



lines of grey

Pil and Galia Kollektiv on Hannah Westwood "Lines of Grey" exhibition at e-raum, Cologne, Germany, April-May 2008

Forthcoming show: part of the [Cupboard Love](#) series, in **Greenwich Foot Tunnel** **October 2008**



Featured Artist: [Hannah Westwood](#)

In his pivotal essay on Modern style in architecture and interior design, Adolph Loos constructed a surprisingly simple narrative of cultural linear progression. We, the moderns, have succeeded in overcoming the phenomenological separation of skin and flesh, exterior and essence and moved forward from the ornamental to the functional, from an extension and symbolic representation of the object's use value to an object contained and defined only by its inherent parameters. Le Corbusier's house as a machine for living was the epitome of this view of design. One hundred years on, and the triumph of an aesthetics defined through functionality is all but forgotten, architecture once again replacing "less is more" with a renewed fondness for spectacle and fantasy. The primitive, ornamental tattoo that Loos associated with criminal tendencies now subsumes the body it adorns, covering it completely and assuming its core function, like the tattooed consciousness of the protagonist of Memento - the signifier of the psychological continuity of the subject standing for identity, or the tattooed prison map on the body of the hero of "Prison Break" - the sign as a real moment of the liberation of the body from the confines of the controlling architecture of the prison.

However, the machine aesthetic celebrated by the likes of Loos and Corbusier has not gone away. Newly fetishised as style, the heroic metal and concrete surfaces that were meant to cleanse us of our primitive atavisms are now embraced as much for their cult value as for any use value. As the latest technology becomes increasingly invisible, scaled down beyond our perception, we can appreciate as decorative the clunky cogs and wheels of now obsolescent artifacts. What these nostalgic adornments obscure, of course, is the extent to which we are willing to internalize and assimilate the technologies of the present, which still beckon us with the discourse of progress, though we know their functional days are numbered and that they too are doomed to be aestheticised with the passage of time.

Hannah Westwood's murals explore this body-machine complex as ornament through an immediate relationship to architecture. Her site specific interventions in the gallery space deny the function of the white cube - it's desire to neutralize the wall as a blank canvas for another canvas - and expose its formal agenda. Smearred traces of her drawing as action confront us with the analogy of wall as skin, the drawing inscribed on it performed as a tattooing ritual. The mechanical parts that were meant to turn our houses, cars, cities and even our bodies into scientifically enhanced paragons of efficiency explode in an ecstatic mess of flesh and metal. Like the manga narratives Westwood draws on, this is not a simple dystopic negation of technology. The juxtaposition of this gory abyss with the conventions of Victorian interior decoration, with its moldings and dado rails and picture rails, suggests that we can learn to live with our nightmares, that the cybernetic perversions promised by the interface of organisms and their creations can yet be tamed. We may no longer believe in the civilizing myths of the early twentieth century, but we still try to exert mastery over nature. An ex-laundrette and an ex-bombsite coexist in space if not time in the gallery. In the near future, the mural that commemorates their meeting point will also be effaced, but for now the explosive encounter is fleetingly brought to the surface, like a scar rising above skin level in response to some stimulus.

