

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

***RETURN TO SENDER:
Prison as Censorship***

**Curated by Mariame Kaba
Co-organized by PEN America**

**September 14 – October 28, 2023
Opening Reception: September 14, 6-9 PM**

Partner Organizations

Rikers Public Memory Project
The Free Black Women's Library
Empowerment Avenue

Participants

Ariel Aberg-Riger
Corey Devon Arthur
Danbee Kim
Pablo Mendoza
Hector (Bori) Rodriguez
Kruttika Susarla

Empowerment Avenue Artists: Mark A. Cádiz, Lamavis Comundoiwillla, Jeffrey Allen Isom, Elizabeth Lozano, Sarah Montoya, Mark Stanley-Bey (Stan-Bey)

PEN America Artists: Moira Marquis, Araya Ratanaphruks

PEN America Authors: Kwaneta Harris, Elizabeth Hawes, Zhi Kai, Arthur Longworth, Daniel Pirkel, Derek Trumbo

Rikers Public Memory Project Participants: Medar de la Cruz (Artist), Helen "Skip" Skipper and Edwin Santana (Speakers)



Corey Devon Arthur, *Revolution*, 2023, Mixed media, 22 x 17 Inches.

The prison is the frontline war in a society that seeks to censor and control people and ideas. The current wave of censorship in schools and public libraries is an extension of the more highly advanced structures of control that have and are being developed in prisons and jails. The prison has always been a testing ground for perfecting surveillance and creating unfreedom.

Return to Sender is an exhibition that maintains that the prison itself is censorship, which is multifaceted and complex. Therefore, the only way to end prison censorship is to end prisons. This is a call for prison industrial complex (PIC) abolition.

When I conceived this exhibition, I decided to invite other voices to join in its creation. I reached out to several people who generously agreed to contribute and when you visit the exhibition, you will encounter



some of their ideas and visions. Those ideas and visions however are in the service of a broader abolitionist politic that is my own. As the curator of *Return to Sender*, I wanted to tell a specific story based on my experiences and understanding of prisons and jails over the past couple of decades. Informing my analysis is the cultural and intellectual production of currently and formerly incarcerated/criminalized people who have contributed their visual art, writing and guidance. Not every person or organization that worked on *Return to Sender* and shared their ideas are prison industrial complex (PIC) abolitionists. For example, PEN America has co-organized this exhibit to showcase prison censorship and does not support abolition.

The exhibition features writing and art by incarcerated creators that examine how prisons enact censorship and limit free expression for incarcerated authors, readers and artists.

Welcome to *Return to Sender*, we look forward to your visit.

Docents will be available every Saturday 12-6 PM for guiding and touring individuals and groups through the exhibition. To schedule a guided group tour, please contact projectspace@efanyc.org

Public Programs

All events and programs are free and open to the public at EFA Project Space (323 West 39th Street, 2nd floor), unless otherwise mentioned. Masks are required for all in-person events, and will be available at the gallery if needed.

Opening Reception

Thursday, September 14, 6-9 PM EST

Join partners and artists for the opening of *Return to Sender*.

ASL Interpretation will be available for this event. [RSVP here](#)

Abolitionist Joy Hours, 4-6 PM

September 16, 2023

Collage, Tea & Chocolate [RSVP here](#)

September 30, 2023

Button Making and Hot Chocolate [RSVP here](#)

October 14, 2023

Herbalism and High Tea RSVP [RSVP here](#)

RE: Return to Sender: Collaborative Zine Workshop

Saturday, September 23, 1-5 PM EST

In conjunction with *Return to Sender* (the exhibit) and *Return to Sender* (the zine), *Return to Sender* (the project team) and EFA's Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop are proud to host *RE: Return to Sender: the workshop*. In this workshop, participants will respond to the concept and reality of prison censorship,



using the work on display in the exhibit as well as the work contained in the zine to create a collaborative zine to share. [RSVP here](#)

Virtual Event: Prison Journalism and Censorship

Wednesday, September 27, Online Event, 4 PM EST

Prison Journalism and Censorship is a conversation between Empowerment Avenue incarcerated writers Christopher Blackwell, Kwanetta Harris, Sara Kielly, and Emily Nonko. Formerly incarcerated abolitionist Jessica Phoenix Sylvia moderates this virtual event. [RSVP here](#)

Take Action at People's Forum

Saturday, October 7, 12-6:30 PM EST

Activities will take place at the People's Forum, 320 West 37th Street (between 8th & 9th avenues) A Banned Book Week Event. [RSVP here](#)

PEN America Report Release: "Reading Between the Bars: An In-Depth Look at Prison Censorship"

Thursday, October 26, 6 PM EST

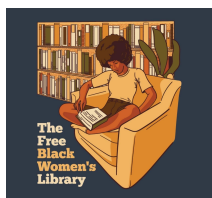
This report release will feature Die Jim Crow artists who are currently incarcerated including Spoon Jackson, The Masses, Territorial and B Alexis. Producers from Die Jim Crow will discuss the censorship these artists face and Moira Marquis, co-author of the report, will discuss the significant findings. A part of Prison Banned Books Week.

Closing Reception

Saturday, October 28, 4-6 PM EST

Join partners and artists to mark the end of the exhibition.
ASL Interpretation Available.

This exhibition is possible by the generous support of Mellon Foundation, Project NIA's donors, and in partnership with the following organizations:





FOR PRESS INQUIRIES

Naomi Lev, Director and Chief Curator, EFA Project Space
[212-563-5855](tel:212-563-5855) x244 / naomi@efanyc.org

EFA Project Space, launched in September 2008 as a program of The Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts, is a collaborative, cross-disciplinary arts venue founded on the belief that art is directly connected to the individuals who produce it and the communities that arise because of it. By providing an arena for exploring these connections, we empower artists, curators, and other participants to forge new partnerships and encourage the expansion of ideas. The program is based on Open Calls as well as invitational exhibitions and projects. It is a home for emerging, mid-career, as well as established curators and artists. We focus our attention on community engagement and public programming. www.projectspace-efanyc.org **The Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts (EFA)** is a 501(c)(3) public charity. Through its three core programs, EFA Studios, EFA Project Space, and EFA Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop, EFA is dedicated to providing artists across all disciplines with space, tools and a cooperative forum for the development of individual practice. EFA is a catalyst for cultural growth, stimulating new interactions between artists, creative communities, and the public. www.efanyc.org EFA Project Space is supported in part by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council and additional funding from The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts.