

VIKTOR & ROLF
15 YEARS
AHEAD OF
THE GAME

LATE OF *THE PIER*
LIKE NOTHING
YOU'VE HEARD

PLAY
YOUR
OWN
GAME
ADVENTURES
IN FASHION

WOLFGANG
TILLMANS

SWITCH & DIPLO
IN JAMAICA

DARIO ARGENTO'S
HORROR HISTORY

THE WORLD'S
SQUAREST RAPPERS

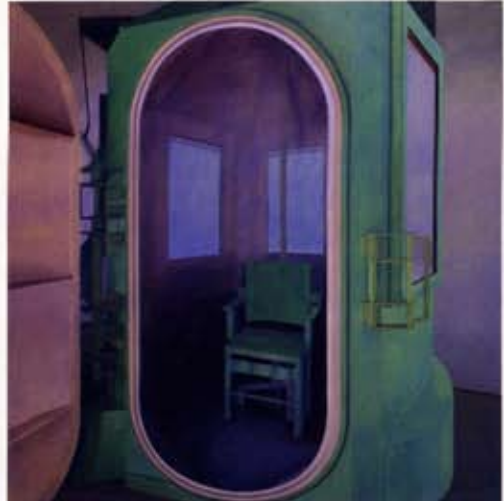
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Clockwise from top left: 'Hanging Chamber' Washington State Penitentiary; 'Lethal Injection Gurney' Huntsville Prison, Texas; 'Gas Chamber' Colorado State Penitentiary; 'Electric Chair' New York's Sing Sing Prison



ROBERT PRISEMAN

THE BRITISH ARTIST CONFRONTS THE REALITY OF CAPITAL PUNISHMENT IN AMERICA

Robert Priseman is interested in the residual energy left in places where intense emotions have been experienced. His recent commission to paint the late Francis Bacon's suburban home, *The Francis Bacon Interiors*, visited both the bathroom where Bacon's lover committed suicide and the bedroom where their passionate love affair blossomed. His latest collection of paintings is no less challenging, exploring various forms of execution still on the statute books in the United States.

"I want to communicate that sense of standing on the threshold of a void that contains some trace memory of presence," explains Priseman. "The drama in the work is in the past but I use perspective to create a sense of the space opening up, so that you can imagine stepping into it."

American Execution has been four years in the making and was initially inspired by Nick Broomfield's documentary on the execution of serial killer Aileen Wuornos. "I was working on paintings of hospital interiors when I saw the documentary, and I became aware of similarities between the iconography of execution facilities and those of medical institutions," explains Priseman. "I was struck by photos of the lethal injection chamber in Huntsville, Texas. The gurney on which the condemned are placed reminded me of a modern form of crucifixion." Priseman began to contact various prisons in the US in

order to take photographs of the gurneys from which to work but was met with a flat refusal every time. Determined to continue to explore the subject of capital punishment in a wider sense, Priseman sourced rare photographs (from human rights activists such as Alan Pogue) and immersed himself for the next four years in the harrowing subject of execution. In the process he uncovered some disturbing facts (such as that the most recent execution in a US gas chamber was performed on February 29, 1999 in Arizona State Prison) and began to create delicate line drawings, providing a strange contrast to the brutality of the material.

"I wanted to explore the strangeness of execution as I see it," explains Priseman. "I discovered that all the different equipment contains its own inherent peculiarities. When executing someone, why would you go to the trouble of placing a mattress on a gurney, or leather padding on an electric chair? These details reveal a disquiet felt by those engaged in the process of putting someone to death. The inventiveness in the variety of methods employed to kill people also troubles me – they seem to indicate a process of ritual, which in turn distances those involved from the act." JOHN-PAUL PRYOR

American Execution is at the Dazed Gallery from June 19