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Jan 18, 2007 at 03:18 PM

Greenwich Architecture Open Lecture Series 200607 AT WORK

University of Greenwich School of Architecture & Construction
Mansion Site, Avery Hill Campus
Bexley Road, Eltham, London SE9 2PQ

- Norbert Singer Lecture Theatre (M055)
- Thursday 18 Jan 2007 17.30

A generation of emerging London architects has turned its back on the sensationalist form-making of the starchitects and is making buildings that are often very quiet, and deliberately ordinary.

The work comes out of a sensitivity to the history and character of the city – concerns that have not much troubled the British architectural mainstream for decades.

Lynch Architects has London in its DNA. The practice's buildings can be seen as investigations into the public and private face of the capital, attempting to reclaim notions of architectural character from the nuances in the city's historic fabric. The work tries to deal with what has been lost in the march of modernism. The analysis is based on the fabric of London, in particular the dominant typology of the terraced house and the leftover sites of the Victorian city.

The East London Black Women's Organisation (ELBWO) was Lynch's first completed public building. Tragically, a matter of weeks after its completion, it was burned to the ground by suspected arsonists.

Two private houses – on Greenwood Road in Dalston and Cazenove Road in Stoke Newington – are perhaps the best evidence so far of this search for a meaningful public face to the contemporary house.

Lynch says: "I'm interested in character in architecture rather than function. Instead, I want to think about character as related to place and personae: ie the possibility of a house having an ambivalent character – a public face and a specifically private face. The modernising tendency to ignore decorum and ornamental character is already present within the 19th-century suburban villa terrace type. So, our corner plot house projects are in fact re-instating the original character of the Georgian terrace, that is, public decorum; thus creating, in a modest sense, a public realm."

Lynch's urge to create iconography in architecture is also expressed here, from the almost Venturi-esque stenciling of the acronym across the glazed part of the facade (look closely and an abstracted ELBWO can be seen on the glass doors), to the evocation of the verandah as a place of social exchange and defensible publicness in West Indian culture. Lynch's buildings are always rich with implied inhabitation.

Kieran Long from an article for ICON May 2005

Last Updated (Jan 18, 2007 at 03:42 PM)

