

2 November–27 November 2010
Herbert Read Gallery

Bernice Donszelmann
Natasha Kidd
Mary Maclean
Tim Renshaw
Camilla Wilson

Programme – Artist Talks

Bernice Donszelmann and Mary Maclean
10 November 2010
Wednesday 2 pm

Natasha Kidd, Tim Renshaw and
Camilla Wilson
20 November 2010
Saturday 2 pm

Private View Night

4 November 2010
Thursday 6 pm–8 pm

Opening Times

2 November–27 November 2010
Monday–Friday 10 am–6 pm
Saturday 12 am–4 pm
Entry is free.

There is limited parking space on
campus (including disabled bays) and
full disabled access to the gallery.

Herbert Read Gallery

University for the Creative Arts
New Dover Road
Canterbury
Kent
CT1 3AN

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Exhibition organised by
Outside Architecture



WINTER

INTERIOR LIFE

In the late eighteenth century August Schmarsow declared that the principal concern of architecture is ‘... always the spatial enclosure of the subject....’¹ Some sixty years later Gaston Bachelard made the explicit analogy between the site of the interior dwelling, in particular the secure *Ur* house of childhood and the interiority of the ego – the housed psyche.² Bachelard’s reflections were made in direct response to the rise of Modernism in architecture. Modernism posed a fundamental challenge to conceptions of the primacy of enclosure as the architectural ‘act’. In its quest for transparency, for air, light and movement, the opening or aperture becomes the focus of wall design over and above enclosure. The wall with its enclosing function, in other words, finds itself newly viewed as if an obstacle to be superseded and overcome. Technology and its new materials aids in these aims, opening up possibilities for forms of architecture that almost dissolve before the eye. The critiques that followed – that the subject is exposed and alienated as a consequence of finding him or herself confronted with places of residence that were transformed ‘... into transitional spaces of every imaginable force and wave of light and air’³ – were inevitable. But the idea of enclosure can be treated as something both physical and symbolic or metaphoric, making these critiques open to question and revision.

‘For the wall is not primarily a wall but ... it is a mirror for man, a projection screen on which he wants to abandon himself to his illusion and recognize himself’ (Oskar Bie).⁴ The occupation or inhabitation of a space might, as such, be understood as a gradual movement toward the appropriation of surfaces for such projections – and the failure of ‘dwelling’ as a failure of this appropriative grasp. (This may go some way to explaining why those decorative elements intended to brighten up hotel rooms always have the reverse effect, of making especially un-homely a space never destined to be homely in the first place. If the way the surfaces with which we surround ourselves are clad is a means by which we project ourselves, the impossibility of any such form of reflection is what makes the hotel room painting an especially disturbing object). But Bie continues: ‘The basic feature of wall decoration is conquering the wall itself....’ ‘The desire is always to trick it out of existence. And from this deception springs the art of wall decoration. This deception is the dream of freedom that man projects onto the wall.’⁵ The implications of this are complex. The projections Bie describes are part of man’s means of inhabiting his space but these are the same means by which he bypasses the literal, by which he can imaginatively inject his interior space with an absence of physical limits and always be elsewhere at the same time as here.

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Of Harold Rosenberg’s characterization of Abstract Expressionist painting, Rosalind Krauss remarked on ‘... the analogy between the inaccessibility of illusionistic space and an intense experience of the privacy of the individual self.’⁶ In other words, the analogy of the spatial interior with subjective interiority equates it with a privileged aesthetic moment. For Krauss, commenting in 1977, Minimalism’s significance lay in its clear rejection of any metaphorical or illusionistic reference to interior space, whether that be in sculptural or pictorial form: for artists like Robert Morris the new sculpture was to be public rather than private; it was to be ‘extroverted’; it was external in its reference rather than internal. In the years that have ensued, while remaining well clear of expressionistic models, the dialogues that post-Minimalist practices (including the monochrome) have had with architecture have produced important shifts of register from the original impetus of Minimalism as defined by Krauss. The relation of the subject to thresholds of inside and outside, to surface and to depth – whether literal or metaphoric – is regularly reanimated. The interior space (and with it ‘interiority’) is clearly, however, conceived as a historically shifting object of enquiry rather than an analogy for a privileged moment.

A figure huddles in the shadows of the flimsiest of shelters and feels comforted that she is enclosed, safe and protected. Another figure, protected by a surround of monolithic concrete walls, feels exposed and terrified. One should never make the mistake of assuming that an interior which is experienced as such is produced only by the physical enclosure of four walls (Henri Lefebvre notably decried the regression of the use of the term inhabiting – *habiter* – into that of *habitat*. It marked for him a transformation in the understanding of a term that had once been understood as an active process into that of a passive noun, a place). In Antonella da Messina’s painting *St Jerome in his Study* the study in question comprises a space within a space: a wooden platform housing the saint and the paraphernalia of his study is itself located within the expanse of the imposing architecture of a cathedral which stretches above and beyond. Of this configuration of the saint’s study Georges Perec notes that it represents the inhabitable in the midst of the uninhabitable. ‘The whole space is organized around *the piece of furniture* (and the whole piece of furniture is organized around the book). The glacial architecture of the church ... has been cancelled out Surrounded by the uninhabitable, the study defines a domesticated space inhabited with serenity by cats, books and men.’⁷ The inhabitable interior is produced not by the architecture that protects against the external elements but by this piece of ‘furniture’ around which the saint’s activity is oriented and from which his serenity is derived.

Adolf Loos’ essay ‘Principles of Cladding’⁸ has long been overshadowed by the fame of the book – in particular its title – ‘Ornament and Crime’. Ornament in Loos, contrary to popular opinion, should not be understood through a simple dichotomy of surface and structure, however. His is not a modernism founded on a principle of truth to tectonic structure. Rather, surface itself becomes spatially structural (it is only ‘mere ornament’ when it fails in that role). Loos’ distinguishes between the literal wall and the wall as surface.⁹ As forms of cladding, carpet and wood play a key role within his architectural design. Unlike the literal wall, the specificity of surfaces like wood, wall and floor carpets needs to be understood as spatially generative. The materiality of these surfaces functions itself to articulate and form space – including shifts between enclosure and openness and circulation and stationary positions. ‘... What is wanted is not mere space but the creation of ‘effects’ (Die Wirkung) The effects – the creation of affect – however comes from the operation of material and forms. Effects are the work of surfaces that create spaces (rooms).’¹⁰ Loos’ work and writing comes from the early twentieth century. A number of architectural theorists today, in the context of the dominance of computer-aided architectural design software and its distance and abstraction from ‘matter’, have re-engaged with the problem of the ‘spatial content of the surface’.¹¹ Interestingly, Fritz Neumeier points to contemporary art as tackling the question from outside the discipline: ‘Contemporary art that argues with the wall itself – be it in the form of the pure surface of a thin layer of paint on a canvas, or in the form of a solid cross wall of steel by Richard Serra weighing tons – stimulates the fundamental question about the ‘material’ of the wall: in other words, about what is left of the aesthetic force and architectural potency of the wall...’¹²

Bernice Donszelmann

1 August Schmarsow ‘The Essence of Architectural Creation’ in Robert Vischer... [et al.] *Empathy, form, and space: problems in German aesthetics, 1873–1893*, trs. H.F. Mallgrave (Santa Monica, Getty Center, 1994), 289.

2 Gaston Bachelard *The Poetics of Space*, trs. M. Jolas (Boston, Beacon Press, 1994).

3 Walter Benjamin ‘The Return of the Flaneur’ in *Selected Writings II 1927–1934*, trs. R. Livingstone, eds. M.W. Jennings, H. Eiland, G. Smith (Cambridge, MA, Harvard, 1999), 265.

4 Oskar Bie *Die Wand und ihre künstlerische Behandlung* (The Wall and its Artistic Treatment), 1904, quoted in Fritz Neumeier ‘Head First through the Wall: an approach to the non-word “facade”’, *The Journal of Architecture*, 4:3 (1999), 250.

5 *ibid*, 250–251.

6 Rosalind E. Krauss ‘The Double Negative: a new syntax for sculpture’ in *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1977), 258.

7 Georges Perec ‘Species of Spaces’ in *Species of Spaces and other Pieces*, trs. J. Sturrock (London, Penguin, 1999), 88 (his emphasis).

8 ‘Principles of Cladding’ in Adolf Loos *On Architecture*, trs. M. Mitchell (Riverside CA, Ariadne Press, 2002).

9 See Andrew Benjamin’s ‘Surface Effects: Borromini, Semper, Loos’, *The Journal of Architecture* 11:1 (2006), 24.

10 *ibid*, 24–25.

11 Neumeier, ‘Head First’, 252.

12 *ibid*.