



For Immediate Release



THE WRITING ON THE WALL

An immersive installation of writing by people in prison around the world, created by Hank Willis Thomas and Dr. Baz Dreisinger

October 31 — November 10, 2019
On the High Line at 14th St.

New York, NY (October 10, 2019) — High Line Art announces *The Writing on the Wall*, a traveling installation composed of essays, poems, letters, stories, diagrams, and notes written by individuals in prison around the world. The installation is a collaboration between Hank Willis Thomas and Dr. Baz Dreisinger with Openbox, and designed by MASS Design Group. The exhibition will be on view on the High Line at 14th Street October 31 through November 10, 2019. A press preview will take place on Thursday, October 31 at 12pm. The High Line will also present public programming around the topic of criminal justice in conjunction with the installation. *The Writing on the Wall* is the second project of the High Line Network Joint Art Initiative and will travel to other Network sites across the United States in 2020.

By emulating a prison cell, the presentation of *The Writing on the Wall* on the High Line will recreate these largely unseen spaces in a public sphere. The installation's design references the palimpsest-like writing on the walls of prison cells and layers these onto opaque and transparent acrylic panels arranged in modules. The arrangement of the installation is based



on measurements of cell blocks so that visitors can be fully immersed in the written and typed words of the incarcerated. The writings were accrued, with the authors' permission, by Dr. Dreisinger during her years teaching in US and international prisons. As a presentation of the crisis of global criminal justice systems, these letters humanize the writers by visually conveying the narratives, thoughts, and emotions of the people behind bars.

"I consider these participating incarcerated individuals as collaborators," says artist Hank Willis Thomas. "The installation serves as a frame for their voices, so often unheard. *The Writing on the Wall* is arranged in non-linear fashion to provoke questions rather than dictate answers."

The project was conceived by professor Dr. Baz Dreisinger and her students at John Jay College of Criminal Justice with conceptual artist Hank Willis Thomas as an effort to spread awareness and galvanize grassroots efforts toward prison reimagining and justice reform. Dr. Dreisinger is the founder of the Prison-to-College Pipeline program at John Jay College, and the founder and executive director of the Incarceration Nations Network. Founded in 2018, the Incarceration Nations Network is a global network that fosters and elevates innovative justice work worldwide. Dr. Dreisinger is also the author of the acclaimed book *Incarceration Nations: A Journey to Justice in Prisons Around the World* and a 2018 Global Fulbright Scholar. Hank Willis Thomas is a conceptual artist working primarily with themes related to perspective identity, commodity, media, and popular culture.

They collaborated with Openbox, an independent design studio focused on urbanism, commissioning the installation's design from MASS Design Group, a nonprofit architecture firm whose mission is to research, build, and advocate for architecture that promotes justice and human dignity.

The installation of *The Writing on the Wall* on the High Line is presented as the second Joint Art Initiative of the High Line Network. The Network is a group of urban reuse projects that share experiences and ideas about the environmental, economic, cultural, and social impact of transforming underutilized infrastructure into new public landscapes. As dialogue and organizing continue around the effects of mass incarceration on our communities, *The Writing on the Wall* is a public platform for incarcerated individuals to share their voices with the audiences of these greenspaces. *The Writing on the Wall* will travel to several other Network sites in 2020, including the BeltLine in Atlanta and the Rail Park in Philadelphia.

As a traveling installation, *The Writing on the Wall* uses artistic expression as a way to connect people around the world with individuals and organizations at the forefront of justice movements through related programming including talks, performances, book launches, readings, vigils, and exhibitions. A part of the Incarceration Nations Network, the project has previously been exhibited in its pilot format in Detroit, New Orleans, Miami, Philadelphia, and other sites in New York City.

In conjunction with the installation of *The Writing on the Wall* on the High Line, the park will present related public programming. On Sunday, November 10, from 12–2pm, criminal justice reform organizations will be stationed at information-sharing tables in the 14th Street Passage. Participating groups include:

- [We Got Us Now](#)
A national movement built by, led by, and about children and young adults impacted



by parental incarceration. Their mission is to engage, educate, elevate, and empower this historically invisible population through the use of digital narratives, safe and inclusive spaces, and advocacy-led campaigns that ensure these voices are at the forefront of strategic initiatives, practices, and policies that will help to keep families connected, create fair sentencing, and end mass incarceration.

- [The Bail Project](#)

The Bail Project is a national nonprofit with the mission to combat mass incarceration by reshaping the pretrial system in the U.S. Their community-based teams provide free bail assistance to thousands of people every year and support them with court notifications, advocacy, and voluntary referrals to local partners for additional services, including housing, treatment, and job readiness. In addition, The Bail Project gathers data and stories to support the work of grassroots movements for bail reform and decarceration. Through these efforts, they seek to transform pretrial justice for generations of Americans to come, bringing us one step closer to ending mass incarceration and racial and economic disparities in the U.S. criminal legal system.

- [Common Justice](#)

Common Justice develops and advances solutions to violence that transform the lives of those harmed and that foster racial equity without relying on incarceration. They operate the first alternative-to-incarceration and victim-service program in the United States that focuses on violent felonies in the adult courts. In addition, they leverage the lessons from their direct service to transform the justice system on a national scale through partnerships, advocacy, and elevating the experience and power of those most impacted.

- [Midtown Community Court and the Center for Court Innovation](#)

The Center for Court Innovation grew out of a single experiment, the Midtown Community Court, which was created in 1993 to address low-level crime around Times Square. Instead of fines or short-term jail, the court provides individualized responses that are restorative to the community and participants. The court also works with neighborhood stakeholders to improve Midtown Manhattan. The project's success in reducing both crime and incarceration led to establishing the Center for Court Innovation to serve as an ongoing engine for justice reform. The Center creates operating programs to test new ideas and solve problems, performs original research to determine what works (and what doesn't), and provides expert assistance to justice reformers around the world.

On November 10, from 12 – 2pm, public tours of the installation will be led by Devon Simmons and Matthew Wilson, two graduates of the Prison-to-College Pipeline program at John Jay College.

Additionally, the High Line Channel video program will screen videos the duration of the installation, nightly from dusk until park close. The selection of videos screened include *Crime, Punishment and a Brazilian Supermax* (2016), directed by Stephanie Black, produced by Beth Skipp and Dr. Dreisinger, with cinematography by Arthur Jafa; *Nightmare: A Film about the Criminalization of Poverty Across the Globe* (2018), directed and produced by Dr. Dreisinger and Alex Pope, provided by The Bail Project; and *2018 Love Letters: Mother's Day* and *2019 Love*



Letters: Father's Day, Google-initiated Love Letters campaigns produced by Ebony Underwood, Founder/CEO of We Got Us Now.

RELATED PROGRAMMING

At John Jay College of Criminal Justice, on November 2 from 12:30 – 6:00pm, the Incarceration Nations Network will host a symposium, Mass Incarceration: a Worldwide Crisis, featuring speakers from around the world offering their justice- and prison-reimagining solutions to this global issue.

ABOUT HIGH LINE ART

Founded in 2009, High Line Art commissions and produces a wide array of artwork, including site-specific commissions, exhibitions, performances, video programs, and a series of billboard interventions. Led by Donald R. Mullen, Jr. Director & Chief Curator of High Line Art Cecilia Alemani, and presented by the High Line, the art program invites artists to think of creative ways to engage with the unique architecture, history, and design of the park, and to foster a productive dialogue with the surrounding neighborhood and urban landscape.

For more information about High Line Art, please visit thehighline.org/art.

ABOUT THE HIGH LINE NETWORK

Presented by the High Line, the High Line Network is a group of industrial infrastructure reuse projects—and the people who help them come to life. As cities become denser and land for traditional parks becomes more scarce, residents are finding creative ways to bring greenspace to their neighborhoods. Projects in the High Line Network transform underutilized infrastructure into new urban landscapes. Redefining what a park can be, these hybrid spaces are also public squares, open-air museums, botanical gardens, social service organizations, walkways, transit corridors, and more.

For more information about the High Line Network, please visit network.thehighline.org.

ABOUT THE HIGH LINE

The High Line is more than a park. It's a public space where you can view art, walk through gardens, experience a performance, savor delicious food, or connect with friends and neighbors—all while enjoying a unique perspective of the city.

Built on a historic, elevated freight line, the High Line has become a world-renowned inspiration for how cities can transform industrial infrastructure into hybrid public spaces.

ABOUT JOHN JAY COLLEGE OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE

An international leader in educating for justice, John Jay College of Criminal Justice of the City University of New York is a Hispanic Serving Institution and Minority Serving Institution offering a rich liberal arts and professional studies curriculum to 15,000 undergraduate and graduate students from more than 135 nations. John Jay is home to faculty and research centers at the forefront of advancing criminal and social justice reform. In teaching, scholarship and research, the College engages the theme of justice and explores fundamental human desires for fairness, equality and the rule of law. For more information, visit www.jjay.cuny.edu and follow us on Twitter [@JohnJayCollege](https://twitter.com/JohnJayCollege).



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@HighLineArtNYC #incarcerationnations #justiceis

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