

Albert
a place of safety

Royal College of Psychiatrists
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Bethlem
Gallery

A Place of Safety is an exhibition of drawings by Albert. This is his first solo exhibition in fifteen years. His works are held in public collections including ABCD Collection, Pallant House Gallery, the Museum of Everything, and Bethlem Gallery Collection, and his work has been exhibited previously in group exhibitions at venues such as the Grand Palais, Paris, in 2025.

For many years, Albert was admitted to the Bethlem Royal Hospital. When he arrived, he brought about a hundred drawings with him, and he was encouraged to pursue his drawing at Bethlem Gallery, which is on site. He has continued to make work there since, even after leaving the hospital. His artworks are always drawings of imagined architectural structures.

Albert's works demonstrate a devotion to an architectural world featuring endless permutations of walls, windows, roofs, gates and fences. The drawings resemble architectural elevations—two-dimensional drawings of a building's facade—but somehow from a slightly more elevated perspective. Often, this allows us to see over boundaries into territory beyond, and into space that is no longer quite so hidden. And yet, we are repeatedly presented with exteriors; even through a window or an open door no interior is depicted.

The buildings often have the feeling of hybrids – places that might suit a range of services and lifestyles. They might also serve a range of historical moments and tastes; there may be a glint of mid-century modernism, but then, suddenly, the gothic. Sometimes, the structures seem to dissolve into abstractions of circles and checkerboard. I see domestic homes, secure facilities, gated communities, city halls, community centres, church steeples, sometimes all in the same structure. There are never, ever, any people. And yet, there seems to be a whole community here. While the drawings might appear from the realm of fantasy, they are really not so different from the logic and patterns of design in the empty office in which they are now displayed, nor from the views of central London from the windows of the fourth floor of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, where styles, history and materials clash and collide, and where we are presented with multilayered vistas featuring the endless exteriors of inaccessible buildings.

Albert himself does not wish to say much about his drawings or about his own personal background. He uses pencils and a ruler. In recent years, he has begun to use more colour. He has an idea of the structure he wants to draw, but it often doesn't go to plan. He acknowledges he makes art but doesn't think of himself as an artist. He figures that 'if you could build these things from scratch, you would wouldn't you? But you'd need planning permission and it would cost millions'. For this exhibition, he has decided to leave individual works untitled, but to title the exhibition *A Place of Safety*. He explains:

They say every man's home is his castle. Some people are happiest when they're at home. You expect to be safe where you live, and you should feel protected... you get in, lock yourself in, you're safe... and other people, they'd have to knock the wall down. But I don't believe in being a prisoner in your own home.

Under the Mental Health Act, 'a place of safety' is somewhere a person in crisis might be brought from their home or a public space to be kept safe and further assessed. It is often a hospital, or a designated '136 suite', but in certain circumstances it can sometimes be a care home, a private domestic residence, or a police station. We could consider that Albert's drawings might represent a different form and location of personal safety, on his own terms. Albert

himself has explained that the drawings are of idealised buildings that he, or others, might enjoy living in. The drawings seem to speak to some shared need we all have in our lived environment for safety and security, alongside comfort and, perhaps, beauty. Our homes and our institutions, including psychiatric hospitals, often reflect a desire to negotiate and balance these factors.

I have organised this exhibition as part of my artist residency at the Royal College of Psychiatrists. In my fourth year of medical school, I requested and arranged a brief placement with consultant psychiatrist Dr Tim McInerney at Bethlem, because I understood he was interested in art. In a meeting in his office one day, I saw a framed drawing on the wall. It seemed to be of a strange, uncertain building. I asked Dr McInerney about it, and learned it had been made by Albert. I have loved and been following Albert's work in the many years since, though I have never been able to see a solo exhibition of his work. Perhaps this project is an attempt to remedy that situation, and to allow others to experience it too. I hope there is something in bringing a number of works together that exposes the language of these drawings and their enchanting capacity to generate a whole world of architectural wonder.

The exhibition is held on the fourth floor of the Royal College of Psychiatrists. Until recently, this floor was used as an office. Furniture left in the space from its time as an office has been used throughout the exhibition, with some rearrangement of tables and chairs. The frames used in the exhibition are specimen trays previously used to store artefacts at the Museum of London. A few are painted metal, but most are made of beech or teak, with plywood backing, and original foam inserts. I have made these into frames with glass (for the wall-based works) or acrylic glazing (for the works on tables) to protect and display the drawings.

Albert's drawings relate to some existing holdings in the College, in particular three framed works displayed on the ground floor, one of which is a drawing by Henry Scott Tuke (1858–1959) of 'Bethlehem Hospital' and its surrounding environment. It depicts what was then the Priory of St Mary of Bethlehem as it then stood in Bishopsgate. These plans are likely based on an engraved copper plate of 1559 held in the Museum of London. Bethlehem hospital, subsequently Bethlem, and colloquially known as 'Bedlam', was founded in 1247, before moving to Moorfields in 1676, then to St George's Fields in Southwark in 1815, and ultimately to its current location in Beckenham, Kent, in 1930. The drawings on the ground floor appear to be part-plan, part-elevation, not entirely dissimilar to the perspectives seen in Albert's work.

Particular thanks go to Albert, for entrusting me and the College with his works. I am also grateful to Bethlem Gallery for their time and support, and for loaning such a substantial number of works to the exhibition. In particular, I have organised this exhibition with the generous help of Isobel Reddington and Sophie Leighton at Bethlem Gallery, and Catriona Grant and Fiona Watson at the Royal College of Psychiatrists. My thanks also go to Mehmet Salaheddin and the Senior Management Team at the Royal College of Psychiatrists for supporting the project. To find out more about Bethlem Gallery please go to www.bethlemgallery.com or visit the gallery on the site of the Bethlem Royal Hospital.

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