Makes Me Wanna Holla: Art, Death & Imprisonment

Logan Center Gallery | July 7–Sept 10, 2023

Logan Center Exhibitions, the Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture (CSRPC), and the Pozen Center Human Rights Lab (HRL) at the University of Chicago are pleased to present *Makes Me Wanna Holla: Art, Death & Imprisonment* featuring 2022-23 “Artist for the People” Practitioner Fellows Dorothy Burge and Michelle Daniel Jones with *Mourning Our Losses*.

Ms. Burge and Daniel Jones completed year-long fellowships co-hosted by CSRPC and HRL that explored the injustices of the carceral system. Their work engages critical race and human rights issues by looking back at forgotten, ignored, or suppressed stories and people. This exhibition asks: “Who gets remembered?”

Ms. Burge presents a series of quilted portraits depicting incarcerated survivors of Chicago police torture. This work is titled *Won’t You Help to Sing These Songs of Freedom?* Each quilt is coupled with newly collected oral histories, artwork, family photos, and poems compiled by students at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Also included are quilts that pay homage to two African American trans women who were murdered in Chicago in 2022; a life-size portrait of Alfred Woodfox, one of the Angola 3 who survived four decades of solitary confinement; and other portrait quilts that demonstrate acts of resistance and resilience.

As both curator and artist, Daniel Jones presents the Mourning Our Losses (MOL) Traveling Memorial, *We Shall Remember*. This exhibit immerses attendees in a multi-sensory experience of COVID-19 in prisons using sound, statistics, and the artistry of those currently and formerly incarcerated that speaks to the horrors of the pandemic. MOL highlights the moral cost of mass incarceration while honoring the lives of all who died while living or working behind bars.
“Artist for the People” Practitioner Fellow Dorothy Burge is a fabric and multimedia artist and community activist who is inspired by history and current social justice issues. She is a self-taught quilter who began creating fiber art in the 1990s after the birth of her daughter, Maya. Dorothy is a native and current resident of Chicago, and is a descendant of a long line of quilters who hailed from Mississippi. Her realization that the history and culture of her people were being transmitted across generations in this art form inspired her to use this medium as a tool to teach history, raise cultural awareness, and inspire action. Dorothy received her Master of Arts in Urban Planning and Policy and her Bachelor of Arts in Art Design from the University of Illinois at Chicago. She is a member of Blacks Against Police Torture and Chicago Torture Justice Memorials; both are cultural collectives seeking justice for police torture survivors. Dorothy is also a member of the Women of Color Quilters Network. Her work will be featured in the Smithsonian’s permanent collection, and she was named a 2020 Field and MacArthur Foundation Leaders for a New Chicago recipient. Dorothy received a 2017 Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Artist as Activist fellowship and is an Illinois Humanities Envisioning Justice Commissioned Artist.

“Artist for the People” Practitioner Fellow Michelle Daniel Jones, ABD, is a sixth-year doctoral student in American Studies at New York University. Michelle’s dissertation focuses on creative liberation strategies of incarcerated people in Alabama. Michelle’s fellowships include Beyond the Bars, Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History at Harvard University, Ford Foundation Bearing Witness with Art for Justice, SOZE Right of Return, Code for America and Rendering Justice with Mural Arts Philadelphia. As an artist, Michelle finds ways to funnel her research into literature, theater, visual art, and photography. Michelle is co-editor with Elizabeth Nelson of a new history of Indiana’s carceral institutions for women with incarcerated and formerly incarcerated colleagues titled, Who Would Believe a Prisoner? Indiana Women’s Carceral Institutions, 1848–1920, published in 2023. Michelle co-authored a play with Anastazia Schmid, “The Duchess of Stringtown,” which was produced in Indianapolis and New York; and her artist installation about weaponized stigma, Point of Triangulation: Intersections of Identity, toured nationally, with a permanent public mural dedicated in October 2021.
Mourning Our Losses (MOL) was created in April 2020 by a volunteer group of educators, artists, students, and organizers—many formerly incarcerated—committed to the release of people from prisons, jails, and immigration facilities across the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic. Viewing incarcerated people as multifaceted human beings is at the core of our work. While we refuse to dehumanize incarcerated individuals the way the prison system does every day, we are deliberate in exposing the conditions they endured behind bars, which often led to their deaths. Our memorials embrace advocacy and movement-building, through telling stories that mourn and celebrate their lives.

We Shall Remember: Mourning Our Losses Traveling Memorial (MOLTMTM) brings to life the experience of our digital website memorial that honors the lives of people who died in correctional and detention facilities in the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic. The MOLTMTM is an immersive exhibit that is educational, displaying critical information and statistics on the pandemic in America's prisons. We will also engage the community to add to the exhibit's public altar for reflection and remembrance. The MOLTMTM showcases the artistry of those incarcerated and formerly incarcerated across the United States with a focus on Illinois artists through works that speak to the horrors of the pandemic and their strategies for survival. We remember the lives of people who died from abominable public health conditions. We believe a loss of any human life warrants mourning and our traveling memorial — through art, education, and lived experience — shares that message across the United States.

MOLTM Featured Artists

Adamu Chan, CA
Alberto Nunez, OR
Anonymous, CO
Anthony “Sonny” Ramirez, CA
Brian Hindson, TX
Carlos J. Ayala, IL
Cedar Annenkova, CO
Chanthon Bun, CA
Cuong “Mike” Tran, CA
D. Nichols, CO
Darrell Fair, IL
Devon Daniels, IL
E L. Burnside, IL
Efrain Alcaraz, IL
Erika, IL
Ernesto Valle, IL
George, CA
JA-HEE, IL
Jami Renee, IL
Jane Field, TX
JD, IL
Jeff-Free G. Raff, CA
Joanne DeCaro, CA
John W. Zenc, CA
Jonathan Marvin, CA
Joseph Dole, IL
Juan Luna, IL
Keith Thomas, CA
Lloyd R. Caldwell, CA
Lonnie Smith, IL
Luci Harrell, GA
Marshall Stewart, IL
Mary Elizabeth Baxter, PA
Mesro Dhu-Rafa’a, CA
Michael Poor, IL
Michael Sullivan, IL
Miguel Disarufino, CA
Page Dukes, GA
Randy Colôn, NY
Reginald BoClair, IL
Renaldo Hudson, IL
Rick, TX
Robert Curry, IL
Ruth L. Poor, IL
Sketch Vetor, IL
Stan-Bey, CA
Tara Betts, IL
William Jones, IL
Willie Spates, IL
PROGRAMMING

Opening Reception
Friday, July 7 | 6-8:00PM

Holla Back: Art & Conversations
Saturday, July 8 | 10AM-3:30PM
Logan Center Screening Room + Great Hall

What These Walls Won’t Hold
10-11:15AM | Screening Room
Documentary screening and talkback with filmmaker Adamu Chan.

We Shall Remember: COVID-19 in Prisons
11:15AM-12:30PM | Screening Room + Great Hall
Panel with members of Mourning Our Losses on the impact of COVID-19 in prisons, and a participatory memory project that will be added to the gallery exhibition.

Lunch + Tabling by Community Organizations
12:30-1:30PM | Gidwitz Lobby

Survivors of Police Torture Speak
1:30-3:30PM | Screening Room
Context + Framing with Alice Kim and Dorothy Burge. Panel discussion with Carl Williams, Anthony Holmes and LaTanya Sublett, moderated by Damon Williams.

Virtual Tour with Incarcerated Scholars
Thursday, July 27 | Private Event

Black August: Solidarity Quilting Workshop
Saturday, August 19 | 12-3:00PM
Logan Center Rooms 801 + 802
Send messages to incarcerated police torture survivors by making quilt patches with Dorothy Burge. Featuring guest speakers Mary L. Johnson (mother of incarcerated torture survivor Michael Johnson) and Gregory Banks (torture survivor).

Artists Live with Dorothy Burge & Michelle Daniel Jones
Wednesday, September 6 | 6-7:30PM
Logan Center Performance Penthouse

Logan Center Programming and Production Staff: Jan Brugger, Ben Chandler, Caleb Clemente, Emily Hooper Lansana, Rooke Hyde, Anika Steppe, Marcus Warren, David Wolf

CSRPC Programming and Production Staff: Beth Awano, Anaga Dalal, Tierra Kilpatrick, Alice Kim, Tracey A. Matthews, Marilyn Willis


Visual Resources Center Technical Consultants: Bridget Madden, Allie Scholten

Curatorial, Research, and Design Contributors: Amber Ginsburg, Sarah Ross & the Interpretations class at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Joaquin F. Verges

Prison + Neighborhood Arts/Education Project: Tim Barnett, Gabrielle Christiansen, Alice Kim, Jason LaFountain

Production Volunteers: Taji Chesimet, Susan Mart, Ruth L. Poor, Michael Poor, Indigo Wright

Makes Me Wanna Holla: Art, Death & Imprisonment is presented by Logan Center Exhibitions, the Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture, and the Pozen Center Human Rights Lab at the University of Chicago. Practitioner Fellows are supported in part by a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to the Centering Race Consortium, a partnership between race studies centers at Brown University, Stanford University, UChicago, and Yale University to center the study of race in the arts and humanities. MOL’s Traveling Memorial is also supported by Illinois Humanities.

*Antonio Nicholas was released in 2022.

I am a fabric and multimedia artist and community activist who was born and raised in Chicago. I hailed from a long line of quilters from Mississippi and Louisiana, including my mother, grandmother, and great grandmother. Although they were all quilters, it was not until my art quilts moved from the personal to political that I learned to value the power of quilts.

Those close to me call me Mama Dorothy, and I follow in the footsteps of generations of Black people who have used quilting to document history and resist oppression. In 2008, I was commissioned to make a quilt about the issue of lynching. Inspired by the stories of Ida B. Wells and James Cameron, my early work told these unsung stories through art as a means of quilting to freedom.

My mission is to inspire generations to action. In response to Trayvon Martin’s murder in 2012, I converted a photo of my nine-month-old great nephew in a hoodie holding Skittles and iced tea into a provocative quilt, which now lives in the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. Since then, I have continued to make quilts that connect the history of this fiber art with social issues that impact me and my communities. Ranging from domestic violence, to incarcerated individuals living with life without parole, to survivors of Chicago police
torture at the hands of Commander Jon Burge, my quilts are resistance in the face of oppression. I call myself a “quiltivist” because I fuse the storytelling power of quilts with activism. I conduct quilt-making workshops and display my work across the country. I often work with the youth, hoping to inspire young people into social justice activism and inevitably, they inspire me right back. The quilts I make are challenging but also powerful. Through quilting, I ask audiences to reckon with America’s white-washed history and anti-Black racism. One quilt titled 16 Shots and a Cover-Up used the autopsy report of Laquan McDonald’s 2014 murder to align the quilt’s silhouette with the precise locations of bullets where Laquan was shot sixteen times by Chicago police. Central to my quilting is storytelling: the stories of who Black people are, how our social and physical oppression has affected us, and why we must keep fighting against such injustices.

My works sustain and document social movements. The work highlights the strength and resilience Black folks display in the face of oppression and discrimination.

– Dorothy Burge
Freedom In Death
– Michelle Daniel Jones

TIME
COUNT TIME
LUNCH TIME
WORK TIME
SLEEP TIME

TIME OF EXPOSURE
EQUAL JEOPARDY
BOTH THE INCARCERATED
AND FREE

TIME OF INCUBATION
PLAGUED WITH SYMPTOMS
AND WORRY
BOTH UNFREE
NO SECURITIES

TIME OF INFECTION
EMBODIED MISERY
HEIGHTENED AND STRAINED FOR THEE
BEHIND WALLS UNSEEN

TIME OF ISOLATION
WATCHING FRIENDS SEETHE
SELF IN PAIN AND DISCOMFORT
IGNORED AND UNMET ARE THE NEEDS

TIME OF TREPIDATION
THE POWER OF COVID-19
CAGED INSIDE A CAGE
ONLY DEATH ITSELF DID FREE

Michelle Daniel Jones
Freedom in Death
2021, quilted materials, 36" x 48"
Image courtesy of the artist.
At the beginning of the pandemic, I was most concerned for the elderly and sick behind bars, many of whom were my friends I’d left behind only three years before. There was so much that we didn’t know about the pandemic, but what I did know is it would be impossible to achieve isolation in quarantine, little to no PPE was available, and social distancing would be a running joke. With colleagues and friends, we asked the Indiana governor to consider releasing the sick, elderly, and those serving less than 365 days as a health measure to reduce the overcrowded prison populations to permit the reasonable executions of the CDC’s quarantine and infection measures. The governor failed to act and out of concern for those who would likely die, Mourning Our Losses was born. From the beginning, our goal was to memorialize those men and women who died behind bars while elevating the devastating effects of COVID-19 behind bars. We actively shared information with other groups around the country, collected memorials, highlighted artists who drew the faces of the dead, held vigils, engaged in advocacy, conducted research, published articles and launched a website to hold our collective memorial work. As an artist, it was important for me to funnel this collective and creative energy into artistic expressions and the Mourning Our Losses Traveling Memorial, We Shall Remember was born. What you experience in this exhibit is an effort to make those of you on the outside SEE it, KNOW it, HOLLA and be CHANGED. Only when there is a change in consciousness does the potential for right action arise.

In my curation of this exhibit, I sought out artists who were either incarcerated or formerly incarcerated that created work about the pandemic or during the pandemic, as a way to process their experiences of living with a debilitating disease in captivity. I am proud to announce that there are 61 works from 50 artists from 8 states. The education alcove challenges what you know about COVID-19 in prisons and the heart alcove is a visceral response to the loss of loved ones. My other work for this show reaches outward from inside, expressing how, for some of my friends, their freedom came not from a sentence modification, post-conviction relief petition, or exoneration. For so many, their release from prison came because they died of COVID-19, alone in an inhospitable environment, and that shit Makes Me Wanna Holla!!!! The injustice of it all is catastrophic, putrid, and vile, yet artistic expression is one of the ways that I and others in this exhibit dealt with the inhumane and unjustified.

– Michelle Daniel Jones