

Alex Hartley: The Houses

Private View 6 – 8pm, Wed 20 June 2018

Exhibition 21 June – 28 July 2018

Victoria Miro Mayfair, 14 St George Street, London W1S 1FE



Alex Hartley *Case Study #22 Stahl House*, 2018
Acrylic, C type photograph, plywood and paint
112 x 151 x 6.5 cm, 44 1/8 x 59 1/2 x 2 1/2 in
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Victoria Miro is delighted to present *The Houses*, a series of new wall-based works by Alex Hartley inspired by iconic examples of modernist domestic architecture.

Alex Hartley's work addresses complicated and sometimes contradictory attitudes toward the built and natural environments, showing us new ways of physically experiencing and thinking about our constructed surroundings. In *The Houses* he brings together photographic and overlaid painterly elements to examine the idea of the viewpoint, the frame and the boundary – between interior and exterior, manmade and natural environments, public and private space, two and three dimensions. Iconic examples of modernist domestic architecture, photographed by the artist over the past twenty-five years, primarily in Los Angeles, form the basis of these atmospheric monochrome works, in which the photographic image lies separated beneath hand-painted elements – describing and embellishing a verdant landscape – applied directly to a layer of semi-transparent acrylic.

Examples include several of the houses that were developed as a result of the Case Study Program, experiments in American residential architecture sponsored by Arts & Architecture magazine, which ran intermittently from the mid-1940s until the mid-1960s, and which changed the careers of Richard Neutra, Pierre Koenig and, to some extent, Charles and Ray Eames. Immortalised through the iconic black-and-white photography of Julius Schulman, these houses helped to redirect the course of twentieth-century domestic architecture. Works on display include *Case Study #22 Stahl House*, 2018, featuring Koenig's famous building, a favourite of the artist, sited in the Hollywood Hills overlooking Los Angeles; *Case Study #8 Eames House (West Elevation)*, 2018; and *Case Study #8 Eames House (Entrance)*, 2018, featuring the building designed by Charles and Ray Eames for their home and studio, which has been revisited in Hartley's work many times, and in various materials and formats, over the course of his career. The sole European example on show is Mies van der Rohe's

1930 *Villa Tugendhat* in Brno, Czech Republic – a paragon of modernist architecture which is now designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Encapsulated in *The Houses* are conflicting ideas of the modernist ideal and its legacy, these decades-old beacons of progression – architectural, cultural, social – appearing spectral, dreamlike, perhaps melancholic in their delicate greyscale tones. Caught up in them, too, are Romantic ideas of the picturesque as seen also in Hartley’s ongoing *Ruin* series, such as his architectural intervention for Wharf Road’s waterside garden, *A Gentle Collapsing II*, 2016, which, resembling an International Style domestic building apparently abandoned to the elements, offers poignant reflection on themes of entropy and decay. While *The Houses* are intact, yet to be reclaimed by nature, they are preserved only through the concerted efforts of human intervention.

The works hinge on the glass-walled pavilion giving rise to the desire for boundaries of other kinds and an ensuing sense of disquiet between architecture – angular, airily modern – and nature which, as evoked by the artist, often appears to engulf and overcome the depicted buildings, heightening a sense of voyeurism. The source material for the series commenced while Hartley was living in California at the beginning of the 2000s. Often frustrated by the fences and hedges that have grown up to screen these buildings since their construction half a century ago, the artist found himself ensnared in trees and undergrowth in a bid to capture the ideal image. This in turn led to his 2004 book *LA Climbs: Alternative Uses for Architecture*, in which Hartley went a step further by climbing the buildings themselves and recording his unconventional routes through the city. While modernist architecture has been a constant touchstone, amplified in Hartley’s recent work is a sense of narrative, of the viewer having arrived at a situation of ambiguous cause and uncertain outcome.

Born in 1963, **Alex Hartley** lives and works in London and Devon. He has recently participated in the Folkestone Triennial (2017), the Yokohama Triennale (2017) and, working alongside British artist Tom James, undertook a major public commission in the historic grounds of Compton Verney Art Gallery and Park, Warwickshire, entitled *The Clearing* (on view until 2020). Hartley also participated in the 2014 iteration of the Folkestone Triennial and undertook a residency with the National Trust for Scotland (2013); he has exhibited at venues including the Contemporary Arts Centre, Ohio, US (2014); Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, and Denmark (2013); Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester (2012). In the summer of 2012, a large-scale island originating from the Svalbard Arctic region was brought by the artist on a journey around the south west region of England as a visiting ‘island nation’, with citizenship open to all: At the end of *Nowhereisland*’s journey, in September 2012, the island was broken up and distributed amongst the 23,003 people from 135 countries who had signed up as ‘citizens of *Nowhereisland*’. As a final gesture, a small piece of the island was sent to the edge of space where some particles of rock from the island will remain forever in the upper-stratosphere. A book marking the completion of the *Nowhereisland* project was published in 2016. Since 1997 Hartley has been engaged in collaborative site-specific projects with architects including David Adjaye Associates and Alford, Hall, Monaghan and Morris.

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