

NOWHEREISLAND



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Alex Hartley

2012 Cultural Olympiad Artist Taking the Lead

It's dawn in early summer 2012. A large crowd has gathered on the Cobb at Lyme Regis. People have camped through the night to be here. The Lyme Bay Sea Scouts and Gig Club have set out in a flotilla of small boats to the mouth of the bay. The sea is calm and placid. Then a remarkable sight emerges against the backdrop of the famous cliffs. A large island moves through the water on a long, low barge. Dark silver in tone, it appears like an alien material on the Lyme horizon. Part epic sculpture, part spectacular vessel, it moves closer to the land dwarfing the small boats that herald its arrival at the harbour. It has travelled over 2000 miles on its journey through international waters from the last land before the North Pole. The island embarked upon its South West journey at Poole, docking in Weymouth during the opening week of the Olympic Games. It will continue on from Lyme, describing the coast with its voyage as it passes through the ports and harbours along coastline to Bristol. The Island gathers and reveals the tales of its encounters and experiences along the way. This is *nowhereisland*.

Introduction

My project for the 2012 Cultural Olympiad is to bring Nymark, an island that I discovered in the High Arctic region of Svalbard, to the South West of England. This distant island, comprising rubble and moraine around a small amount of bedrock, was revealed from within the ice of a retreating glacier, and I was the first human to ever stand on it. The island has been recognised by the Norwegian Polar Institute and named and included on all subsequent maps and charts.

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Project summary

- The island material will be collected and transported from Svalbard to South West England in 2010.
- An interdisciplinary team of experts will travel to Svalbard with us forming an inspirational resource for the project, accompanied by filmmaker David Bickerstaff.
- The island material will be transferred onto a barge which will be towed from port to port. The barge will be fabricated to act as a platform to support the irregular topography of the island.
- The island's first destination will be Poole harbour in mid July, where it will be greeted by a celebratory welcome event, and its last journey will be through the Avon Gorge under Brunel's Suspension Bridge to Bristol's floating harbour by October.
- *Nowhereisland* will be in Weymouth and Portland for the duration of the Olympic sailing events.
- Overall, the island will travel along 702 miles from port to port around the South West coast, accompanied by a customised Support Vehicle carrying the resource and island's curator.
- At eight specific places along its route, it will stay for longer, co-hosted by local organisations, allowing for a sense of ownership to develop.
- The island will declare itself a new micronation whilst in international waters, and a citizenship programme will operate through the specially commissioned website.



Artist's impression: Island Removal

Nymark is about the size of a football pitch and is part of the archipelago that makes up the final land mass before the North Pole. My proposal is to collect a proportion of this bleak and barren island, to load it onto a cargo barge and to bring it, via international waters, to the harbours of the South West region of England. Whilst in international waters on the way to the South West, the island will change its status to become a micronation and will be renamed *nowhereisland*. After storage in Devon over the winter months of 2011, the material will be transferred onto its specially fabricated platform-barge where it will take on the physical shape of the island from which it came. Towed behind a tug, it will make this epic poetic journey from one edge of land to another, an uprooted island in transit. It will then circumnavigate the South West peninsula, visiting harbours and ports during the period from mid July to October 2012 to coincide with the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

In selected places, *nowhereisland* will be co-hosted by local organisations and groups from scout clubs to art centres, boat building academies to historical societies, who will work with us through bursaries to organise the related activities during the island's stay in their locality. Coordinated press and publicity campaigns, alongside a specially adapted project support vehicle will all herald the arrival of *nowhereisland* in each place. This support vehicle will act as a fully-stocked resource, passport office and tourist bureau – it will be the embassy for *nowhereisland*.

The transportation of this piece of virgin land is intended to create an artwork of epic proportions which will inspire discussion around key questions of national identity, climate change, land-grab and the exploitation of natural resources as well as the romantic associations of an island landscape. This is an artwork that celebrates the pioneer and the explorer, a model of both the individual and the team striving and achieving something impossible. *Nowhereisland* provides both an inclusive and challenging opportunity for all to engage with the 2012 Cultural Olympiad, embodying a uniquely ambitious vision of the local, national and global.

This artwork will capture the imagination of the public, fully engaging its audience, targeting young people in particular; and in doing so, it will address the most significant global issue of our time: namely how we can respond to the urgent issue of climate change together. The project embodies the spirit of international co-operation that is at the heart of the Olympic ideal.

After the end of its tour, the island material will be returned to Svalbard and the island will be made whole again. The transitory existence of *nowhereisland*, that redefines and expands the possibilities of what an artwork can be, will have a far reaching impact and legacy.



Why the South West region?

The South West is a region defined by its relationship with its coastline, which at 702 miles is the longest of any region in England. It looks East and North to the rest of the United Kingdom, but it also looks West across its physical boundaries, to the Atlantic and beyond as a gateway to the world. It is historically a point of epic departures. Its own history and folklore are intricately linked with the sea. It is the edge of land, a vast and beautiful peninsula reaching out into the ocean.

South Devon Coast

In the age of discovery, John Cabot set sail from Bristol under the English flag in search of the fabled North West Passage. The South West was home to Drake and Raleigh and to the pilgrims who sailed from Plymouth on the Mayflower (a cargo ship that had traded with Norway). The region is bound up with our sense of national identity, and a significant part of our sense of Englishness comes from the South West and from its relationship with the sea. More than in any other of the UK's regions, as South Westeners we remain in closer touch with our identity as an island nation.

In September 2009, the first commercial cruise ships started to use the North West Passage, for which Cabot had searched. Climate Change has reduced the pack ice to a point where the waterways have become regularly and predictably navigable. Our project will bring together this new land revealed from within the retreating ice, and make links with a peninsula historically bound up with exploration.

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Project Viability

Contact has been established with the Governor of Svalbard. As a UK citizen, I have the right to mine on the archipelago, but in the Olympic spirit of co-operation between nations, I have sought to gain permission to 'borrow' the island and be gifted the material required to make up *nowhereisland*. This negotiation is at an advanced stage, with the authorities keen to collaborate with us on the realisation of the project.

We are able to justify the removal of the island and its temporary transplantation. The island is made up of rubble and moraine. Moraine is grit generated from the enormous forces exerted upon the rock surface as the ice pack moves. This grit is moved to the glacier's edge and is held together by the permafrost. This material that makes up the island is constantly being unfrozen, eroded and dispersed into the sea. To remove this totally inert material for a given period will not adversely impact on the delicate environment. At the end of the island's journey it will be returned and remade.

Nowhereisland will be independently risk assessed at all stages to ensure best practice in relation to health and safety and the project will budget for appropriate public liability insurance through the involvement of the Situations programme at the University of the West of England.

We are absolutely convinced that now that this project has been chosen, it will become one of the key focal points for the Cultural Olympiad not only here in the South West, but also for the entire UK and beyond. The combination of such a big idea executed with such simple elegance and subtlety, enables *nowhereisland* to have no limits to its accessibility. Its potency lies in the combination of an iconic and inspirational image and the potential complexity of forms of engagement with the project as a whole.

Engagement Programme

At the core of this project is of course the epic journey which the island will make, but what will ensure a broader and long-lasting legacy for the project is an inspiring engagement programme integrated within the project itself. The Engagement Programme will be fundamental to the stories *nowhereisland* will leave behind.

Each week a new port community will host the island, having awaited the arrival of this extraordinary visitor. Each host will be supported to make the most of this temporary guest through a bursary, focusing on a few of the issues inspired by its presence through workshops, events or discussions supported by the Curator/Ambassador. These activities could include local bands welcoming the island into port, linking up with sailing club regattas, school geography projects and political debates. Host organisations could include any local society or club, for example; sea scouts, transition towns, local museums and galleries, wildlife centres, the Women's Institute, schools or theatres. The Curator will start work forging these links in early 2010.

The Island's Curator will also work with regional strategic partners such as RiO, Find Tour Talent, regeneration agencies, extended schools provision and local authority sustainability units, in part to identify the most appropriate local partners, but also to ensure integration with long-term regional strategies as well as being flexible and responding to local activities and concerns.



Artist's Impression:
Island Arriving in Lyme Bay

Support Vehicle: The Island Embassy

Nowhereisland is an interdisciplinary project. Resources developed for the use by the host organisations will be developed by an interdisciplinary team: a cultural geographer, a geologist, an archaeologist, a political historian, an artist and a climate change scientist. They will develop a menu of inspirational learning, creative and archiving resources which will arrive in the Support Vehicle, accompanied by the island Curator/Ambassador.

The Support Vehicle will be an adapted mobile library, or similar. Its appearance will be modified to accompany and compliment the island, immediately recognisable as *nowhereisland's* partner. It will be a focus for the activity on land in each port, as well as one of the repositories of archived information about the island's journeys and port activities. It will accumulate ideas and discussion as it progresses from harbour to harbour. We feel that the project addresses the key purpose of Artists Taking the Lead through the scale of ambition, the size and diversity of the audience that we will reach, and the importance of the ideas embodied in the work.

Micronation

Whilst in international waters on the journey between the Far North and South West England, the island will declare itself a new micronation. Audiences will be able to apply for citizenship, both in person via the support vehicle, and remotely, via the internet. This branch of the project will live on well beyond the Olympic year, with the 'citizens' and registered users democratically deciding the direction and development of the web-based project.

Website

The Creative Agency, Bullet, envisage creating a website that acts as a central hub for the project that:

- presents the project in a compelling, engaging and dynamic way;
- provides tools, support and space for a dynamic *nowhereisland* community to grow;
- encourages and facilitates participation (on a number of levels), supporting the real-world travels and activities;
- provides a clear route to any associated education and learning resources;
- actively works with content across a range of different media platforms, being responsive and capitalising on the best fit social media and any emerging technologies in the future;
- provides easy ways for people to get involved, to join the mailing list, external networks, to become ambassadors, to create a group that links individual citizens and to add news about related events.

The website will be managed by Situations through a Content Management Systems (CMS) meeting best web practice, considering usability, accessibility, code compliance and web standards.

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Legacy

Nowhereisland will expand people's view of what art can be and where it can take place. First and foremost it is a work of art, and it will challenge perceptions of where art happens and what art can be about.

Cornish Coast

The greatest legacy that *nowhereisland* could achieve is as a platform and exemplum for young people to engage with the issues addressed by the project:

- Exploring a sense of place through an epic, nomadic public sculpture never to be forgotten;
- Embodying the spirit and values of the 2012 Cultural Olympiad, excellence, friendship and respect;
- Providing a focus to the global and local debates surrounding climate change;
- Raising awareness of land-grab and exploitation of the world's natural resources.

Other key outcomes will include:

- The *nowhereisland* support vehicle will become the depository of the project's archive, and will remain readily accessible and will be offered, after its exhibition tour, to a national collection for public exhibition.
- The acclaimed filmmaker David Bickerstaff will make a collaborative feature-length documentary for independent release. This film will explore how the notion of nationhood and ownership can turn citizens into activists and generate a focal point for others to engage with the poetics of art, politics and the disappearing landscape, all set against the backdrop of the 2012 Olympic Games. Match funding for the film production will be sought from art and film commissioning agencies such as South West-based Picture This and DVD distribution.
- Bullet Creative will maintain the project's web presence providing a forum and hub for debate beyond 2012.
- A publication will document the project and the interaction and contribution of its hosts, audience and citizens in 2013.
- An exhibition will be generated from material and artwork collated and generated by the journey, (including the support vehicle). It will be integrated into my existing exhibition commitments and in addition, new venues will be sought to show the project's documentation and extend the project inland so that further communities are able to experience *nowhereisland*.



Project team

Creative team

- Alex Hartley, Artist and Project Director
- Tania Kovats, Artist
- Claire Doherty, Curator and Director of Situations
- Michael Prior, Associate Curator (Engagement), Situations
- David Bickerstaff, Film Director

Production team

Situations, UWE, Bristol

Design and communications strategy

Bullet Creative

Alex Hartley

Alex Hartley is an artist of international repute. Well known for his encased photographs of the interiors of galleries, tower blocks and fictitious structures, Hartley has exhibited work for over 20 years, in Europe, North American and Japan. Hartley has also developed monumental architectural installations that create a disorientating fictional space that both perplexes and seduces the viewer. Long interested in the relationship and interdependence between architecture and nature, Hartley has most recently produced photographic works with sculptural architectural elements built up on the surfaces, filling images of actual landscapes with surreal studies of fantastic utopian architectural forms.

In 2004, Hartley was one of the participants in the Cape Farewell Art/Science expedition to the High Arctic. This extraordinary environment inspired Hartley, and his Nymark project caught the imagination of visitors to the acclaimed *The Ship—The Art of Climate Change* exhibition at the Natural History Museum.

Alex Hartley is represented by Victoria Miro Gallery.

Awards and commissions

- 2007 Winner of Linklaters Commission, the Barbican, London
- 2005 British Embassy, Moscow
- 2000 Winner of Sculpture at Goodwood ART2000 Commission Prize, London

Selected solo exhibitions and projects since 2000

- 2008 Leeds Metropolitan Gallery
- 2007 Edinburgh International Art Festival Exhibition, Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh
- 2005 Don't want to be part of your world, Victoria Miro Gallery, London
- 2003 Outside, Distrito Cuatro, Madrid
- 2001 Case Study, Victoria Miro Gallery, London

Selected group exhibitions include:

- 2008 Art & Climate Change, Fundación Canal, Madrid, Spain; Tokyo, Japan
- 2008 The Brotherhood of Subterranea, Kunstbunker, Nuremberg, Germany
- 2007 Art & Climate Change, Kampnagel, Hamburg
- 2006 PLAY: Experience the Adventure of our Cities, Urbis, Manchester
- 2006 The Ship—The Art of Climate Change, Natural History Museum, National Conservation Center, Liverpool Biennial
- 2006 Renegade City: Units Moved, The Yard, Architecture Foundation, London
- 2006 International Waters Steven Wolf Fine Arts, San Francisco
- 2005 Cape Farewell Project, Davis Langdon LLP, London
- 2002 Art + Mountains: conquistadors of the useless, The Alpine Club, London
- 2001 No World Without You – Reflections of Identity in New British Art, Noga Gallery of Contemporary Art, Israel

Architectural collaborations

- 2009 David Adjaye Associates, C.A.B.E. Offices, London
- 1998 Alford, Hall, Monaghan and Morris, Great Notley Primary School
- 1997 Alford, Hall, Monaghan and Morris, Walsall Bus Station

Collections

Arts Council of Great Britain; The Bailey Collection, Toronto; The British Embassy, Moscow; Contemporary Art Society, London; DG Bank, Frankfurt; Ringier Collection, Zürich; Deutsche Bank Collection; The Saatchi Collection, London; De Beers Collection, London; Caldic Collection, Rotterdam; FRAC Basse Normandie, Caen; Simmons & Simmons, London; TI Group; Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien; Government Art Collection, London

Selected reading

- Alex Hartley: not part of your world (Edinburgh: Fruitmarket Gallery, 2007)
- LA Climbs: Alternative uses for Architecture (Alex Hartley, Black Dog Publishing London 2003)
- Burning Ice – Art & Climate Change (London: Cape Farewell, 2006)
- Martin Herbert, 'Pole Positions: Art's Arctic Adventures', Modern Painters, April 2006
- Liz Wells, 'Uncertainties of the topographic?', Source, December 2005
- Alex Hartley, Outside, Lorenzo Fusi (Madrid: Distrito Cu4tro, Galeria de Arte, 2003)
- Sculpture at Goodwood British Contemporary Sculpture 02/03, Ann Elliot / Angela Dyer (Chichester: Goodwood Sculpture Park, 2001)
- ArtAction, Environmental Justice Foundation (London: Sotheby's, 2001)



"In the future no one will live in cities"
Photograph with bass-relief model. 2007