

Anti-fame. Tony Fretton '13

This is a review of an exhibition of the architecture of John Glew that ran for a short time in the Camden studio of Martina Geccelli in her program RaumX, the review being published after the exhibition closes. From this unpromising start I am going to launch a case for architecture that exists below the thresholds of fame in our troubled society. But before I do, let me be clear, John Glew is an exceptionally talented designer and photographer, and his website <http://www.johnglew.co.uk/> is where he will soon carry a downloadable pdf of the exhibition.

We have to be wary of fame these days, it is sick perhaps even and then die-with dignity-in public Party girls become singers, waste their lives, die young and are memorialised by their family. Artists exhibit a bed, tent or diamond encrusted skull, and former commodity brokers sell giant dog artworks to oligarchs. It could all be seen as sinister fun, except that it blunts minds to committed creative work. Who really wants to be part of it? Better to produce work and develop your thoughts. That is what John Glew and other architects like him are doing. As with the Austrian architect Hermann Czech, John Glew channels a great deal of thought into a small number of things, including those over which he has no direct control. His clients get a very high ratio of artistry and configurational intelligence per sq m on limited budgets. An example is the house in Gloucester Crescent, which is not only full of lovely spaces but, as I see it, ideas about existence. His design for BDP of the concert hall and foyer in Leeds Grand Theatre, make him the match of any of us designing today. His architecture repays concerted looking and thoughtful consideration. By staying below the thresholds of fame he does the proper work of design, which to make a general civilised culture available through daily experience.