

Media Release

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Basic Necessities

On View

April 21, 2021 – April 19, 2022

Location

298 Broome Street
New York, NY 10002 (building facade)



New York City, Lower East Side - Michelle Repiso presents [Basic Necessities](#), a multimedia project that features three individuals and the mechanisms they used to sustain their humanity while incarcerated. Every item represents an object that was either created or was a resource for rehabilitation during their confinement – focusing on art, creativity, and imagination in an unlikely place. This exhibit doesn't minimize their crimes but instead, it highlights how one copes with the situation they are in to help better themselves and their community. Repiso's work addresses the importance of understanding the person and not passing judgment based on previous circumstances.

Basic Necessities was conceptualized in 2016 when Repiso was photographing fitness trainer Coss Marte. Marte founded a gym on the Lower East Side, [CONBODY](#), that employs formerly incarcerated individuals, like himself. Soon Repiso was speaking with several of the other trainers about their shared experiences and the tools they used to keep their sense of self in an unforgiving environment. Marte, for example, developed a mental and physical exercise program for self-improvement. He also described the meals he would make to establish peace and a sense of unity with fellow incarcerated men. Trainer Shane Ennover created flowers out of toilet paper to send as mementos to his wife, while also constructing chess pieces to continue playing chess during his time in solitary confinement. The project soon grew to include Juan Howard, a mutual friend that composed music and wrote poetry in numerous journals to feel connected to his life "on the outside."

Basic Necessities was originally intended to be exhibited in a traditional gallery setting with funding provided by the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council in 2020. Shortly after receiving the award, the Covid-19 pandemic crisis shut down all non-essential public spaces and Repiso had to reconsider how to present this work. "I didn't want to have a one-time Zoom event, I wanted to create a shared space where people could physically see the exhibit. I decided the safest thing to do would be to exhibit the show outdoors", Repiso says.

With the support of an emergency grant from the Foundation of Contemporary Arts, Repiso refactored the exhibit in 2021 to leverage the entire facade of a warehouse space on the Lower East Side. Photographs and their accompanying text are displayed on large vinyl panels and QR codes have been added to provide viewers an opportunity to explore the multimedia components of the exhibition on their mobile devices. Repiso also collaborated with New York artist [Steve Ellis](#) to use the top half of the building's facade as a canvas to create a hand-painted mural that functions as both advertising billboards and artwork 24 hours a day. This specific building holds great significance because, after his release, Marte's first NYC gym was located at this location and a block away from the corner bodega where he used to sell drugs.

"Coss, Shane, and Juan were willing to share their journey with me and I want to share it with others. It's important that people hear their voices," says Repiso. This exhibition demonstrates our need for communication and connection no matter how harsh the environment.

About Michelle Repiso

Michelle Repiso received a BFA in Photography (2000) from The Corcoran School of the Arts & Design. In 2007 she moved to New York to pursue a career in photography and has worked with various commercial clients as a portrait, documentary, and still life photographer. In 2016 she developed Create & Connect, a program designed to provide incarcerated men, women, and adolescents with a creative structure to keep contact and maintain communication with family members and loved ones through a process of dialogue and hands-on art projects. Michelle is also an adjunct faculty member with the International Center of Photography (ICP), Teen Academy, and with The Pablove Foundation. She's certified as an M/WBE business and works in both analog and digital formats while actively exhibiting work and collaborating with other artists.

To learn more about Basic Necessities and to hear audio from the participants please visit, <http://michellerepiso.com/basic-necessities>

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