Everyday, a word like ‘carcass’ is taken for granted in timber yards and DIY stores: in these surroundings it does not conjure images of the abattoir or butcher shop. The carcass is, instead, a base unit with 3 (not 4) walls, typically waist-height, open-topped and floored. Fitted in a kitchen, flush with others very much like it and united in support of a formica slab, a laminate stretch, a beechwood or granite worktop, the humble carcass recedes behind the door chosen to front it. It is disappeared, presenting itself as an interior subsumed by function. A dumb body, a zombie, the flat-pack carcass is aesthetically undifferentiated, an android form conceived according to the efficiencies and conveniences required by systems of mass-production and customised mass-consumption.

In Lyonesse, James Rigler works with carcasses on a material and conceptual level. His cabinets have familiar, domestic dimensions, yet clad in a strictly regular arrangement of rectangular lozenges modeled on the fenestration of Council tower blocks, they assume monumentality and sculptural presence. Rigler synthesizes Le Corbusier’s dictum that ‘a house is a machine for living’ with the ergonomics that re-organized 20th century interiors as paradigms of ordered efficiency. His cabinets manifest themselves singularly, as lavish baroques. The Cityscape furniture produced during the 1970s by the American craftsman, Paul Evans, figures as a significant and glitzy precedent, but if Cityscape’s chrome-plated, polyhedral facets anticipate Patrick Bateman’s Manhattan with references to skyscrapers and the uncompromising, hard-bodied Minimalism of Robert Morris and Donald Judd, 1 Rigler’s opaque, grey facing commemorates the Brutalist landmarks vanishing from Glasgow’s skyline.

Symbolic of both principles and problems, Glasgow’s pre-cast concrete tower blocks were built during a frenzy of post-war slum clearance and resettlement. Modular by construction, high-rise schemes accommodated populations uprooted from overcrowded Victorian tenements in monolithic clusters on hillsides outside the city proper. Too soon, they were seen to magnify negative perceptions of parts of the city as a violent, deprived environment, and whilst a lack of planning and investment exacerbated social and structural problems, the burden of failure came to be attributed to the tower block as an ideological form. In the 1990s, in the dawning of the ‘miracle’ of a cultural renaissance, the Council started pulling them down, fitted kitchens and integrated laundry chutes notwithstanding. Using powdered marble, slate and mica with Jesmonite, in Lyonesse, Rigler reimagines the dust from demolitions in composites that bring buildings and furnishings together via their ideology.

This year sees the careful dismantling of the Bluevale and Whitevale buildings, whose distinctive wrap-around balconies overlooking Parkhead – ‘Paradise’ - are gnawed away layer by layer. Also, the postponed blow down of the six remaining Red Road blocks, made widely famous by film-makers, tight-rope walkers and the Commonwealth Events Committee...
alike. Glasgow will miss them, their complex history and their imposing aesthetics. Viewed from the car-park levels of the Tesco Superstore at Springburn, Red Road rose on the horizon like a not too distant Goremenghast; the crenellations of Bluevale and its twin stood over the East End like Samurai. Underneath, chilled by the microclimate, the physical encounter with facades 31 stories tall could be melancholic and sublime; inside, a neuroses of foyers, lifts and corridors to negotiate. Rigler’s cabinets for Lyonesse are, in part, concentrated expressions of a peculiarly Glaswegian Modern Gothic that chimes with his interest in pushing antagonistic aesthetics to a place of absurdity. Under the kind of pressure necessary to condense and compress the aesthetics and rationale of a tower block into an object, the furniture on show in Lyonesse finds memorial form, potent and tomb-like.

Rigler uses his detailed knowledge of architectural ornament and attraction to geometrical order to accelerate equivalences between disparate eras and styles. In his recent show At Every Fading of the Stars, an excess of smoothly rationalized Corinthian-style columns generated the kind of perspective and architectural ambitions familiar to anyone who plays Minecraft; a pair of heavy, Leonine feet orientated a day-bed with Egyptian proportions towards Memphis by way of the Viennese Secessionists, Dagobert Peche in particular. In this vein, a miniaturized model of the cathedral of St. Sernin at Toulouse - a confined, safe-house for holy relics - is profiled as deeply in Lyonesse as the changing shape of Glasgow's skyline, and the descent into the basement space at Marsden Woo is a phenomenologically important preface to the cabinets Rigler presents as Brutalist reliquaries.

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1 See Glenn Adamson in Constance Kimmerle (ed) “Paul Evans: Crossing Boundaries and Crafting Modernism” (2014)

2 At Every Fading of The Stars, 30 January - 8 March, 2015, Tramway, Glasgow.