

Eric Howeler

surfaces of pleasure: *luster*

Luster, the dictionary tells us, is a quality of a surface that is characterized by brightness, or radiance - gloss or sheen. It shares the root of lust which comes, like illustration, from the German. So, lust and luster are surfaces and pleasures, surfaces of pleasure and the pleasure of surfaces. The works collected by Henry Urbach all deal with surfaces in delightfully different ways. *Luster*, the new show at Henry Urbach Architecture, features work by a group of artists and architects addressing issues of surface, space, desire and pleasure. As stated in the press release, the participants "share a common obsession with the surfaces we construct and how they serve to manage anxiety and focus desire".....

Two of my favorite pieces are by An Te Liu: a column of household sponges entitled *Soft Load* and a swatch of wallpaper entitled *Levittown*. The odd tower of sponges makes up a polychromatic columnar member, tentatively installed under an exposed beam. The sponge, an instrument of hygiene, for maintaining clean (if fetishized) surfaces, is transformed into a bogus structural member, which feigns structural support, while made up of porous blocks of sponge, suggesting obsessive maintenance of surface. The classic opposition of structure/surface is put into play by this witty piece. Liu's other piece is a sample pattern of wallpaper made up of kaleidoscopic aerial views of Levittown. The source image, a view of the monotonous pattern of suburban tract housing in Levittown is reproduced to create a Rorschach-like surface. The aerial perspective, implying surveillance, is confounded by the multiplication of images and becomes decorative pattern. The bi-axially symmetrical pattern of generic American post-war landscape transforms to the erotic, traumatic form of the biomorphic. Wallpaper, at once a noun and a verb, parallels the reality of a speculative development of the American suburb that consumes both the suburban and rural frontier with a repetitive pattern of the familiar.....

Luster's steamy innuendo and its discursive underside illuminate much of what makes contemporary spaces stimulating and compelling, sensual and repulsive. Henry Urbach's curatorial effort is sharp and timely.....The works raise important issues, calling into question normative spatial practices and banal quotidian surfaces.

