

Audio Description Transcript:

Prison cell at Parkhurst, 1974

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A man wearing large over-ear headphones sits with his back to us on a narrow bed in a narrow room with a barred window high in the wall. Parkhurst is a high security prison on the Isle of Wight, in a Victorian building that has been in used since 1838.

This black and white photograph in landscape format shows a room probably no more than six feet across. It portrays a mixture of austerity, domesticity and obsession. At the far end, opposite us, is a high rectangular window, right under the curve of the barrel ceiling and above head height. It's deep in the thick wall, with eight crisscrossed bars. Light spills in. The ceiling and right hand wall are of brick, covered with thick layers of speckled white paint.

Every horizontal surface has been covered with fabric, most of it patterned with geometric or exuberant floral patterns. The single bed has a plain quilted coverlet with a valance, and a frilled pillowcase. On the left, against the wall, there is a table and a shelf unit, both covered with patterned oilcloth, a check teatowel tucked under a mini cooker, a kettle on a triangular shelf, a striped mug and a stock of Ever Ready batteries. There's a low covered table under the window, and another small, dining-height table between the bed and the viewer on the right hand side.

The right hand wall is almost entirely covered with dozens of photographs pulled from porn magazines or calendars, all showing naked women in erotic poses.

The photographs are of different sizes, some overlapping. The images are repetitive but each slightly different. The women have long hair, falling loose over their faces. Most of them lie back on beds, viewed from above; one stands on a beach with one knee on a boulder, turning to look over her shoulder at the viewer. Some of the women look out while others are focused inward, one hand cupping a breast or reaching for the triangle between their legs.

Two sconces on the wall either side of a large print seem to hold paper flowers, suggesting a shrine, and a small triangular shelf above the bed, covered with a floral cloth, has just room enough for a framed half length photograph of a half-naked woman wearing a gauzy blouse.

The man with his back to us, presumably the prisoner who has decorated the room, is slim, light-skinned with short dark hair. He wears a loose striped shirt and jeans. The wire from his headphones goes to a small transistor radio on a shelf above his pillow. There is an album lying on the bedspread behind him.