



SCROLL ▾

Whilst in El Salvador, I heard about a gang truce that had been going for about 10 months and thought it may give me the opportunity to meet up with some gang members and ask them about their reasons for joining a gang.

The gang members were friendly and open with me but lived in a state of warfare with the police and rival gangs, even with the truce. The community I focused on had two gang related funerals during the week I was there. When they were taking me to one of their armories we had to play cat and mouse with the police on several occasions, driving round and round in circles with one of the gang leaders. The reason the place was crawling with police was that the leader had ordered a couple of executions the day before and the bodies had been left in the street.

The next day we were given permission to visit one of the country's most notorious prisons, Penal de Ciudad Barrios. This is a prison just for MS gang members. It was built for 800 inmates but currently houses 2600. It is guarded from the outside by the army, with prison staff manning the entrance and check points. Once you enter you soon realise that there are no guards inside the place, the MS themselves manage it.

Walking around it's difficult to know that it's a prison, the corridors are filled with men standing around chatting, watching football in the central exercise square or playing chess.

I met up with Carlos, one of the spokesmen for the MS who is campaigning for prisoner's rights and for the basic needs of the prisoners, such as simple health care and training. They have managed to organise a space that acts as a hospital, and if you're ill you go there and hope for the best. I didn't see any medical staff in the entire place. They've also managed to set up basic art, sewing and woodworking rooms and some of the inmates make toys and furniture. It's a start but a very small one.

I wanted to do a portrait of Carlos that shows him within the context of the prison, to show what had become of him and the condition he lives in. He's almost looking in at the horror around him, scared by what came before.

It's clear that this is a place they literally dump you and forget about you, and every inmate is made to feel just that.

ADAM HINTON

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