

ADA EXHIBITION TEXTS

Undoing Time: Art and Histories of Incarceration

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Introduction

Undoing Time: Art and Histories of Incarceration is grounded in research that examines how art and images depicting sin, punishment, justice, and more affect the way we think of mass incarceration today. The exhibition's curators analyzed more than one thousand historical works of art—including the Code of Hammurabi, Greek sculptures of a blind Lady Justice, Renaissance paintings of Adam and Eve's original sin, European Enlightenment prints of prison architecture, and twentieth-century photography of US chain gangs and internment camps—reflecting on questions of art's role in the history of incarceration. What forces shaped the beliefs that mass incarceration makes communities safer, that jails deter crime, and that our penal systems are fair and just? Why do the images focus on

bodies in chains or the architecture of confinement rather than the families and communities impacted by the carceral system? How does art play a part in propaganda and stereotypes? How might contemporary artists critique or offer new images to our visual consciousness?

In the United States, roughly 2.2 million people are incarcerated in state and federal prisons and local jails—239,000 people in California alone. BAMPFA recognizes a long history in California—and the Bay Area specifically—of incarceration, detention, and resulting trauma. These histories include Indigenous imprisonment and genocide, first by Europeans and later by Mexico and the United States; the exploitation of Chinese Americans in the late 1800s and early 1900s as contract laborers

for the Transcontinental Railroad, many of whom were first detained for months or years at the immigration station on Angel Island; the Japanese Americans who were interned at Manzanar and Tule Lake; Alcatraz Island's sensationalized role in America's prison system; and the continued operation of the San Quentin State Prison, California's oldest prison, just across the bay.

Undoing Time includes twelve newly commissioned artworks by Carolina Aranibar-Fernández, Juan Brenner, Raven Chacon, Sandra de la Loza, Cannupa Hanska Luger, Ashley Hunt, Michael Rohd, Paul Rucker, Xaviera Simmons, Stephanie Syjuco, Vincent Valdez, and Mario Ybarra Jr. The artists were invited to disrupt the history of images of incarceration and offer alternative stories

that have not yet been depicted. Their research-based, multidisciplinary works create a broader systemic view of mass incarceration, while also allowing us to imagine new possibilities for the future.

Undoing Time: Art and Histories of Incarceration is generously supported by the Art for Justice Fund, a sponsored project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors. Organized by the Arizona State University Art Museum, Tempe, Arizona, it is cocurated by Director Miki Garcia, Curator Emeritus Heather Sealy Lineberry, LACMA-ASU Curatorial Fellow Matthew Villar Miranda, and Senior Curator Julio César Morales, in conversation with artists, scholars, students, activists, community organizers, and educators.

The Berkeley presentation is organized

by BAMPFA staff and coordinated by
Christina Yang, chief curator, with Claire
Frost, curatorial assistant.

Artist Works

Cloudroom

Carolina Aranibar-Fernández

Cannupa Hanska Luger

Stephanie Syjuco

Juan Brenner

Michael Rohd

Paul Rucker

Mario Ybarra Jr.

Ashley Hunt

Sandra de la Loza

Vincent Valdez

Xaviera Simmons

Raven Chacon

Cloudroom

The Cloudroom offers a history of art that depicts imprisonment beyond a single, narrow perspective. Rotating and ticking in and out of sync, mirroring the mechanics and failures of keeping time, the slide carousels in the space contain more than five hundred images sourced from the digital archives of twenty-one major international museums. These images were tagged by the museums with words typically associated with incarceration: *prisoner, jail, punishment, trial, captive, inmate, crime, and sin*. In order to understand how these works reflect our presumptions of justice, the exhibition's curators categorized them into twelve prominent themes, including architecture (18.6%); nation-state, law, and social

contract (14.6%); and religion, faith, myth, and allegory (11.2%). These three themes form the basis of the social construct of incarceration reinforced by art history.

The Cloudroom proposes a more expansive orientation from which to consider incarceration. These images form part of the past, but they do not have to occupy the single narrative of incarceration in our shared present. Each of the twelve artists' installations for *Undoing Time* uses these incomplete and unfinished histories to understand who the carceral system serves and to envision a freer future.

Carolina Aranibar-Fernández

Bolivia, born 1990;
lives in Phoenix, Arizona

Multi-ples Capas (Multiple Layers)

2021

Mixed-media sculpture, sound, and installation, including adobe, gold, light, and organic materials

Carolina Aranibar-Fernández's works focus on pre- and postcolonial histories in the Americas. Her installations, objects, and performances are informed by her research into the histories of resource extraction and the oppressive labor systems that have fueled the ideologies of colonization and capitalism, from slavery to

mass incarceration.

Multi-ples Capas invites audiences to walk on adobe bricks that will slowly crumble into powder, mimicking the cycle of the construction and deconstruction of built systems throughout history and the successive imprints of human activity on the land. Scratched into the handmade tiles are the names of corporations that rely on carceral and other forms of oppressive labor. Gold leaf patterns reference systems of value and monetary exchange that drive their corporate activity. Hanging glass planters with visible layers of soil grow aromatic plants and herbs, including mint, rosemary, sage, fenugreek, coneflower, tobacco, and succulents—all known for their healing properties. The artist used these botanicals to highlight the physical and emotional illnesses caused by

centuries of displacement, abusive manual labor, and incarceration.

Cannupa Hanska Luger

Standing Rock Reservation,
North Dakota, born 1979;
lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico

The ruin of Dominion (And other Gods we never named)

2021

Ceramic and fiber

Cannupa Hanska Luger strives to “reclaim and reframe a more accurate version of 21st-century Indigenous culture and its powerful global relevance.” In researching the history of incarceration for this project, he was struck by the oldest notions of captivity. Much lurid attention is given to ancient practices of sacrifice and bloodletting in Indigenous American and

Central American cultures, but there is much less recognition of the violent postcolonial systems of captivity and slavery that have led to the current mass incarceration.

In order to confront the centuries-old urge to cage and control bodies, Luger chose to name this urge and give it a deity that could then be toppled. The monumental male bust at the center of the artist's installation references Greek and Roman heroic sculptures and is reminiscent of early twentieth-century European monuments, while the body drawn on the wall recalls drawings of horizon lines, as if the land has pulled down the false god. The installation alludes to sculptures toppled in response to fallen governments or more recent community actions in the United States to remove public statues

celebrating systemic racism and inequality.

Stephanie Syjuco

Manila, Philippines, born 1974;
lives in Oakland, California

Shutter/Release

2021

27 dye sublimation prints on aluminum

Stephanie Syjuco's practice questions the disciplinary and historic specificities of photographic image making. In *Shutter/Release*, Syjuco borrowed from archives of anthropological photographs depicting Indigenous people in the Philippines as racially inferior. She worked with material from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including photographs from Bilibid Prison in Manila, a prison established by the Spanish

colonial government in the late nineteenth century that still imprisons more than 25,000 people. Syjuco used the “healing brush” in Photoshop, a tool intended for retouching blemishes, to symbolically remove or liberate the pictured bodies from their carceral and colonial environments. The artist placed the healed image on aluminum, producing traces of silhouettes and uninhabited landscapes that challenge perceived ideas of history. Syjuco explained, “My own body, sitting in the archives, becomes both a temporary shield and a marker of defiance, while at the same time acknowledging that the images still remain.”

Juan Brenner

Guatemala, born 1977;
lives in Guatemala City, Guatemala

B'oko': City of walls

2021

Photography, video, animation, and sound

Juan Brenner's methodical, research-based artworks explore the persistent, residual impacts of colonialism in Guatemala, addressing such topics as urban violence, femicide, corruption, and migration. The artist also draws direct linkages to the history of US intervention policies and the impact of the American prison industrial complex on Central American countries today.

For this project, Brenner conducted research in the municipality of Chimaltenango in the Guatemalan highlands. Considered the most beautiful and fertile area in the country, this was also a sacred site for the ancient Maya. However, it has been a disputed territory for centuries—with a history of Indigenous incarceration, exploitation, violence, and slavery—and was radically transformed by a prison called the Chimaltenango Preventive Detention Center in the early 2000s.

Using light-jet prints, video projection, data tracking, animation, and audio interviews, Brenner collaborated with and photographed Chimaltenango townspeople—describing them as “the innocent that get caught in the middle of the war, some have to work for the

system or are just too poor to be able to do anything else”—to portray a complex portrait of the region.

1

Twenty-four-year-old Kush is one of the most sought-after marijuana distributors in the area. His relationship with the world of crime began at the young age of sixteen, when a close relative introduced him to marijuana cultivation. One thing led to another, and after his mentor's incarceration, Kush was forced to take over the business.

In a journey of over four hours by car, Kush and the artist navigated through the community and its surroundings, to the places where Kush constantly makes deliveries. In this period of time, Brenner learned firsthand about the operation of the drug business, extortion, corruption of authorities, and power games between gangs in the area, all run from the same

epicenter of power: the Chimaltenango
Preventive Detention Center.

2

Fleeing physical abuse in her first marriage, Chiqui sought refuge in the Chimaltenango community in the late 1990s. She almost immediately identified the opportunity to start a food and snack business in front of the detention center.

From very early on, Chiqui made her home on the vacant lots in front of the detention center. Over the years, her close family also moved to the area in search of a better future and the job opportunities the prison generated. This was the genesis of a community that today houses more than fifty families. Josie, the eldest of her daughters (pictured here), is from the first generation to be born and raised in this new community.

Ten years after this incredible story of

perseverance began, Chiqui was wrongly accused of various crimes, and in a twist of fate, she was imprisoned for a year in the same detention center that for so many years was her source of income and growth.

3

Maria and Carmen were the owners of a regional food restaurant on the outskirts of Chimaltenango, and until just over a year ago, this business was a prosperous venture with a bright future. Then a frequent and trusted customer asked the business owners to watch over his phone, which he dropped off at the restaurant and promised to pick up the next day.

The phone was actually a trap commonly used by criminals in the prison, who use their gangs on the outside to execute their wishes. These gangs place a phone in the possession of their target and then use it to threaten them. For Maria and Carmen, this meant that the following months turned into a nightmare of extortion and relentless pressure to get the large sum of money

demanded by these criminals in exchange for not harming their families. Carmen and Maria had no other choice but to pay for their safety and close the business that for many years was the main source of income for their families and employees. These images were taken in the last phase of the demolition of their restaurant.

4

Odilia is a Xamán dedicated to the cult of Santa Muerte. She operates from San Andrés Itzapa, a municipality of Chimaltenango, where esoteric practices and pre-Columbian cults are mixed with the Catholic religion in a fascinating way. Maximón (San Simón) is the patron saint of this community and the only Mayan descendant deity that made the transition to be accepted by the Spanish crown in colonial times.

Most of Odilia's clients are detained at the Chimaltenango Preventive Detention Center. Odilia generates the vast majority of her income by doing "jobs" that pursue liberation, protection, and abundance for these individuals.

5

While executing his *Tonatiuh** project, the artist made a series of road trips through the Guatemalan highlands in search of scenes and characters that could connect him with the reality that is the outcome of five hundred years of history after the conquest of his ancestral territory by the Spanish crown.

When Brenner met Erick, he was trying to make a living fixing potholes on the streets of Chimaltenango in exchange for voluntary donations.

This image was taken just twenty-four hours after his release from the Chimaltenango Preventive Detention Center, after serving

two years for the crime of armed robbery.

In a brief and informal conversation, Erick exposed his concern for his complex future, tattooed and with a criminal record. A coherent idea of his social reintegration was almost impossible.

**Tonatiuh was the artist's first major project about the Guatemalan highlands.*

6

This image is part of the *Tonatiuh** series, a project that focuses on analyzing the repercussions of the conquest of the territory now known as Guatemala more than five hundred years ago. Fito (a false name used to protect the identity of the subject) is a very important figure in this project. He revealed to the artist how many motorcycle taxi (tuk tuk) drivers in Chimaltenango are blackmailed by gangs operating from inside the jail to move drugs in exchange for respecting the drivers' and their families' lives.

After Fito's and the artist's first meeting, Fito's life continued to be closely related to the Chimaltenango Preventive Detention Center. In May 2021, his son was murdered inside the institution while serving a five-

year sentence for drug trafficking.

**Tonatiuh was the artist's first major project about the Guatemalan highlands.*

7

Marvin is a lawyer dedicated full-time to the defense of inmates held in the Chimaltenango Preventive Detention Center.

For almost a decade, he has experienced firsthand the complex operational dynamics of the institution. Marvin cited “a flagrant and unpunished corruption that reigns in the institution” as the main reason for the ruin of the prison.

Originally from Chimaltenango, Marvin witnessed the abrupt change of the adjacent area; he remembers its past as a “paradise.” The nearly three-kilometer journey between the Inter-American Highway and the detention center (where many of the images in this project were shot) has transformed into a dangerous

ecosystem that has degenerated as a result of demographic changes; relatives, associates, and partners of the inmates are rapidly populating the detention center's surroundings. The rural nature of the area has thus morphed violently as many of the residents abandoned their homes, trying to avoid extortion and looking for a safer place to live.

8

Carlos makes a living selling ice cream in the area of Parramos and San Andrés Itzapa, municipalities of Chimaltenango. His daily route is roughly thirty kilometers. Armed with a cooler and his bicycle, Carlos constantly struggles to reach his minimum sale goal. Carlos and his family subsist on approximately 12 USD a day.

Carlos's sales map revolves around the days he visits the Chimaltenango Preventive Detention Center because he can triple his daily sales there due to the consumption of his products by the inmates' visitors.

Carlos's case is an example of how the informal dynamics of the prison are sometimes the only economic solutions for residents of the area. Poverty is the

sociopolitical reality of the Guatemalan highlands, with almost 60 percent of the population living below the poverty line.

9

Angel is the main pastor at Iglesia de Jesucristo, the primary evangelical church in the Chimaltenango area, which has more than two thousand active members.

His role as *capellán* (chaplain), a member of the clergy attached to the armed forces, gives him access to the internal workings of the prison, both its successes and its failures.

Angel describes the inmates' and the authorities' lack of interest in civic education, social reintegration, and the spiritual formation programs that his institution offers as "very frustrating":

"We feel that the authorities do not want our help and that they are more interested in participating in the 'inside business'

than being part of the good things we want to implement.”

10

For more than ten years, German worked in the health ward at the Chimaltenango Preventive Detention Center.

His position as a nurse exposed him to countless situations that completely changed his understanding of the prison system in Guatemala.

German experienced the lack of care and services that the prisoners of the institution confronted. He pointed out that it is “almost impossible to do a good job” due to corruption and lack of attention on the part of the management of the prison.

Additionally, German witnessed many sad stories of crime, hatred, murder, rape, corruption, racism, injustice, and abandonment inside the detention center.

Michael Rohd

Baltimore, Maryland, born 1967;
lives in Phoenix, Arizona

Re(Script)

2021

Site-specific dramaturgy/participation:
vinyl, projected text

Michael Rohd's dramaturgical practice consistently pushes the limits of what theater can be with new forms of engagement and spectatorship rooted in cocreation and community well-being. The cofounder of Sojourn Theatre, a twenty-one-year-old ensemble company, and Center for Performance and Civic Practice, Rohd creates productions that include active audience participation

and field research, encouraging civic dialogue among the audience and actors. He believes in “a responsibility to make work, projects and practices that put me responsibly and curiously in relation to the larger world. What’s really powerful is the notion of people coming together . . . to be in dialogue with each other.”

Drawing on Rohd’s background in theater, *Re(Script)*, his first solo project for an art museum, consists of a series of text-based interventions throughout the museum that he refers to as a score. The score invites the audience to contemplate ethical questions: When were you first punished? Who taught you forgiveness? Can you imagine a justice you have not seen? Another interactive display encourages visitors to project ready-made yes/no questions that address the issues with

which *Undoing Time* grapples. Rohd's work is a poetic bridge between art and shared public experience.

Paul Rucker

Anderson, South Carolina, born 1978;
lives in Richmond, Virginia

The Joy of Land Development

2021

Two-channel video with sound composition,
artifacts; 7:00 min

For over two decades, Paul Rucker—a multimedia visual artist, composer, and musician—has illuminated the legacy of enslavement and its relationship to the US prison industrial complex. His video *Proliferation* (2009), inspired by maps created by the Prison Policy Initiative showing the growth of the US prison system over time, explores the evolution of prisons in the United States through an

animated series of colored dots indicating the location and number of prisons from 1778 to 2008. Rucker stated: “The incarcerated are a relatively invisible aspect of American society. The United States is 5% of the world population, but we have 25% of the world’s prison population.”

Central to Rucker’s new work is the narrative of Geronimo (1829–1909), an Apache leader who fought against the Mexican and American armies over the Indigenous land now known as Arizona. Although his 1886 capture was theatrically staged in a series of photographs by C. S. Fly that depict him as the last Native American leader to surrender to the United States, Geronimo was actually a prisoner of war, incarcerated for the last twenty years of his life. This work reenvisions the

history of a cultural icon through the lens of incarceration and exploitation.

Mario Ybarra Jr.

Los Angeles, California, born 1973;
lives in Wilmington, California

Personal, Small, Medium, Large, Family

2021

Custom stage facade with monitors with sound, photographic wallpaper, framed photographs, five aluminum pizza pans of various sizes, three hand-painted canvases, and wood

Mario Ybarra Jr. creates sculptures, installations, photographs, and activist interventions to examine his Mexican American identity. His studio is in his hometown, the predominantly working-class, Mexican American neighborhood of

Wilmington, near the port of Los Angeles. As he works, he is surrounded by memories of growing up in the old “hood”—a consistent source of inspiration and human stories.

Personal, Small, Medium, Large, Family is part of a trilogy of projects exploring the Red West Pizzeria as a community gathering place in Wilmington. Conscious of how people engage with space, Ybarra tapped into all of the senses to explore how communities are impacted by incarceration. His re-creation of the restaurant’s kitschy decor reflects the history of the neighborhood. Photographs of Little League teams hang on the walls, including one of the artist’s childhood best friend, Richard, who was recently released after thirty-two years behind bars. Ybarra captured Richard’s personal story: how he

kept his identity by refusing prison tattoos, maintaining a positive attitude, and using education to occupy his time. The video shows Richard as he reenters society, enjoying the small freedoms so often taken for granted. An original soundtrack was composed for the video based on Richard's experience.

Ashley Hunt

Los Angeles, California, born 1970;
lives in Los Angeles

Double Time

2021

Two-channel video and photographs

Ashley Hunt has collaborated with activist and community organizations over the last twenty years to produce work centered around the US prison industrial complex and mass incarceration. Rather than seeing art and activism as two exclusive spheres of practice, he approaches them as mutual and complimentary, drawing on the ideas and aesthetics of social movements, cultural theory, and art.

Double Time expands Hunt's nine-year project, *Degrees of Visibility*, a body of landscape photographs taken throughout the United States that documents spaces in which prisons sit. The series explores how the American prison system conceals prisons, as well as the human beings they hold, with the geography of their surroundings.

Hunt's installation includes photographs and video of the Florence Correctional Complex in Arizona, which is scheduled to close in the next few years. Hunt approached the complex as a living ruin, revealing layers of history that led to the prison economy's collapse. He explained, "I've been thinking about the layering of the ruins, seeing the Southwest as a kind of palimpsest of multiple ruins of different regimes—settler colonial, missionary,

military industrialist, racial capitalist—on top of one another.” The local flora acts as a witnesses and indicates growth, life, and possibility.

Sandra de la Loza

Los Angeles, California, born 1968;
lives in Los Angeles

Unsettling the Settled: Archival Glimpses of Abolitionist Futures

2021–ongoing

Two-channel video, archival materials, and
hand-cut and digital transparencies on light
boxes

With archival contributions from Billy Branch,
Jorge N. Leal, Ellias Serna, and Juan
Figueroa

Sandra de la Loza utilizes archival
materials and mixed media to produce
artworks that examine the power dynamics
of “history” and collective memory.
Referring to herself as a performative

archivist, she gathers, slices, blows up, and remixes historical records in an effort to critique how dominant narratives are formed and perpetuated.

Unsettling the Settled is the first work in a series that explores three decommissioned carceral institutions in Los Angeles. For this installation, De La Loza focused on the former Lincoln Heights Jail, which was reclaimed by a group of local artists and activists who formed the Aztlan Cultural Arts Foundation from 1992 to 2000. A collaged wall and series of light boxes feature flyers for fundraising benefits, historical photographs, and video footage of music performances that reflect a burgeoning Los Angeles youth culture. A two-channel video of the jail in its current state is interwoven with interviews describing the histories of youth

subcultures in California and the earliest instances of policing and criminalizing Black and brown youth. Together, the works reflect a community rising up against anti-immigrant sentiments and police brutality through grassroots liberation struggles in solidarity with Indigenous North and Central American social justice movements.

Vincent Valdez

San Antonio, Texas, born 1977;
lives in Houston, Texas,
and Los Angeles, California

The Rope (After Marsden Hartley)

2018

OTHOUSANDANDSEVENTEEN

2017

“Nothin’ to see here, keep on movin!”

2008

Oil pastels on paper

Vincent Valdez

Adriana Corral

El Paso, Texas, born 1983;
lives in El Paso

Requiem

2016–19

Clay, cast bronze, and ash

**Students of Rhode Island
School of Design**

America?

Is This the American Way?

1969

Silkscreens

Known for his large-scale, hyperrealistic paintings and drawings, Vincent Valdez depicts Chicanx and Mexican American histories that have been erased from recorded American narratives. He centers and depicts the forgotten protagonists from among his neighbors, family, friends, and communities.

In this exhibition, Valdez's works draw from both activist movements and personal memory, tracing the rise of state-sanctioned violence in America's past and present. Created by Rhode Island School of Design students, *Is This the American Way?* and *America?* express symbols of American military intervention through gas masks, aviator sunglasses, battle helmets, and firearms. In *TWOTHOUSANDANDSEVENTEEN*, an American flag recedes into a shadowed

ground, while in *The Rope (After Marsden Hartley)*, bound hands either climb up or are captured by the rope. “*Nothin’ to see here, keep on movin!*” is based on Valdez’s memory of his participation in the 2007 May Day demonstrations in Los Angeles’s Macarthur Park, which demanded pardon for undocumented immigrants. Together, these works question and critique the stability and construction of US governance based on foundational ideals of justice and equality, reminding us that today’s uprisings belong to a long lineage of fights for civil rights in the United States.

Raven Chacon

Fort Defiance, Navajo Nation, Arizona,
born 1977; lives in Albuquerque,
New Mexico

Live from Alcatraz

2022

Performance

Produced in collaboration with Art in the Parks
and Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy

Raven Chacon (Diné) is a composer working with noise, installation, experimental performance, and chamber music whose artistic practice is grounded in Indigenous history and practices. From an early age, Chacon began to compose music on piano and later on guitar, incorporating influences from

his immediate surroundings, including heavy metal music and his grandfather's traditional Navajo singing.

As part of *Undoing Time: Art and Histories of Incarceration*, Chacon debuts a new sound work. The work is a sonic meditation on the histories of Alcatraz Island and its occupation for nineteen months, beginning in November 1969, by the group Indians of All Tribes as a protest regarding civil rights abuses. It utilizes pre-recorded sounds of prison complexes in the Bay Area, and archival sound footage of Radio Free Alcatraz, which broadcast news of the occupation from the island every weeknight for most of the first year of the protest. Chacon will perform the sound work in the penitentiary's former hospital wing because he is interested in excavating the layered violent histories on the island while in a

space formerly dedicated to healing and repair.

When available, details about the performance will be posted on the BAMPFA website.

Xaviera Simmons

New York, New York, born 1974;
lives in New York

Skin Hunger

2021

Photographs, videos, animations, and
paintings

Xaviera Simmons unpacks the ramifications of American white supremacy through reflection and repair. She often includes her own artistic voice in her work by making herself a character and using her language as audio or text. Simmons's attention to pattern, composition, space, time, and character development comes from her experience on an eighteen-month walking meditation, organized by Buddhist monks, in which she retraced parts of the

transatlantic slave trade—from the United States to the Caribbean and Africa.

In Simmons's *Skin Hunger*, a large, sculptural arrangement of white pedestals sits at the gallery's center. It operates as a visual and material neural hub, firing off multiple synapses that are made of photographs, videos, animations, and large-scale text paintings—a metaphor for the sprawling web of the US carceral system. The work's title references the need for human touch. It “offers entry and reprieve inside of a seemingly never ending loop of anti-Blackness, anti-Indigeneity and white supremacist human-building.” Referring to the installation as a “breath,” it offers beauty and horror in an attempt to wrestle with, push against, and transform—inch by inch—the very literal language-based conditions within which we are seemingly fixed.

