



The Exhibition: *Doing Time | Depth of Surface*, commissioned by Philagrafika, is an exhibition exploring the architecture and stories of Philadelphia's historic Holmesburg Prison. Spanish artists Patricia Gómez Villaescusa and María Jesús González Fernández have created large-format "printings" of drawings, paintings and graffiti left by former inmates on the walls of the prison, which opened in 1896 and operated for nearly a century before being decommissioned in 1995. The exhibition gives a voice to the guards, employees and inmates who lived in the Northeast Philadelphia prison.

Special Events:

Artist and Curator Brunch, Exhibition Walkthrough & Tour (FREE)

Saturday, January 28, 11 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Includes a brunch reception and exhibition walkthrough with the artists and curator José Roca, followed by a free tour at Eastern State Penitentiary. *Space is limited; RSVP is required:*

cperkins@philagrafika.org

Docent-Led Exhibition Tours (FREE)

Saturdays 12-12:30 p.m. and 1-1:30 p.m. from February 4 – March 17

Philagrafika docents will lead a 30-minute exhibition tour, highlighting stories from the artists' residency at Holmesburg Prison while providing anecdotes and background on the creation of the artworks.

Exhibition Catalogue:

Philagrafika's *Depth of Surface* exhibition catalogue, designed by Smyrski Creative, includes 33 color images selected by the artists, two essays and an interview with the artists conducted by curator José Roca. Patricia Robertson's essay *Printing the Past: Gómez + González' Monoprints* guides the reader through the artists' process of printing prison cell number 805, and *Borderlines*, an essay by Jennie Hirsh, brings clarity of meaning to Gómez + González's artistic practice. The catalogue will be available for free during the exhibition's run at The Galleries at Moore; it can also be ordered from Philagrafika's website (philagrafika.org), free with shipping and handling.

Doing Time | Depth of Surface

Dates:

January 28 – March 17, 2012

Opening Reception:

Friday, January 27, 6 p.m. – 8 p.m.

Public Opening:

Saturday, January 28, 2012

Venue:

The Galleries at

Moore College of Art & Design

20th and Ben Franklin Parkway

Philadelphia, PA

215-965-4027, thegalleriesatmoore.org

Admission & Hours:

Free for all exhibitions and public programs.

Gallery hours: Monday – Friday, 11 a.m. – 7 p.m.; and Saturday, 11 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Phone number:

Philagrafika, 215-557-8433

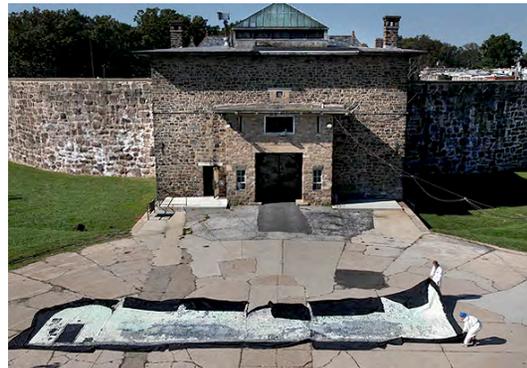
Official Project Website:

philagrafika.org/gomez-and-gonzalez.html

Artists:

María Jesús González Fernández &
Patricia Gómez Villaescusa

ABOUT HOLMESBURG PRISON



Holmesburg Prison is located on Torresdale Avenue in Northeast Philadelphia. The prison opened in 1896 and was used continuously for almost 100 years until it was closed in 1995. Similar in design to Eastern State Penitentiary, the structure is characterized by a central hub from which cellblocks extend out. It was a maximum-security prison with high brick walls that surround the 17-acre compound.

Originally made up of six cellblocks containing a total of 450 cells, with the intention of keeping inmates in solitary confinement, it boasted modern plumbing, incandescent lighting, and forced air ventilation and heating. For the past 16 years, the site has been used only for police testing and training programs. The films *Up Close & Personal* (1996), *Animal Factory* (2000) and *Law-Abiding Citizen* (2009) have filmed scenes on location in Holmesburg Prison, and in 2000, photographer Thomas Roma documented the derelict state of Holmesburg with the book *In Prison Air*.



Quick Facts:

- Opened in 1896
- Closed in 1995
- Uses wheel-and -poke model, as designed by John Haviland for Eastern State Penitentiary

Project Partners:

City of Philadelphia
Holmesburg Prison
Philadelphia Prison System

Special Acknowledgement:

Joseph Bastone, Officer, Philadelphia Prison System
Sally Elk, President & CEO, Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site
Robert Eskin, Public Information Office, Philadelphia Prison System
Lou Giorla, Commissioner Philadelphia Prison System
Captain Edward Miranda, Philadelphia Prison System
Sean Kelley, Senior Vice President, Director of Public Programming and P.R. Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site
Valerie Robinson, Senior Attorney, City of Philadelphia

ABOUT THE ARTISTS



Patricia Gómez Villaescusa and María Jesús González Fernández were both born in 1978 in Valencia, Spain, where they still work. Their artistic partnership began while the artists were working toward Fine Arts degrees from the *Facultad de Bellas Artes de Valencia* in 2002. Their work has been exhibited in numerous solo and group shows in Spain. They have won a number of grants and awards, including, among others: the photography prize for *El Cultural* (2010), and first prize at *Generación 2008 Caja Madrid Art Grants and Awards* (2009), and a *Generación 2007* artist grant (2007). Collections that house their work include Caja Madrid, DA 2 DOMUS ARTIUM Salamanca, the Polytechnic University of Valencia, the University of Sevilla, Caja Catilla-La Mancha, Bancaja, and El Mundo. *Doing Time* is Gómez and González's first project in the United States and their fourth collaboration of this nature.

Gómez and González work in a collaborative process grounded in an artistic practice similar to mural conservation. Utilizing a modified version of a conservation technique known as *strappo*, they work primarily to preserve the surfaces of buildings — the veritable “skin of architecture” — by detaching a wall's surface layers. Using a layer of fabric and glue they remove the surface, in its entirety, in a process much like ripping a bandage off skin. In fact, *strappo*, an Italian word, means to rip or tear. This process allows the artists to extract a tangible record of the site in its current state, preserving the expressions of identity, memory, apathy and desire of its former residents.

PREVIOUS WORK

La casa desplegada (The House Unfurled), 2005

Gómez and González produced their first architectural prints in houses in the El Cabañal neighborhood of Valencia. The beautiful Modernist homes were slated for demolition and the artists felt inspired to preserve their walls. After pulling the top layer of paint from 12 interiors, the result was an enormous rolled print that measures 340 meters long by 2 meters high (or about 1116 by 7 feet).

Proyecto para cárcel abandonada (Abandoned Prison Project), 2008-09

Gómez and González's first prison-based project was at Valencia's century-old

Doing Time | Depth of Surface

Press Contact: Megan Wendell, Canary Promotion, 215-690-4065, megan@canarypromo.com

Modelo Prison. It has been out of use since 1993 and was being refurbished to serve as an administrative building at the time of the artists' intervention. They created large-scale imprints of the prison's walls that were covered in graffiti and messages. To provide a context for these “prints” and to demonstrate their process, they also produced photographic and video documentation.

Proyecto per a presó abandonada (Abandoned Prison Project), 2011



During their preparations for an exhibition of the Abandoned Prison Project at the *Fundació Pilar i Joan Miró* in Mallorca, the artists were presented with the opportunity to work in another prison in Palma. This time, the institution was still in the process of being shut down and the artists were able to be on site during its final days along with the remaining seven inmates. They worked with these prisoners, recording their marks and graffiti instead of simply discovering anonymous traces of those who had left the site long ago.

EXHIBITION NOTES



Curatorial Concept

Gómez and González have a collaborative artistic practice that is centered around capturing the spirit of a place, its history and memory by preserving the marks imprinted on the walls — more precisely the outer surface that was in contact with its inhabitants, the veritable “skin” of architecture. This technique could be characterized as “detachments” since the actual paint of the wall is affixed to a canvas and removed in its entirety. In school, the artists studied (1996-2002) all forms of

printmaking. While still at university they started including walls and other surfaces as “matrices.” The artists have since trained in the technique of removing paintings and frescoes from walls of buildings that have structural damage or face demolition, and they have developed a conceptual artistic practice based on their technical expertise. They believe that their work, besides its conceptual and aesthetic value, is a vital documentation that serves as an archive of memory.

Speaking about their work as a form of expanded printmaking, the artists have stated: “From an experimental conception of printmaking, the fact of removing paint from a wall is, for us, an act of printing; and what we obtain from this practice is considered a print: it is, though, a unique print, done outside the atelier, without a press, ink or paper.” For the artists, understanding their work as print is more conceptual than technical, since the technique that they use is actually closer to removing a mural (a process very similar to *strappo*, a traditional technique used to remove paintings off the original support). They came to this realization by accident: “The origin of our practice was

when a piece of the wall surface unexpectedly pulled away from the canvas that was attached to the supporting wall. Instinctively, we thought of this as an act of printmaking: the wall is the matrix; the scars and marks on its surface, with several overlapping layers of paint, history and signs, is imprinted by time and vital experiences. The supporting element that receives and registers the information is the canvas. The work of the press, which makes the transference possible, is the process of fixing the canvas to the wall with glues to remove the surface once it has dried.”

Exhibition Catalogue Excerpts

From *Borderlines*, by Jennie Hirsh:

“Working within claustrophobic cells behind closed doors, and rifling through files, photographs, notebooks, logbooks, and photographs in local archives, the artists collected fragments of time passed behind bars, discovering a part of the city usually invisible to the population at large. In turning their attention to those individuals – guards, administrators, and prisoners – whose stories and bodies were deemed unfit for circulation in mainstream society, the artists pursued a side of the urban landscape that is, by design, inaccessible to the population living ‘on the outside.’”

From *Printing the Past*, by Patricia S. Robertson:

“These prints created by means of such a strenuous process are an unexpected art form that literally archives the remnants of the lives of the many inmates along with the architecture and history of Holmesburg Prison. Capturing on the cloth the graffiti, the traces of weather and effects of time inscribed in the cells of the prison, Gómez and González use the prison walls much like an etching or relief plate from which they print the history of marks scratched and drawn into the paint and plaster. These large-scale prints are a record of surfaces that put into focus the history of textures which preserve ‘vital experiences.’”

Q&A: CURATOR JOSÉ ROCA INTERVIEWS GÓMEZ + GONZÁLEZ



In 2011, Philagrafika invited Spanish artists Patricia Gómez and María Jesús González — an artistic partnership known as Gómez + González — to execute a project at Holmesburg Prison, the results of which would be exhibited at Moore College of Art & Design. The artists’ radical understanding of print resonated with Philagrafika’s mission of expanding the conceptual and technical frontiers of printmaking.

José Roca: At the start of the residency, your work within the site was delayed due to additional city requirements to ensure your safety as well as that of city employees. Waiting to begin your intervention in the cells, you spent extensive time in libraries and special collections, delving deeper into the prison’s complex history.ⁱ In light of this setback, what were the main challenges of this project?

Gómez + González: First, bureaucratic issues pushed back the start of the project more than two months, forcing us to work against the clock once we got inside without the option of correcting our outcomes.

Once inside the prison, we faced other problems: the paint used on the walls and the extreme humidity of the site. The lead-based paint on the walls at Holmesburg was extremely hard and resistant to being removed from the wall, which required our use of surfactants to penetrate and soften the paint, making it easier to peel off with a water-based glue. This seems ironic given that in many parts of the building, the paint has been peeling off by itself. We ended up experimenting with more than 15 different types of bought or prepared glues to find a formula that would work for the various surfaces — what worked for one wall failed on another. We did not have time to employ a chemist to analyze our results; instead, we had to take chances, knowing that each experiment with peeling could not be repeated if it did not work.

JR: Did this project change the way you think about your practice?

G + G: For each project, we work under different conditions, which require us to find new solutions. Our practice was surely enriched by this experience, as we became more flexible and open to circumstances. With *Depth of Surface*, we encountered a decrepit building with much information on its walls already lost. And yet the site offered unexpected information: We began another type of salvaging not centered exclusively on architecture but on other elements that reveal the site’s history. For example, we unearthed other voices, like the writings of the guards in their logbooks. We documented the site through photography and video via a surveillance camera and sound recordings.

JR: Were there paradoxes you encountered regarding the condition of the site and the architecture of incarceration?

G+G: Since being decommissioned in 1995, the prison has deteriorated significantly. Comparing photographs of the cells in the book *In Prison Air*ⁱⁱ with what we found confirms how much the walls have decayed in only six years [since the book’s publication]. It was difficult for us to identify the cells that we had previously seen in the book because the walls had lost more than 70 percent of the drawings and other graphic information that they had when the prison closed.

Time, humidity and the general abandonment of the site have produced this rapid deterioration.

JR: In interviewing former guards, did you learn anything unexpected about the prison?

G+G: We learned that the guards were as much under surveillance as were the inmates, as the logbooks they kept made clear. Besides registering what happened in each cellblock, the hourly reports written by the guards were also used by their superiors to control them: to check if they had done their jobs properly, especially if there was a complaint from one of the prisoners.

JR: This is your third experience working at a prison. Do you have a specific interest in prisons, or was this purely coincidental?

G+G: No, this was not an accident; for us, an abandoned prison contains valuable information on its walls. We sought out the first prison in Valencia. In the two subsequent cases, we were invited to perform interventions, once through the Fundació Mirò in Mallorca, and the latest through Philagrafika. Our interest in prisons has grown exponentially each time, as we learn more about the penitentiary system worldwide by comparing different prison sites. Architecture is always different, and the people we encounter and their respective stories are also always different. In turn, we have produced very different types of artworks. This project brought us closer to the origins of the panoptic system, which was the model used in the two prisons where we worked previously, and allowed us to establish continuity among the three projects.

JR: You produced a sound piece inspired by the Holmesburg guards' logbooks. Can you explain why you chose this medium?

G+G: The voice repeating the same phrase over and over is analogous to a state of boredom; the phrases that the guards wrote to document what happened in the prison express the slow, monotonous passage of time that they endured. This orated version of the official

written record complements the silent voices of the prisoners captured by making prints of the writings on the walls.

JR: In the past, the inmates at Holmesburg were involved in dermatological experiments. Is this particular history reflected in the works you did for this project?

G+G: For us, the connection between human skin and architecture is as critical as it is obvious, and we have explored it in the past. Moreover, the walls inside a prison where an inmate expresses himself are like a second skin that envelops and protects him, separating him from the exterior but also imprisoning him. When nothing remains of a place and its walls are the sole element left to tell a story, our job is to reclaim and reveal those histories.

We are not interested in denouncing the experiments performed with the inmates — this has already been well documented — but we cannot avoid it completely, either, insofar as this is part of the history of the prison and the cityⁱⁱⁱ. Our work resonates with these events naturally because we engage with layers of history as found in the diseased walls that have lost their skin, as they are crumbling from the extreme humidity, and are unhealthy due to their lead content and other environmental issues. What has happened to Holmesburg's walls echoes what happened to the skin of the inmates who participated in medical experiments that had grave consequences for their health.

ⁱ These institutions include: The Library Company; the Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Philadelphia City Archives; Urban Archives, Samuel Paley Library, Temple University; Athenaeum of Philadelphia; Free Library of Philadelphia, Print and Picture Collection; Philadelphia Historical Commission at Philadelphia City Hall; and Anne and Jerome Fisher Fine Arts Library at the University of Pennsylvania.

ⁱⁱ Thomas Roma, *In Prison Air: the Cells of Holmesburg Prison* (New York: PowerHouse Books, 2005)

ⁱⁱⁱ See Allen M. Hornblum, *Acres of Skin: Human Experiments at Holmesburg Prison* (New York: Routledge, 1998) and Allen M. Hornblum, *Sentenced to Science* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2007).

ABOUT THE PRESENTERS



Philagrafika

Philagrafika, formerly known as the Philadelphia Print Collaborative, was founded in 2000 in recognition of a growing convergence in Philadelphia of artists, educators, curators, nonprofits, galleries, print workshops and museums that needed a central organizing body for cooperative initiatives. Philagrafika builds upon the Philadelphia region's rich printmaking history and abundant artistic resources to enhance the city's presence as an international center for innovative printmaking. Philagrafika's mission is to promote and sustain printmaking as a vital and valued art form by providing artistic, programmatic and administrative leadership for large-scale, cooperative initiatives with broad public exposure. They do this through an international contemporary art festival, an annual invitational portfolio and special projects. Their programs have been designed to present new curatorial and critical models for printmaking — models in which the medium is presented as an integral component of current artistic practice. For more information, visit <http://www.philagrafika.org>.

Doing Time | Depth of Surface is Philagrafika's first exhibition since the presentation of **Philagrafika 2010: The Graphic Unconscious**, a citywide, multiple-venue, international festival that redefined contemporary printmaking. With a mission to promote and sustain printmaking as a vital and valued art form, Philagrafika continues to build upon and reinforce the themes of innovation and collaboration that were first explored in the organization's 2010 festival. The commission of Gómez and González also continues support of international artists in interpreting Philadelphia's history.

Moore College of Art & Design

The Galleries at Moore offer new perspectives into the work of established and emerging regional, national and international contemporary artists and designers. Originally established as a single gallery in 1968, today, the galleries have exhibition spaces throughout Moore's campus; these include the Goldie Paley Gallery, established in 1983 featuring national and international artists and designers; and the Levy Gallery for the Arts in Philadelphia, which has highlighted established and emerging talent in our community since 1987. Serving the only art and design college for women in the country, The Galleries at Moore have featured a number of groundbreaking exhibitions dedicated to women artists and designers.



The *Doing Time | Depth of Surface* artist residency and exhibition at Moore College of Art & Design is a project of Philagrafika. *Doing Time | Depth of Surface* has been supported by The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage through the Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative and in collaboration with SPANISH CULTURAL ACTION (AC/E). Exhibition support was provided by the National Endowment for the Arts. Additional project support was provided by the Haverford Hurford Humanities Center Internship Program and Crane Arts.

José Roca

Curator

José Roca was born in Barranquilla, Colombia, in 1962, and is based in Bogotá, Colombia. He graduated from Universidad Nacional de Colombia with a degree in architecture; specialized in Critical Studies at the Whitney Independent Study Program in New York; and holds a master's degree from Paris' Ecole d'Architecture in Design and Administration of Cultural Buildings.

For 10 years, Roca ran the artistic program at the Banco de La República, Bogotá, and transformed it into one of the most respected institutions on the Latin American circuit.

Roca was co-curator of the following exhibitions, among others: 1st Poli/gráfica Triennial in San Juan, Puerto Rico (2004); [27th São Paulo Biennial](#), Brazil (2006); Encuentro de Medellín MDE07 (2007); [Cartajena](#), urban interventions in Cartagena, Colombia (2007); and [Valparaíso](#), interventions in Valparaíso, Chile (2010). He is currently chief curator of the 8 Bienal do Mercosul in Porto Alegre, Brazil. In 2007, he was a jury member for the [52nd Venice Biennale](#).

In 2010, Roca was the artistic director of [Philagrafika 2010: The Graphic Unconscious](#), a festival of contemporary printmaking which took place in various exhibition spaces throughout Philadelphia, PA. Among Roca's other curatorial projects are *Traces of Friday: art, tourism, displacement*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, USA (2003); *Botánica política*, Sala Montcada, La Caixa, Barcelona, Spain (2004); *Phantasmagoria: Espectros da Ausência*, touring exhibition organized by Independent Curators International and the Museo de Arte del Banco de la República (2007-009); *Otras Floras*, Galeria Nara Roesler, São Paulo, Brazil (2008); *Muntadas: Mecanismos da Imagem*, Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, Brazil (2010). In 2011, Roca headed the curation of an exhibition of Rio Grande do Sul artist Regina Silveira at the Iberê Camargo Foundation in Porto Alegre, Brazil.

Jennie Hirsh

Contributing Essayist

Jennie Hirsh is Assistant Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art in the Department of Art History, Theory and Criticism at the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA). Prior to joining the faculty at MICA, she held postdoctoral fellowships at both Princeton and Columbia Universities, and her work has been supported by the U.S. Fulbright commission to Italy, the Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation, and the Mrs. Giles Whiting Foundation. She is currently completing a monograph on Giorgio de Chirico, which focuses on his pictorial and literary self-representation, and her volume titled *Contemporary Art and Classical Myth*, co-edited with Isabelle Wallace, has been published with Ashgate Publishing. Her essays on Giorgio de Chirico, Giorgio Morandi, Jean-Luc Godard and Roberto Rossellini, Pipó Nguyen-Duy, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Yinka Shonibare, Regina Silveira and Michael Huey have appeared in scholarly volumes, academic journals and museum catalogs, and she recently served as general editor for the catalogue *Philagrafika 2010: The Graphic Unconscious*.

Patricia S. Robertson

Contributing Essayist

Patricia S. Robertson is a printmaker and book artist who works primarily in monoprint. She has exhibited in Philadelphia, PA; Silver Spring, MD; Wilmington, DE; Baltimore, MD; and Birmingham, AL. Her undergraduate degree is from the Kansas City Art Institute in printmaking, and she received her MFA from Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia. She has been a resident at the Vermont Studio Center and Penland School of Arts & Crafts. She has traveled to Los Angeles as a visiting artist to create monosilkscreens at SelfHelp Graphics. In addition, she has been a docent at the Philadelphia Museum of Art since 2003 and is currently coordinating the volunteer docents at Philagrafika for this exhibition.