



**(Title)**

Recent paintings by Renata Pari-Lewis

**instress**

The Victorian poet Gerard Manley Hopkins coined the terms 'inscape' and 'instress' to describe two related worlds—the world encountered by poetry and the world depicted by poetry. Inscap is the characteristic, defining identity, unity and order of a thing or a scene. Instress is twofold: the impulse, force or internal dynamic system assuring that unity, as well as the force that conveys it entire to a beholder. Instress is the recognition of inscape by a kind of consilient resonance between what is there to be seen, the seer and the seeing; between object, subject and art.<sup>1</sup>

For Hopkins, the alliterative fabric of poetry, and the poetic transport of sprung rhythm that carries it, is a means of conveying both inscape and instress through the direct concrete materiality of language; through the weight, imbricated contours and fabric of words, building in form and energy:

Cloud-puffball, torn tufts, tossed pillows | flaunt forth, then chevy on an air-  
Built thoroughfare: heaven-roysterers, in gay-gangs | they throng; they glitter in  
marches

Down roughcast, down dazzling whitewash, | wherever an elm arches,  
Shivelights and shadowtackle in long | lashes lace, lance, and pair.

Delightfully the bright wind boisterous | ropes, wrestles, beats earth bare

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Greenblatt et al., Ed. "Gerard Manley Hopkins." *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. 8th ed. Vol. 2. New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006, p 2159.

Of yester tempest's creases; | in pool and rut peel parches  
Squandering ooze to squeezed | dough, crust, dust; stanches, starches  
Squadroned masks and manmarks | treadmire toil there  
Footfretted in it. Million-fuelèd, | nature's bonfire burns on.<sup>2</sup>

The inscape, instress and sprung rhythm of Hopkins' poems offers an instructive parallel to Renata Pari-Lewis' recent collection of paintings. In that work we are presented with a sustained, insistent attention to the coincidence of inscape and instress within the domestic. Three related motifs stand out for me in this work: atmosphere, light and suspension.

### **atmosphere**

Atmosphere means, literally, 'vaporous circumambiance'<sup>3</sup>: a quality of settings in which time rather than space predominates; where space itself is rendered indeterminate and ambiguous. Everything seems to have become mutually absorbed into an evanescent, dematerialised region, in which form and context, content and container have become indiscernible: a pure contexture, entirely given over to indefinite reformulation.

The pervasive atmospheric register of Lewis' domestic interiors results in part from a distortion of the familiar Cartesian order of space, where orthogonal rooms are aligned the length of corridors. Here, space is folded to produce continuities, porosities and links that breach the logic of concrete reality. The architecture is never given as a totality: space is sequential and episodic; though bound to a continuous texture. Its limits are not delineated by geometric borderlines, but by variable densities of atmosphere—by the relative grain, density, viscosity and permeability of a precipitated luminosity meeting the resistance of its own materiality.

Likewise, there is no exteriority. Pari-Lewis frames a specific conception of the outside: interiors have no antinomial counterpart—no prospects out to a civic exteriority, over-against which they might be read:

None of the rooms have a view and are not about looking outwards. The sense of the outside world can only be felt through the light. They are meant to be insular but not claustrophobic. One is very much on the inside and remains there.<sup>4</sup>

Everything in this world is tangled in the contained, intestinal porosity of rooms and corridors, leading only to indefinite circuits without escape. Yet these distortive modulations of the real manage to capture, with marked precision, the particular temporality of a diurnal moment, or the circumstantial, subjective mood and ambiance of a moment:

My works neither depict day-to-day scenes nor try to reflect on how people and figures might use or occupy the rooms and space depicted. Rather they are a representation of a state, and a relationship of that state and the environment itself. The spaces are deliberately empty, projecting to the viewer the mindset under

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<sup>2</sup> Gerard Manley Hopkins. 'That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and on the comfort of the Resurrection,' in <https://www.bartleby.com/122/48.html> accessed 4 July 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Tawa, M. (2014). 'Vaporous circumambiance: Towards an architectonics of atmosphere,' in *Interstices: Journal of Architecture & Related Arts*, 15(1), 12-23; available at <http://interstices.aut.ac.nz/ijara/index.php/ijara/article/view/194> accessed 4 July 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Renata Pari-Lewis, personal communication, September 2018.

which they might have been constructed.<sup>5</sup>



### light

The sense of space and time in these paintings emerges as a function of the play between light and dark, shade and shadow, illumination and obfuscation, revelation and concealment. And yet this play conveys a kind of insistent luminosity. The sources of light are not plainly given. Rather, they seem like the opaque glowering of a generalised, external ambiance. Interiors are suffused by an infiltrating glare and a scintillation of dark surfaces glanced by indirect light sources. But this luminosity is not external. It emerges out of the very material conditions of the spaces depicted—the walls, floors and ceilings, certainly; but even more so the veils and fabrics that furnish, billow and animate the scenes. That light skims dim surfaces, bringing crepuscular materiality to shimmer or phosphoresce.

The gaze (who is it that looks?) is not set up as the aperture of an objective, distant, disengaged looking. It is imbricated into the contours, the material textures, the porosities and hollows, the luster of wooden sideboards and bedheads, the gleam of doorway edges, the nap of cloth, the folds of curtains. Edges of rooms, the interstitial shade and shadow that frame them, the darkest areas of the paintings, all work to produce intermediate zones or milieus of various kinds: thresholds and disjunctions that are equally between rooms and spaces as they are between atmospheres, lives, emotions and states of being.

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<sup>5</sup> Renata Pari-Lewis, personal communication, September 2018.



Figure 4.

### **suspension**

Such depictions of the domestic, of the domicile, of the *domus*, are necessarily depictions of a private world sequestered from public, civic space. Yet the lineaments of that sequestration are indeterminate. The boundaries of spaces—the meeting of floor, wall and ceiling at skirtings, corners and covings—are not discernible but implied, indirectly suggested zones. This is realised by an intensely painterly method that foregrounds the materiality of the image and the gestures of its production by insistent over-painting that occludes underlayers; blurs, smears or smudges contours and edges; creates discontinuities within the texture of the scene and effectively dematerialises the space-defining limits of interiors. There is an a-perspectival flattening of space; and at the same time, an aeration or re-spatialisation due to discontinuities in the layers. Consequently, the scenography is characterised by a kind of suspension and liquefaction: rooms hang in a netherworld, always on the verge of potentially indefinite dis- and re-assembly.

The interior scenography undergoes severe alteration. Each depiction begins with the familiar, the objective and the recognisable, only to shift into the unfamiliar and uncanny. Scenes are disturbed through a process of evanescence, disappearance or erasure of the domestic in the very midst of domesticity. Mobilised by way of a succinct yet urgent painterliness, the work is performative and registers the impress of time: the duration, rhythm and tempo of reflection and action. The act of depiction, much like domesticity itself, is always an infinitely-finishing process. However, this evident temporality in the technique of painting is matched by a palpable sense of time in the scenography. The time of day might be familiar, but time itself does not pass here. What is depicted is not a moment 'in' time—an impressionist instant for example, or the palpable ambience of a particular moment in Vermeer. Often, light looming through a window, diffracted by drapes

into a scattering glare, will dissolve everything into an oceanic swell: a kind of absorption of chronological time into the oneiric expanse of timeless ever being.