

Recycled Modernism

Eric Schumacher's work bridges the historical gap between certain aspects of modernism, cubism and brutalist architecture, formalism and minimalism and their place in contemporary art and society. More specifically, he is interested in asking, what can the ideologies of these movements tell us about the composition of our present? How have those modernist experiments shaped the social and built environments we inhabit? What has been their influence and legacy?

The tensions between the formal concerns of modernist art and architecture and the individual's subjective experience of these things lies at the heart of Schumacher's work. It is structured around the rigorous or excessive adherence to recognized forms, a search for an elusive harmony, opposed by the inequities and compromises of the every day, a pure geometry constructed with insufficient materials and inefficient tools.

Utilising inexpensive materials, crude construction and simple design methods, processes which mirror the priorities of ravaged post World War 2 European countries and their governments; Schumacher creates sculptures of striking angular geometries.

Some of these forms could be models for social housing, state institutions or shopping centres. However, they are devoid of socially progressive intentions. They are not the gleaming projection of some future utopia, rather a richly textured, imperfect present, already crumbling, daubed with flashes of colour. In this they are much like the results of the post war building projects, their grey facades were soon streaked by rain and covered with moss, weathered and stained by the harsh climate of northern Europe, a climate which is inhospitable for the materials of which they were constructed.

Others are precariously balanced linear forms, propped up on wooden platforms, halfway between construction and collapse. These are rooted in abstraction, their lines describing geometric spaces, the sculptural equivalent of crude geometrical proofs, quickly sketched by a mathematician; a Pythagorean assemblage of triangles and rectangles. Referring to constructivist sculpture and abstract painting these objects are heraldically imperfect, eschewing conventional notions of "craftsmanship" and yet they are meticulously constructed with a modesty of gesture and material.

And yet amongst this geometry and all encompassing ideologies, the hospital green and institutional blue, there are glimpses of the domestic, flashes of the private and personal. Manifesting as a found object or a sprayed lurid flash of pink, they are evidence of the human presence. Strips of wallpaper adorn planes of the sculptures like the remnants of a private space exposed by the demolition of a building; a reminder of the individual amongst the collective, the private realm within the public sphere.

Rather than replicate the socialist utopian ideology of the brutalist architects, the simple, clean aesthetic of purely conceptual geometry or adopt the conventional position which critiques these concerns as dehumanising and impersonal, these works subvert and disrupt these traditional discussions. They are rooted in the here and now, blemished and flawed whilst functional and richly diverse. They are already in the process of decay at the hands of the invisible forces of entropy. Whether it is time, deindustrialisation, crime or the transposition of a pure concept into the physical world, all things are subject to a decline, gradual or sudden, and eventually fall into ruin. Schumacher's work teeters between the twin poles of a thing's conception and its ultimate fate, its creation and destruction.

Text by Dan Brown, 2011