

The Autry Presents

Behind Bars: Incarceration in the West



Image: Harry Vroman, Alcatraz Island, San Francisco Bay, California, 1911-1913. Gelatin silver print. Braun Research Library Collection, Autry Museum; A.184.25

Los Angeles, CA (January 21, 2020)— The Autry Museum of the American West presents *Behind Bars: Incarceration in the West*, a special installation that takes a look at some of the many forms incarceration has taken in the American West over time, in conversation with a new photo series taken in California state prisons by fine art photographer **Pep Williams**.

“History is always a conversation between the past and the present,” said **Josh Garrett-Davis**, Gamble Associate Curator of Western History, Popular Culture, and Firearms at the Autry. “Our hope is that Pep Williams’s striking photographs of the landscapes and communities in California prisons will illuminate the deeper histories of incarceration represented in the museum’s history and art collections—and that those longer histories shed light on our present-day conversations about incarceration.”

Located in the Autry’s *Law and Order* gallery, *Behind Bars* explores the experiences and creative work of Westerners imprisoned under various circumstances. The installation presents the stories and humanity of the incarcerated and strives to broaden visitors’ perspectives by sharing stories that are often forgotten.

Behind Bars explores several different sites, including Alcatraz Island. This rocky outcropping served as a military fort, a federal prison that held infamous criminals like Al Capone and James “Whitey” Bulger, and also, lesser-known, as a prison for Hopi men who resisted sending their children to government schools in the late 19th century. The installation looks at prison art as both a rehabilitative form for inmates and their irrepressible expressions of creativity. *Behind Bars* also includes a landscape painted by Taneyuki Dan Harada while imprisoned in the Topaz incarceration camp in Utah during World War II, and drawings by Kiowa artist Zotom, which he made while incarcerated at Fort Marion in Florida in 1877.

Presented in conjunction with historical objects are images of 21st century prisons by Pep Williams. In 2017, Williams was granted rare access to photograph inmates in Chuckawalla and Ironwood State Prisons in southeastern California. Williams’ photographs capture the subjects’ dignity and humanity amongst harsh circumstances.

“Many family members can’t visit their loved ones in prison and some have fixed ideas on how prison is inside,” said Williams. “If one kid who loves his father or brother who is locked up and they haven’t seen them in years and worry about them can look at my images and think well maybe he is doing ok on the inside and leave on a positive note and smile about their family member.”

About Pep Williams

Pep Williams is a fine art and street photographer from South Central Los Angeles. He has traveled internationally shooting for magazines and his photographic exhibitions. His work has appeared in galleries and museums domestically and abroad. He is one of the only photographers to have ever been granted access into the California State Prison System, where he created a series of inmate portraits titled *Out Of Bounds*.

IMAGES AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

About the Autry Museum of the American West

The Autry is a museum dedicated to exploring and sharing the stories, experiences, and perceptions of the diverse peoples of the American West, connecting the past to the

present to inspire our shared future. The museum presents a wide range of exhibitions and public programs—including lectures, film, theatre, festivals, family events, and music—and performs scholarship, research, and educational outreach. The Autry’s collection of more than 500,000 pieces of art and artifacts includes the Southwest Museum of the American Indian Collection, one of the largest and most significant in the United States. Visit TheAutry.org for more information.