

Objects of Desire from Still Life

Aesthetic culture has reflected affluence in differing ways throughout history. The frugal Dutch interior was transformed by the enhanced quality of materials and possessions in the seventeenth century during the rise of mercantilism. In the period of industrialisation in Victorian Britain furnishings became ever more elaborate and an increasing number of surfaces were required to display accumulated possessions. The visibility of goods was however undesirable in the modernist house. Light, open space and simple cupboards, to disguise the paraphernalia of the kitchen or dressing room, better suited the idealist principles of modernist architects and designers and their clients. **John Riddy** encapsulates this modernist age in a series of black and white photographs featuring modernist domestic spaces. The apartments designed and lived in by architects Berthold Lubetkin and Erno Goldfinger have been preserved or refurbished to approximate their original appearance in the thirties, but traces of the present – such as a car visible through a window – serve to dislocate the sense of time. Meticulous in his capturing of the harmony and rational form of the rooms, Riddy also manages to convey the philosophical concerns of preserving human scale and extending the presence of nature into the urban environment. In these contemplative portraits, however, an equivalent focus is devoted to the presence of objects positioned so purposefully within them, the assembled collection of tribal and other personal artefacts in the Goldfinger home and the exquisite almost fetishistic display of modernist furniture in the Highpoint flat. Collective nostalgia for the idealism of the modernist project is made more poignant by the persistent humanism of the scenes, the personal orchestration of objects of desire.

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