Like the slide projections, The Abolitionist Artifact physically and conceptually connects the contemporary Prison Industrial Complex to the racism and xenophobia deeply rooted in American history. The Abolitionist Artifact is paired with Niagara Square, an original video filmed in 2022 and combined with still images from the Elizabeth M. Fink Attica Archive. The still images show protesters filing Niagara Square during the 1971 Buffalo trial of indicted inmates known as the “Attica Brothers.” The crowd in these photographs holds signs demanding justice and “Freedom for Attica Brothers Now,” while telling the crowd that “Attica is All of Us.” The activists standing in the snow this past February echoed the same sentiments, even 50 years later. In Buffalo, there have been 29 deaths at the Erie County Holding Center since 2005. Nationally, prisoner labor is still exploited and health care of prisoners is still abysmal. The prison system remains a modern-day extension of slavery. Ultimately, Attica NOW serves to collapse the 50 years between the uprising and the current state of incarceration in the US. The exhibition begins and ends with the voices of those most directly impacted by the conditions of prisons and detention centers in the US. The Abolitionist Artifact conceptually connects the contemporary Prison Industrial Complex to the racism and xenophobia deeply rooted in American history. The Abolitionist Artifact is paired with Niagara Square, an original video filmed in 2022 and combined with still images from the Elizabeth M. Fink Attica Archive. The still images show protesters filing Niagara Square during the 1971 Buffalo trial of indicted inmates known as the “Attica Brothers.” The crowd in these photographs holds signs demanding justice and “Freedom for Attica Brothers Now,” while telling the crowd that “Attica is All of Us.” The activists standing in the snow this past February echoed the same sentiments, even 50 years later. In Buffalo, there have been 29 deaths at the Erie County Holding Center since 2005. Nationally, prisoner labor is still exploited and health care of prisoners is still abysmal. The prison system remains a modern-day extension of slavery.

Ultimately, Attica NOW serves to collapse the 50 years between the uprising and the current state of incarceration in the US. The exhibition begins and ends with the voices of those most directly impacted by the conditions of prisons and detention centers in our community and they demand better, Attica NOW erases the notion of “progress” while empowering individuals to raise their voices, to do the work, and to make real and lasting change. This exhibition was made possible, in part, by the generous support of the University at Buffalo Department of Art.

Additional exhibition support provided by: Ashkers, Current Catering, Marketing Tech, and individual donors.
Visitors first see Attica NOW in black wall vinyl that is over 100 inches tall. The exhibition begins with scenes from Attica on September 9, 1971 with We are Men, an installation of still text and moving footage projected through analog technologies. Once the inmates of Attica took over the facility, a committee of elected inmates drew up these demands as preconditions to end the takeover and presented them to the public. For Attica NOW, the text of the Declaration to the People of America is a static document stretched across an overhead projector and illuminated on a free-standing screen from the ’70s. The text is large and only one sentence fits on the screen at a time. Moving the film across the glass platen is not automatic. Some visitors, unfamiliar with this outdated machine, struggle to manage the rolling process. Others stand patiently, turning the crank to read the words written 50 years ago.

The gallery is full of antiquated technology that transports visitors back in time. The 21 inch Hantarex MGG video monitor, nicknamed The Block, was popular in public spaces such as nightclubs, chain stores, and airports in the 1980s because multiple units could easily be stacked and stored. The screen fills all but a half inch of casing, allowing multiple monitors to be placed together with minimal space between the images. The video format, including running time clocks, points to an era when audiences believed the images they saw and media they were delivered, especially through their television sets on the nightly news. Alongside the monitors, slide projectors hum and click through the slide carousels, recalling both academic and institutional informational and instructional presentations.

Next to the projector, footage from the Elizabeth M. Fink Attica Archive plays on a single Hantarex MGG video monitor. Elliott James "E.L.D." Barkley reads the demands for the national news media. The Declaration included calls for better medical treatment, fair visitation rights, improved food quality, religious freedom, higher wages for inmate jobs, and an end to physical abuse. It also asked for basic necessities like toothbrushes and showers every day, professional training, and access to newspapers and books. Additionally, speakers call out "slave masters," such as the Governor Nelson Rockefeller, New York corrections, and the United States courts, all of whom oppressed these individuals. Visitors also see and hear many of the men speak, each calling for social justice and societal unity. The camera pans across the dozens of black, white, and brown men sitting and standing together in D Yard, some wearing football helmets, others wrapped in blankets, and many with fists raised in the air.

Visitors also see and hear many of the men speak, each calling for social justice and societal unity. The cameras pan across the dozens of black, white, and brown men sitting and standing together in D Yard, some wearing football helmets, others wrapped in blankets, and many with fists raised in the air.

If the front gallery is the “Attica” in the exhibition title, the Joanna Angell Gallery is the “NOW.” For Attica NOW, CaldodeCultivo designed the Abolitionist Artifact, an activist tool to bring attention to the consequences of the Prison Industrial Complex in the lives of frontline communities. Artifact is defined by Merriam-Webster as a simple object (such as a tool or ornament) showing human workmanship or modification as distinguished from a natural object, especially: an object remaining from a particular period. The Abolitionist Artifact certainly functions as a tool, however its meaning and purpose moves between the past and the present. The artifact employs two rotatable drums, featuring illuminated calls to action on each of the five surfaces. The drums can be rotated and fixed with a simple pin and lock system changing the pairings between upper and lower text.