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Cover image: Joshua Lopez, *Say Their Names*, Photograph, 24" x 18"



Welcome Home

Curated by Jeroen Stevens
May 31 - July 27, 2024

apexart - nyc

Alex Anderson
André P.
Bruce Blake
Felix Guzman
Gregory Frederick
Iman LeCaire
Joshua Lopez

Welcome Home probes the carceral urbanism dedicated to isolating the 21st century's urban "outcast." Intermingling photography, poetry, painting, storytelling,

Welcome Home

Never in human history have so many people been forced to dwell in cages. In the U.S. alone, almost two million people are trapped within the confines of prisons, jails, and detention centers. Low-income, migrant, and black communities are disproportionately penalized. Over half of New York City's adult black men are currently ensnared in the trammels of correctional control – in prison or jail, on probation or parole. Even upon release, the shackles of incarceration persist, branding individuals as lifelong "felons," fundamentally barred from mainstream society. As a consequence, those discharged from "correction" and "penitence" are almost ten times more likely to end up homeless. About half of the convicts dismissed from New York State prison cells are directly funneled into precarious homeless shelters. Bunks, hots, and cots of one institution get customarily supplanted by those of another. In turn, rampant criminalization of homelessness significantly increases the risk of winding up behind bars again. Welfare is steadily superseded by prisonfare and shelterfare. Urban poverty deplorably herded together, deposited in substandard housing produced and operated under state-custody. Rooted in systemic inequality, this revolving door between mass-incarceration and homelessness arguably masks one of the world's most sophisticated racial segregation doctrines.



Felix Guzman, *Poetry Saved My Life*, Photograph, 18" x 18", 2021



Rev. Khalil G. James and the Reentry Theater of Harlem (Directed by Alex Anderson), *Ritual for Return*, 2021

and performance, directly impacted artists interrogate the intersection of punitive oppression and struggles for justice. *Welcome Home* claims the gallery as a pedestal to contend the pervasive hostility faced by marginalized communities, and its deep anchorage in the architectural anatomy of our contemporary urban world. What kind of "welcome home" does one encounter when coming home homeless? Which pathways towards emancipation and abolition are spearheaded by grassroots art and action?

Felix Guzman is a poet and speechwriter, advocating for solidarity and kindness as foundational pillars of community restoration. As a "survivor of too many broken systems," he declares, "poetry saved my life." Felix's poems are a call to arms for more compassionate care, where pacifism and reconciliation are radical acts of resistance against institutional dwelling environments thriving on oppression and violence. Writing became a vehicle for redemption, a quest to overcome the recurrent trauma of cyclic incarceration and homelessness. "Warehoused in jails, prisons, hospitals, and shelters - I never lost me."

Alex Anderson, incarcerated for 15 years for possession of a few grams of marijuana, directs the Reentry Theater of Harlem, utilizing the transformative agency of performance art, drumming, and storytelling to empower those impacted by the alleged criminal "justice" system. Participants collectively engage in a *Ritual for Return*, a life-changing rite of passage poised to upend the dehumanizing rituals that sustain and are sustained by penitentiary confinement. For *Welcome Home*, he draws from photography, video recordings,

and live-performances that convert the art gallery into a public stage dedicated to otherwise silenced voices and suppressed stories.

Bruce Blake's satire deals with the trials and tribulations of post-carceral recidivism and parole restrictions that impede personal and social progress. When brought into custody, he was sent straight into solitary confinement for rejecting the barbaric humiliation of a body search: a carceral ritual of abasement. At present he deploys theater and comedy to highlight the absurdities and demeaning injustices that are hardwired into carceral formulas of poverty containment.

After military service in Vietnam, **Gregory Frederick** was diagnosed as "MICA," Mentally Ill and Chemical Addicted, and afflicted by "PTSD," which he spells out as: "*You Are Fucked. Big-Time.*" Gregory's astounding paintings relate to his own idiosyncratic housing pathway, tossed around from South Carolina to Pennsylvania, from Ohio to New York, and from military prison in Vietnam to South Korea. Release from correctional custody on Rikers Island and a handful of max-security prisons, brought him straight to the Bellevue Men's Intake Shelter. He found himself tucked away in Wards' Island's mass-shelter complex. After three decades of imprisonment, homeless shelter proved worse.



Gregory Frederick, *Harlem drum circle*, 2023, Gouache and Acrylic on board, 32" x 40" (detail)



Bruce Blake, *Compassion, Made By Love*, 2021, Video, 1:32 mins

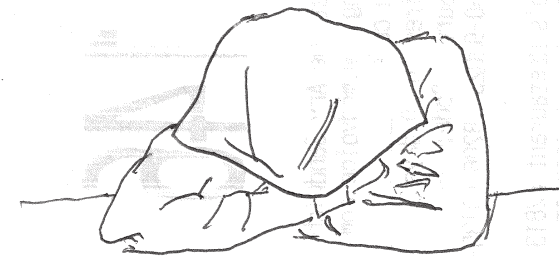
Gregory grew up in the American South when Jim Crow laws enforced strict racial segregation. Three quarters of a century later, the accomplishments of the civil rights and black power movements are overshadowed by prodigious carceral expansion. Michele Alexander called it the "New Jim Crow:" an unprecedented vast penal industry that disguises structural racism and inequality behind a lucrative business that propagates the very needs it proclaims to fulfill. Defunct by design, both prisons and shelters produce and reproduce their own clientele. The United States detains around a quarter of the global prison population, making it home to the largest correctional system on Earth, absorbing approximately \$80 billion each year. Facilitated by the 13th amendment, incarcerated workers annually produce more than \$11 billion in goods and services. Rooted in plantation logics, the private prison industry is considered one of the country's most profitable investment assets. Concurrently, homelessness is rampant. While housing more millionaires than any other world city, more than 72,000 people sleep in New York's main homeless shelter system each night. The city's \$3 billion dollar shelter business is banking on poverty. Thousands more are bedding down in the subways or stations, if not sleeping rough out on the streets. One out of every hundred newborn New Yorkers is born in a homeless shelter. Against the backdrop of soaring rent prices, evictions, housing financialization, and an augmenting migrant influx, the homeless shelter complex is by and large lodging Black and Latinx community members. Even if they represent only a fifth of the New York City population, more than half of the shelter residents are black. A growing number are single-mother families and children.

André P. is a resident in one of the roughly 600 shelter facilities scattered across New York's urban fabric. As phones with cameras became widespread, photos and

videos denouncing wrongdoings in NYC Department of Homeless Services facilities became common. Following a recorded fight between a migrant shelter client and a DHS police officer in 2022, the DHS announced a blanket prohibition against photos and recording in its facilities, citing concerns about "client confidentiality." André's contribution argues how justice requires that the living conditions in shelters and drop-in centers are truthfully and accurately documented. He fights with humble dissent, reverting the ban on photography by drawing with found pens on abandoned store receipts.

Joshua Lopez was a direct witness to police-led bloodshed. On March 25, 2011, an undercover NYPD police officer shot his uncle on his way to buy groceries. He left five children. Joshua himself had earlier been sequestered into juvenile detention. Following the lynching of George Floyd, Joshua put forth his body as an emblem of remembrance and resistance, inscribing the names of those lost by the hand of the state. A total of 177 names adorn his chest and back. Many more are on a waiting list. By engraving the fatalities of structural injustice, his body acts as a canvas of protest, each tattoo a testament to failing institutions. He meanwhile assembles stories and newspaper printouts of exonerated wrongful convictions in visual collages. In 2023 alone, 153 exonerations were registered in the U.S., the overwhelming majority resulting from official misconduct. Altogether, the victims spend more than 2,000 years in prison for crimes they did not commit. More than four out of five were persons of color.

Strangled by a political crackdown on gay individuals, and violence at the hands of her family and neighborhood, **Iman LeCaire** fled persecution in Egypt, where identifying as LGBTQ+ still offers a legal licence to be jailed and killed. She landed in New York as a homeless transgender woman. As a protest leader, she rallies against queer misogyny and police



André P., *"No/Recording"*, 2023, Drawing on Starbucks receipt, Dimensions variable



Iman LeCaire, *Untitled*, 2022 (Photograph by D.J. Lehrhaupt)

violence. Her work interlaces Ancient Egyptian mythology, Islamic spirituality, humanitarian engagement, and communal emancipation. After it was recurrently battered as the central target of threats, attacks, humiliation, abuse, assault, and ungrounded arrests, she currently mobilizes her transitioned body as an instrument of art and activism. While the U.S. is increasingly riddled with violence against transgender and gender non-conforming people, Iman takes to the streets of NYC to demand justice for Black Trans Lives, and their sheer right to live. Between the last two Transgender Days of Remembrance, at least 33 reported transgender and gender non-conforming Americans were killed. Almost all were Black or Latinx. Together with her husband, Iman operates Trans Asylas, evacuating transgender and non-binary asylum seekers from persecution. For *Welcome Home*, Iman elaborates on her own "seven lives," to probe what it means to find "home" amidst the incommensurable destructiveness that transgender people face.

Together, the artists question the fairness and justness of pernicious urban realms too often and too easily taken for granted. Raising the disquiet about harmful urban architectures, they challenge conventional boundaries of thought. Advocating for the dismantling and abolition of institutions that have proven to be broken, their work sets out to incrementally piece together a more humane city from the shattered remnants of the old. Welcome home.

Jeroen Stevens
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NYC Open Call Exhibition

Exhibition selected by more than 685 jurors in more than 74 countries from 472 submissions