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'Remnant No. 2' by Drew Conrad. Courtesy of Fitzroy Gallery

A common childhood experience, at least for those youngsters living on the edge of wilderness, is hiking through a wood and stumbling upon a lonely, dilapidated dwelling—crumbling in decay. The child will peruse the perimeter for clues, hints and allusions to the building's past. Unable to find answers lost to history, the child's imagination seeks to satisfy the mystery.

It's the stuff day dreams are made of. The human mind loves decay. The past—the deterioration of the present—fascinates us.

And in *Ain't Dead Yet*, artist Drew Conrad's first New York solo exhibition (on display at [Fitzroy Gallery](#)), we, the viewer, experience the thrill of examining installations that recall once-known-but-lost-to-time architectural ruins. Conrad's works create an aura of mystery as palpable as the smell of the fresh earth sprinkled at their foundations.

Incorporating rust, debris, stain and sediment, among other elements, Conrad transforms laths, shingles and damask wallpaper into deconstructed remains of domestic interiors and seedy roadside haunts. Throughout the exhibition, lights flicker. Wires dangle forgotten, coming to rest in tangled globs on the floor. Groupings of triangular flags cross overhead, forming boundaries to

an undefined space.

From large sculptural installations to splintering relics cantilevered from the wall, Conrad repurposes found objects and personal snapshots into decorative yet distressed excerpts of a larger narrative. The installation reflects a prelapsarian (read: analog, pre-Internet ubiquity) age, an era your grandparents may remember nostalgically but has now been left behind—vulnerable to rot and decomposition.

In *Dwelling No. 1*, the remnants of an old staircase guide the eye upward and around, revealing a crumbling wall holding a series of underexposed black-and-white photos. Mismatched sconces and a majestic crystal chandelier shine on the photographs. Each picture is enclosed in its own frame; they sag from the weight of dirt seeping inexorably into the interior.

The photographs—a boat at sea, a church steeple silhouetted at sunset and the front porch of a home at dusk—are discrete in content but cohesive in subtext, forming a sense of loss from time gone by.

In other works, such as *Remnant No. 2 (The Record Collection)*, a stack of old record albums sit undisturbed on a shelf-like structure that contains three rusted metal sirens bunched together at a corner. Curiosity moves the viewer closer to inspect the albums' worn spines, revealing the names of rock legends. Meanwhile, the senses are further elevated by the decades-old sound system, which plays a scratched audio track that loops on and on. The softness of the worn track is haunting.

The 33-year-old Conrad, a native South Carolinian residing in Brooklyn, leaves the viewer wondering if his sculptures are manifestations of childhood memories, or contemplations on the sense of mortality hidden in all fleeting moments of our daily lives. Maybe both.

But either way, *Ain't Dead Yet* proves an exemplar of the evocative form. The possibility of existential decay only enhances this evocation.

Drew Conrad's Ain't Dead Yet is currently on view until January 20 at Fitzroy Gallery, 195 Chrystie Street. For more information visit www.fitzroygallery.com or call (212) 343-8670.

—Stacy Seiler