

Cabinet

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ARTIST PROJECTS / PENAL CODES

When we commissioned the artist projects for this issue, we asked the participants to consider a scene of punishment, whether real or imagined, that they have either been the subject of, participated in, or witnessed (either in actuality or in a fictional context). These scenes of punishment could range, we explained, from the minor (e.g., being given a parking ticket or being sent out of class) to the severe (e.g., torture, capital punishment) and might just as likely emerge from any of the wide range of institutional contexts in which punitive measures are enforced—from the arena of the family to the school, from competitive sports to larger political bodies. While the generality of the brief did in fact produce projects with diverse content, we were intrigued to find a striking formal symmetry—every one of them included, in one way or another, a textual element, suggesting that perhaps scenes of punishment have within them something that exceeds the visual, requiring that we must, finally, return to language to fully access their meaning.

