

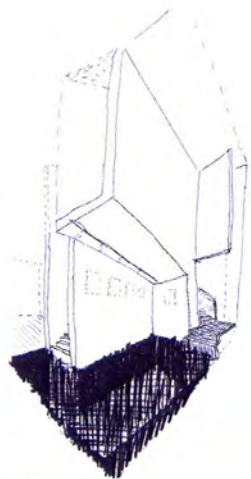


Lynch Architects' east London gallery draws on the history of the type and the life of the street. Critique: Alexandra Stara.

The origins of the art gallery are domestic. The typology of the renaissance villa includes a space associated with the entrance – usually a long ‘gallery’ or sequence of spaces forming part of the introduction to the main salon – where paintings and sculptures would be on display. The villa gallery was an essential manifestation of the residence’s (and the residents’) decorum, situating the family culturally and historically. Although Madder Rose is a commercial gallery, it is part of a conversion project of two Georgian houses, which also includes two apartments. The fragmented, sometimes awkward spatial structure of the existing houses has been treated as an opportunity rather than a hindrance. There is no attempt to erase the latent domesticity of the space in favour of the abstract neutrality usually favoured in such cases.

Artworks are not addressed here as disengaged, autonomous appearances in a space of mere convenience for commercial exchange. They inhabit the place. The architecture invites them to settle in for a while, claiming different corners and setting up different opportunities for engagement with the

viewers. There is a corridor, bringing whatever hangs on the wall close up and offering it to us while we’re moving; the main ‘salon’ is a subtly complex room a few steps up, with a deceptive geometry, partly visible all the way





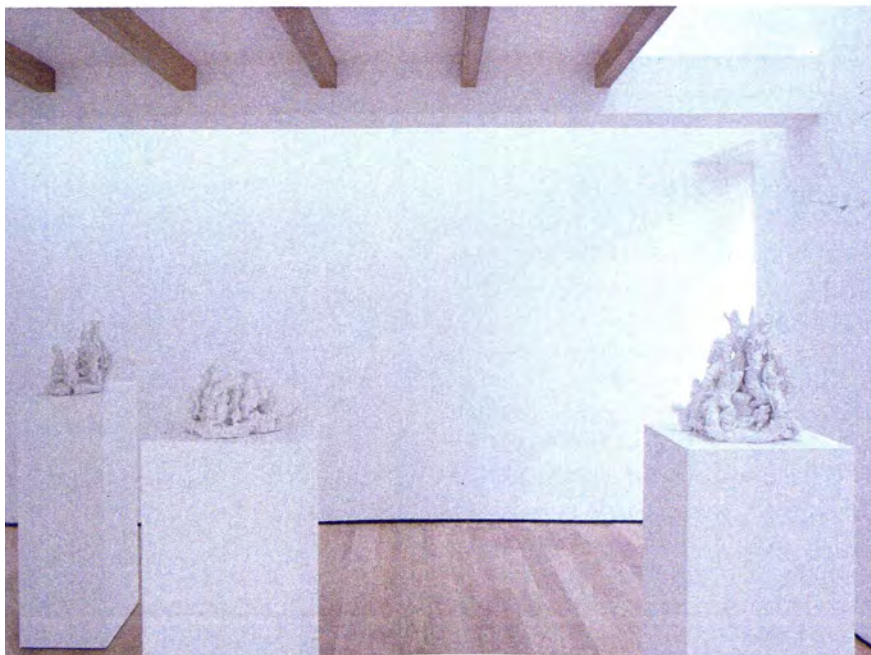
from the street and partly hidden, with an intriguing suspended box as ceiling, hanging between two skylights (the section reveals it as the terrace of the flat above); there is a staircase leading down to a basement exhibition

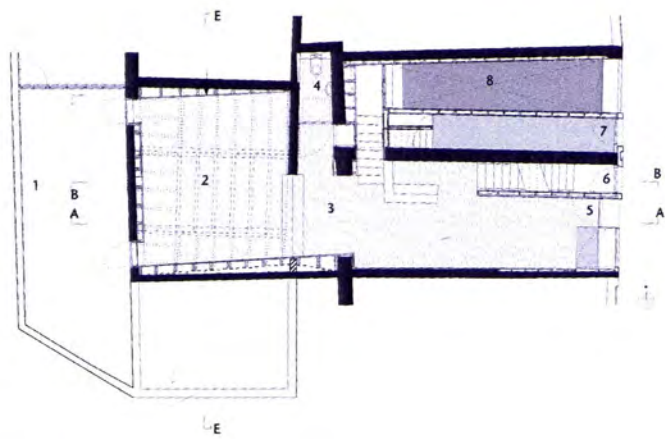
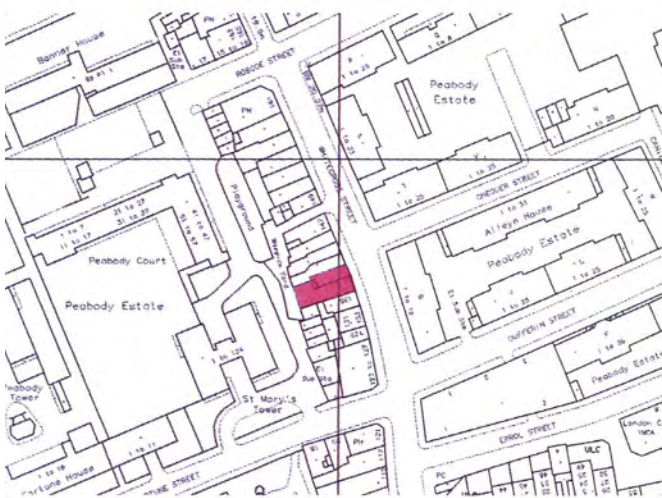
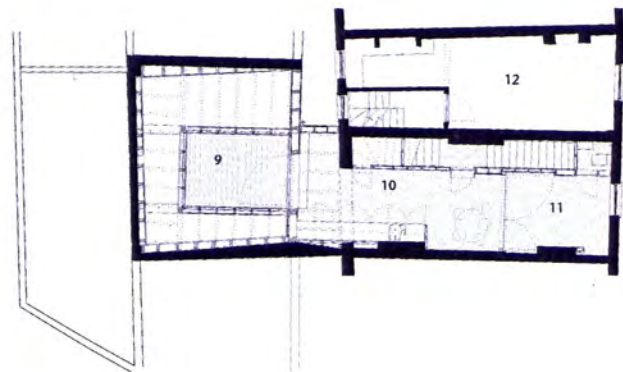
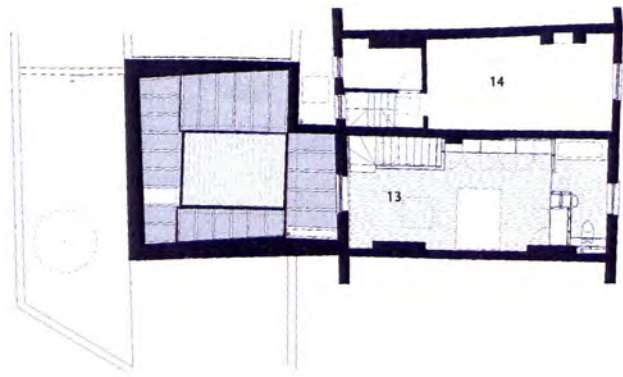
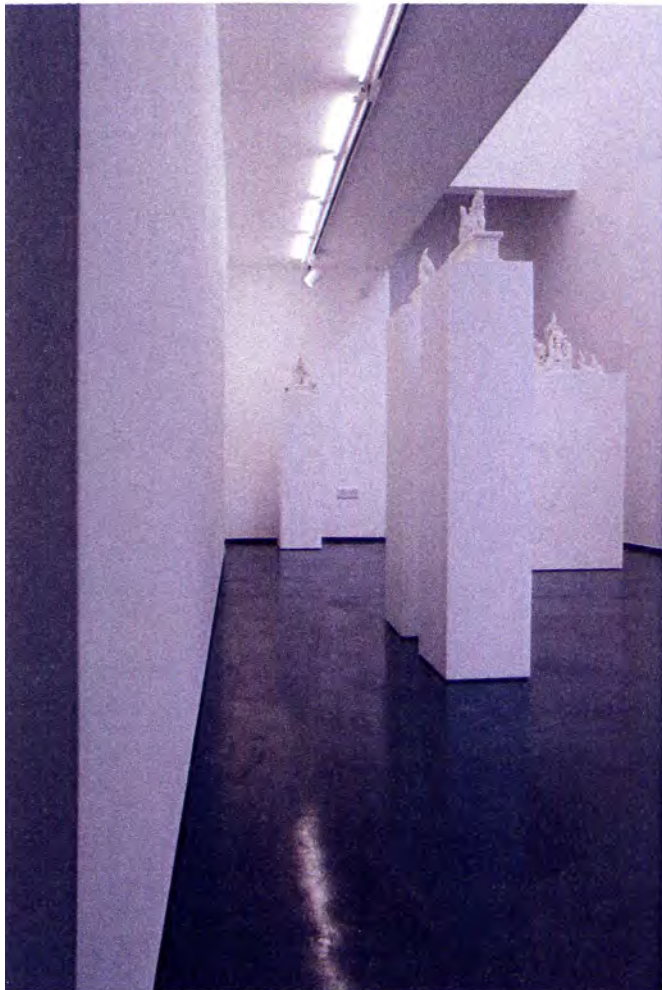
Above View through ground floor gallery to courtyard (ph: Christian Macdonald).
Above left Gallery shopfront (ph: CM).
Below The top-lit gallery (ph: CM).
Below left Model of the roof terrace.
Sketch The basement gallery.

room, which is only revealed once we're halfway down, and the underbelly of two staircases revealed on the ceiling (on one occasion with dramatic exaggeration), alluding to the apartments upstairs, which can only be accessed from the street.

The resulting sense of surprise emphasizes the way we discover things in spaces, and makes us aware of how we choose to look at something, offering artists and curators a variety of challenges and opportunities to think outside of the conventional 'white cube'. Already, a number of artists have decided to make site-specific installations, including a cast ceramic wall sculpture in the top-lit space, a timber hut in the courtyard and light boxes that can be viewed from the street at night. In contrast, landings on staircases enable work to be displayed in the sort of context they might be housed in once purchased by private collectors.

The gallery may be pervaded by an air of domesticity, but it is far from mundane. Transformation, ambiguity and illusion – consistent themes in Lynch Architects' work – are employed in appropriate measure,





affording us a rich and poetic engagement with the spaces and the art. One of the more dramatic moves occurs at the entrance of the gallery, just behind the glass facade: with the use of reflective glass on the floor (allowing a hint of the gallery's basement office below), and mirrors on the side wall and ceiling above, an intense play of degrees of transparency and multiple reflections is effected. The threshold between city and gallery is accentuated as a moment of transition from the everyday to the extraordinary.

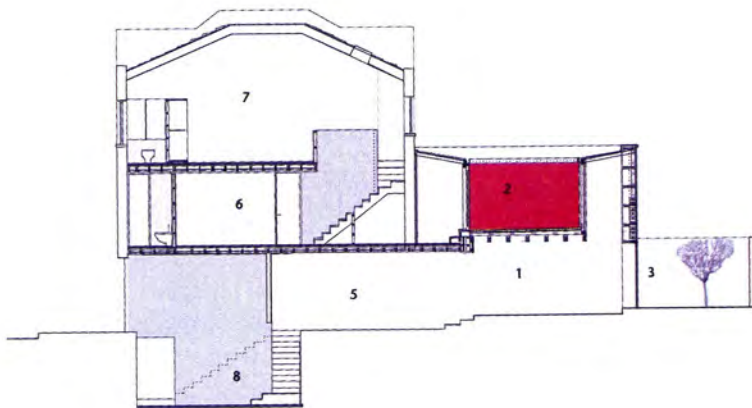
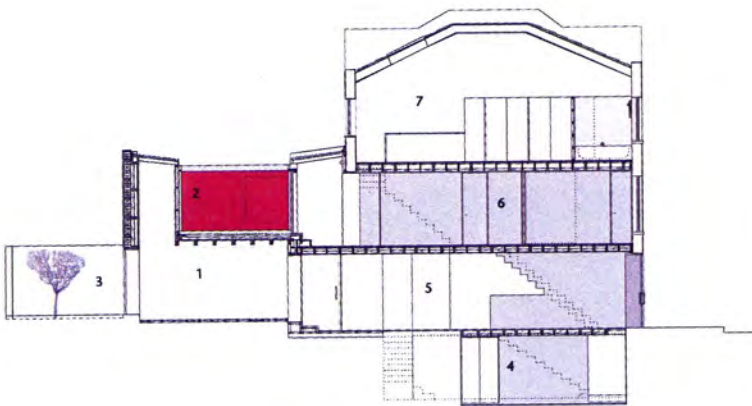
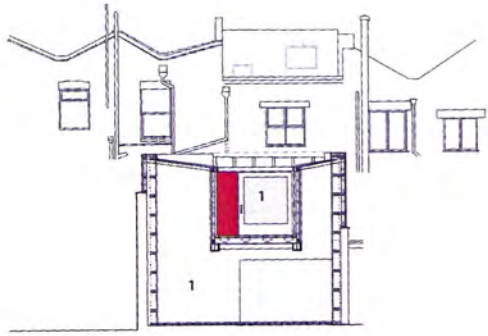
The continuous shadow gap between walls and floor throughout the gallery – one of the subtler moments of conceit at work here –

becomes particularly effective in the basement gallery. Taking the narrow staircase down from the ground floor and upon turning the corner at the landing, we are confronted by an elegant double-height space, with a window at ground level, above us, and a striking black floor, unique to this room. The poured material has a cool, chthonic feel to it, seemingly disappearing under the walls as 'ground' in more ways than one. On a hot day, walking barefoot on it is one of the many unexpected joys of the space. The excavated, shaded quality of this space sets up an interesting juxtaposition with the skylit, elevated 'salon' upstairs.

Top left The double-height basement gallery (ph: Patrick Lynch).

Location plan Surrounded by Peabody housing estates, Whitecross Street runs between Hawkmoor's St Luke's Church to the north and the Barbican, to the south, and is host to a regular street market, to which improvements are now being made.

Plans Ground, first and second floors: 1 courtyard, 2 top-lit gallery, 3 gallery, 4 wc, 5 entrance to gallery, 6 entrance to gallery flat, 7 entrance to second flat, 8 double-height basement gallery, 9 roof terrace, 10 kitchen/dining in gallery flat, 11 living room in gallery flat, 12 second flat, 13 bedroom in gallery flat, 14 second flat, upper level.



Setting up a responsive, poetic structure for the display of art results from Lynch Architects' understanding of the primacy of architecture's situation. The urban site – both as place and history – is the backbone of the Madder Rose scheme. The way the gallery's facade relates to the street is decorous, as is appropriate to its function, with rather expensive materials and careful detailing but without ostentation or formal disjunctions; perfectly balanced within Whitecross Street's Georgian terraces, yet anticipating the development of the area. The possibility of opening the glass window completely introduces the opportunity of a further fusion between

street world and art world. The other street window, which looks down into the basement space, allows an intriguing glimpse, past some of the drab social housing blocks on the eastern side of Whitecross Street and some Victorian buildings beyond – through to Bunhill Row Gardens and the historic non-conformists' cemetery. The neighbourhood of the gallery is London at its eclectic best – from Hawksmoor to the Barbican via half-bombed Whitecross Street, with Georgian houses on one end and council estates on the other – and this view sums it up perfectly.

The new apartment above the gallery (the only one whose interior was completed by the

Sections From top, E-E, A-A, B-B:

1 top-lit gallery, 2 terrace, 3 courtyard, 4 basement office, 5 gallery, 6 living space, 7 bedroom, 8 double-height basement gallery.

Above Rooflights arranged around the roof terrace to the apartment bring light the walls of the ground floor gallery (ph: top, Andy Laurie; below Tom Lee).



Above/below *The underside of the apartment's roof terrace is a crucial presence in the top-lit gallery space (ph: Christian Macdonald).*

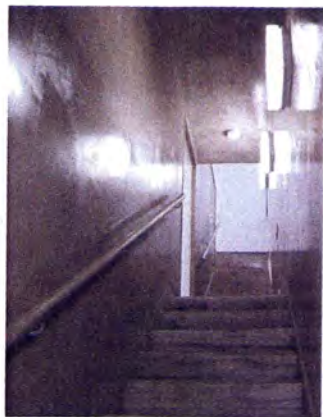
architects), although independent from it, arguably holds the key to the project. The intriguing cube suspended above the skylit exhibition space and, volumetrically, a crucial presence in the architectural scheme, is its roof terrace. Concluding the long, single space that runs the length of the plot from street front to back yard, in which sit the main living areas of the flat, the terrace is walled in to the height of the interior space. It is a room without a ceiling, painted in the beautiful dark red known as Madder Rose. While we are denied straight views in this protected shell, fragments of the city skyline jut above the parapet – the council block just behind, one of the Barbican towers farther away – situating this rather surreal room in the urban context. In a moment of delightful playfulness, just before stepping out onto the terrace from the flat, the architects have placed a mirror on the wall to our right,

which reflects the tower to our left, but which we cannot see yet, except in reflection.

The scheme's architectural knowingness could tempt one to start searching for possible references – Le Corbusier's Beistegui apartment being one of the more obvious, for that beautifully strange, yet strangely appropriate roof terrace, as well as various baroque precedents for the intriguing conceits throughout. But the point remains that Lynch Architects has carved an intellectually ambitious and architecturally sophisticated little scheme out of two Georgian houses, with poetic imagination and decorum, as well as a real sense of optimism for the role of art in everyday life and the potential of city living at its most regenerative in this fascinating neighbourhood.

Dr Alexandra Stara is principal lecturer and director of graduate history and theory at Kingston University School of Architecture.





Patrick Lynch writes:

Madder Rose gallery is designed in response to its Clerkenwell context, just outside London's city wall. The scope of works comprises the renovation and conversion of two Georgian houses to create two apartments and a private gallery for contemporary art, located within the St Luke's Conservation Area. Whitecross Street runs south from Hawksmoor's church to the Barbican, and is one of the few streets close to the delights of Shoreditch and the power of the City that retains a slightly Dickensian character of urban lawlessness. The project was partly funded by Islington Council with a grant from English Heritage, who approved the creation of a new shop front and insisted on the reintroduction of sash windows in

Above Mirror around the entrance; stair to the gallery apartment; second floor of the apartment; view of a Barbican tower from the apartment (ph: PL).

Below Whitecross Street. Improvements by Muf are due later in 2007 (ph: AL).

Project team:

Architect: Lynch Architects; design team: Patrick Lynch, Claudia Lynch, Naomi Shaw, Jacques Dahan, Adnan Celikovic; structural engineer: Rodrigues Associates; services engineer: Butler & Young; contractor: Bennetts Developments; client: Debbie Carlsaw.

Selected subcontractors and suppliers:

Lighting: Zumtobel Staff; sanitaryware: Sanyo System; concrete screed: Gifcrete Cemflow; security shutters: Arrow; Corian worktop: Dupont; rooflights: Velux; underfloor heating: Ipecc; glazing: Standard Patent Glazing; tiles: Architectural Ceramics; precast concrete door-frames: Evans Concrete; shop front: Mainbond.

one of the houses. The two early Georgian houses vary in size, scale and construction, and are offset between one and two degrees as the road bends to acknowledge the presence of subterranean streams. This slight misalignment becomes noticeable in an open plan space, and we have exaggerated this difference to take advantage of the 'natural perspective' that results from walls that are neither parallel nor perpendicular. New wall linings take up some of the tolerance between the two houses, and structure and services are encased within this 'poché'. The plywood-plasterboard lining adjusts and amplifies the offset to between four and five degrees at the rear, creating a sense of dynamic movement from one space to the next. The plan diagram enables free movement from space to space in a figure of eight, and avoids the oppressive dead-ends that can arise from the use of perspective in gallery spaces.

The rear gallery takes advantage of the 'hot' sunlight that falls in from high rooflights, arranged around a suspended cube that forms the roof terrace of the apartment above. In contrast the double-height lower gallery that drifts under firewalls between the two properties is a 'cold', east-facing space, and a long view is offered down the street towards Bunhill Gardens. These two spaces are almost the same size and proportion, but are detailed to have very different atmospheres

in response to their orientation to the sun and to the morphology of the building, thus intimating how they are used. Consequently, although quite small, Madder Rose can show a variety of types and scales of artworks, and group shows.

Current legislation would have complicated modifications to the flat on the right, so we created a protected route to the existing staircase at the rear, and removed the ground floor of the gallery, creating connections to the basement underneath the new firewalls. The flat on the left is open-plan, but a series of volumes are created with room-like characteristics, that can be closed down or opened through full-height doors that act like moveable walls. While the second floor bedroom is a large

tent-like volume, the first floor living spaces are quite low, culminating in a west-facing terrace.

The ground floor entrance facade is designed to open completely during private view parties, extending the new public territory designed by Muf through the gallery out into a west-facing rear courtyard (as yet incomplete). Monthly private views will occur like periodic street festivals, bringing two exotic worlds into confrontation. An artist's studio (for one of our clients, a painter) will occupy a garage that is currently unused at the rear of the gallery, opening further dialogue with passers-by and the street market, and the nightlife and domestic realms, all of which sit side-by-side together in typical urban complicity and co-dependence.

