

"Prison Landscapes" and the Art of Incarceration

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PRISON LANDSCAPES



Alyse Emdur

[Image: Prison Landscapes, published January 2013 by Four Corners Books].

Photographer Alyse Emdur recently published a book called "Prison Landscapes" on her photo series that documents prison waiting rooms, many of which feature landscape paintings done by inmates and used by prisoners and their families/visitors as backdrops to their own photos. While obviously implicated in quite different cultural and political dynamics, the practice of using elaborate but not hyper-realist painted backdrops is reminiscent of photographic studio practice in other parts of the world, including India and Africa, where the image is meant to perform a particular aspirational scenario more than a documentary one. While many of the technicolor scenes clearly connote the liberated space of the outdoors--whether familiar or fantastic--some interiors (for example, a medieval castle) have more ominous overtones. [Here's](#) the artist's website. [Here's](#) a link to some of the images and an interesting interview with the photographer that focuses on the backdrops as an overlooked vernacular art form, with keen attention to the social and aesthetic contexts of their production. And [here](#) is a recent piece on her work from the New York *Times*.