

No Human Way to Kill: Paintings, Drawings and a New Book

By Robert Priseman



Exhibition 16-30 March 2010

White Box, 329 Broome Street, at the Bowery, New York, NY 10002

Viewing Hours Wed-Sun 11am-7pm, Sat-Sun 12-6pm Admission: Free, Phone: 212-714-2347

Email: info@whiteboxny.org, Web: www.whiteboxny.org

Reception, Book Signing and Talks, 23rd March 6pm-9pm

Talks by Artist Robert Priseman, Rev. Cathy Harrington, Sir Nigel Rodley

March 16 marks the opening of one of the most challenging art events of 2010: **No Human Way to Kill** at White Box New York. This landmark exhibition and book launch presents a series of paintings, drawings and new book focused on the subject of the death penalty by British artist Robert Priseman.

The paintings were first shown in London where they caused a stir on the British art scene:

"The acclaimed cutting-edge painter took over the gallery with his searing and terrifying meditations on the various execution methods still on the statute books in the United States. This had to be one of the gallery's most talked about shows." **Jean-Paul Pryor, Dazed & Confused Magazine**

A visit to see Robert Priseman's images of American execution chambers is no easy experience. Standing in front of the almost life-size paintings, you, as the visitor, are the only person in the painting and therefore the execution 'room'. There is no escaping from a full-on confrontation with the perversity of the death penalty and the reality of your own mortality.

"I wanted to explore the strangeness of execution as I see it," says 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."

The works are based on years of research to uncover rare images of execution rooms in America, most of which forbid any photography or visits by the uninvited. This new exhibition is presented in association with Firstsite Contemporary Art in the UK.

The book **'No Human Way to Kill'** is published in conjunction with the Human Rights Centre at University of Essex and Amnesty International and promoted by Human Rights Watch. It opens with an account from Rev. Cathy Harrington whose daughter Leslie Ann Mazzara was lost to murder. Cathy negotiated a life sentence for her daughter's murderer, Eric Copple, who had potentially been facing the death sentence. This moving personal story is followed by a view of what life is like from inside death row at San Quentin by PEN winner Anthony Ross who was a former Crips gang member alongside Stanley 'Tookie' Williams. Former Texas prison Warden and Peabody recipient, Jim Willett, who oversaw 89 executions, gives a detailed description of how an execution is carried out.

Robert Priseman is a highly acclaimed artist. Work by the artist are held in The Royal Collection, Windsor Castle, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, Sheffield Hallam University The University of Kent, Cambridge University Library, Queen's Lancashire Regiment and the University of Hull. An interview with Priseman by art historian Michael Peppiatt, Francis Bacon's biographer, was published in September 2008. His series of paintings, **The Francis Bacon Interiors** was exhibited at Huddersfield Art Gallery 2009 along with works by Francis Bacon, Richard Hamilton, Graham Sutherland, Lucian Freud, Leon Kossof and Frank Auerbach. He has held solo exhibitions at the European Commission, Curwen Gallery, Addison Ross Gallery London, the University of Essex, Derby Museum and Art Gallery. His latest show 'Gas Chambers' opens at COCA in Christchurch New Zealand this March.

Further Quotes:

"Distanced and deadly factual, Robert Priseman's etchings reveal a world we know exists in our midst but steadfastly avoid thinking about. These sinister spaces are host to the most deadly concepts of time. Between the snap of a neck and actual extinction lie some twenty minutes of throttled half-life. Even a severed head, its eyelids still opening and closing, lingers on. By appearing to gloss over the barbarity of official killing, Priseman's images allow its full horror to seep more vividly and more memorably through." Art Historian, Michael Peppiatt

"Robert Priseman's twelve etchings are beautiful and strange: airless depictions of the spaces in which and the objects by which healthy human beings have been, and still are, put to death under law. Some of the devices are disturbingly homely, even comic-looking – the eager inventor's over-elaborate handiwork – and soon nearly all appear this way. The would-be scientificity of the lethal-injection gurney and the gas chamber is punctured, that is, not only by their place in the series alongside the garrotting chair, but by the artist's evenly precise and dispassionate attention to perspective and texture, to straps and bolts and curtains. The graphic technique lets us address visually a major theme of the texts in this collection, and notably of Priseman's own Afterword. The complication of the machines, like that of the entire juridical process of execution, is a kind of

hangman's hood, to shield an individual from responsibility for the act."

Christine Stevenson, the Courtauld Institute of Art

Notes to Editors: American Use of Death Penalty

Notable dates:

August 6th 1890: First use of the electric chair

September 12th 2007: Last Electrocution in USA (to date)

January 25th 1996: Last hanging in USA to date

January 26th 1996: Last use of firing squad in USA (Utah) to date

February 8th 1924: First use of Gas Chamber in USA (Nevada)

March 3rd 1999: last use of Gas Chamber in USA (to date)

Facts:

- American joins China, Iran, Iraq and Pakistan in accounting for over 90% of executions in the world today.
- There are currently over 3200 prisoners on death row in the US.

LINKS

http://www.amazon.com/Human-Way-Kill-Robert-Priseman/dp/095620824X/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1265291356&sr=1-1

Amazon link for buying the book

<http://www.dazeddigital.com/ArtsAndCulture/article/5412/1/Gas-Chambers-Robert-Priseman>

<http://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/No-Human-Way-To-Kill/270724271834> 'NHWTK' on facebook

Amnesty International's Abolish the Death Penalty Campaign

<http://www.amnesty.org.uk/content.asp?CategoryID=78>

Interviews: Robert Priseman and Rev. Cathy Harrington are available for interview.

High res images: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/robertpriseman/>

<http://www.flickr.com/groups/nohumanway/> Flickr site for 'NHWTK'

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