

an *Im-Modern Vernacular*



Photographs by
RICHARD GLOVER



Folk Modern

Richard Glover's, *An Im-Modern Vernacular* is a series of portrait-like shots of apartment buildings. They have a flat, formal quality that underscores their design and construction features. Seen as a sequence, the photographs reveal a continuity of architectural philosophy lurking behind their facades. It's at this point that the images start to take on a far more subjective interpretation. Some see the Modernist era of architecture as a spectacular failure, pointing out its celebrated disasters, while others revel in the market value of its high end successes. From the perspective of the Post Modern era an assessment of the value of this kind of architecture depends entirely on one's own view of the recent past. Glover's own view meanwhile seems tantalizingly neutral – here, he seems to be saying, look at this and wonder what it might mean.

Buildings seem to ask to have their pictures taken. Landmarks, icons and monuments are designed with the express intention of being looked at in a way that's the complete opposite of the suburban house, of shopping malls or airports, of the high rises that dot the cities of the world. Yet it's these features of the urban landscape that seem to tell us the most about the people who made them, and perhaps more crucially, why they were built. Glover's photographs recall the work of German photographers Bernd & Hilla Becher. Working since the 1960s, the Bechers created typological collections of German industrial landscape features – water towers, coal mines, factories and warehouses. Their precise collections of images have an eerie, scientific aesthetic that reveals the discontinuous and counter intuitive decorative features found in otherwise wholly utilitarian designs. Glover's work over the past few years has explored similar facets of architectural design, finding his fascinations in the urban landscape. His series *Kellyville* and *New Suburbs* from 2005 recorded the creation of new housing on the outskirts of Sydney's North Western suburbs, capturing the suburbs in a pristine state before time and eclectic individual choices begin to reshape their surfaces into something far more ad-hoc.

The apartments captured in this exhibition have resisted the reshaping that buildings usually undergo over time. Since their scale and collective ownership resists whimsical or capricious changes, the buildings still retain an individuality that belies the Modernist reputation for factory-like regularity. It could be argued that Modernist architecture, like other high points of Modernist art, is far more grounded in the quirky individuality of their designers and builders than we imagine. Glover captures the lines and shapes of these buildings with the eye of a keen documentarian while allowing odd differences to emerge: the flat grey skies of English urban space set next to the sci fi futurism of colour saturated Sydney; the statuesque authority of Blues Point Tower next to the baroque excesses of a paneled seaside apartment building, the quaint almost folkish curtaining of windows in a nameless English block of flats next to the dramatic perspectives of orange brick and white concrete.



Buildings tell a story. They construct a narrative of similarities and differences. It's only in the mind's eye of the ambitious architect – or the set designer of a science fiction movie – do cities ever have design continuity. By searching out the examples of a particular type of building, Glover presents an intriguing alternative narrative of what ifs and what-might-have-beens – what if the whole world had ended up this way? What if the future had come to pass in the late 1950s? Instead, the world is a weird admixture of spaces and places all jostling for attention before they're paved over for the next phase of design and build. Glover captures this other world in the precise tones of the scale model, the unerring eye of the camera and the CAD. Instead of finding a utopia, we find the real world.

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