

Prison, beyond the walls (Prison, au-delà des murs)

18 October 2019 – 26 July 2020

At the end of the eighteenth century, crimes that would usually have been punished at the execution block began to be punished in prisons. Imprisonment was seen as more humane than the capital and corporal punishments that were often handed out. Combining isolation, physical confinement and mental submission, the aim of prison was to punish and exclude criminals in order to protect society. This exhibition explores the paradox that emerged during the following century: how to exclude people while preparing for their return to freedom?

Prison, beyond the walls (Prison, au-delà des murs)

18 October 2019 to 26 July 2020

A joint production by the Musée des Confluences, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum in Geneva and the Deutsches Hygiene Museum in Dresden.



Credit: Prison of Nantes, photograph by Grégoire Korganow.

Following an introduction that looks at the birth of prison institutions in Europe, visitors discover rules governing the prison environment, as well as the balances of power they create and ways in which they are broken. This is followed by a look at how inmates survive imprisonment, through activities, creativity and links with the outside world. From trafficking to riots, and escape to suicide, light is thrown on the various expressions of rebellion in prison. While today, imprisonment is a punishment that is generally accepted by public opinion, alternatives aimed at reintegrating prisoners in society are raising questions and beginning discussions.

The exhibition brings together various accounts as it compares the viewpoints of inmates, prison staff and prison experts. Everyday objects are also presented, as well as photographs and artworks, in particular those done by inmates.

The French version of the exhibition at the Musée des Confluences also includes a unique theatre production created by Théâtre Nouvel Génération de Lyon (TNG). Through the illusion of small 'théâtres optiques' (optical theatres), visitors live an experience of imprisonment in three acts, which blurs the boundaries between inside and out.

Historical, philosophical, anthropological, sociological and artistic perspectives paint a complex picture that shakes up stereotypes and questions the paradox of prisons, which exclude individuals from society while preparing them for their return.

Press contacts

Musée des Confluences: Claire-Cécile David
claire-cecile.david@museedesconfluences.fr / +33 (0)4 28 38 12 14

Anne Samson Communications: Fédérica Forte / Caroline Remy
federica@annesamson.com / + 33 (0)1 40 36 84 40
caroline@annesamson.com / +33(0)1 40 36 84 32