

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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What People Locked Up for 23 Hours a Day Yearn to See

by [Victoria Law](#) | September 19, 2017

The following is excerpted from an article appearing last week on [Gothamist](#), about the Photo Requests from Solitary exhibit currently on display at Photoville in Brooklyn. Solitary Watch has been collaborating on the Photo Requests from Solitary project for the past five years. Scroll down for information on exhibit location and hours.



WHITE WOLF
Graydon White for Bob

Bob asked for "a prime night scene, with a full moon shining off the water. There is the best possible chance of
gray wolves standing on the shore in the snow, and their pack leader. All the white wolf's eyes are a pale
blue, looking at the full moon." He explained, "I was, rather surprised (HIS) and you show the wolfman!"

No one knows exactly how many people are held in [solitary confinement](#) throughout New York State. There's the SHU, or Special Housing Unit, a special unit dedicated to locking people away from other. Then there's keeplock, where people are confined to the cells in their housing units. There's also protective custody, where people fearing or at risk for violence, are confined. In each of these, people are held in their cells for at least 23 hours each day. Often, their only human contact is with the guard that brings them their food or handcuffs them before bringing them to the shower three times each week. Some have spent years, and sometimes decades, in isolation.

While Rikers Island [records the numbers](#) of those who are isolated, no data is compiled from jails throughout the state. As of September 1, 2017, state prisons held [2,886 people in SHUs](#). Approximately 1,000 people are held in keeplock, where people are confined to the cells in their housing units.

That's how New York City photographer Noelle Theard became involved. After returning from Timbuktu and Mali, she saw the request for a sunrise over the Sahara. She knew she had an image that fit perfectly and dug through her negatives to send it in.

Though Theard is no stranger to prison reform issues, she was particularly inspired by the project's participatory and practical nature. The best part was that the photos could be of use to someone, she told *Gothamist*. Sometimes we get caught up in the overarching narrative [of an issue] that we forget that people are living these realities.



Solitary Watch News