

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2018/04/30/photo-requests-from-solitary-comes-to-philadelphias-eastern-state-penitentiary/>

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New Exhibition Debuts at the Birthplace of Solitary Confinement, and Invites Viewers to Take Part

by [Jean Casella](#) | April 30, 2018

Photo Requests from Solitary (PRFS) is an ongoing project hosted by Solitary Watch that invites men and women held in solitary confinement to request a photograph of anything at all, real or imagined, and then finds an artist to make the image. The astonishing range of requests includes the freestanding columns at the Great Temple of Amun, Karnak, A blue rose, cut with all its leaves remaining, held in a crystal/clear vase or a hand and if possible, the Perseids meteor shower as a background, a gray and white Warmblood horse rearing in weather cold enough to see its breath, and Myself with a blue sky.

Taken together, these requests provide an archive of the hopes, memories, and interests of people who live in extreme isolation. The photographs taken in response complete an artistic collaboration that acknowledges the shared creativity and humanity of individuals on both sides of the prison walls.

On Friday, May 4, a new site-specific installation of Photo Requests from Solitary will open at Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia, the birthplace of solitary confinement and now a museum and historic site ([Press Release](#)). For the first time, PRFS is inviting exhibit visitors and website viewers to fulfill a request from someone in solitary.

[The exhibit opening](#) on May 4 from 5:30-7:30 pm is open to the public, and the installation will remain in place until the fall of 2018. Eastern State also contains other artist installations, and an award-winning permanent exhibit called Prisons Today: Questions in the Age of Mass Incarceration.)

Starting May 3, the public can also view our new website at photorequestsfromsolitary.org to see the hundreds of requests and photos received to date, choose a request to fulfill, and upload your photos.

The Photo Requests from Solitary project was initiated in 2009 by Tamms Year Ten, a grassroots coalition of artists, advocates, family members and men formerly incarcerated in Tamms Correctional Center in southern Illinois, which was shuttered in 2013 after years of opposition. In 2013, the project became a collaboration between artist and advocate Laurie Jo Reynolds (Tamms Year Ten), artist and educator Jeanine Oleson (Parsons The New School for Design), and journalist Jean Casella (Solitary Watch). The project that year expanded to California and New York, where it continues to fill requests and using the project to support local campaigns to limit the use of solitary confinement.

In New York, where more than 4,000 men and women are in some form of isolation, the project is partnering with the [New York Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement](#). A group of photos taken for men and women in New York's state prisons was featured, for the first time, in an exhibit at the Legislative Office Building in Albany in May 2017. In September 2017, the same exhibit had [a two-week run at Photoville](#) in Brooklyn ([Press Release](#)), and it is currently touring to sites around the state.

In 2018, Photo Requests from Solitary was awarded an artist installation grant by Eastern State Penitentiary, the nearly 190-year-old prison in Philadelphia that was the birthplace of solitary confinement and is now an historic site and exhibition space. The new Photo Requests from Solitary exhibit opening at Eastern State on May 3 features a selection of existing photos, along with new requests from New Jersey and Pennsylvania state prisons. PRFS will simultaneously launch the project's first dedicated website. In its first venture into crowd-sourcing, Photo Requests from Solitary will invite exhibit visitors and web viewers to fulfill requests, encouraging them to think about their own relationship to people in solitary, as citizens, artists, and potential collaborators. .

To learn more about the project, view requests and photos, or take a photograph for someone in solitary confinement, visit photorequestsfromsolitary.org (site live on May 3).

Banner image from photo by Casey Dorobek, taken for Bob in New York, who requested: A winter night scene, with a full moon shining off the snow. Trees in the back ground. A pack of gray wolves standing just outside the trees in the snow, and their pack leader, AN ALL WHITE WOLF, on a plateau, howling at the full moon To me, wolves represent FREEDOM and so does the wilderness.

Jean Casella is the director of Solitary Watch. She has also published work in The Guardian, The Nation, and Mother Jones, and is co-editor of the book Hell Is a Very Small Place: Voices from Solitary Confinement. She has received a Soros Justice Media Fellowship and an Alicia Patterson Fellowship. She tweets @solitarywatch.

Accurate information and authentic storytelling can serve as powerful antidotes to ignorance and injustice. We have helped generate public awareness, mainstream media attention, and informed policymaking on what was once an invisible domestic human rights crisis.

Only with your support can we continue this groundbreaking work, shining light into the darkest corners of the U.S. criminal punishment system.

by [Valerie Kiebala](#)

June 13, 2019

by [Jean Casella](#)

March 27, 2019

by [Victoria Law](#)

September 19, 2017

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My brother and I were both released from prison last year; him from federal prisons such as USP Victorville, USP Coleman, USP Lewisburg, and USP Allenwood, and me from N.C. state prison. I have done about a year in solitary but my brother spent 2/3 of his time in solitary.

How can we become

Involved in our fight towards civil rights for all?

We are both extremely competent writers and linguistic abilities have made me able to reach a larger audience due to my studies in Spanish, Arabic and Farsi.

I would be so grateful for you to inform me of anyway we could be of assistance.

Truly,
Brian Joseph McHugh, CPFT, student, yoga instructor, research assistant and Arabic/Spanish translator to the handicapped pursuing graduate degrees from UNC Chapel Hill.

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Hello Brian. Please feel free to email us directly at info@solitarywatch.com.

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