America. A middle people with no middle ground.”

The artist Carl Pope sees the trophy hunting of animals as a practice that U.S.-American police officers extend to humans. Following the death of Leonard R. Barnett, an unarmed suspect in a robbery who was shot by police officer Scott L. Haslar in July 1990, Pope created a trophy or plaque for each of the thirty Indianapolis cops involved in the extrajudicial killing of a black man between 1980 and 1991. Though Barnett had broken his leg when he crashed his car after being chased, Haslar claimed he had attempted to flee by foot—the reason Haslar gave for shooting him dead at the scene. The police department awarded Haslar a medal of valor for his handling of the incident and later promoted him to sergeant. Barnett’s death was one in a wave of extrajudicial police shootings of black men by white officers in Indianapolis between 1987 and 1992, as reported by Human Rights Watch.<sup>7</sup> Edmund Powell’s killer, officer Wayne Sharp, continued with the police force even after Powell’s family won a lawsuit for wrongful death and Sharp was alleged to have affiliations with the National Socialist White People’s Party.

Pope’s work, *From the Trophy Collection of The Indianapolis Police Department and The Office of the Marion County Sheriff’s Department* (1992), features awards for the cops like Haslar and Sharp who were allowed to keep their jobs and often received

<sup>6</sup> Simon Harrison, “Skull Trophies of the Pacific War: Transgressive Objects of Remembrance,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 12, no. 4 (December 2006): 821, 826, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2006.00365.x>.

<sup>7</sup> “Indianapolis: Incidents,” *Shielded from Justice: Police Brutality and Accountability in the United States*, Human Rights Watch, June 1998, <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports98/police/uspo66.htm>.





accolades and promotions after being involved in extrajudicial killings, instead of being fired or indicted for murder. In its original installation, the thirty trophies and plaques were assembled in a case below the the taxidermied heads of a buffalo, moose, and deer, all animals indigenous to the Americas. Though the animals do not reappear in later iterations of the work, their significance in the first version should not be underestimated. Bison were systematically hunted to the point of near extinction by white settlers and cavalymen in the early days of the U.S. occupation, and in Pope's work they represent both themselves and the Native Americans whose lives depended on them. The connection between Native Americans and the buffalo was actively exploited in the 19th century by those such as Philip Sheridan, General-in-Chief of the U.S. Army from 1883 to 1888. Through the juxtaposition of hunting trophies with symbols of police encounters that suggest war trophies, Pope effectively links the dispossession of Native land and the near extermination of Native people with the systematic killing of black men by the police in the name of "civilization": Both become causes for settler-American award and celebration.



Carl Pope, *From the Trophy Collection of The Indianapolis Police Department and The Office of the Marion County Sheriff's Department*, 1992



Jordan Weber, *kNOw Space (prototype)*, 4/8/2018

As the fulcrum around which the politics of capture turn, the issue of animality prompts a comparison of the prison, including immigrant detention centers along the border, to the zoo. Foucault suggested that Jeremy Bentham's 1791 designs for a panopticon penitentiary that would never be built were based on Louis Le Vau's 1664 menagerie for Louis XIV's collection of animals at Versailles, the king's hunting palace outside of Paris. In this royal precursor to the modern zoo, seven cages were positioned on seven





sides of an octagonal room; a door occupied the eighth side.<sup>8</sup> This schema allowed the king to sit in the center of the room, where he could see his collection of animals from around the world while remaining hidden. Comparing Le Vau's design to one of Jordan Weber's *kNOw Spaces* (2018) makes apparent how the one-way viewing of the menagerie was similar to the conditions of a hunter in a blind. Weber's *kNOw Spaces* are hunting blinds refashioned for urban environments. Covered with one-way mirrors of the kind used in police interrogation rooms, the exterior of the *kNOw Space* reflects the surrounding environment to camouflage its presence. A critique of police predation of black and brown bodies, Weber's structure is outfitted on the inside as a space for reflection and meditation.

Under later French kings, the living collection of the menagerie would supplement the naturalist's studies of the stuffed and pickled specimens in the cabinet of curiosity. Under democratic rule, the royal *Wunderkammer* and menagerie would inform the organization of the state institutions of the natural history museum and the zoo in Paris. Louis XVI's collection of animals and plants from the royal garden formed the foundation of the Jardins des Plantes, the French national botanical garden, which opened in 1791 at the end of the first French Revolution. The animals that died in captivity were stuffed and displayed at the neighboring Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, which opened in 1793. In Foucault's interpretation, Bentham's "Panopticon is a royal menagerie; the animal is replaced by man, individual distribution by specific grouping and the king by the machinery of a furtive power."<sup>9</sup> Though few actual prisons were built following his design, the ideology of surveillance in what Bentham called the "inspection-house" would go on to influence modern prison architecture.<sup>10</sup> Grégoire Chamayou expands upon Foucault's comparison: "By setting up animal hunting as the model of legitimacy for its violence, state racism (contrary to a whole side of the modern philosophical tradition) reduces political law to a zoological definition of natural law—in which law has no limits other than those of power, and of a power biologically defined. The model of zoological predation thus makes it possible to naturalize the right to kill, to make of it a state prerogative based on racial superiority."<sup>11</sup>

In the essay "Blackness, Animality and the Unsovereign," included in this section, Che Gossett argues that animality underlies hegemonic perceptions of black bodies in the United States as a carryover not only from slavery but also colonial hunting practices in Africa. Unpacking the carceral logic of the zoo and placing it side by side with the prison, Gossett makes a compelling case for thinking about the mass caging and killing of black people—who are conceptualized discursively as bestial and animal-like—in tandem with the mass caging and killing of animals. Combing through the writings of black radical thinkers, from Frederick Douglass's commiseration with oxen to Achille Mbembe's necropolitics, and placing them alongside texts by theorists of critical animal studies like Gilles Deleuze and Giorgio Agamben, Gossett argues that any abolitionist project must think about animal liberation, black liberation, and criminal liberation as entangled endeavors.

<sup>8</sup> Between 1812–21, Millbank Prison was built on the site that Bentham had originally purchased for his panopticon. Whereas Bentham's was a circular structure, Millbank was hexagonal, with six sides surrounding a central chapel, and thus in the lineage of Le Vau's menagerie.

<sup>9</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 203.

<sup>10</sup> Philip Steadman, "The Contradictions of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon Penitentiary," *Journal of Bentham Studies* 9 (2007): 2, <http://doi.org/10.14324/111.2045-757X.030>.

<sup>11</sup> Grégoire Chamayou, *Manhunts: A Philosophical History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 132–33.

Artists Rodrigo Valenzuela, Regina José Galindo, and Jenny Polak consider the conditions of confinement that migrants experience in detention centers when they are captured at the border. Valenzuela's video *Diamond Box* (2013) evidences how the migrant is already ensnared in an economic system that makes navigating the various traps along the border their only option for survival. To create the video, Valenzuela paid undocumented immigrant laborers their daily rate to speak about their experiences of crossing the border. The "diamond box" of the title refers to boxes made for storing tools in the backs of pickup trucks; they are also used as containers for smuggling people across the border, triangulating labor with immigration and confinement. Filmed in a windowless room that approximates the detention centers where migrants are held indefinitely, each speaker recounts traveling with a *coyote*, the dangers they encountered en route, and the treatment they endured when captured by ICE agents, including the withholding of food and water. Their stories depict the process of crossing the border as passing from one container to another, from the safe houses where eighty to one hundred people wait for guides in a small room to trucks that move people across country lines to the detention center itself.



Rodrigo Valenzuela, *Diamond Box* (video still), 2013

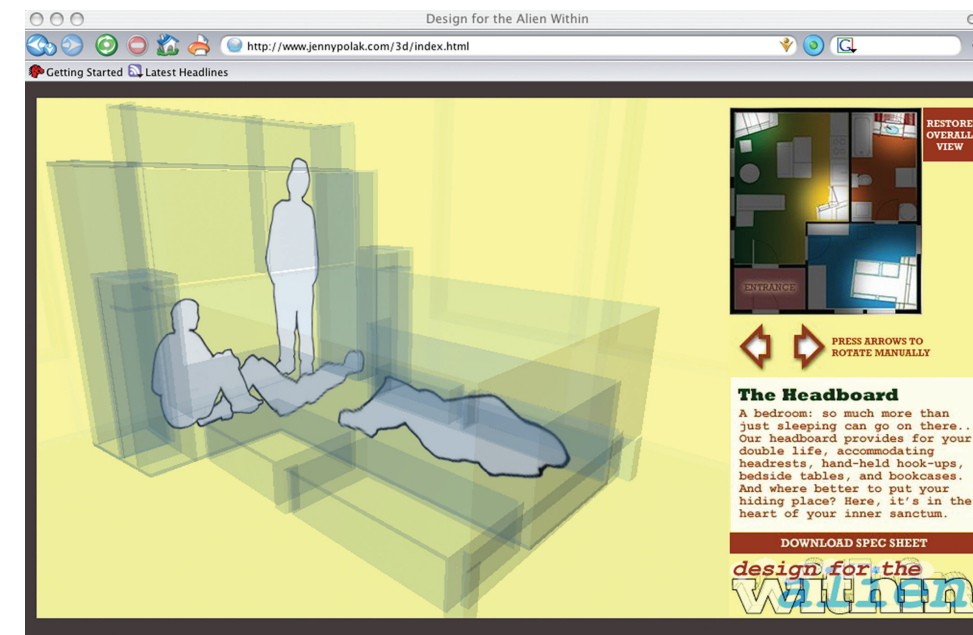
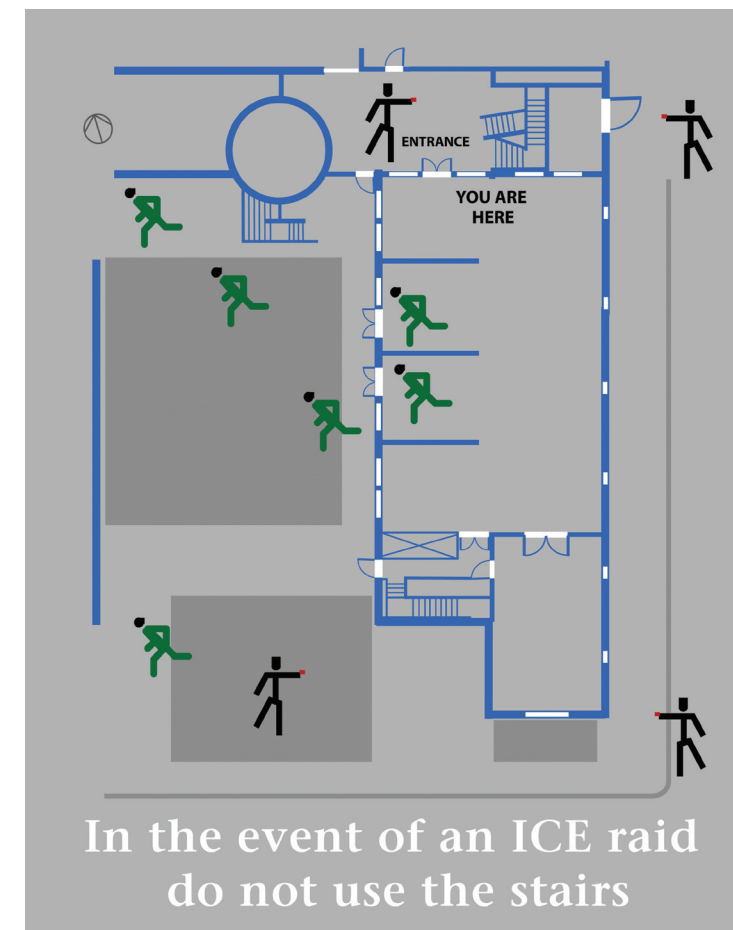
For her performance and installation *America's Family Prison* (2008), Regina José Galindo rented a single-family detention cell from the Sweeper Metal Fabricators Corp., a manufacturer and supplier of prison and detention equipment. At the time, a two-month rental cost \$8,000. The unit was of the kind used at T. Don Hutto Family Residential Facility, a for-profit private detention center that held immigrant families, including pregnant women, mothers, and children, indefinitely as they waited for their cases to be heard. Galindo lived in the rented cell with her husband and then two-year-old daughter for a 36-hour durational performance that took place during the opening reception of the artist's exhibition at Artpace in San Antonio.<sup>12</sup> The audience, including myself, was

<sup>12</sup> The result of a three-month residency at Artpace, *America's Family Prison* was curated by Franklin Sirmans. The exhibition was on view March 13–May 11, 2008.

Regina José Galindo, *America's Family Prison* (detail), 2008

forced to grapple with the liberty and leisure of our unfettered visual access to the artist, with husband and child, in confinement, while also being reminded that the exhibition space was only a two-hour drive away from T. Don Hutto, located outside of Austin. A corresponding video documents the artist and her family attempting to occupy their time in the tight quarters; a playpen shoved in the narrow space between the door and bunk beds would make exiting the room impossible if the door weren't already locked. Named for one of three founders of the Corrections Corporations of America, T. Don Hutto was retooled as a detention center for women only, rather than families, the year after Galindo's performance, because of allegations of the systemic abuse of detainees. Investigations into accusations of sexual assault by the guards continue today.

Jenny Polak comes to social and material art practices with a background in architecture and immigrant rights activism. Created in collaboration with Lauren Gill and detained immigrants across the country, her project *HardPlace* (2002) recreates the schema of detention centers, which are often relegated to areas far from public view, in the virtual space of the internet, based on detainees' memories and drawings. Polak also transforms private and public spaces into hiding places for migrants. *Design for the Alien Within* (2006) is a fictional company represented by a web-based catalogue advertising a range of household furniture that has been modified to hide people. Niches are built behind bookshelves, under staircases, and behind bed frames. Polak reconceptualizes the host-parasite relationship that figures the immigrant as an invading pest by couching her modified furniture within the framework of hospitality. With *ICE Escape Signs* (2006–present), Polak transfers this idea to the space of the museum. Like the institutional signage near fire alarms that indicates the quickest way out a building during an emergency, Polak's escape signs instead aid the reader in the event of an ICE invasion, showing the fastest way out of a building without going through the front door.

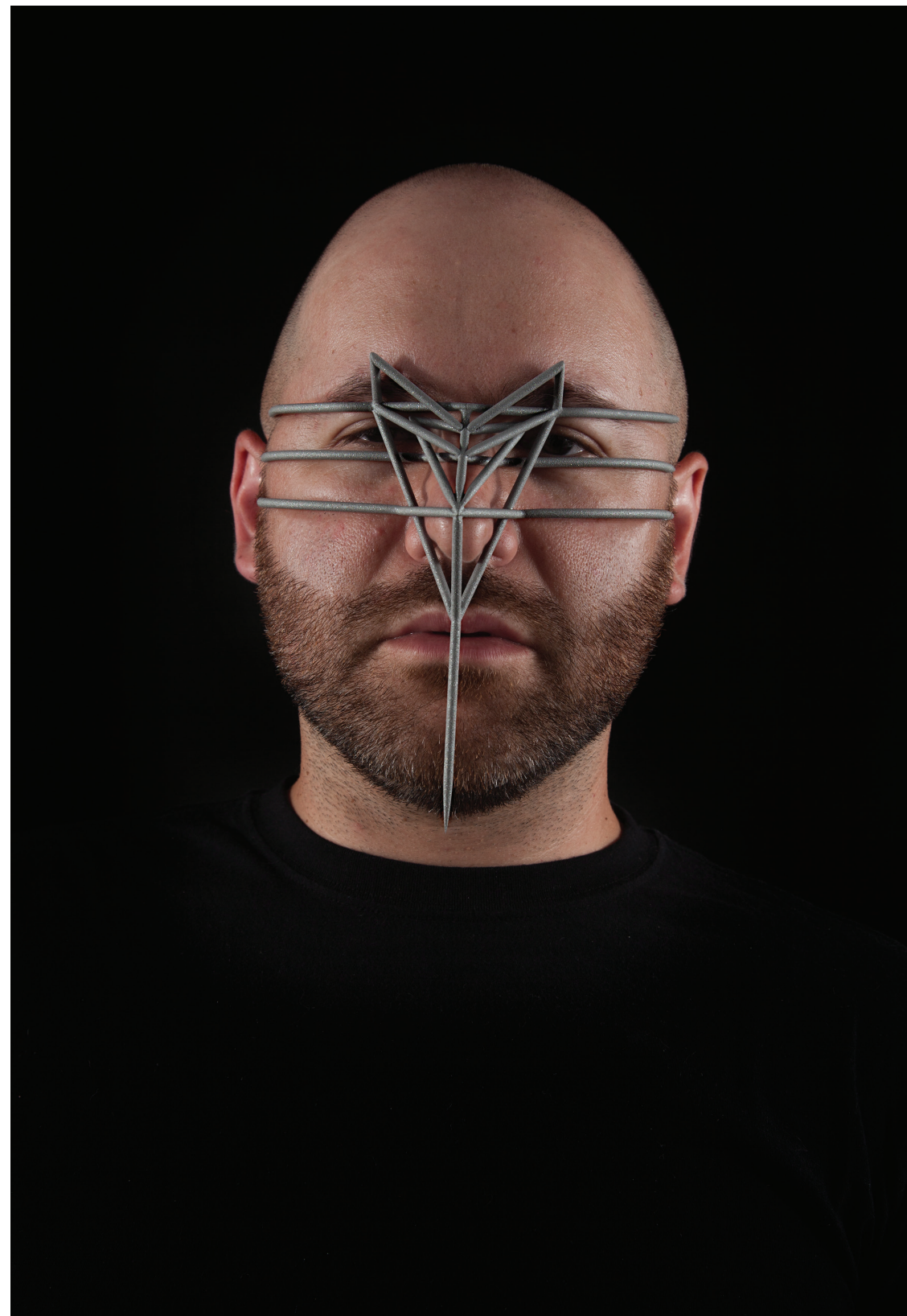
Jenny Polak, *Design for the Alien Within: The Headboard Unit*, 2006–presentJenny Polak, *ICE Escape Sign*: NJ Institute of Technology, 2008





Zach Blas, Installation view of *Face Cage #3* and *Face Cage #2* in *transmediale* at Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, 2015

Zach Blas investigates the overlap between physical spaces of confinement and virtual technologies of capture. To construct *Face Cages* (2013–16), Blas and three artists with whom he frequently collaborates—micha cárdenas, Elle Mehrmand, and Paul Mpagi Sepuya—underwent biometric facial recognition scans. The results flattened the topographies of the artists' faces into two-dimensional maps. Blas rematerialized these scans as wearable, sculptural objects; the networks of intersecting, drawn lines are replaced by thin tubes of metal. Each scan and corresponding object emphasizes the features unique to each person, while abstracting their face into a diagram. Blas's, for instance, is centralized on his eyes and nose, with three lines extending ear to ear like glasses and a single metal point going towards his chin. Sepuya's, conversely, encases the entirety of his face in a rectangular framing device. The four artists wore their masks for endurance performances captured on video. Over time, each face slackens from carrying the weight of the metal mask. Blas's *Face Cages* bear striking resemblances to the head cages from 16th-century Europe that were adopted across the Americas through the 18th century. The scold's bridle, for instance, was a device used mostly to punish women through humiliation and pain while still allowing them to work. In her essay for this section, Shoshana Magnet, author of the book *When Biometrics Fail: Gender, Race, and the Technology of Identity*, connects Blas's *Face Cages* to the development of biometrics within the prison system. As Magnet relates, biometrics fail most often when attempting to record the bodies of the people who are most frequently targeted. Through the example of how biometrics have attempted to read gender, Magnet shows how the flattening of bodies into code leaves no space for personhood. The mask, a means of camouflaging one's identity in another context, in this case fixes and traps a person in an imposed category.



Zach Blas, *Face Cage #1* (video still), 2015

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