

Jo Addison  
Gordon Cheung  
Adam Gillam  
Julian Hughes Watts  
Kounosuke Kawakami  
Max Mosscrop

# **Reconstructing the Old House**

Steven Rendall  
Danny Rolph  
Benet Spencer

**2009**

## **Reconstructing the Old House**

**Nunnery Gallery**, London

4 - 26 April 2009

**Ruskin Gallery**, Cambridge

9 - 31 October 2009

Curated by Benet Spencer

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## Foreword

Architecture is everywhere. Artists, it seems, have always looked at it. *Reconstructing the Old House* features nine artists who, in various ways, draw upon architecture or the urban environment for inspiration. The focus is on a creative process. All the artists are 'makers' of images and objects, through construction, or even reconstruction.

It is no coincidence that many of the artworks featured have collage underpinning their methodology. The materials vary from newspaper to plastic, cardboard to canvas, and, alongside this interest in the means of construction, there is the occasional flight of fantasy.

Early points of reference for this project included the comparison that can be made between Brancusi's Paris studio and Frank Gehry's LA workshop. Both places are exploding in sculptural form - full of related and evolving shapes that stretched convention for either art or architecture. From here my consideration for an architectural influence ranged from the purity of the modernist grand plan to the ad hoc improvisation of Rio de Janeiro's Favelas.

It is my hope that putting these wide-ranging but related group of artists together, this exhibition will highlight a specific area of activity, where individuals feed off architecture or the urban environment, whilst manipulating and refining their source material towards original and imaginative ends.

**Benet Spencer, March 2009**

## Reconstructing the Old House

Architecture, once again, appears to be a strong reference point for contemporary art practice. Not in the sense of a joint (utopian and global) model (conjoining architecture, painting and sculpture) as in De Stijl or Russian and Polish constructivism, where reciprocal influence and, ultimately, assimilation worked to inform the artwork's social and formal implications, but rather as a complex and critical negotiation on different levels: metaphoric, iconographic, ironic. Reconstructing the Old House curated by painter Benet Spencer examines these multiple architectural infusions within current practice. They lead, invariably, to reflections upon modernism, the city, corporate and business environments, general reconsiderations of form and representation, as well as the digitization of visualisation (a relatively recent shared platform between architects, artists and designers).

Perhaps a relevant prophetic moment can be located back in the early 1990s with Peter Doig's Concrete Cabin series of paintings. Here, Le Corbusier's housing project, Unité d'Habitation in Marseilles, France, is depicted from within the adjoining woods. Le Corbusier's visionary building, completed in 1952 was by 1973 partially derelict and dilapidated, and in the early 90s was open to artist's projects as part of its subsequent rehabilitation (it is currently, amongst other things, a hotel). With this iconic ruin of the modernist project as his subject, Doig's images tend to articulate something of the tragedy of our current relation to classic modernity and its social and aesthetic project. Depicting the approach to the building from a surrounding wooded area, they create a series of loaded, almost cinematic, images. The particular framing of the images, and the almost voyeuristic

glimpsing through the trees of the hulking edifice of this faded warhorse of modernity emphasises its otherness to the present. The latter is underlined by Doig's actual approach to the medium itself (with its bizarre invocation of symbolist painting – almost a cross between Hödler's and Segatini's fin-de-siecle landscapes of yesteryear) has little to do with Le Corbusier's purist enterprise. It is through nature that the modernist ruin is viewed and the suggestion is that this geometric, utilitarian, machine fantasy - in its abject state - will be subsumed once again by nature itself.

Writing in 1911 the social philosopher Georg Simmel examined the aesthetics of the architectural ruin. He suggested that “ the ruin [...] of a building means that the work of art is dying, other forces and forms, those of nature have grown; and out of what of art still lives in the ruin and what of nature already lives in it, there has emerged a new whole, a characteristic unity.” But also, “The ruin has an additional fascination: the destruction of the spiritual form by the effect of natural forces. [...]” While Simmel's idealist opposition of ‘culture’ and ‘nature’ firmly place his ideas in the late 19th century, he points to the notion of the ‘spiritual’ (and here we might locate the Unité as a socio-aesthetic project) ‘brought home’ (or rather back to earth) through the processes of time and decay.

Reconstructing the Old House is involved with such debates; it is about how we, individually, provide ourselves with an adequate vantage point to see the present and the past, and the kinds of structures that inform our reading. It goes beyond the opposition of the cultural, or ‘spiritual’ and nature; culture itself has fragmented – refracted, even - and proves itself as corrosive an element as anything nature can muster. Modernism as a ruin, or equally, the ‘old house’ that needs reconstructing, finds resonance in all the work presented here. If representations of modernism abound in this exhibition, whether in approach or image, then it is from a distance, and viewed with the unity that an aesthetic project has when it is seen from a critical distance and not a lived inhabitation. Simultaneously, however,

and this is the element of tragedy (not nostalgia) here: there is a voracious exploration of the unity of the aspirations (visually and ideologically) belonging to that past, but also what Simmel calls the “secret justice of destruction” – a contradictory embrace of locating a set of concerns, whilst acknowledging, and accepting, their current historical dissembled state.

Benet Spencer, Gordon Cheung and Kounosuke Kawakami, each in their own way, explore this ambivalent state of being. Modernist housing complexes float amidst apocalyptic or infringing landscape settings, or, in Spencer’s case, in Angel Town, an elaborated abstract geometric ground transforms the rigidity of a housing estate in a free embellishment. Steven Rendall, Julian Hughes Watts, and Jo Addison each take elements from the city’s everyday life and explore their strange defamiliarized opacity as signs (a picnic area; the electronic detritus with which we surround ourselves; the reductive abstraction of a logo). Max Mossdrop, Adam Gillam and Danny Rolph work directly with materials that both evoke a (constructive) past and yet also the current disruptive and delirious spaces evoked by corporate modernism.

Architecture, too, operates within these ambivalences: on the one hand, in its contemporary manifestations, it wants to recuperate the audacities of the 60s or the experiments of Osaka (Expo ‘70) translated into corporate spectacle. On the other, we have Herzog and de Meuron inhabiting the structure of materials and processes with as much gusto as any modernist, often expanding the possibilities with, for example, the flow of video to construct their relational parts. Rem Koolhaas, too, has located the virtual forces of social and economic flow – shopping for example - as energies that have replaced any stable system of grounding, and that the plight of the architect is, “truly impossible: to express increasing turbulence in a stable medium.” The same might be said for both painting and sculpture, and if so, why do we persist? Koolhaas has provided the reply to this: “Despite its success, I see architecture as an endangered brand, and I’m trying to

reposition it. [...] to reinvent a plausible relationship between the formal and the social [...]” This can only be done, not by wishful thinking or nostalgia, but by repositioning and reconstructing radical aesthetic possibilities – even if as a kind of mirage - both with unflinching knowingness and criticality, and yet with an alertness and openness to the supplementary conditions of what are not recognized; put simply: the new.

### **David Ryan, March 2009**

George Simmel, ‘The Ruin’ (1911) in *Essays on Sociology, Philosophy and Aesthetics*, New York, Harper, 1965

Rem Koolhaas, *S,M,L,XL* Monacelli press, 1995, new York, p.847

Rem Koolhaas, quoted in Hal Foster, *Design and Crime*, Verso, London/New York, 2002, p. 62

David Ryan is an artist and writer, based in London and Cambridge. He is Reader in Fine Art at Anglia Ruskin University and Research Fellow at Chelsea College of Art and Design.

## Jo Addison

Jo Addison (b. 1970 in Cambridge) received a Post-Graduate Diploma in Fine Art Print from Slade School of Fine Art in 1995 following BA Fine Art Sculpture at Norwich. Recent solo shows have included No One Sees The Barn – Outpost, Norwich and Visitors - Five Years, London. Selected group exhibitions include Friday Night, Saturday Told Galerie Skuggi, Reykjavik, Zwielflichtige Augenblicke Felix Ringel Galerie, Dusseldorf, Tonite! Spanganga, San Francisco and Whitstable Biennale, Doubtful Pleasures, APT Gallery,.London. In 2009 work has been included in Animated - Wysing Arts Contemporary Cambridge, Sale - Royal Standard Liverpool, Cortez Arrives - Herbert Read Gallery, Canterbury and Free Association - Area 53, Vienna. Addison is currently Senior Lecturer at Norwich University College of the Arts and Visiting Lecturer at University of Westminster and University of the Arts, London. Jo Addison lives and works in London.

### **Bin 2007**

Wood, Card, Oven-bake clay

50 x 30 x 35cm

### **Picnic Area 2007**

Oven-bake clay

11 x 8cm



## Gordon Cheung

Gordon Cheung (b.1975) studied Fine Art at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design and Royal College of Art, graduating in 2001. Recent solo shows include: The Promised Land, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York 2009; Volta NYC, Unosunove Gallery and Galerie Adler, New York 2009; Wilderness of Mirrors, Galerie Adler, Frankfurt, Germany 2008; Death by a Thousand Cuts, Chinese Arts Centre, Manchester, 2008; God is on Our Side, Unosunove Gallery, Rome 2007; Fall of the Rebel Angels, Alan Cristea Gallery, London 2008; Paradise Lost, Laing Art Solo and Commission, Newcastle, 2007. Selected group exhibitions; Painting the Glass House, Aldrich Museum and Yale Museum, Connecticut, USA, 2008-09; John Moores 24, Walker Art Gallery, 2006; British Art Show 6, Manchester, Nottingham, Bristol, Gateshead, 2005-06. Forthcoming 2009 shows include a solo museum at New Art Gallery Walsall, Walsall UK and a group show at Carré d'Art - Museum of Contemporary Art, Nimes France. Gordon Cheung lives and works in London.

### **Living Machine Study 2008**

Financial Times, Ink, Acrylic Gel,  
Spraypaint on Canvas  
153 x 109cm



## Adam Gillam

Adam Gillam (b. 1970 in East Farleigh, Kent) studied Painting at the Royal Academy Schools and at Liverpool John Moores University. Recent solo exhibitions include *I Am Definitely Coming For Longer If I Come Again* at KLERKX in Milan and *Art in a Cupboard* at Keith Talent Gallery, London. Selected group shows include *Brussels Biennial 1; Show Me Don't Tell Me*, curated by Nicolaus Schafhausen and Florian Waldvogel from Witte de With (Rotterdam), *Wandering Rocks* at Gimpel Fils (London), *For and From*, Metropole Galleries (Folkstone); *The Way We Work Now*, Camden Arts Centre (London); *This Show Is Ribbed For Her Pleasure*, Cynthia Broan Gallery (New York) and recently with Sara MacKillop at MOT International (London). Forthcoming projects include *Cortez Arrives* at Herbert Read Gallery in Canterbury, and an exhibition curated by Sara Stenczer for Olivier Houg Gallery, Lyon, during November 2009. Adam currently lives and works in London.

### **Untitled 2008**

Mixed media

165 x 39 x 51cm



## Julian Hughes Watts

Julian Hughes Watts (b. 1969 in Cardiff) studied Fine Art at University of Central England, Birmingham, and Royal Academy of Arts, London, graduating in 1994. Selected exhibitions include Royal Overseas League, London, 1995; Deptford X, London, 2001, 2004 and 2005; Dustcamp, London, 2002; Century Gallery, London, 2002; Revolution by Trailer, curated by Juan Bolivar, London, 2004; Eau Savage. Lucy Mackintosh Gallery, Switzerland, 2006; 10th Planet, Tower Bridge Complex, London, 2006; Seeking Tacit Utopias, curated by Thomas M. Wright, Surface Gallery, Nottingham, 2006; Eau Savage, curated by Juan Bolivar, Fieldgate Gallery, London, 2007; Intervention, curated by Richard Ducker at Fieldgate Gallery, London, 2007. Awards include Worshipful Company of Painters Award and Leverhulme Scholarship. Julian Hughes Watts lives and works in London.

### **New logo 2009**

Enamel paint on board

30 x 39cm

### **Uranium Mine 2006**

Digital animation (still)

55 second loop



## Kounosuke Kawakami

Kounosuke Kawakami studied at Central Saint Martins College of Art And Design, BA (hons) and MA, graduating in 2003. Solo Exhibitions include Migration, Houldsworth Gallery, London, 2007; Mindustrial Evolution, Bearspace Gallery, London, 2006. Group Exhibitions include Twenty, Dazed and Confused Gallery, London, 2008; Echo, Zaimu, Japan, 2008; The Future Can Wait, Atlatntis Gallery, London, 2007; Hand In Hand, Japan Embassy, London 2007; Tech-Mac-Mayacom, Tokyo, 2007; Creekside Open, APT Gallery, 2007; New London Kicks, Soho House, New York, 2007; Dynamic Entropy, Houldsworth, London, 2006; Mindustrial Evoloution, Bearspace Gallery, London, 2006; Synchro-Tron, Aqffin Gallery, London, 2006; Curious New Terrain, Nolias Gallery, London, 2006; 10th Planet, Tower Bridge Business Complex, London, 2006; Prizes include Vision of Contemporary Art Prizewinner, Ueno Royal Museum, Japan, 2008; Celeste Art Prize (shortlist), 2007; Marmite Art Prize, Finalist, 2008; Creekside Open x 2, Finalist Selected by Matthew Collings and Emma Biggs, Finalist, 2008; Creekside Open x 2, Finalist Selected by Victoria Miro, Finalist, 2008. Kounosuke lives and works in London.

### **Industry 2007**

Mixed media on canvas

165 x 213cm

### **Dam 3 2007**

Mixed media collage on paper

82 x 56cm



## Max Mosscrop

Max Mosscrop (b.1963) studied architecture at the Universities of Liverpool and Oregon, followed by Fine Art at Liverpool John Moores University and the Royal Academy Schools, graduating in 1997. Solo exhibitions include In the Shadows of Heaven, Droit House, Turner Contemporary, Margate, 2004; Travesty, Henry Peacock Gallery, London, 2001. Group Exhibitions include Eating at Another's Table, Metropole Gallery, Folkestone, 2004; Doubtful Pleasures, APT Gallery, London, 2004; This Show Is Ribbed for Her Pleasure, Cynthia Broan Gallery, New York, 2005; Underlie, Keith Talent Gallery, London, 2005; Silent Inhabitants, Kunsthalle Arbon, Switzerland, 2006; World's End, Carlton Hotel, Melbourne, Australia, 2008; Cortez Arrives, Herbert Read Gallery, University for the Creative Arts Canterbury, 2009; Pattern Recognition, City Gallery, Leicester, 2009. Max is a Senior Lecturer in Fine Art at De Montfort University, Leicester and lives and works in London.

### **Everything is Everything 2008**

Watercolour on gesso panel and wood

140 x 40 x 40cm



## Steven Rendall

Steven Rendall was born in England in 1969 and currently lives and works in Melbourne, Australia. After graduating with a Bachelor of Arts (honours) at DeMontfort University, Leicester (1993) he completed an MA at the Royal Academy Schools, London (1996). Solo exhibitions include: *Luxury, Serenity & Pleasure*, Hell Gallery, Melbourne (2008); *The Last Paintings*, West Space, Melbourne (2002) and *We only have this excerpt*, Henry Peacock Gallery, London (1999). Group exhibitions include: *A re-Constructed World*, Linden Centre for Contemporary Arts, Melbourne (2005); *Superstructure*, West Space, Melbourne (2005) and *Kunst–Darm*, Henry Peacock Gallery, London (2001). His curatorial ventures include: *World's End*, Carlton Hotel & Studios, Melbourne (2008) and *Life is getting longer*, VCA Gallery, Melbourne (2006). As Rendall&Spier he has collaborated with Bryan Spier on projects including: *The Essay*, West Space, Melbourne (2008) and *The Red Lion*, O Projects, Melbourne (2008). He lectures in the Faculty of Art and Design at Monash University, Melbourne. Steven Rendall's work appears courtesy of John Buckley Gallery.

### **Living Room** 2005-09

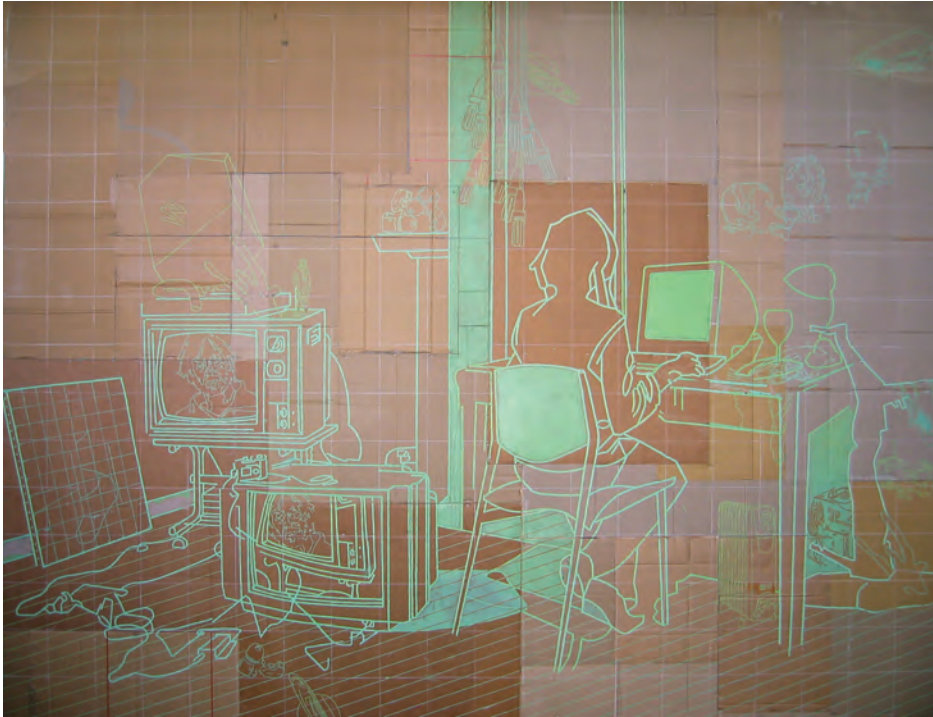
Acrylic on Cardboard

275 x 359cm

### **Cadaver** 2009

Oil on Canvas

215 x 268cm



## Danny Rolph

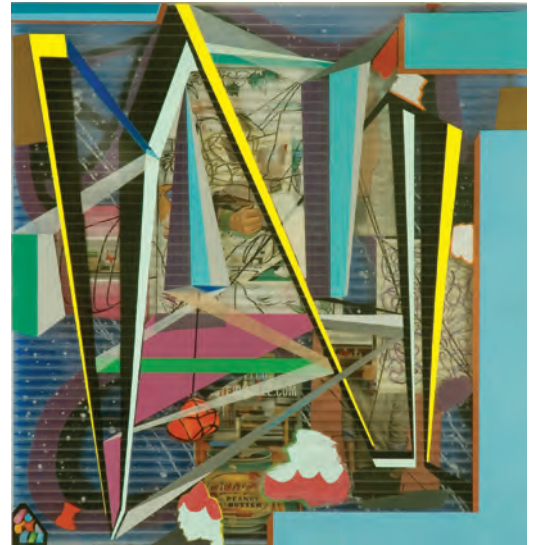
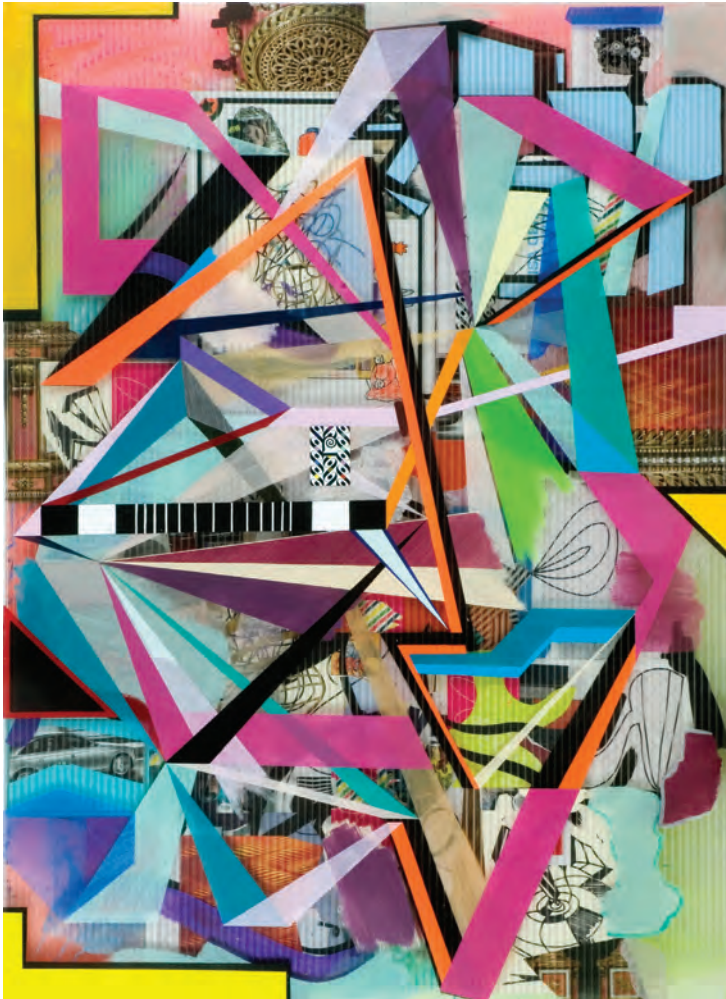
After studying Fine Art at Winchester School of Art (1988-91) Danny Rolph graduated in painting from the Royal College of Art in 1993. He has exhibited extensively in Britain, Europe and the United States, and his work is included in major private and public collections worldwide, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York and the Tate Gallery, London. Solo Exhibitions include Barbara Davis Gallery, Houston (2009, 2007 and 2005); AR/Contemporary, Milan (2005, 2007 and 2008); There is No Such Thing as Pure, Hales Gallery, London, (2006); Rutherford, Newlyn Art Gallery, Cornwall, (2005). His group exhibitions include Superstratum, Koraalberg Gallery, Antwerp, 2008; Pure Optic Ray, Fred Leipzig, 2008; Through the Stargate, AR/Contemporary, Milan, 2008; Park Avenue, Southampton City Art Gallery, 2008; When Forms Become Attitude; This Drawing, Cynthia Broan Gallery, New York, 2005; Collage, Bloomberg Space, London, 2004; New British Painting: Part 1, John Hansard Gallery, 2003. Awards include British School at Rome Scholarship, 1998 and a Delfina Trust Award, 1994-96. Danny Rolph is represented by Barbara Davis Gallery, Houston and AR/Contemporary, Milan. He lives and works in London.

### **Canning 2008**

Mixed-media on Trinwall  
100 x 100cm

### **Peel 2008**

Mixed-media on Trinwall  
150 x 105cm



## Benet Spencer

Benet Spencer (b.1969 in St Albans) studied at Birmingham Polytechnic and the Royal Academy Schools, graduating in 1995. Solo exhibitions have included Mappin Open Solo Show, Mappin Art Gallery, Sheffield; Woodcutter's Contract, 2060 Vision Gallery, Antwerp and Negative Exposure, Static Gallery, Liverpool. Since 2004 he co-curated the group exhibitions Tiergarten, 2060 Vision Gallery, Antwerp, Weekending, Globe Gallery Newcastle and RMIT Project Space, Melbourne; and curated Fantasy Island, Metropole Galleries, Folkestone. Group exhibitions include Germinations 8, Breda, Holland, 1994; John Moores 19, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, 1999; Over2You, Wetterling Teo Gallery, Singapore, 2004; 10th Planet, Tower Bridge Business Complex, London, 2006; Inaugural, Cube Noir Gallery, Liverpool, 2006; Seeking Tacit Utopias, Surface Gallery, Nottingham, 2006; and Worlds End - Future Perfect, The Carlton Hotel, Melbourne, Australia, 2008. He was a prizewinner in the Unipart Reflections of Technology Competition, 1995 and the Mappin Open, 2001. Benet is currently Course Leader in Fine Art at Cambridge School of Art and is based in London and Cambridge.

### **Angel Town 2009**

Oil and Acrylic on Canvas

160 x 200cm



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