

March 7, 2014

## Prison Obscura



"Tameika Smith, 9 July 2012, San Francisco, CA." From the series "Take A Picture, Tell A Story." © Robert Gumpert

Photos are taken in prison every day, thanks to ever present surveillance cameras. But how would the men and women whose every act is scrutinized by their jailers choose to be represented if they could control how they are photographed and depicted? The exhibition "[Prison Obscura](#)," curated by Pete Brook, editor of the blog [Prison Photography](#), has provided those of us who live outside prison with a look at inmates as they are rarely seen.

On display at Haverford College through today, the exhibition includes work from photographer Robert Gumpert's "[Take a Picture, Tell a Story Project](#)," in which he audiotapes the stories of inmates in the San Francisco jail system. Another exhibited artist, [Alyse Emdur](#), has said she wanted to show "America's incarcerated population, not through the usual lens of criminality, but through the eyes of inmates' loved ones." She examined the idealized landscapes used as backdrops in prison visiting rooms, where inmates and family pose for keepsake portraits. After she found a photo of herself at age 5 "posing in front of a tropical beach scene while visiting my brother in prison," Emdur has asked hundreds of prisoners to share their own photos with her.

"Prison Obscura" also includes vernacular, surveillance, evidentiary, and prisoner-made photographs. Brook writes, "'Prison Obscura' builds the case that Americans must come face to face with these images and imaging technologies both to grasp the cancerous proliferation of the U.S. prison system and to connect with those it confines."

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