

Exploring Asylum Hill - a Solitary Garden at Stowe



It's a very small garden, but a very substantial work of art. It is based on a memoir published last year and selected for this year's Stowe Prize. The work of art was designed by Jackie Sumell. The memoir is titled *Solitary*. It is the life of Albert Woodfox and it is especially important now that we as a society are looking at racism and criminal justice more closely.

In the memoir Woodfox tells first the story of all the crimes he did commit that put him into prison, and then the one he did not commit that resulted in his four decades spent in solitary confinement.

He also tells of his transformation and self-education while in prison that allowed and caused him to be one of the Angola Three, and the last to be released. They were three Black Panther members in Angola who were falsely convicted of killing a guard and sentenced to life in solitary back in 1972.

Jackie Sumell, began creating Solitary Gardens after she received a letter in 2006 from Herman Wallace, another of the Angola Three who was trying unsuccessfully to grow plants in his cell.

The first of these gardens were planted in New Orleans, and the most recent is here at the Stowe Center.

The effect of the garden, the book and the Stowe Prize is to call attention to the violence of racism in general and the criminal justice and prison system in particular. It's meant to challenge our hearts and minds to move away from the expectation that fear of punishment will transform people and make them better human beings. Its goal is to find a way to replace that with clear-eyed compassion that can allow individuals to truly transform themselves.

The book tells that story in words that are often painful to hear and a review is available [here](#). The Garden as art, fills in additional impact that mere words cannot. The photos [Here](#) are intended only to encourage you to visit the site and not as a substitute. It is available from dawn to dusk at the Center near the Stowe House until October 10th. The public is welcomed.