

James Lawson – *Compelling Perspectives*

Visual Description

This exhibit is of 16 photographs by James Lawson. I will describe 5 of the works. The photos are all printed in a 7.5" x 9" format and are framed in simple black frames with white mats. They are arranged two to a panel on the large, freestanding gallery panels. There are four double sided panels, covered with a beige carpet-like material, stacked in a line, running north-south. The panel faces also point north-south. The panels are numbered 1 through 8, with 1 being the northernmost panel, 2 being the south facing panel on the rear side of panel 1, and so on, through panel 8 being the southernmost panel.

James says of his work:

I am fascinated by, to use a theatrical metaphor, the back-stage. So much of what we see is a presentation – a performance, a façade, an illusion, sometimes a complete fabrication. I like to delve into places where things - either stored or discarded - have been piled up out of view. I am also, as may be apparent from these photographs, drawn to found text, grids, and repeated patterns.

Panel 1 – Royal Trash (image on right)

This image is a dramatic scene with deep black shadow dominating the frame. In the middle to the bottom left of the image we can see a brightly illuminated triangle of wall and a small patch of ground. The rough concrete wall triangle that is visible, is covered with different kinds of graffiti – red, black, white and orange letters of different sizes, as well as scratches and chips at the edge of the wall. The only full words visible are ROYAL TRASH in thin black letters. To the left of the graffiti wall a patch of ground has a few small pieces of garbage strewn about and a bright red lower piece of another wall or bin visible at the very far left side. The red of this wall is repeated in a red circle on the graffiti wall. The rest of the image is a deep rich black, with nothing else visible. It is as if a spotlight has been cast on this very small vignette of urban life.

Panel 2 – Post Office 1 (image on left)

Given the title, the next photo is in what must part of the sorting plant of a large post office. The concrete room with no windows is lit by fluorescent lights hanging from the ceiling, alongside pipes and wiring which runs toward a perspective point at the back wall. The machinery visible is painted light blue and comes down to a table-top height in the middle of the image. There are several units of the same machinery set beside each other (we can see at least four), but the one in the foreground hides the details of the others behind it. We can only see that the machines are repeated. On the left hand side of the machinery is a chute that rises. It is outlined in yellow paint. On the right hand side is a large blue bin, with some flaps that open toward the table top area that are scuffed and worn. There are some large controls on the side of the bin with a red emergency stop button visible. The bins rise up to the ceiling height. The blue metal legs of the machinery rest on a polished concrete floor. There are some faded straight yellow lines painted on the floor under the machinery. There are some structural columns between the left hand chutes, which are painted yellow up to about 8 feet in height. Above that they are white like the ceiling, and large letter M is visible on all of the columns we can see. Aside from the bright yellow and the blue of the machinery, there are also touches of bright red in some levers on the machinery, and some thin pipes that run along the ceiling. In the very front of the image is a well-used black wheeled office chair, facing away from the machinery and to the right of the image. It emphasizes the lack of people in the image and the overall desolation of the scene.

Panel 4 – Kiev 2 (image on right)

This photograph is of what might be a lobby in a large building. The central part of the image is taken up by three identical glass doors with metal frames and knobs, installed side by side. There is some light reflected off

the glass doors, which are labelled faintly 4, 5, 6 at the top of each door. Through the glass we can see that each cubicle is identical, with small square white tile walls above a dark brown tile that covers the floor and bottom part of each wall. The cubicles are each the size of a phone booth, but there is nothing visible to indicate what happens inside them. The wall in which the doors are set is also covered in tile. The upper 2/3 of the wall (from halfway up the doors) is a sunshine yellow rectangular tile set vertically. There is some discoloration in the tiles which may be from lighting or from age. A metal vent can be seen right at the top of the image, centered over the doors. The bottom 1/3rd of the wall is set with large, natural stone tiles, with reddish brown and grey coloration. Between the two types of tiles runs a border of the natural stone topped with a deeper red tile. Over on the far right of the image is a wooden box inset into the wall. It has a small round glass window in it and has several red and white signs with various letters and numbers. It appears to be locked shut with a chain. Right below the wooden box is a small sign attached to the wall, with a bright blue border around a white square. Image is grounded by the floor which is covered with a dark grey tile with tiny white flecks. The strong geometrical shapes of the doors and tiles dominate the work, and the unusual colour combinations of the tiles are surprising.

Panel 7 – Brewery (image on right)

This image shows the interior of a large brewery with repeated patterns of stainless steel and copper vats, piping and tubes, valves and tanks. The viewer looks down a long row between two types of vats. On the right side of the image are large, rounded, stainless steel vats, with a thin strip of copper around the bottom edge. They stand on adjustable legs, and are attached to other areas in the brewery through tubes. On the left hand side are copper vats, though not as orderly as the steel ones on the right. They are also attached through steel tubing, and there are some red taps visible. The two sides converge at the far end of the passageway, furthest away from the viewer. In the foreground is a stainless steel arch or support, which frames the inside of the image. There is a light blue tank of gas and some tubing and regulators hung on the arch on the right hand side. Across the ceiling of the passageway, numerous tubes and pipes in steel, copper, and white plastic criss-cross the space. They bend at angles to reach other areas. The floor is a light grey colour, and stripes from the shadows of the pipes are visible

Panel 8 – Farm 3 (image on right)

The final image is inside a greenhouse, a vast indoor space with light coming in from all sides through the glass walls and roof. Ever so slightly to the right of centre in the image, is a perspective point, a small square of white light (it may be a door at the far end of the greenhouse) toward which all the other lines in the image lead, and where the eye is drawn. The image is divided in half horizontally and has very strong horizontal lines in both the top and bottom halves. In the bottom half, the greenhouse floor is filled with large tables which are arranged horizontally across the space. There is a walkway between two rows of tables which leads diagonally toward the vanishing point. Most of the tables in the image are empty, however in the foreground, the tables are covered with black plastic agricultural crates of drying onions with their yellowed leaves still attached. Most of the onions are yellow onions but some crates that are further away (and so somewhat less distinct) look like they might hold purple onions. A few of the leaves are still greenish, but most are dried, yellow, and hanging out the side of the crates. The onions fill about 1/8th of the tables we can see in the image.

The top half of the image also has strong horizontal lines running across it. There are metal racks or lights that hang above the tables in the greenhouse, mirroring the horizontal tables in the bottom half. The racks are white with some rust spots showing through. Above the racks we can see some metal structures of the roof and the glass panels that make up the roof of the greenhouse. Along the sides of the images, in a thin line, we can see the glass walls of the greenhouse. These are made up of square panels of glass, and there appear to be shades that could be pulled to cover the glass, bunched up at vertical structural columns at regular intervals along the walls.