

LA County Public Defender Offices Civic Art Project

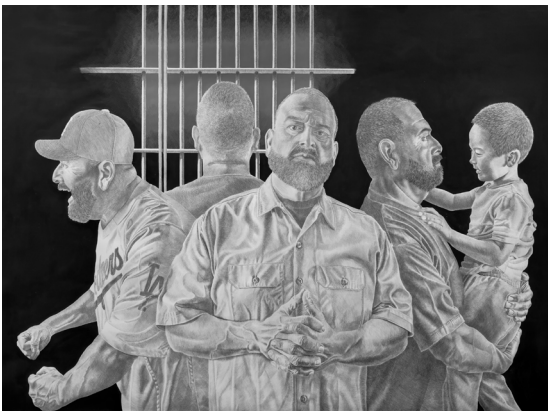


Los Angeles
County
Arts &
Culture

Project Background

In the Summer of 2022, the Department of Arts and Culture commissioned eight local artists to create site-specific artworks for the Department of Public Defender's Offices in the historic Los Angeles County Hall of Records building. These talented artists include Abel Alejandro, Moses Ball, Kenturah Davis, Andrew Hem, Elana Mann, Sergio Teran, Ian Roberston-Salt, and Jody Zellen. The artists' group, a diverse blend of emerging and experienced public artists, have created eight unique works of art to celebrate the work of the LA County Public Defender Offices after an extensive community engagement aspect, which focused on the LA County Public Defender's Office clients and staff members. The artworks are as varied as the artists themselves, ranging from pencil drawings and paintings to abstract installations.

Artworks



Abel Alejandro

A Man in Plain Sight, 2023

Graphite and acrylic on paper

Throughout his work, artist Abel Alejandro explores the concept of masculinity in American contemporary society. *A Man in Plain Sight* depicts the journey of an ordinary person through the legal system, an experience that often invites unfair and oversimplified judgement from others. Alejandro aims to capture this man in multiple contexts -- on the street, in the legal system, and at home-- representing a typical individual served by the Los Angeles County Public Defender's Office. By portraying the subject from multiple perspectives, the artwork disrupts any singular narrative, emphasizing that no one should be defined solely by their past actions or circumstances. The artwork suggests that we have complex identities and that with the help of the right advocate, our complexities and uniqueness can be seen and appreciated.



Moses Ball

From Remorse to Redemption, 2023

Acrylic and oil paint on aluminum composite

In this artwork, the struggles faced by those within the justice system are seen through the lens of Edward, a bright student and gifted athlete who was charged with a felony and faced years in prison. His determination to seek justice is depicted by the Sankofa symbol, a powerful Ghanaian adinkra that signifies looking back to move forward. The running shoes represent Edward's dedication to achieving his goals despite his challenges: when Edward discovered that he and his Public Defender were both competing in the same triathlon, running helped transform his feelings of anger into trust and camaraderie, it became his source of strength.

In the painting, the sunset, which may hint at dark times ahead, is illuminated by the light from a dove, symbolizing inner peace and freedom. A candle motif shines on Edward's reflections about his experience: "The courthouse... It's not the end in many ways, it was my beginning. There's a light at the end of darkness. A candle is my symbol; it signifies light."



Kenturah Davis

Excerpt of Contingency - Angela Davis II (Dominique), 2023

Pencil on paper

Through a collage of texts arranged from the writings of political activist and philosopher Angela Davis, choreographer/anthropologist Katherine Dunham, and logician Jonathan Chimakonam, the artist suggests the possibility of reconfiguring how we conceive of freedom to consider how language shapes our experience of the world, and how we create the texture of our society through our laws.

In keeping with her practice, Davis invited three Black women working for the Los Angeles County Public Defender's Office to be photographed. A composition of photographs of Deputy Public Defender Dominique Brown, was ultimately selected to be translated into a drawing on paper rubbed with carbon pigment over the essay. In this, the artist blurs the personal and the political, stating that the implications of language are "activated through our bodies." Viewers can experience multiple dynamics of the artwork: from afar, it presents a gestural movement of the Black female figure; up close, it reveals the subtlety of the text. Together, these ideas can evoke other possibilities in our pursuit of justice and liberation.



Andrew Hem

Belief, 2023

Acrylic and oil on canvas

Belief by artist Andrew Hem portrays six individuals who work for the Los Angeles County Public Defender's Office- an attorney, a social worker, an investigator, a paralegal, an information technology analyst, and a legal assistant. With the Van Nuys courthouse visible in the background, the figures look ahead towards a brighter future where everyone, including the most disadvantaged communities, has equal access to a fair justice system. The mural behind the figures depicts a public, which stands in appreciation of the compassion, dedication, and commitment of the Public Defender's Office.



Elana Mann

After Clara Shortridge Foltz, 2023

Mirrored glass and printed aluminum

This artwork pays tribute to Clara Shortridge Foltz, the founder of the Los Angeles County Public Defender's Office. Among her accomplishments, Foltz was California's first female attorney, a powerful suffragist, and a single mother of five. Like many historical figures, Foltz has a complicated legacy – she was part of a coalition that passed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. However, much of her later work sought to protect disadvantaged populations. At the Chicago World's Fair in 1893, Foltz introduced the concept of a Public Defender, an agency designed to provide free court representation for those without means. In 1914, the Los Angeles County Public Defender's Office was founded, the first in the nation. Foltz then worked to duplicate this effort through legislation in 30 states.

By including a mirror in the design, the artwork also honors the many people working to further the values of the Los Angeles County Public Defender's Office. During the development of this artwork, artist Elana Mann observed how Foltz's original vision for the Public Defender's Office has evolved to include rehabilitation, restoration, healing, and harm reduction. Foltz's aspirations are intricately woven and reimagined through the perspectives of the people who are reshaping the judicial system even now.



Ian Robertson-Salt

In Their Hands, 2023

Acrylic on wood panel

In Their Hands by artist Ian Robertson-Salt is a thought-provoking representation of a single defendant's journey through the criminal justice system. The anonymous female figure depicted in the artwork highlights the disproportionate number of Black and Latina women who are involved in Los Angeles County's criminal justice system. The hands surrounding the subject offer a sense of comfort and empathy, while also conveying the emotional struggles that individuals can encounter on both sides of the County's justice system. The artwork has a polychromatic color scheme. A symbolic design laid on top of the image is based on the locations of the courts and the Public Defender's offices throughout the County of Los Angeles.

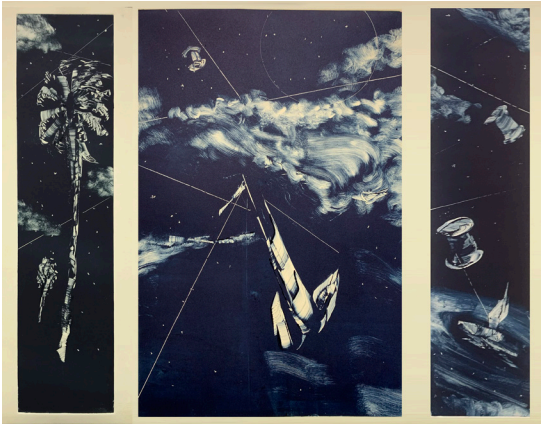


Sergio Teran

Crow's Nest and 3 Constellations, 2023

Oil on hardboard panel; Ink on paper

Sergio Teran's artwork is a polyptych consisting of one large painting and three monoprints. The painting showcases a boat being constructed on a rooftop against the backdrop of a composite landscape of Los Angeles County. There is a stretch of sky without water above the horizon, which creates an absurd and challenging situation, however, the accompanying monoprints depict the same boat traversing through waters, which seamlessly transition to sky. The boat is a vessel that enables humans to travel the world, symbolizing freedom, but one that requires the investment of time, knowledge, and labor to become a reality. The title "Crow's Nest" alludes to the high vantage point one must assume when seeking guidance in exploring the unknown. This effort necessitates hope and trust. Within these images, Teran presents a metaphor for justice as a collaborative learning, labor, and rehabilitation process that ultimately empowers individuals to transcend their present circumstances.



Jody Zellen

Courthouses Past and Present, 2023

Acrylic lenticular

Courthouses Past and Present is a lenticular artwork by artist Jody Zellen that oscillates between images of past and present courthouses. The work consists of two large montages of courthouse exteriors, with photographs of historical buildings depicted in black and white and images of contemporary buildings in subtle jewel tones. To create this piece, Zellen researched historical archives and photographed the façades of several local courthouses, carefully pairing past and present elements to suggest movement through time.