

*Forgotten Futures:  
modernist architecture of the british  
seaside town*

Sam Nightingale



*Forgotten Futures: modernist architecture of the british seaside town* is an on-going body of work by artist Sam Nightingale, concerned with producing a typology of modernist (circa 1930's) architecture found in British seaside towns.

The architectural style of many of the buildings seen in *Forgotten Futures* is a direct result of the social and political utopian dreams that were present during much of the modernist period. The aspiration for a certain type of future – which we could say is embedded in the façade of these buildings – was largely unrealised and these structures have come to represent an architecture of failure, as today many of these buildings have been left to deteriorate or, at best, forgotten.

The seaside town of the 1920-30s was a place for dreams of escape and freedom for all. It seems therefore an appropriate location for such modernist architecture, which was constructed with that utopian desire for something different – a better world. Sussex in particular is home to a large number of these buildings; *Forgotten Futures*, for example, includes, the De La Warr Pavilion built with its desire to be a cultural centre for all, or the beachside escape of the 'Oyster' bungalows built as part of the 'plotlands' in Pevensey Bay – homes that could be snapped up for £295 in 1937, or the striking Saltdean Lido – the last surviving lido in Sussex.

At the heart of this project is an intention to recognise that these buildings came out of a set of social and political beliefs of their time, that they act as symbols representing the architecture of society itself, and that each building has the possibility for its own subjectivity and voice. In attempting to represent this, Nightingale also wants to consider what it is like to revisit these buildings some 80 years after their conception. While the buildings are now of course separated from their moment of production, Nightingale's project aims to enliven that temporality as one of a potential future that paradoxically can only ever exist in the past. Recording this temporal dislocation photographically provides a way to simultaneously acknowledge that the buildings are 'out of time and place' and to evidence the past in the present moment.

Like the typologies produced in the 1930's by the German photographer August Sanders, Nightingale, in a way is also making portraits – portraits of buildings, where each subject's character is implicit in its façade, bearing testimony to its complex history and its once potential future. In constructing these portraits, which he does using an outmoded technology itself, the large-format plate camera, he follows a typology based on three categories: derelict or dilapidated buildings that soon face possible extinction (unless they have been lucky enough to become listed buildings – something that often only slows the process); buildings that have been completely redeveloped – sometimes where their original purpose has changed completely; and finally those buildings that somehow exist under the radar – quietly doing what they have always done.

Further images from *Forgotten Futures: modernist architecture of the british seaside town* can be found on the artist's website: [www.samnightingale.com](http://www.samnightingale.com). Individual framed prints are available for purchase.

Sam Nightingale is a London-based artist who works with photography and the moving image; he exhibits internationally, and his work has been included in exhibitions and film festivals in America, Australia and Europe. Nightingale works in a conceptual research-based way to enliven and implode the hidden spaces within and between built structures – the uncertain spaces of story, memory and imagination.

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