

*Empty spaces, what are we living for?
Abandoned places, I guess we know the score, on and on
Does anybody know what we are looking for?
- Queen, The Show Must Go On*

The show must go on! The motto, said with conviction since the days of travelling circuses, signals that showbiz stops for nothing. The same could be said of the news—and what is news if not entertainment? With the 21st-century invention of breaking news cable television, aired 24-7-365, the news doesn't stop. Mass shootings, hurricanes, forest fires, terrorist attacks, celebrity deaths, these are just a sampling of the favourite topics covered by the news. The fodder of tragedy demonstrates the most perverse form of the attention economy, one where you can't move away from the screen, even as it fills you with dread. I can imagine a not-too-distant future where humankind has ceased to exist, yielding to the extreme weather conditions that are in our path. All that remains is the news, silently broadcasting to an audience of zero.

Tristram Lansdowne's paintings capture this experience, not only in content, but in the way their composition disorients the viewer. Unconcerned with being pragmatic, newsroom architecture focusses instead on aesthetics. The result is a space that doesn't make visual sense: surfaces curve in juxtaposition with hard lines, depths of field are manipulated. In the eponymous painting, *Eyewitness*, the desk has the illusion of both moving towards you and away. The circular lines of said desk connect to the curve of the earth on the monitor, producing a relentless loop. Even divorced from a dystopic setting, Lansdowne's paintings communicate a feeling of dread through their point-of-view. From there, trepidation only increases.

News-anchor desks, a symbol of authority not unlike an altar, loom like an operating table. The whole room is pristine—a hermetically sealed interior. As the rest of the world falls into turmoil, the space where the news exists remains clean, sterile, unchanged. In this way, it shares a similarity with the space of an art gallery, adding a dizzying mirror-like dimension to the work. These are sanitized spaces, shown within a similarly pristine environment, hung on a wall and taking up the same room as a flatscreen monitor. Do we look at Lansdowne's paintings like we look at television? Our eyes thirsty for the novelty of the flashing graphics, while at the same time allowing the familiar set to fade into the background?

The images are both futuristic and nostalgic, communicating an overall ambivalence about temporality. This feeling is cemented by the colour palette. The blues shift to pink like a cotton candy sunset, sepia pushes up against pure black, interspersed with

minty greens and whites. The effect feels artificial—colours from life transmitted through gamma rays.

The architecture of newsrooms typically sinks into the subconscious of my viewing experience. Lansdowne takes the background focus and brings it to the foreground, and in doing so, causes my understanding of the space to shift. The tension between banality and grandiosity is on full display. I now understand the way the architecture signals power and authority. Sharp edges pierce in every direction, replicating the abstract lines of Kandinsky. The complexity of the lines transfixes. The viewer knows that what takes place here is serious business.

The architectural critic Jeffrey Kipnis, in his 2016 essay *By Other Means* on the work of Peter Eisenman, writes:

The very qualities we most admire in great works of architecture – intimacy, repose, spirituality, transcendence, stateliness, majesty, awe - while not in and of themselves to be despised, are nevertheless also the very architectural instruments that authority uses to belittle, to subject. Whenever a work of architecture demands close attention, close reading, its palette of effects cannot but change in character from the emotive to the intellectual, and it can no longer serve so easily the ends of power.

Lansdowne is interacting with architecture in a similar way, stripping it of its power by shifting our gaze from emotive to intellectual. This explains how I went from never noticing newsroom sets in my many years of news watching, to understanding the architectural subliminal messaging at play. The architectural set within the newsroom is redundant, it is not meant to house, or provide comfort, or shelter, it isn't even structural. Instead, it exists only to signify authority.

As I mentioned, the world is ending. Climate change, which some may escape for a little while longer, will come for us all. The televisions within Lansdowne's paintings are all tuned in to the same channel: of weather systems wreaking havoc. Lansdowne depicts clouds and storms with lightness and gravity in the tradition of John Constable's own fascination with documenting the dramatics of weather. The mercurial weather is left to its own devices, witnessed only by the cinematic lens. The images on the screens echo the movement of the sets—articulating that the true source of authority doesn't lie in architecture, but in the weather.

- Tatum Dooley