APOTHECARTS

A PROJECT OF: TULANE ALBERT & TINA SMALL CENTER
IN CONJUNCTION WITH: SOLITARY GARDENS
WITH SUPPORT FROM: JOHNSON CONTROLS, INC.
“You want people to tell you their story. And sometimes if you’re too didactic, people don’t want to talk. But I think as an artist, you have the responsibility to gently interrupt the status quo and show them what they never knew, to seduce and destroy.”

- jackie sumell, Solitary Gardens
This project was completed amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, during which many students took turns quarantining and remoting into class.
SOLITARY GARDENS

PRISONER'S APOTHECARY

PROJECT MISSION

LISTEN
The Solitary Gardens, turn solitary confinement cells into garden beds that are the same size and blueprint as the cell Herman (Wallace), and so many others spend decades in. The contents (plants, flowers and herbs) of the prison-cell-turned-garden-bed are designed by prisoners serving their sentences in isolation through praxes on the outside. Central to this project is a call to end the inhumane conditions of solitary confinement, simultaneously inspiring compassion necessary to dismantle systems of punishment and control.

The Solitary Gardens is a social sculpture and collaborative project that cultivates conversations around alternatives to incarceration by catalyzing compassion. This project directly and metaphorically asks us to imagine a landscape without prisons.

Solitary Gardens is a long running project started by Jackie Sumell in collaboration with many allies, volunteers, incarcerated folks, and artists. The project has led to several offshoots including the Prisoner's Apothecary and the idea of traveling apothecary carts.
To understand the context, issues, and work of the partner organization, Solitary Gardens, the Small Center design team volunteered at their Lower Ninth Ward site. The design team built a new solitary garden bed and were exposed to the materials and deep histories of the abolitionist garden.

The Solitary Gardens are constructed from the byproducts of sugarcane, cotton, tobacco and indigo—the largest chattel slave crops—which we grow onsite, exposing the illusion that slavery was abolished in the United States. The Solitary Gardens utilize the tools of prison abolition, permaculture, contemplative practices, and transformative justice to facilitate exchanges between persons subjected to solitary confinement and volunteer projects on the “outside.” The beds are “gardened” by prisoners, known as Solitary Gardeners, through written exchanges, growing calendars and design templates. As the garden beds mature, the prison architecture is overpowered by plant life, proving that nature—like hope, love, and imagination—will ultimately triumph over the harm humans impose on ourselves and on the planet.
The Prisoner’s Apothecary is an offshoot of Solitary Gardens. The Prisoner’s Apothecary transforms the plants from The Solitary Gardens into medicine for communities most deeply impacted by the insidious reach of mass incarceration. The Prisoner’s Apothecary will produce natural medicine, tea, tinctures, steams, and salves. As the medicine is designed by folks who are incarcerated, incarcerated individuals will have a unique opportunity to heal the communities they are often accused of harming. This action will transcend perceptions of criminality, restoration, and redemption. As part of a national tour, The Prisoner’s Apothecary will offer free plant medicine and healing justice workshops to communities marginalized by mass incarceration, violence, and heteropatriarchy. Beginning in 2016 as part of the Rauchenberg Residency, this project has taken on many lifeforms, including a Creative Capital Grant and a successful Kickstarter Campaign. As we continue to build, this initiative will be built with a collective of grassroots organizers, artists, healthcare activists, farmers, and educators working toward harm reduction, health sovereignty, and accessible community care. Team up with healers around the country, one of our strongest partners is Samara School of Community Herbalism in New Orleans. As part of this initiative, Samara students will share their notes from class with incarcerated individuals through written correspondence, transcending education and access.
As part of the Prisoner’s Apothecary family of projects, the design team was asked to design and fabricate mobile healing units that expand the reach of the project and create new opportunities for conversation and education.

**Design Team’s Driving Questions**

How can design seed growth?

How can we seduce and destroy?

How can we mobilize conversation?

The team worked to define the scale, quantity, and materiality of these carts which act to seed conversation.

Partners in this conversation were Jackie Sumell of Solitary Gardens along with Jenn Stovall with the Samara School of Community Herbalism. The Apothecarts are based out of an allied space, Resurrection After Expiration, and meant to travel short distances across the city of New Orleans.
Design started in small groups and focused on a range of topics related to the mobile carts. Research ranged from historical precedents of apothecaries around the world to local precedents of mobile food vendor carts. Additional research included design strategies for adaptability and transformation which included schematic understanding and technical understandings of materials, connections, and options.

**Mobility**

**Aggregation**

**Display**

**Transformation**

**Advocacy / Action**

**Storage**

**Humanity (and non-commercial)**

**Complexity (of issues)**
The twelve person studio split into four groups to integrate the research themes and lessons into four cart proposal ideas. Teams worked at the scale of 1:1 cardboard mock ups to think through dimensions, connections and opportunities. Themes are highlighted in the captions.

- Transformable surfaces
- Storage and signage
- Inhabitable cart
- Sheltered conversation
- Small scale mock up
Design and prototyping included smaller transport and display boxes to hold the tinctures, salves, and products of the gardens.
The Apothecars, when deployed across the city need to accommodate conversations and provide seating. The design team prototyped various portable seating from CNC prototypes to custom made finger jointed versions. Key driving factors were durability, accessibility, and portability.
Further investigations and prototyping centered around the surfaces people would come into contact with. The design team focused on the tactility of materials and how simple pieces could embody layered meanings. Handles and exterior surfaces were designed to welcome touch and foster conversation.
The team determined that aluminum would be the best material for the body of the cart. In a humid climate it wouldn’t warp like wood and it wouldn’t be damaged as easily. It could also be washed when it gets dirty and could be cut or scored with text and patterns.

The shell or body of the carts became opportunities to focus on messaging and transformability. Designing how the carts could literally carry a message as they crossed town was important. CNC (computer numerical control) milling is the use of a large drill to carve away material. The drill is controlled by software that generates code for the pattern or material that needs to be removed to achieve the final product. The material is removed in layers so the process can take several hours.

Tests on samples of aluminum were made to decide what hole diameters would be best for patterning. Paint tests on those samples were also done to get a preview of what the final product might look like.

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Logos and branding for the Apothecarts went through several iterations, all revolving around the flower Bidens pilosa, also known as Beggar’s Ticks. Early logo ideas can be seen on this page.

The biden is a prolific weed in New Orleans with a small white flower head. These plants can be used for various apothecary remedies and is particularly important to the client.

The final iteration of the logo (right) was inspired by block printing methods so, if necessary, the logo can be simply and quickly reproduced. It depicts a biden from a cell-like structure with light grid lines indicating the bars that no longer confine the flower, but are in forgotten.
The Abolitionist’s Field Guide

a project of the prisoner’s apothecary

The design team saw a need and opportunity to generate educational information to further Prisoner’s Apothecary’s mission of educating the public about mass incarceration, solitary confinement, and prison abolition. In response, a part of the design team met with local organizations and graphics experts and created “The Abolitionist’s Field Guide”. This zine-styled informative handout will join the Prisoner’s Apothecary’s goods in the drawers and cubbies of the Apothecarts.

What is abolition?

Abolition: a political vision with the goal of eliminating imprisonment, policing, and surveillance and creating lasting alternatives to punishment and imprisonment.

Incarceration Rates among founding NATO countries

Because slavery did not end, it merely evolved into other systems of oppression and control, such as the school-to-prison pipeline, and the prison industrial complex.

The ubiquity of prisons in the United States is a holy system—buildings in the 1860s, the US remained the biggest prison building project in the history of the world (CR) that continues, we know the power to dismantle it.

Our modern prison system is built on the remnants of chattel slavery. The 13th Amendment of the United States Constitution includes a strategic exception to the abolition of slavery for those “duly convicted of a crime.”

The prison abolition movement began in the 1980s as a response to the War on Drugs which increased the U.S. prison population from 500,000 in 1980, to 1.3 million in 1990, and over 2 million by 2000.

People convicted of crimes in the US are treated like weeds—ignored, dismissed, or even eradicated. What if instead of responding to harm with more harm, we respond with compassion and the understanding that we all experience harm, and we all commit harm?

This is a good example of an abolitionist principle, which is to look long-term. Think of a garden being tended. Weeds pop up and must be removed. When we eradicate weeds, we create conditions that don’t allow for growth or transformation. We remove plants, and the garden becomes more conducive to the type of growth we wish to attain.

By most people would agree that the cycle of criminalization and punishment is unjust and unproductive, many are left with the question: If we get rid of prisons, what do we do about violent offenders such as sex offenders or murderers?

Prison abolition grapples with this question by asking: How do we create a world where prisons are unnecessary? How do we shape our society so that the current world foster the conditions it criminalizes?

Abolitionist scholar Ruth Wilson Gilmore often says that “Prisons are catchall solutions to social problems.” Issues like housing access, health care, un(der)employment, and immigration laws are at the heart of the problem—when people are unhoused, they may be forced to sleep in the street, which is criminalized. When people lack health care, they may be forced into desperate situations.

As much as abolition is about getting rid of prisons, it’s also about creating structures where they simply aren’t needed.

But what about...
CONSTRUCTION
FINAL
FUTURE
A team member worked on the construction drawings for each cart. These drawings describe the dimensions, materials, and connections of the carts. A printed copy was kept in the shop for everyone to reference and mark up as the build took shape.

**Armadillo**

**Camelback**
The team began by welding a steel frame for each cart, basing their measurements on conventions, human scale, and trailer base dimensions outsourced to Ultrapolis. Each frame was then outfitted with basic cabinetry, allowing measurements to real-life dimensions as the project progressed. The team divided and conquered as members worked on box fabrication and others worked on continuing to outfit the cabinetry. Aluminum sheets were milled at the Tuleane Millhaus, sent to Joly’s Metal Works for bending, and Kirkfields for powder coating. Assembly followed and the team collaborated to troubleshoot uneven edges, loose components, and inaccurate measurements to make the final Apothecarts.
Troubleshooting

Powder coating drop-off

Cork shelf backing

Box dividers

Tool Duel

Six dressers

Cork shelf bonding
MATERIALS BREAKDOWN

Course Materials: $2,591.05
Milling: $1,426.38
Finishes: $917.38
Furniture / Signage: $742.65
Cladding + Organizational Materials: $1,850.55
Framing / Structure: $907.87
Hardware: $733.24
Packing & unpacking

Fully deployed
On display

Ride like the wind
The Prisoner’s Apothecary team is looking beyond carts to a future home in the Resurrection After Exoneration space on St. Bernhard Ave. Our design team worked on a schematic design proposal for the future expansion as a work space, meeting space, and street-facing cafe. The schematic design work frames possible futures for the renovated space and suggests materials and colors that derive from the Apothecarts research.

**Proposed Program Plan**

The design team explored different mixed-use spaces that could be adapted for various functions. They considered the potential for storage, transitional space, and gender-neutral bathrooms.

**Proposed Mixed Use Space**

View towards front:
- Storage
- Transient space
- Gender-neutral bathrooms

Proposed Apex Cafe Space:
- Outdoor space: classrooms, herbal prep work, gardens

Proposed Mixed Use Space:
- Mixed-use space: Samara school, classroom, event space, adaptable storage

Storage:
- Student project work, student shop, student storage

This comprehensive approach aims to create a versatile and inclusive environment that aligns with the Apothecary’s mission.
Adrian Evans, Graduate
Home: Augusta, GA
Favorite Plant(s): Lavender, Eucalyptus, Olive Tree Plant, Weeping Willow, Orchids

Anna Deeg, 5 Yr. Undergraduate
Home: Philadelphia, PA
Favorite Plant(s): Rosemary or Dahlias

Bhumika Shirole, Graduate
Home: Pune, India
Favorite Plant(s): Lemongrass

Chloe Silva, Graduate
Home: Cherokee, OH
Favorite Plant(s): Rhubarb or Astilbe!

Dana Rollman, 4th Yr. Undergraduate
Home: Hilliard, OH
Favorite Plant(s): Lavender or linden

Daniele Martin, 5th Yr. Undergraduate
Home: San Carlos, CA
Favorite Plant(s): Apricot tree

Daniele Scheineng, Graduate
Home: Fort Wayne, IN
Favorite Plant(s): Roses and Wisteria.

Jeremy Ready, 5th Yr. Undergraduate
Home: New Orleans, LA
Favorite Plant(s): Gold Cypress

Lizzie Bateman, 5th Yr. Undergraduate
Home: Memphis, TN
Favorite Plant(s): This is tough! Probably magnolia tree or gardenia.

Rebecca Dunn, Graduate
Home: Lafayette, LA
Favorite Plant(s): Jalapeno! I am sure!

Zach Speroni, 5th Year Undergraduate
Home: Long Beach, CA
Favorite Plant(s): Sunflower

Emilie Taylor-Welty, Professor
Favorite Plant(s): Mexican Petunia

Nick Jenisch
Position: Project advisor
Favorite Plant(s): Wild ginger, Lilac, Sweet olive

Jackie Sumell
Position: Solitary Gardens Lead Artist
Favorite Plant(s): Bidens pilosa, Passiflora incarnata, and Albizia julibrissin.

James Rewert, 5th Yr. Undergraduate
Home: Concord, MA
Favorite Plant(s): Elephant ears and Jatho Tree

Dana Ridenour, 4th Yr. Undergraduate
Home: Hilliard, OH
Favorite Plant(s): Lavender or linden

Danelle Martin, 5th Yr. Undergraduate
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Abolition a political vision with the goal of eliminating imprisonment, policing, and surveillance and creating lasting alternatives to punishment and imprisonment; a commitment to ending cycles of harm

Apothecary a health professional trained in the art of preparing and dispensing plant medicine, or a shop where such medicines are sold

Chattel slavery a form of slavery wherein the enslaved person is legally rendered the personal property (chattel) of the slave owner

Healthcare sovereignty the ability to choose medicines that are socioculturally and ecologically appropriate, thereby, providing practiced, reliable and contextually relevant health care options

Herbalism the study or practice of the medicinal and therapeutic use of plants, now especially as a form of alternative medicine

Mutual aid the collective actions it takes to support community wellbeing and reaffirm that all lives have inherent value. Think solidarity, not charity

Permaculture a set of design principles centered on whole systems thinking, simulating, or directly utilizing the patterns and resilient features observed in natural ecosystems

Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) the overlapping interests of government and industry that use surveillance, policing, and imprisonment as solutions to economic, social and political problems

Restorative justice a system of criminal justice which focuses on the rehabilitation of offenders through reconciliation with victims and the community at large; antithesis of carceral justice

Restrictive housing unit (RHU) often called administrative segregation, restrictive housing is used by correctional administrators to isolate imprisoned people from the general population

Radical vitalism a framework that encourages us to understand the broader patterns and interrelations between all of life, to see the flows and interdependencies that make life and health possible, and to see how health is compromised when the links are broken

School to prison pipeline a system wherein children are funneled out of public schools and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. Deeply linked to zero tolerance rules

Seduce and destroy the process of engaging an individual in conversation about sensitive topics and introducing revelatory information, stories, etc.

Transformative justice the process of healing and understanding that harm to an individual comes from collective roots and should be repaired communally versus governmentally
PLANT GLOSSARY

Common Nettles

Gomphrena

Mint

Morning Glory

Mustard Collard

Nasturtium

Pea

Peppermint

Perilla

Periwinkle

Sensitive Plant

Sesame

Delicata Squash

Dianthus

Dill

Earth Smoke

Echinacea

Eggplant

Elderberry

Fennel

Green Bean

Hibiscus

Hollyhock

Honeysuckle

Horseradish

Hot Peppers

Hyacinth

Lemon Verbena

Lettuce

Lima Bean

Lupine

Marigold

Plantain

Poppy

Portulaca

Snapdragon

Sorrel

Spearmint

Spiked Cockscomb

Spilanthes

Spinach

Forget - Me - Not

Kale

Kohlrabi

Phlox

Shallot

Figurine
Becce Ellis with Solitary Gardens:
Promise of Justice Initiative for their support.
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Kirkfields for powder coating the aluminum components.
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Resurrection After Exoneration for their partnership in promoting Prisoner’s Apothecary and storing the carts.

Reviewers: Ana Groeger of Chicago Field Museum
Ann Yochum of Albert and Tina Small Center
Amanda Wiles of S.O.U.R.C.E. and Mel Chin Studio
Ben Smith of Tulane School of Architecture
Edison Caulfield of Tulane School of Architecture
Jose Cortes of Albert and Tina Small Center
Katie Nguyen of Eskew Dumez Ripple
Michael Dalle Molle of Good Wood
Ryan Doyle of Detroitist