Roanoke County Jail, Salem, Virginia

“All I can tell you is that our capacity is for 108 men and women, and the jail is holding more than that.”

ATLANTA FOR ABOLITION:
DISMANTLE THE
PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

OCTOBER 21-NOVEMBER 10
EXHIBIT, WORKSHOP
& CULTURAL EVENT
Degrees of Visibility

As a six-year survey of the visual politics of the prison industrial complex, Degrees of Visibility offers a body of photographs that study the landscapes in which over 250 prisons, jails and detention centers sit, throughout each of the fifty US states and territories. Each photograph is shot from a publicly available point of view, and is titled according to the number of people imprisoned and the name of the jail or prison. The project is a study of the aesthetic regime that governs today’s prison industrial complex, documenting how history’s largest system of civil imprisonment has been enabled through its disguise within the system itself, in others, the prison’s language gives way to a history, a document or record that offers a different understanding of the space. All statistics were obtained between 2013 and 2016. The exhibition of Degrees of Visibility will include a series of events, including an opening weekend of cultural events and workshops, hosted by Project South, SNaP Co, SONG and Critical Resistance.

From the founding of the United States until the present, the south has perpetuated a legacy of state-driven racial and economic oppression, whether through slavery, convict leasing, Jim Crow laws, or the incarceration of Black communities. In the early 2000s, tracking the changes that accompanied today’s extraordinary prison expansion, it began. The Civil Rights movement that began after World War II, whenot with the Civil Rights movement and the growing popular mobilization for civil rights, was followed by a period of increased arrest and incarceration rates, which became known as the “punishment turn.”

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Partnering Organizations

Critical Resistance

Critical Resistance seeks to build an international movement to end the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) by challenging the belief that caging and controlling people makes us safe. We do this by joining a global movement to end the PIC and its many forms of violence, including legal violence, mass incarceration, and police violence. Critical Resistance recognizes that the work of abolition and justice for all is part of global struggles against inequality and powerlessness. The success of the movement requires that it reflect communities most affected by the PIC. Because we seek to abolish the PIC, we understand communities most affected by the PIC to include all people who have experienced or are at risk of incarceration. This includes women, people of color, and all those who are criminalized.

The work of CR is focused on the intersections of cultural production, community organizing, and direct action. We take an integrated approach to building an anti-imperialist movement that is rooted in the PIC and its many forms of violence. Critical Resistance (CR) is engaged in concrete programs, campaigns, and educational efforts to reduce the power and reach of the prison industrial complex while building up community resources towards addressing harm and accountability. At CR, we are taking steps to support national work alongside our Southern initiatives, including community building projects to support national work and action on the ground.

SNAP Co – Solutions Not Punishment Coalition

SNAP Co is an organization of people engaged in organizing and building an international movement to end the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) and its many forms of violence, including legal violence, mass incarceration, and police violence. SNAP Co is engaged in concrete programs, campaigns, and educational efforts to reduce the power and reach of the prison industrial complex while building up community resources towards addressing harm and accountability. SNAP Co is taking steps to support national work alongside its Southern initiatives, including community building projects to support national work and action on the ground.

Project South

Project South is a Southern-based leadership development organization that creates spaces for movement building. We work with communities who have been pushed forward by the struggle to strengthen their leadership and strategy, and to build the Southern movement. Project South organizes in Southern states and regions, working with communities to develop leadership, skills, and resources to build the Southern movement. Project South works on issues related to immigration, criminal justice, and economic justice. Project South is engaged in organizing and building an international movement to end the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) and its many forms of violence, including legal violence, mass incarceration, and police violence. Project South is taking steps to support national work alongside its Southern initiatives, including community building projects to support national work and action on the ground.

SNaP Co – Solutions Not Punishment Coalition

SNaP Co is an organization of people engaged in organizing and building an international movement to end the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) and its many forms of violence, including legal violence, mass incarceration, and police violence. SNaP Co is engaged in concrete programs, campaigns, and educational efforts to reduce the power and reach of the prison industrial complex while building up community resources towards addressing harm and accountability. SNaP Co is taking steps to support national work alongside its Southern initiatives, including community building projects to support national work and action on the ground.
Rather than see art as only a space of reflection, I see it as a space of action, where the meanings and perceptions that art has the ability to activate mingle with people’s lives, always taking place within a set of social relations, amidst economies, politics and possibility. For this project, it has been important to work with a venue who recognizes this and sees it as a part of what it facilitates, while also seeking community organizations to help shape the space of its audience, interpretation and potential effects as they are carried beyond the walls of the gallery.

My first introduction to Critical Resistance was in 1998. A number of friends from Chicago had just returned from CR’s first national conference in Berkeley, energized by the thousands of activists who’d turned up, seeking ideas and strategies for changing the system, and recognizing with one another that change and a different future would be possible.

It was in 2000 while shooting for my first feature documentary, Corrections (2001), that I had the chance to interview some of CR’s founders. Impressed and schooled by the work they were doing, I began to develop a series of projects in dialogue with their work. This included: Attica: Roots of Resistance to open their 2001 Eastern Conference; A Prison in the Fields (2001), which documented their work to challenge the construction of a second prison in Delano, California; and a pair of videos around their work on prison resistance and support services, a pair of videos around their work on prison resistance and support services.

Ashley Hunt is an artist living in Los Angeles, where he directs the Program in Photography and Media at CalArts.

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