

ARUSHA

GALLERY

A closed door, a den

A place is never just a place. Into every stone, hearth, battered old chair, into every branch, leaf and clearing, into every flagstone on every street - we pour a little of ourselves. Memories, thick like honey, run over every inch and seep into the places we visit, colouring them in a nostalgia unique to our own lived experiences. Though we may look at a place and see it plainly in its physical staging - staring at the same walls, the same floors, the same sky - to each of us it is irrevocably changed by a personal connection. A seemingly unremarkable scene is rebirthed anew - haven, an oasis, a refuge.

In his treatise *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard noted “*Memories of the outside world will never have the same tonality as those of home and, by recalling these memories, we add to our store of dreams; we are never real historians, but always near poets, and our emotion is perhaps nothing but an expression of a poetry that was lost.*”

We are our memories, a compilation and constellation of all that we have encountered throughout our lives. Our lived experiences shape us, they colour how we see and feel the world around us - the space around us affects us, just as we affect the space around us. Home is a many-faceted term, one that cannot simply be boiled down to the four walls within which an individual dwells. Home is a sense of comfort, safety - which can be found in many different forms. Some find solace and a sense of wholeness in the outdoors, in nature's embrace amongst the flora and the fauna. For some, a traditional home, four walls and a pitch signify that sense of impenetrable refuge. For others, home is a person - a friend, a lover, a child, the feeling that surges up from inside when you are near the ones who know you best.

The artists in this exhibition explore what home means to them, from candle-bathed nooks and impenetrable stone fortresses, to the earth, the sky, the wind on their skin and the sunlight as it filters through the leaves, encompassing, cocooning - bathed in the saturating haze of memories, dreams and whispered words, an open door - an entrance, a closed door - a den.

The show gleans its inspiration from Pierre Albert Birot's poem, *Intérieur*.

*A la porte de la maison qui viendra frapper?
Une porte ouverte on entre
Une porte fermée un antre
Le monde bat de l'autre côté de ma porte.*

*(At the door of the house who will come knocking?
An open door, we enter*

*A closed door, a den
The world pulse beats beyond my door.)*

This idea speaks to the duality of doors - on one hand a portal to the rest of the world, the beating pulse of bustling life just outside waiting to be explored, but on the other hand, a barrier, a sealant for refuge - a closed door creates a sanctuary,

Charlotte Keates is no stranger to the interior, and her spaces are havens of colour, texture and form. Her scenes, though devoid of figures, thrum with a sense of life, of inhabitation - a scene just vacated, a presence nearby. *The house shelters daydreaming* mirrors our desire to create a warm and comfortable home for ourselves and our loved ones. The house, adorned with trinkets and objects collected on our travels, imbues the very bones of the structure with intense living memory - weaving threads of thought across every surface.

In Anna Roche's work, these threads are almost tangible - in sweeping strokes of undulating colour, memory seems to dance across every surface, creating a surreal dreamscape of slightly off-kilter familiarity. In her scenes we recognise the attributes of our own abode - a lamp casts shadows across a floor, a cushion lies plump upon a weathered armchair - they are ordinary spaces made extraordinary in their unique and textured surface.

Nina Silverberg's works imbue everyday objects with a wistful emotion. Books, often an escape into an imagined world, are the central focus of works such as *Again* and *One Day*, speaking to the creature comforts of our existence, while *At Night* evokes the light in the dark, an interior, lit and bathed in a golden glow from the open arch, casting shadows as it illuminates all in its wake.

For Iwan Lewis, the imagined dreamscape is much closer to the surface. His scenes echo scenes from life - his figures lounge in comfortable stance, his houses lie in tranquil silence in the eye of a storm as in *Mwg Taro*, faceless figures are dwarfed by an all-seeing being in *Comparatively Speaking The Oxidised Centurion and The Ordovices Had Little To Nothing In Common*. His scenes are hypnagogic - swirling colours and shapes that seem to bleed out from the living plain into the land of dreams - present, and strong - but never threatening. His works find their solace in life and location, echoing a sense of solidity just below the rolling surface.

Likewise, Margaret R. Thompsons paintings delve into a higher plane, their subjects still dreamlike, with a serene and meditative quality. Her works transcend the physical world, finding refuge in a betwixt space. The works exude a mystic spirituality,

capturing not just a scene, a likeness, but its very essence. Her work *The House Protects The Dreamer* presents the home as a setting for mental and emotional exploration, offering the security and sanctuary to allow our minds to wander.

Eleanor Moreton's works *Village (red earth)* and *Cottage (red earth)* speak to a more traditional reading of a sanctum. Nestled in the hills, protected by trees and rich deep earth, the structures in her paintings are isolated, but never lonely. Their singularity denotes a sense of peace and tranquillity - an oasis of calm amidst a hectic world. Their soft and hazy qualities stir deep within their viewer a sense of contentment and security.

Holly Mills' work shifts once more to the interior, with *to slip under* evoking the inner sanctum that is the home - the bed, a place to slide into, to set your mind to dreaming while the rest of the world hangs, suspended, in the balance - waiting for your re-entry, when once more you take up the mantle of the day. In *city* and *midnight* we get a sense of this suspended world - the witching hour, an empty building, sitting, watching, waiting.

Helen Flockhart too opts for more private chambers as the stage for her work *Awake* in this exhibition, her figure stretched out, prone, on a raised bed. Shoes lie nearby, hastily discarded, pointing in the direction of the door - as if a flight risk, seeking escape. Her figure seems to melt into the bed, almost transfixed - as if processing some pressing concern, finding her bunk a safe and ready space to slip away into thoughts.

From the interior to the exterior, in Emma Steinkraus' works, a haven is found not within the confines of walls but in the flora and fauna of nature, to be surrounded by small and delicate butterflies in *Remix I, (Butterfly Album)* or slumbering beneath a leafy green canopy on daisy strewn meadows as in *Remix II (Little Flower)*. In her works she shows the peace, comfort and beauty to be found amongst the trees and creatures, a different sense of emotional grounding, yet every bit as potent and encompassing as the ones that came before.

It shows that home, that sanctuary, that haven - it is more than just an enclosed dwelling. While we may indeed find our inner peace and refuge in the places where we live, or out in nature, it is not the walls and the doors that keep us held in their shelter, it is not the trees that keep us covered - but the memories, emotions, hopes and dreams that we weave into the very fabric of their existence. We are the spaces we create for ourselves.