

PAUL DAVIES
BELVEDERE LOOP
15 SEPTEMBER—02 OCTOBER

In his forthcoming exhibition, Paul Davies will present a series of new paintings alongside a suite of unique photographic drawings. Entitled 'Belvedere Loop', the body of work announces the artist's recent fixations and long-awaited return to Sydney. The major Olsen Gallery exhibition will run 15 September—02 October.

Australian artist Paul Davies has long been interested in painting, architecture and photography. Over time, this interest has come to lie in the intersection of these disciplines, where their fundamental aspirations are shared. Common to these practices is their fervent celebration of light, but also their capacity to marry disparate threads into a single composition—asserting a degree of givenness all the while. These factors, of light and construction, expose something greater about Davies' widely celebrated artmaking.

The artist is known for his seemingly sunny depictions of 'West Coast' sites—a landscape he became familiar with during the six years that he lived in Los Angeles. During this time, Davies was drawn particularly to the region's Modernist history, and to the scattered relics, dreams and torment of the 20th Century. In his new paintings, the architectural subjects are nowhere in particular, according to Davies, who instead has thought about his filmic locations as aggregates of time and space—as kinds of case studies or

hypotheses. Far from idyllic, however, these places stand to us with a stern façade, one entirely unadorned and devoid of occupants. The empty deck furniture and unflinching waters trouble the illusion of his breathless settings. Like a raised belvedere, the buildings depicted look outwards, offering only a blackened interior to their audience. Like cameras, they orchestrate light while framing vistas of the world around.

Davies was raised in a home fitted with its own take on a photographic darkroom, a facility built into a cupboard by the artist's father. He was introduced early to now-antique photo processing, where light and its absence brought shape and colour to a page. The most primitive engagement of this processing is found in the making of a photogram—a camera-less image inscribed by the light that falls through one surface on to another. Enchanted by this vision, the artist developed his own unique means to translate such images into paint. Over the years, Davies has gained great access to world-class buildings of his choosing, providing him with the opportunity to amass an enviable archive of photographs. These photographs are printed large and laid flat so that their elements can be meticulously carved by hand. Intricate details of sunlight and foliage are maintained during this process, leaving behind a tremendous bounty of positive and negative forms. The artisanal practice pays homage to the craft inherent in the construction of Modernist designs, contrary to the 'machinic' promise of uniform living. Davies arranges his paper cuttings on

primed canvas and treats the surface like a photogram—methodically exposing the gaps to pigment. This calculated process leaves room only for chance encounters between neighbouring colours and textures. The final compositions are something of a kaleidoscope, just one of many visions made possible by his basic units.

Employing similar materials to those wielded by 19th century chemists, the artist has also set about making a suite of works on paper for the exhibition, conjured from the very same hand-cut stencils that inform his paintings. These photographic drawings recall the early experiments of 1830's scientists, made at a time when human's ability to 'fix' an image was the cause of significant public excitement. His photosensitive surfaces are painted with chemistry and pigment prior to their irrevocable treatment to light. Peeling away his collage of stencils, Davies revives the magic of traditional photography—where the final image can be anyone's guess. For the series, the artist has selected a narrow range of hues, each one reminiscent of a 'purist colour' published in Le Corbusier's 1931 catalogue. For many years, Davies' works of this kind have been passionately collected by museums and regional galleries across the United States and Australia, institutions keen to unveil a lesser known yet foundational branch of the artist's practice.

'Belvedere Loop' will run 15 September—02 October at Olsen Gallery, Woollahra.

BENJAMIN CLAY

Olsen Gallery



Paul Davies
Blue, Light Blue, 2021
acrylic on canvas
122 x 91 cm