

The Société Elizabeth Fry du Québec & Engrenage Noir / LEVIER present

AGIR ART OF WOMEN IN PRISON

AGIR/ART OF WOMEN IN PRISON

For the first time in Canada

An exhibition of artworks created in women's detention facilities

27 May to 16 June, 2011 – FREE ADMISSION

Eastern Bloc Gallery

7240, rue Clark, 2nd floor, Montreal - De Castelnau Metro

INFO: www.expoagir.com

Spokespeople of the event:

the artists

Carole Laure & Devora Neumark

Montreal, April, 2011 — Artworks by 49 incarcerated women created in collaboration with 8 multidisciplinary artists who were invited to work within detention facilities, will be shown to the public in an elaborate exhibition entitled **AGIR / ART OF WOMEN IN PRISON**. Presented by the **Société Elizabeth Fry du Québec and Engrenage Noir / LEVIER**, this community art event, the first of its kind in Canada, offers a forum for the voices of criminalized women, usually left unheard. The spokespeople for this event are Carole Laure, actress, singer and director, and Devora Neumark, interdisciplinary artist and Co-director of **Engrenage Noir / LEVIER**, both well known for their commitment to art and community.

AGIR / ART OF WOMEN IN PRISON, held from 27 May to 16 June, 2011 at the **Eastern Bloc Gallery** in Montreal brings together 35 artworks – sound installations, videos, animation films, photographs, posters, music, songs, slam poetry and dance – created over the course of two years (2008 – 2010) at the **provincial prison Maison Tanguay, Joliette Federal Penitentiary, Institut Philippe-Pinel** and the **Thérèse-Casgrain Halfway House**.

The exhibition reveals the individual struggles of women in conflict with the law, acknowledging them in an artistic context and recognizing them beyond a crime committed, a sentence purged or a set of stereotypes. Their collective work explores the link between incarceration and different types of poverty – economic, social, familial, cultural, emotional.

AGIR / ART OF WOMEN IN PRISON aims to create public awareness about the challenges of social reintegration for women who were in conflict with the law. The exhibition is intended to initiate a critical conversation concerning our use of incarceration and possible alternatives to imprisonment.

Guided tours of the exhibition will be available on Thursdays, 2, 9 and 16 June, beginning at 5:30 PM. Three roundtable presentations will be held beginning at 7:00 PM, Thursday 2 June [*Art in Prison*], 9 June [*The Condition of Incarcerated Women and Their Transition Into the Community*] and 16 June [*The Role of Prisons and the Possible Alternatives*].

Along with the **Société Elizabeth Fry du Québec** and **Engrenage Noir / LEVIER, Eastern Bloc** - an exhibition and arts production centre dedicated to New Media and interdisciplinary art - is part of a community art movement, which aims to combine principles based on the active participation of artists and community members in the creative process with principles based on social responsibility and cultural democracy. Eastern Bloc's singular architecture – concrete walls, metal doors and smaller adjacent rooms – which could be considered reminiscent of certain detention facilities, make this gallery an "ideal" space for the **AGIR** exhibition.

ORIGIN OF THE PROJECT

AGIR PAR L'IMAGINAIRE ► Artworks made by criminalized women and professional artists in detention facilities during a period of two years (2008-2010)

In the spring of 2007, two non-profit organizations pooled their collective expertise to create a community art project: the **Société Elizabeth Fry du Québec (SEFQ)**, whose mandate is to promote the social reintegration of criminalized women and create social awareness of these women's reality; and **Engrenage Noir / LEVIER**, which fights poverty and systemic inequalities through the use of community art and humanistic activist art. This collaboration resulted in **AGIR PAR L'IMAGINAIRE**, a collective art project in correctional facilities that aimed to involve incarcerated women and artists in a co-creative process.

Confinement is a painful experience, which intensifies the sense of exclusion. Through artistic co-creation, these criminalized women made a space for speech while exploring better life scenarios for themselves.

Artists **Reena Amoneda Chang** (afro-contemporary dancer), **Paul Litherland** (photographer), **Meena Murugesan** (interdisciplinary artist), **Jessica MacCormack** (interdisciplinary artist), **Hélène Engel** (singer), **Émilie Monnet** (interdisciplinary artist), **D. Kimm** (interdisciplinary artist) and **Andrew Harder** (musician and sound technician) worked alongside the women during this process. These artists followed a training and exchange program prior to the beginning of the project in order to prepare them for the numerous challenges encountered within the detention institutions.

AGIR / ART OF WOMEN IN PRISON ► Public exhibition of artworks

This artistic and human adventure, which took place during two years within prison walls finally emerges in the world outside with a visual and sound art exhibition, **AGIR / ART OF WOMEN IN PRISON presenting 35 artworks.**

TEMPS D'AGIR ► Publication of a CD Book

This adventure also produced a CD book entitled **TEMPS D'AGIR** : a collection of texts, photos and collages created by criminalized women and the project's participating artists. Published by **Planète rebelle and Les Filles électriques** (Collection Traces), this publication is available for sale at the exhibition and in all book stores for 22\$.

SPOKESPEOPLE

"All my films are about resilience because I believe that life does not end with a label and that everyone has the ability to bounce back from trauma or difficulty. Artistic creation is often the trigger that could change a person's life and even save them. Often however, what is needed is an external encouragement to sustain inner strength. My involvement in AGIR is a way to support these women who have managed to overcome challenges and become stronger. Life is an open journey, which at any moment can take a new turn."

- Carole Laure

"Co-creation is a personal and social commitment which helps develop more responsible, healthier and equitable relations between citizens. I hope this event will bring us to carefully consider the role we all play in sustaining the prison system."

-Devora Neumark

INFO

AGIR / ART OF WOMEN IN PRISON

www.expoagir.com

27 May to 16 June, 2011 – **Free admission**

Eastern Bloc Gallery - 7240, rue Clark, 2nd floor, Montreal

Hours:

Tuesday - Wednesday - Saturday – Sunday: 12 to 6 PM

Thursday: 12 to 9 PM (guided tour at 5:30 PM/ roundtable presentation at 7 PM)

Friday: 12 to 8 PM

Links:

Société Elizabeth Fry du Québec: www.elizabethfry.qc.ca/eng/welcome.html

Engrenage Noir / LEVIER: www.engrenagenoir.ca

Éditions Planète rebelle: www.planeterebelle.qc.ca

Les Filles électriques: www.electriques.ca/filles/social.e

THREE ROUNDTABLE PRESENTATIONS

THURSDAY, 2 June, 2011, 7 pm: Art in Prison

Presentation of the Agir par l'imaginaire project, which was the basis for the **AGIR / ART OF WOMEN IN PRISON** exhibition, and its contextualization relative to other art initiatives developed in Canadian detention institutions.

GUESTS • **Véro Leduc**, President of Stella. Her graduate research subject (at UQÀM's École de travail social) is the Agir par l'imaginaire project experience, and explores links between community art and social recognition • **Amélie Girard** works at Engrenage Noir / LEVIER, as coordinator for the Art Culture Committee of the Montreal Urban Aboriginal Community Strategy NETWORK, among other responsibilities • **Sylvie Verville**, currently incarcerated at Joliette Institution, created the photographic work *Blessée** at Maison Tanguay • **Meena Murugesan**, multidisciplinary artist, collaborated on the work *Nous sommes votre miroir**, created by Pascale, Julie Chantale St-Jean, Sophie Rheaume, Melanie H. and Adina, at Joliette Institution, as well as *Caged Songs** created by Renae, Cassandra Nephin, Lorraine, Lisa, and Brigide at Thérèse- Casgrain Halfway House • **Nicodème Camarda** is an ex-convict of Bordeaux prison and a Souverain anonyme. He is a writer of tales and poems

FACILITATOR **Lynda Champagne** teaches philosophy at Collège Maisonneuve and lectures about democracy, participation and citizen engagement. She is a facilitator for the Rendez-vous stratégiques hosted by the Institut du Nouveau (INM).

* works presented in the **AGIR / ART OF WOMEN IN PRISON** exhibition

THURSDAY, 9 JUNE, 2011, 7 pm: The Condition of Incarcerated Women and Their Transition Into the Community

The myths and realities of incarcerated people and the challenges associated with social reintegration faced by women who have been in conflict with the law.

GUESTS • **Ruth Gagnon**, trained criminologist and General Director of the Société Elizabeth Fry du Québec, Ruth Gagnon has worked with criminalized women for over 20 years • **Patrick Altimas** is Director of the Association des services de réhabilitation sociale du Québec, an organization devoted to the promotion of community action in the field of criminal justice

• **Julie Chantale St-Jean**, recently released from a federal sentence is one of the creative collaborators of the video installation *Nous sommes votre miroir**. She continues to work with community-based art projects, including her involvement as a member of the Steering Committee for *Art Entr'Elles*, an art collective of women who have been in conflict with the law • **Sheri**, originally from Winnipeg, is a Native woman who spent 17 years in several federal detention facilities, including four years in solitary confinement. She is currently on parole on a study/work project.

FACILITATOR Joane Martel is a criminology professor at the École de service social of Université Laval. Her research deals with the sociology of criminal law, gender and identity issues, and time and space as it relates to prison life.

* work presented in the **AGIR / ART OF WOMEN IN PRISON** exhibition

THURSDAY, 16 JUNE, 2011, 7 pm: The Role of Prisons and Possible Alternatives

This roundtable will offer new perspectives about our society's reliance on incarceration and the importance of critical reflection about possible alternatives to imprisonment.

GUESTS • Marion Vacheret is Associate Professor at the Université de Montréal's School of Criminology. She is interested in the failure of the prison model of the past 30 years, which is based on risk management of criminalized persons • **Kim Pate** is General Director of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies, professor at the University of Ottawa Faculty of Law, and has been an activist for social justice for the past 25 years • **Justin Piché** works at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology of Carleton University and is interested in the costs of incarceration versus that of possible alternatives • Having served a long sentence, one **anonymous guest**, who has now been active in social work for over 12 years, will discuss the ways in which incarceration affects one's life and share her thoughts on possible alternatives.

FACILITATOR Anne Lagace Dowson is a radio journalist who was a longtime host of the CBC Radio Noon program, aired daily across Quebec. She holds a Masters degree in Canadian Studies and is involved with the cultural scene, especially in the field of literature. She has facilitated numerous panels and debates on the arts. In 2008, she was an NPD Party candidate for the Westmount – Ville Marie district.

THANK YOU!

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MEDIA

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Media Section: www.expoagir.com/media.html