

Thomas Demand

Commercial Travellers' Association (CTA) club // March 23–April 22

A SPACESHIP TOWER stands in the center of Sydney's central business district, seen but ignored by the thousands of office workers who have walked by it every day for the past 35 years. But German artist Thomas Demand not only saw the tower, he snuck in to find a time warp, a club for the Willy Lomans of Australia, commercial travelers who would retire to its wedge-shaped monastic bedrooms after a convivial meal downstairs



with their fellow lost-soul peddlers.

Rarely is a venue so intrinsically transformed by an artwork, though the Kaldor Public Art Project series—of which this is the 25th—did begin with Christo and Jeanne-Claude's famous *Wrapped Coast* in 1969. With "The Dailies," Demand has used his skill for transforming reality into fiction to subvert much of what this tiny world of rituals might represent.

The monasticism of these cells is profaned in an ongoing story by Louis Begley, commissioned by Demand to arouse fantasies about the sexual availability of hotel chambermaids. Demand's images of broken Venetian blinds, unplugged electric sockets, and missing ceiling panels taint the rooms' neat folded curtains and immaculate stucco ceilings. An ashtray full of butts pollutes the Prada scent created especially for the exhibition, and the drain in the room offering a view of the Prada shop in that otherworld outside the windows depreciates its Pavlovian presence.

But then Demand delights in undermining expectations. His photos of these mundane matters use the highest quality dye-transfer process, but the objects photographed were actually made of cardboard and were destroyed following their immortalization. It's fascinating to consider how little it takes to open Sydney's eyes to the elephant in the square at its heart—so little, but so fastidiously employed. —Jeremy Eccles

Thomas Demand
Installation view of
"The Dailies."

MONTREAL

Janet Werner

Parisian Laundry // March 30–April 28

THE CONTRASTS IN painter Janet Werner's work are striking and obvious: big and small, cool and hot, hard and soft, beautiful and ugly. On viewing, however, they become elusive. Her subjects are mostly women, some from the pages of fashion magazines, and often, before they are painted, collaged together in the manner of *cadavres exquis*. In all of them there is a hyper-consciousness, in which looking and being fuse. These are subjects—models, really—whose charge is their fragility, whose gaze is a double mirror, dysmorphic on both sides. They slip into abstraction under a cultivated universal regard.

For her latest exhibition, Werner attempts the largest formats of her career. There are parallels to be made between Werner and John Currin, who was her classmate at Yale, with their mutual fixations on the contemporary bourgeois, but Werner is less fussy in scale and execution. Actually, Werner has painted Currin's wife and muse, Rachel Feinstein, twice, and the second attempt, seen in this show, demonstrates the difference: Werner's work is called *Stalker*, 2012, and it is huge and rough-hewn, its buxom, slightly fecund figure hiding behind her hair like a camouflaged predator. With the force of the artist's thick brushwork and the bluntness of her palette (often a muted blue-gray, with shocks of hot color, distinctly present in her figures' underpainting), Werner's canvases can recall Picasso and his self-styled contemporary follower George Condo.

To wit, Werner can be violent. In this show, she attempts her first nude, *Sheila*, 2011, and its slightly jaundiced body crumples around its nipples, which peer outward like those in Magritte's *Le Viol*, 1934. If aesthetics will scrutinize bodies, implies Werner—in tones both political and classicist, for she is strongly sensitized to the canon of portraiture—these bodies must, in turn, stare out. They must devour. —David Balzer



Janet Werner
Smearcase, 2011.
Oil on canvas,
60 x 48 in.