

HEATHER ROWE: ON RETURNING

D'AMELIO TERRAS, NEW YORK

9 NOVEMBER - 23 DECEMBER



On Returning, 2007 (installation view), mixed media, dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist and D'Amelio Terras, New York

Modernism has long suffered certain negative connotations due to its ideological commitments and for its aesthetic proscriptions. Yet most of its exemplary markers have been enshrined in the museums, which makes them easier to control and offer for ritual sacrifice to the artists and critics who still need the power of the negative to get their creative acts under way. But such is not the case with what we generally call late modernist work: art and architecture of the 1950s, 60s and 70s which held fast the ideals articulated by previous generations in the face of art's expanded field. That it was late meant it was less important and thus its fate would remain uncertain.

Though time has come to favour certain works of late modernist art – especially paintings, such as those by Morris Louis, Jules Olitski and Kenneth Noland, which have seen renewed critical and commercial attention – late modernist architecture has been less fortunate, especially if it's by Paul Rudolph. Rudolph's important yet much maligned work – 'brutalist' is a term of derision for many of his buildings' occupants and neighbours – has come under attack recently from developers who feel the land is more valuable than the designs or the history sitting on top of it. Such was the case for the signature Michaels House in Westport, Connecticut, designed by Rudolph in 1972, which was razed in January to make way for new construction (presumably something the developers thought would be more, well, 'modern').

Enter Heather Rowe. For her second solo show at D'Amelio Terras, Rowe has adopted the vocabulary of Rudolph's now demolished Westport home and created an architectural folly that evokes the forms and materials

of the original without quite memorialising it. The syntax of Rowe's piece is dominated by the white stucco beams and quadripartite columns which gave the Michaels House its distinctive geometry. But within this matrix one finds bits of stapled-up veneers, broken windows, shag carpeting and other minutiae that telescope one's attention away from considering the form as any kind of reconcilable whole.

For Rowe, *On Returning* is meant to manifest an incomplete or emotionally reconfigured and possibly fictional memory – which is exactly how most of us approach Modernism itself. This is not a creative reimagining of a specific architectural work, but an allegory of our fraught relationship to an aesthetic legacy which, for many of us, could only be learned rather than lived.

In this, Rowe's work takes its place next to a growing number of projects that reassess the legacy of modernist architecture but which are less interested in critical negation than in some sort of productive renovation. And at the moment, the architectural folly appears as this practice's favoured vehicle. Rowe's logical counterpart here is Monica Sosnowska, whose *1:1* (2007), installed at the Polish Pavilion for last year's Venice Biennale, rethought the pavilion's 1930s architecture by literally cramming it with the steel skeleton of a postwar-reconstruction housing-block factory. Both Rowe and Sosnowska play architecture's memory card, but they recognise that this memory – Modernism's memory – is necessarily a collective one with which we're perhaps only now coming to terms. *Jonathan T.D. Neil*