Interrupted Life: Incarcerated Mothers in the United States
A month-long art exhibit and public education program
Sonoma State University
April 2009

The Stakes:
♥ This program responds to two pressing issues. ► First, the United States, led by the State of California, has dealt with a broad range of social problems (violence, poverty, underemployment and changing economies, failing school systems, drugs, discrimination and inequality) through a policy of mass incarceration, in which over 2 million people are currently imprisoned in U.S. prisons and jails and over 7 million are under some form of criminal justice system control (parole, probation, jail, or prison). In order to support this dramatic increase in punishment, our society has had to transfer financial and social resources from education and social services into criminal justice. ► Secondly, women, and namely poor women of color, represent the fastest growing group of prisoners, with nearly 115,000 women in state and federal correctional facilities. The majority of these women are also mothers or primary caregivers to family members outside the system. When women are incarcerated, therefore, children’s lives are severely impacted. The increasing rate of women’s imprisonment, in other words, is also a crisis in our society’s ability to create a viable future. The situation of incarcerated women and their families is often hidden from public view and the Interrupted Life program highlights this largely invisible experience. ♥

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