

Nicholete Brocchi

It's not a move it is a Transition

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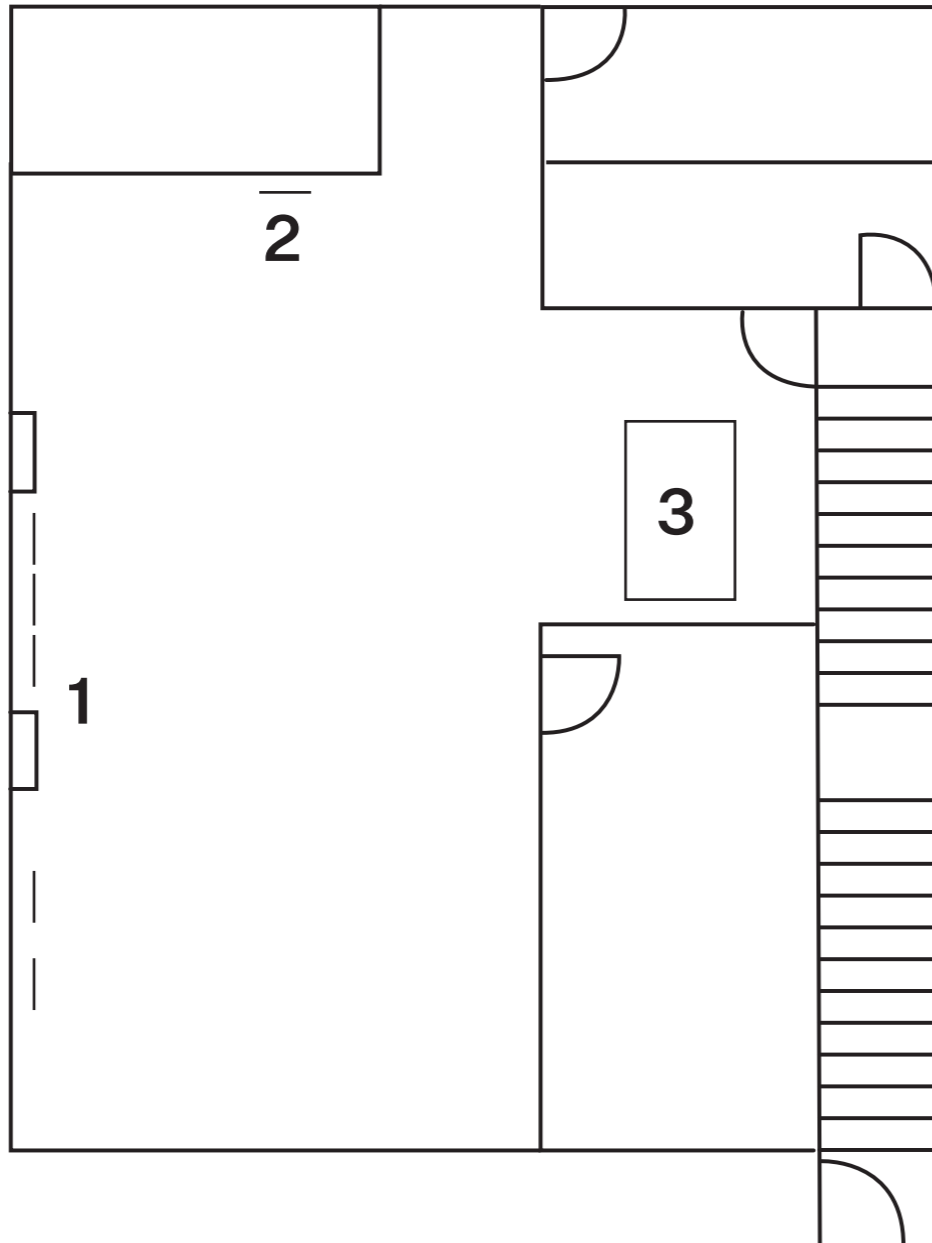
It's not a move it is a Transition

Works list:

1.
Shift, one hour and twelve minutes
digital prints on brushed aluminum
65 x 43 x 5cm
2019

2.
It's your call
HP Pavilion 10 notebook, HP charger, Uniden 8355, Telephone cord, Extension cord, Paint
dimensions variable
2019

3.
Line in Line out
Digital print on paper
21 x 14.8cm
2019



RM Gallery Hours
Thursday and Friday
1pm — 6pm

Saturday
12pm — 4pm

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www.rm.org.nz

info@rm.org.nz

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3 Samoa House Lane
Auckland

JustSpeak is a youth-led movement advocating for transformative change in the justice system.

The changes we seek include an immediate reduction in the prison population, an end to institutional racism, and the establishment of a justice system that honours Māori as tangata whenua. We believe our justice system should recognise the status of the New Zealand government as a governing partner alongside Māori under the terms of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Our network is made up of many different people who are personally invested in change - from prison reform to prison abolition. We are all united by the shared view that a just society does not lock up its most vulnerable people, and that we are capable of more effective and compassionate methods of addressing harm.

Right now close to 10,000 people are in prison in New Zealand. Around 3,000 of these people are on remand and have not yet been sentenced. Ten. Thousand. People. In prison.

For each of these people inside prison there is a family and a community outside who are impacted by incarceration. We call this the 'collateral consequences' of prison and what it looks like is children losing parents, families losing income security and the erosion of community structure and stability. Poverty, limited access to healthcare and education, intergenerational trauma.

These are the drivers of crime. All of these factors make communities and individuals vulnerable, and force people into situations where breaking the law becomes a reasonable option. The exact circumstances that prisons create for those communities on the outside are also the circumstances in which people are more likely to break the law. In this way, prisons precipitate the drivers of crime, creating feedback loops that further entrench inequality by their very nature. Our prison system creates a cascade of consequences extending far beyond the fenceline.

"I was a lot more withdrawn once my dad went to prison. Even though I was already a shy kid, it just made me more nervous, aware that anything could happen any minute, things could change for what seem to be no reason. So I just became a lot more withdrawn, wanted to just stay at home. I really hated going to school." Kōrero Pono exhibition - www.justspeak.org.nz/koreropono

Proponents of our punitive prison system like to say things such as ‘do the crime, do the time’. But reductionist takes like this rely on conceptualising a sector of our society as lacking in humanity. It relies on the idea of choice - that people choose crime, violence, or addiction because they enjoy the lifestyle. What it intentionally fails to acknowledge is that for people who live precariously, ‘choice’ often exist between two states of harm. Either you commit benefit fraud or your kids don’t eat. Either you sell drugs to subsidise your income or your parents freeze in their cold house. Either you self-medicate with substances or you attempt to cope with mental health challenges and trauma unaided. Nobody would choose to be confronted with only these ‘choices’, and yet these are the people who populate our prisons. They deserve help, support, and respect.

Why does the New Zealand government put so many Māori people in prison?

When we talk about transforming our justice system and addressing these issues, we also need to talk about colonisation. In New Zealand, Māori experience greatly disproportionate levels of contact with every level of the criminal justice system, and despite comprising just 15% of New Zealand’s general population, Māori make up over 50% of our prison population. We know that institutional racism is a primary reason for this.

For transformative change to become a reality, white New Zealanders need to get comfortable with talking about our history of colonisation, and grow the strength to separate out the facts of institutional racism from our own feelings of discomfort. As a nation with a violent and traumatic past, we must foster our own resilience to be able to name these traumas honestly, and identify where we continue to replicate them. We’re not going to get anywhere if guilt and shame are allowed to steer the course.

Institutional racism is beginning to be acknowledged at a government level. In 2015 Police Commissioner Mike Bush admitted to “unconscious bias” within the police force. Since then Corrections Minister Kelvin Davis has been vocal about the racism evident in our justice system, saying;

“The question then becomes, ‘so, what do we do about it? Because if it’s not unconscious bias, well then it’s conscious bias and we’ve got to make changes to make sure that Māori aren’t particularly picked on, or seen as the ones that are committing all the crime” (Kelvin Davis, radionz.co.nz, 20 August 2018)

The solution here is twofold. Māori communities must be given agency and resources to design and implement a justice system based on tikanga and Te Ao Māori, and the New Zealand government needs to commit to honouring the terms of Te Tiriti o Waitangi by acting as a governing *partner* in the true sense of the word. As Kelvin Davis stated “If Māori make up more than 50 percent of the prison population, we should actually be talking to Māori about what the solutions are too”.

What would an alternative look like?

Harm comes in many guises, but it’s defining feature is that it makes us feel afraid. Part of the reason why a punitive approach to justice has been so successful is that it taps into that fear response, and sells us a quick fix. It relies on the false dichotomy that if we put ‘bad’ people in prison then ‘good’ people won’t be harmed. When you’re buzzing on the edges of fear it’s hard to think critically about this flawed logic, but the honest truth is that there is no way to erase all harm. We can minimise risk as much as we want, but harm - both intentional and unintentional - is an unavoidable part of the human experience.

It’s a hard concept to accept, that sometimes bad things will happen. It’s even harder to accept that punishing people for causing harm does little to reduce the effects of that harm, and nothing to prevent that harm from recurring. But that is the truth. Punishment may give us a fleeting sense of justice, but if we think about justice as something that is meaningful and lasting and contributes to safety and happiness - that’s not what punishment gives us. What our current punitive prison system gives us is people held in cages, and released with very little real support into society where they have very few opportunities to sustain themselves.

We like to think that prison is a place where people go for rehabilitation, but the reality is that prison environments as they exist in New Zealand are not conducive to rehabilitation. People living in carceral environments are exposed to additional stressors that we would never encounter outside of prison. If at times it has seemed difficult to you sharing a house with three flatmates, imagine the challenges that would come with living in a heavily regulated environment with limited time outside, rudimentary levels of comfort, drastically restricted access to your family and support networks, and very few ways to distract yourself, alongside hundreds of others living under the same conditions.

We reckon we can do better, so let’s insist instead on a therapeutic and restorative system. One where people who have experienced harm are supported to heal, and where those who have caused harm are held accountable and supported to address the reasons behind that behaviour. We know that prisons don’t provide this, so let’s demand better.

If our goal is to make our society safe and happy, then our justice system absolutely needs to reflect these values. Our justice system needs to provide services that are truly rehabilitative and healing, and it needs to be capable of dealing with the complexities of humans in order to deliver a type of justice that serves us all.

This is the kind of justice we all truly do deserve.

Essay by Just Speak members