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VENTURES: It's a Documentary Posing as a Web Site

By Allison Fass

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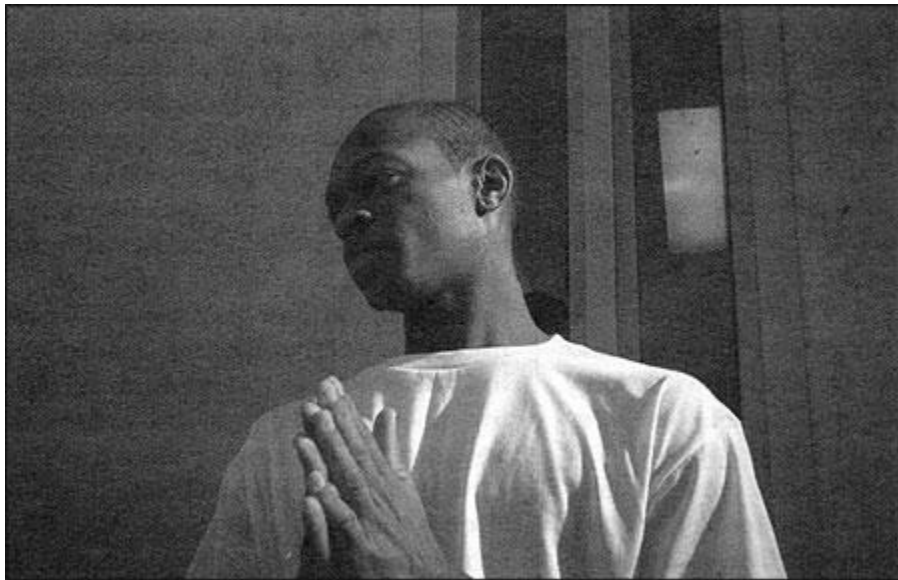


Photo: John Mills, a 22-year-old inmate. (Sue Johnson/Picture Projects)

Silicon Valley meets New York arts scene. Picture Projects does not merely design Web sites or create documentaries. It produces combinations of both.

Situated at 176 Grand Street (near Mulberry Street) in a third-floor loft space, Picture Projects is headed by Alison Cornyn, an artist, and Sue Johnson, a documentary photographer. They met at an interactive telecommunications graduate program at New York University.

More than six years since, the company has worked on more than 20 projects for various clients, including cultural institutions like the Museum of Natural History and corporations like I.B.M. Their projects, which cost \$50,000 to \$600,000 and are sometimes financed through grants, also include collaborations with photographers, journalists, filmmakers and academicians on documentaries that address social issues.

"The people that come to us come to us for very specific reasons," said Ms. Cornyn, citing the company's use of images, narrative and storytelling.

Their first project was a presentation of photographs taken by Gilles Peress titled "Farewell to Bosnia." Another was "Re: Vietnam—Stories Since the War."

The most recent work by Picture Projects, 360degrees.org, is an examination of the American criminal justice system and its prison population, which the company has been doing for two years. Ms. Cornyn and Ms. Johnson came up with the idea because of their own interest in the subject.

One inmate, John Mills, 22, is serving seven to nine years at the Polk Youth Institution in North Carolina. Anyone with Internet access can witness Mr. Mills's current life through pictures and recordings made in his cell, as well as through first-person stories from his mother and officers at Polk.