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Audio Description script for The Photographers' Gallery, Saturday 4 July 2020

Hannah Reyes Morales, photograph From the series *Manila City Jail, Philippines, 2018*

This colour photograph is landscape in format. In the foreground, dominating the photograph, nearly forty men are crowded inside a sectioned-off space of a warehouse-like building. The photograph has been taken from either inside the space or through a doorway or window looking onto the space.

The building interior stretches off into the distance. Its ceiling is double height with a corrugated pointed metal roof supported by bare, dark wooden beams, with white painted wooden crossbeams running horizontally along its length. The walls are painted a creamy peach colour. Several small bags and rucksacks of different colours and sizes hang on walls or low beams.

A double height of windows runs along both sides of the building. The windows have painted white metal bars running vertically and hands-width apart, with a horizontal bar dissecting each window's centre. Sunlight comes through the window from the left, but on the right the men are in shadow. A single electric light bulb is suspended from a beam in the foreground, offering little illumination.

A painting, applied directly to the left wall in the foreground, depicts a cartoon-like racehorse ridden by jockey with a red top, white jodhpurs and black boots. The composition of the photograph cuts off the jockey's head. Written in italic lettering on the painting are the names of horses and jockeys – Jack, Jury, Mayor, Mario, Aida. The painting seems incongruous the rest of the scene – the raw space, the cramped conditions for the men.

All the men are wearing lemon yellow tops in different styles – some vests, some t-shirts with short sleeves. A number of the men's shirts have the words printed 'MANILLA CITY JAIL DETAINEE' printed on them in black, capital letters, and 'D9' printed on the shoulder of the t-shirt. Others wear plain yellow t-shirts or vests, or t-shirts with brand names on them. All the men are wearing shorts of different lengths, styles and colours. Some are barefoot, others wear sandals or shoes.

The men appear to be of varying ages – from late teens to early 70s. Most of the men have dark hair, cut short or very closely cropped. Many have intricate tattoos on their arms, legs, chests or necks. A few wear necklaces, one wears a watch, another a silver bracelet. The man seated in the centre foreground has white, fluffy hair, a white moustache and a wispy goatee. The men's expressions are a mix of concentration on what is out of shot, and distraction. One man is smiling slightly. The atmosphere seems calm.

The men occupy this space in different ways. Some are sitting cross legged on the mottled grey concrete floor. Some sit with their arms enfolding their raised knees. Others perch on the short concrete staircase with a wooden railing that leads up to the left from the centre of the photo to the left wall. The staircase leads to a platform half way up the room where other men are standing or perched. Some men lean against the walls or in the centre of the room, arms folded or in pockets.

Most of the men are turned or facing to the left of the photograph, looking at something out of the frame of the photograph. The photographer's presence is noted as a handful of men look directly at the camera.

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The caption for this photo, in an article in the New York Times, stated "Watching television. Most inmates are pretrial detainees. Some will wait for months for their cases to be resolved." The article, by Aurora Almendral, was featured on 7 January 2019 and had the title and subtitle:

Where 518 Inmates Sleep in Space for 170, and Gangs Hold It Together: Misery and overcrowding are worse than ever in the Philippines' pretrial jails, with guards so outnumbered that gangs increasingly keep the peace.

The article goes on to state:

Since President Rodrigo Duterte's violent antidrug campaign began in 2016, Philippine jails have become increasingly more packed, propelling the overall prison system to the top of the World Prison Brief's list of the most overcrowded incarceration systems in the world.