





# A PUBLIC ART PROJECT

by Michael Fortune

“The Kitchen Sessions” is the title of a public art project by artist Michael Fortune, commissioned by Galway City Council through the Per Cent for Art Programme.

The project began in 2008, and centred on the housing estate of Fána Burca in Knocknacarra, Galway City. The project featured a participatory process whereby the residents of Fána Burca were invited to join the artist in learning digital video, photography, animation and web-based media, and in turn to share and articulate their personal experiences of their home on the estate. Following this open call, a group comprising of five families and friends came together to work alongside the artist. Due to the commitments, demands and time restraints faced by many families, Michael devised a model of working to fit around each household’s timetable, and in their own homes. This creative exchange resulted in the production of this publication which documents the unfolding stories of each family’s life mapped through conversations and observations of the objects and temporary traces of everyday life in their homes.

Also featured in this publication is a specially commissioned essay by Sarah Tuck, the Director of Create, the national development agency for collaborative arts, entitled “The Kitchen Sessions - Public Art and Domestic Space” which explores the complex meanings of community and artists working in the public realm.

In order to harness their new skills the participating families also developed a new website [www.thekitchensessions.ie](http://www.thekitchensessions.ie) and hosted a digital film festival in Fána Burca between the 18th and 20th of December 2009.

This commission was funded by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government from the Per Cent for Art Scheme funding generated from the Fána Burca Housing Scheme in Knocknacarra, Galway.

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## FOREWORD

We are delighted to welcome The Kitchen Sessions to the growing register of significant art commissions initiated by Galway City Council's Public Art Office under the Per Cent for Art Scheme. Embracing contemporary practices and genres, the initiative under the curatorship of Megs Morley, Galway City Council is steadily developing a programme of important art interventions that enrich the creative lives of our citizens and add to Galway's reputation as a city that encourages artists and their work.

The City Council is fortunate to collaborate here with Michael Fortune, one of Ireland's most respected contemporary artists. His work in Fána Burca is a model of good practice in a shared narrative of everyday life in our city. In this inspirational project, Michael Fortune and the residents of Fána Burca have generated ideas and stories that fuel imagination and give creative pleasure to participants and audience alike. Re-imagining and re-encountering their homes through the opportunities offered by the skilful use

of new media, the participants have charted their lives, their challenges and comforts in a moving and authentic portfolio of significant human artworks.

We congratulate the residents of Fána Burca who have profoundly and wholeheartedly contributed to this creative project, and we thank Michael Fortune for his unstinting commitment.

Public art projects are by their nature a series of ever-developing relationships between artist, community and locale. The Kitchen Sessions is a powerful example of such potent symbiosis. Curated by Galway City Council's Arts Service and supported through the Per Cent for Art Scheme, it offers the opportunity to tell our stories and to live our lives creatively.

**Councillor Declan McDonnell,**  
Mayor of Galway City,  
Galway City Council

**Mr. Joe MacGrath**  
City Manager,  
Galway City Council



The Kitchen Sessions-  
Public Art and Domestic Space



The public art commission of artist Michael Fortune, through the Per Cent for Art Scheme, sought from the outset to expand conventional definitions of both art and community based arts practice. In working outside the gallery, studio or theatre, artists need to negotiate and respectfully navigate not only community engagement but also possible resistance. The process of transforming a potentially tricky or awkward negotiation not only affects what kind of art gets made but also alters an artist's original concept for the work and process of engagement and collaboration within a community context.

Allied to this is the critical question asked by Grant Kester in *Conversational Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* 'how do we define integral community membership?'<sup>1</sup> For Kester 'community' is necessarily complex, and to hypostatise a concept of 'community' fetishises ideas of authenticity. Kester's critique of a simplistic evocation of 'community' warns of a 'discursive violence' when one person speaks on behalf of another 'no matter how firmly he or she is anchored within a given collective'<sup>2</sup>. A proposition of consensus

('community') based on a discursive act that neutralises difference. For artists working collaboratively in a community context, how community, understood as a set of relations, is negotiated is not simply an ethical consideration but the locus of the work itself. As Miwon Kwon notes in *One Place After Another* artists working collaboratively with communities of place need to remain vigilant to the pressure to reproduce community as a 'mythic unity' and instead open up possibilities that permit a more multi-layered, complex and inter-subjective understanding of place and identity.<sup>3</sup>

The negotiation that artist Michael Fortune, with the support of Megs Morley, Galway City Public Arts Officer, undertook with the local residents of the Fána Burca estate in Galway City, shifted and refined the original proposal. Importantly it was the adaptation of the initial idea that led the artist Michael Fortune to offer an open invitation to participation which was reciprocated with open houses.

For artist Michael Fortune the resulting change in direction of the residency emboldened an ethos of 'gift exchange',

a refinement to the initial proposal that not only highlighted the role of the community as host, but also honoured a quality of exchange between artist and residents.

The domestic private setting of the kitchen as both workshop and production space rephrases arts making as a shared human capacity intimately connected to everyday life. This localised strategy of engagement provided for an alternative model of 'community' - a model based on affinity rather than location and place.

In offering all the residents of Fána Burca with an open invitation to participate in the project, *The Kitchen Sessions* avoided a monolithic or bureaucratic mobilisation of 'community'. A network of five families became the core of *The Kitchen Sessions*, developing the skills to storyboard, film, narrate, animate and edit their own short films. In addition Michael Fortune worked in their homes photographing the seemingly incidental - the markings made to measure a child's height, a Marks and Sparks dress, the Koran on top of a wardrobe, door knobs and silver buttons. Through these apparent random and



intimate arrangements of the home, stories unfold that express the humour, resilience and passions of the residents. Narratives of home and belonging that give shape to a neighbourhood and provide both an imaginative map of the Fána Burca estate and a document of direct experience of ‘lived’ time and place.

In many ways The Kitchen Sessions series of films belong to the wider participatory culture enabled by the low cost of film making and the advent of Web 2.0. The short films claim affiliations to a range of genres including film noir, science fiction, action heroes and fairytales - toy horses come to life, Batman saves Princess Pathetic, in an interweaving of mass produced culture and folklore. In keeping with the DIY ethos of participatory culture, all participating families are selecting video clips from YouTube, which will be screened in their homes as part of a YouTube festival. This festival, reliant on the invitation to individual homes on the estate makes public the private, a process of festival making that relies on and is produced

by the social interactions of the Fána Burca estate.

Through the circulation and distribution of The Kitchen Sessions through YouTube, the local residents of the Fána Burca Estate are connected with a wider spatially dispersed ‘community’. However just as ‘community’ in a social context is a complex and an often contested set of relations, the use of the term ‘community’ as a promise of online connection likewise requires scrutiny. As Peter Westenberg writes in Affinity Video HTML, IP, P2P, HTTP, FTP mix with Trust, Friendship, Affinity, Communitality, how do we recognise friends online? By comparing our profiles? By following hyperlinks, are friends those who invite us to be a part of their ‘community’?<sup>4</sup>

In the case of Michael Fortune it was the very process of negotiation that opened up a more complex and contingent reading of ‘community’, which in turn provided the context and circumstances for a more intimate engagement. As a consequence The Kitchen Sessions offers a rich insight

into the lives of residents of Fána Burca, tracing the interests and the imaginative collisions between science fiction, folklore, fairytales, super heroes, the personal and the spiritual, that reflects the participants’ interests and affiliations.

The history and process of The Kitchen Sessions, from initial commission to the collaborative process of working with residents, provide an important case study on the complex meanings of community and working in residence. As a process The Kitchen Sessions provided a framework for working in the Fána Burca estate - drawing on the resources of the community, reflecting these and providing something back in return.

The gift exchange ethos that informed and shaped the residency is legible in this working process - the participants have a mac laptop, camcorder, tripod and external hard-drive so they can independently edit and produce short films, and a dedicated website so they can upload and share their films with one another and the wider local community.

In forging a provisional community of co-producers and co-creators The Kitchen Sessions film and photography series speaks of our affective and meaningful relationships with others. Michael Fortune in siting his practice within residents’ homes, not only positioned his role as the artist within a framework of mediatory practices and exchange, but also found a means through which the work could proceed based on the qualities of hospitality and welcome.

The resulting work, The Kitchen Sessions, boldly captures this ethos, in which residents of the estate share the imaginative landscapes of their homes and thoughts, a collage of intimacy that builds a shared public space of the Fána Burca estate from the private and domestic.

**Sarah Tuck, Director,**  
Create, the national development agency for collaborative arts



1. Grant Kester - Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art, University of California Press Ltd, 2004, p130
2. Ibid, p130
3. See Miwon Kwon - One Place After Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity, MIT Press Paperback edition, 2004
4. See Peter Westenberg, Affinity Video in Video Vortex Reader: Responses to YouTube, edited by Geert Lovink and Sabine Niederer, Number 4, Institute of Network Cultures, Amsterdam, 2008



## Rachel and Reuben





## Union Jack Mat

Rachel: Nothing has caused so much trouble in my house as that rug. All Irish people have a reaction to that rug one way or another. Most people say nothing and you can just see them looking out of the corner of their eye. And they can't believe how brazen I am to stick it on the floor. And then British people run to it and stand there, and I stand on it to wash the pots. My little moment of home. But it's funny, I could never have it as a Welsh dragon. I could never stand on a Welsh flag, I could only stand on a British one, so I don't know what that's saying.





Photos of Rachel and Reuben

Rachel: I put those up so long ago. I don't even notice half this stuff is in my house anymore. How old was I then? I must have been 32 or 33 when those were taken. And that is Roo, only one. And that is him with his gappy teeth. I don't even look at those anymore.

My Mother's Teacup

Rachel: That's my mammy's teacup which she used to drink out of. I love it because it's so paper thin and when you hold it up to the light you can see through it and the cracks in it. I love the fact that it was stained when I got it, with her tea. And now I have added to the stains with my tea.



My Mother's Teapot

Rachel: That's my mother's teapot which was bequeathed to me on the condition that I used it and didn't just look at it.

That was the teapot on the table I grew up with and I had no notion that everybody else didn't drink from teapots like that until I was quite a lot older. And she kept it shiny like that all the time. She used it, but my dad would never have drunk tea out of it, he just had a mug and a tea bag.



— Reuben, 20th Aug '04

~~Reuben~~ Reuben 23rd of Aug (2006)

— Reuben 23rd of Aug

— Reuben 23rd of Aug

Reuben 23rd of Aug

— Reuben 23rd of Aug

## Reuben's Measurement

Rachel: That's just how much Reuben has grown since we've been in the house. We started writing on the wall which means we can never paint that wall, ever. And it's just something my mum did when we were growing up. So, I did it.



We moved here five and a half years ago, so whatever that is, 2004. I had a little giraffe thing (to measure him against) up on the wall of his bedroom for a while and he outgrew it so we had to start on something else. So that's why.

His friend Giacomo is in there as well. Don't think any of his other friends are in there. No. And that's him in that little drawing there.





## All these incredible dresses

Rachel: I'll tell you what happened with that dress. It's a bit of a mad story. My parents split up when I was eleven and my grandmother always had this thing...you know, like a foot stool. A pouffe is what they used to call it. And for some reason or other it ended up in our house when the split thing happened with my parents. So my mum in one moment of great anger... she hated the thing, ...it was a horrible white leather thing...She stuck a knife in it and ripped it open and out came all these incredible dresses. That being one of them. I lived in them for years but I gave most of them away. I don't know why I gave them away. They were so beautiful and that was the only

one I kept. I wore that 'til I got pregnant. Basically I lived in it.

It was my Aunty Netta's and she died when she was 36, before I was born so I never met her. She was my father's sister and it had come from my father's mother's house.



## The men who built me a house

Rachel: When we moved in there were lots of pencil marks around the windows and around the house. Some of them I painted over, I had to, but I left whatever I could. There were a lot more and they've all gone. That's just what's left. You know it's kind of like honouring the work that went on in the house, building the house. I was very aware when I moved in that there had been these men working in this house, building this house. And I'd been homeless before I'd moved in and it almost felt like someone had built me a house....given me a house and some protection and safety for me and Roo.



## Door Knobs

Rachel: They've gone up at different times. The purple ones only went up about four or five months ago and the others I've had for maybe ten years waiting for a place for them to be.



I got these in B+Q. My sister-in-law and my brother gave me that dangly thing.



Those are from Monsoon. I love those. Below you can see a picture Reuben drew of me cooking.



You can see in this one how the kettle is making the door go like that, the pretend grain.





## The Floors



Rachel: These floors don't get tidied, but I've always done that. I should live with sawdust really. I don't change the table cloth, I just whoosh everything off it and leave it on the floor for a week and it gets trampled all over the floor and I just clean like that. It's the last thing that gets cleaned, the floor. I hate cleaning floors, I hate it. I'll clean everything else but not floors.

## Washing Up



Rachel: I only do washing up either when it absolutely has to be done because I haven't got anything to cook on or I do it everyday when Reuben is doing his homework. So that I am standing by, not looking and he can get on with it, but he can ask me if he has got a question and I'm not in his face, and he feels like he's done it himself. That's what I do once a day, just when he is doing his homework.



## Aunty Mo's Card

Rachel: Aunty Mo sent me that. My lovely Aunty Mo who died in June. I just think it's so ridiculous to suggest that we love everyone, so I put it there. (Laughs)





“Much as I loved God, I wanted a packet of sweets”

Rachel: This was given to me by my Godmother, Miss Sale. My mum loved her. She used to have a Promise Box in her house that was all about what Jesus promised. It had a hundred rolled up promises from the bible in it. You got a pair of tweezers and every time you went to see her...her idea of a treat... everybody else would give you two quid or a packet of biscuits or something but she would give you a promise from God. It used to rile me. Much as I loved God, I wanted a packet of sweets.

And you used to have to get a pair of tweezers from her bathroom and she'd say, “Come on, I'll let you have a promise”, and she'd build it up like it was this big thing. And by the time we were four we had copped on

and knew this was not exciting. I did it 'til I was about eighteen or something. I had to.

But anyway, before she died, she asked me, “What would you like when I die?” and I said, “Those two incredible vases.” They were about this tall...about a metre tall, and I just knew they were worth a mint. They were beautiful and I just loved them to look at.

When she did die, not long after, Aunty Mo, my lovely Aunty Mo, went down to get the vases. I said “Go down and get the bloody vases. I've earned those vases after all that promise business.” And she went down and the family had been like hawks and taken everything. So Aunty Mo is battling with an umbrella to try and keep the

vases, and she phoned me up and said “They've gone, they've gone. I've just seen them put them in the van. They've got your name on them, but I saw them go in the van.” So I said “Oh don't worry about it, take something else.” She says “What do you want?” “Oh, there's a picture of a girl with flowers in her hair, that'll do.” It was just the first thing that came into my head that I remembered from the house. So I got that picture. But I didn't realise it's about one hundred and sixty years old and it's an original. I did love the vases though.





## My Nain's Basket



Rachel: That's my Nain's sewing basket. It's got quite a few of my things in it but about half of the things in there are my Nain's and I love that. She was a great knitter as well as a sewer; anything that needed sorting out. She did tiny little stitches. She was a brilliant seamstress. A lot of seamstresses in our family.



Rachel: I've no idea when the last time that was opened. That is the actual measuring tape that my Nain would have used. She had eleven children and she would have made all her children's clothes, every single one. Apparently they were known as the best-dressed children in the village. As is often the case with poor families. She made them all. And on Sunday they would have gone to church twice a day, all of them in white. And she'd made them all and they'd

all be washed and laundered. She lived in a two-up, two-down. So that is probably, possibly the tape measure that measured all of the children's clothes. And that's the jar the tape would have arrived in when she died when I was seventeen. I don't think I've ever used that.





## My Buttons

Rachel: These are all buttons that were attached to garments that I've loved and don't wear any more or have been given to me or I've liked. But mostly they're clothes over the years that either me or Reuben or someone I love doesn't wear anymore but

I've just kept the buttons. In the back is my mother's fox fur button. It gives me the creeps to be honest. I remember that coat. She'd go marching into church in that coat feeling like the cats whiskers. I hope she had some knickers underneath. (Laughs)



## Name Badges

Rachel: That's the only one left. I remember when these were ordered and it was a really big thing. You can see the cotton where it was attached to something, it must have been attached to something that colour. It would have been on all our school uniforms.

You sent away and ordered them and they came back in the post. I can just remember it being this big thing that they arrived in the post because nobody else had them and I think she felt a bit fancy doing it. Fancy things like boarding school, private school; it was

a posh-family thing to do. Nobody else had them and she was going to have it for her children. I remember her sitting in the evening sewing them on.



Shahid, Betsy and Alicia





## The Adhan - A Call to Prayer

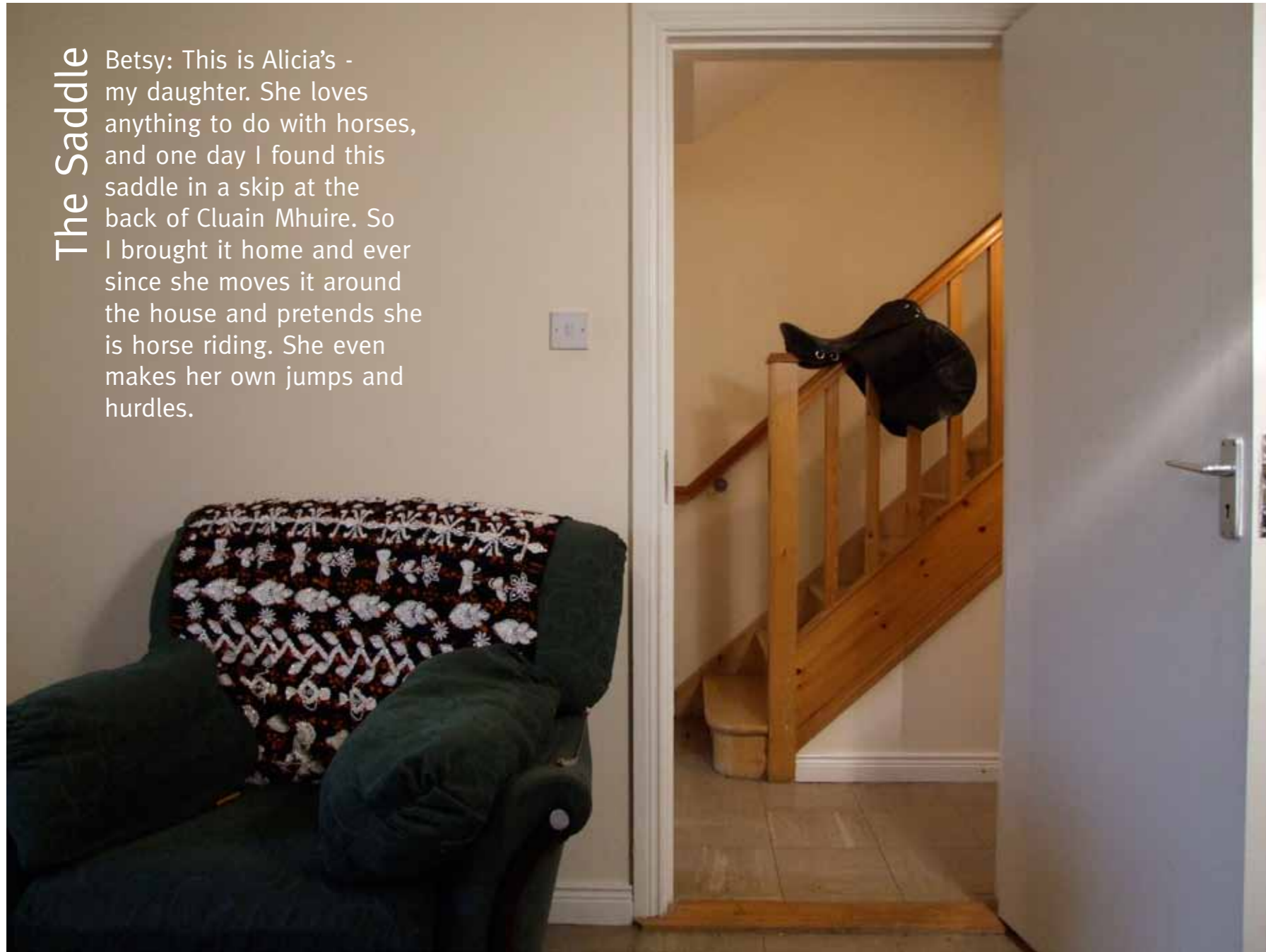
Shahid: When you live in a traditional Muslim community and society you get used to hearing the Adhan... and the Adhan actually dictates what time you have to start praying. The Adhan is a call to prayer which is played through loudspeakers so that the whole community knows when to pray. So because we live in a non Muslim community we don't have that privilege of hearing the Adhan. So I found something on the Internet called Adhan software, and it's a programme which contains all the different prayer times. Five prayer times a day for any city around the world. All you have to do is type in the city and it will automatically calculate the latitude and the longitude and by doing so we would know what time the sun rises and the sun sets.

If I am working on the computer, the Adhan plays from the computer speakers and I would then leave whatever I am doing, most of the time, and go to prayer. There are times when I haven't switched the computer off at night before going to bed, and the speakers are very loud and they wake us up. So I've to rush down to make sure the neighbours don't wake up to the sound of the Adhan.



## The Saddle

Betsy: This is Alicia's - my daughter. She loves anything to do with horses, and one day I found this saddle in a skip at the back of Cluain Mhuire. So I brought it home and ever since she moves it around the house and pretends she is horse riding. She even makes her own jumps and hurdles.





# The Folder

Shahid: This is a folder I bought for all my paper work from when I was seeking asylum. It's got my passport, international driving licence, post office savings book, deportation papers and all that. I've had a rough ride for a few years. Most of this stems from my time in the hostel. I was confined to a small room, basically a few metres square with a bed, a TV and a chair, you know. That was my life for four years.

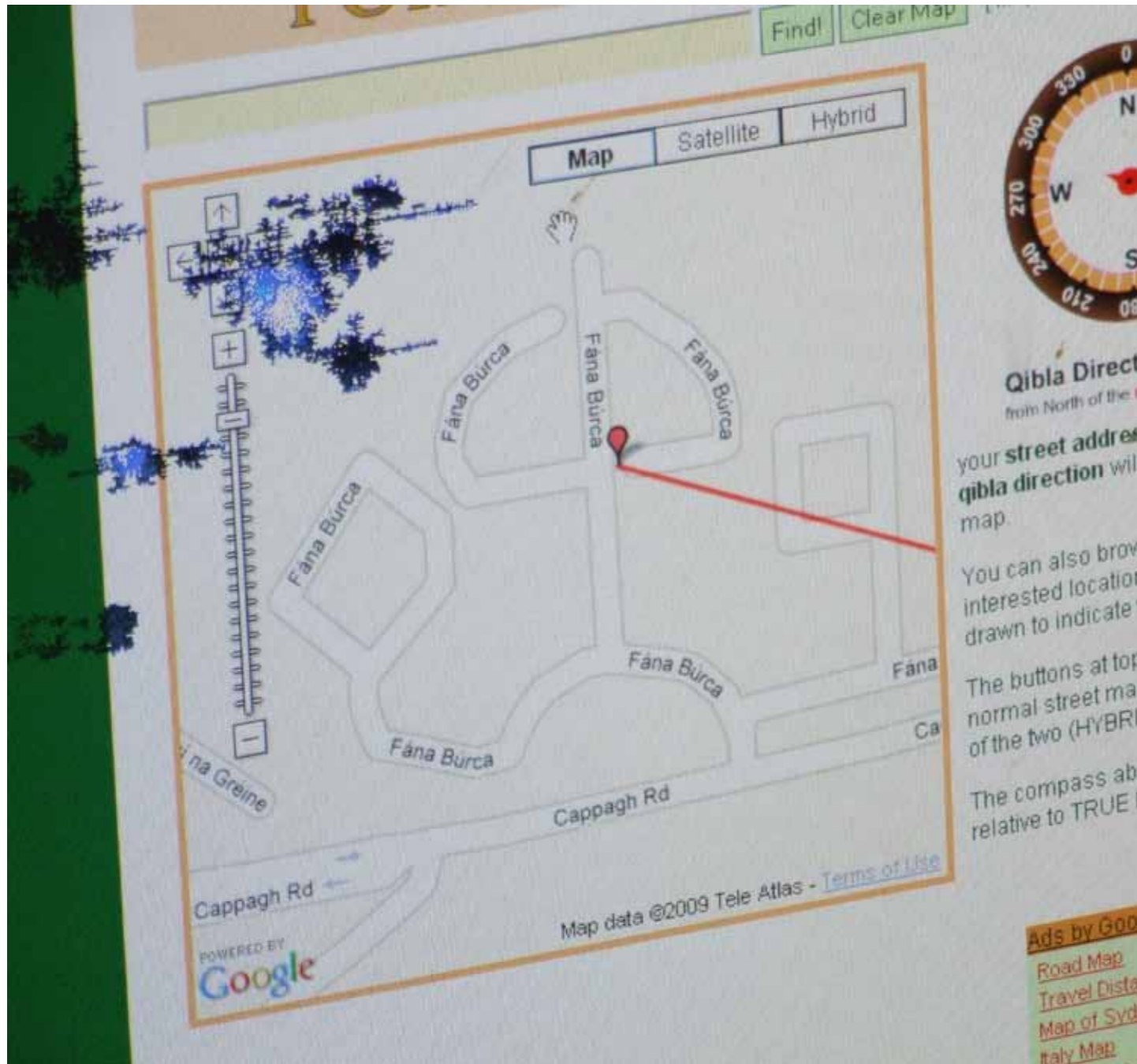
I wanna actually disassociate or detach myself from as much of the comforts of life as possible because in doing so that makes

you more aware of the fact that life in this world is only transient. I don't know whether you believe in the next life and that, but I certainly do, and I believe that we are going to be here for a short while and that we should go through this life as a traveller. Just take what's needed and that. You know, you never see a hearse with a trailer full of furniture. So what's the point in collating all these worldly possessions when you can't take it with you to the grave.



Shahid, Betsy and Alica





## Google Maps

Shahid: When I moved here, the first thing I had to do was find the direction of the Ka'bah relative to where we are. There are several methods to do that. The easiest one is the compass but I am not really used to working with compasses so

that didn't work. So I tried out this programme called Qibla finder. It has Google maps on it. So we found Fána Burca on it and we worked out where our house was and from that then we worked out the direction we have to pray to.

I never bothered buying a purpose made prayer mat so I've always used whatever was around. I used that when I was in the hostel. It's actually a bed sheet from the hostel and somehow it miraculously appeared when I moved here. (Laughs)





## The Highest Book in the House

Shahid: That is the Qur'an (Koran). And as you can see in the picture it occupies the highest position in terms of books in the room. And that is because as Muslims we are taught to have great respect for the Qur'an. All Muslims are aware of the importance of respecting the Qur'an. So they'd always put it in the highest position...even Muslims that would not be practicing Islam. They'd have such great reverence for this book that they'd put it in the highest spot. In that pile there, actually the top three books are different copies of the Qur'an. The highest one is in Arabic and the others are all translations.



## My Curry Sauces

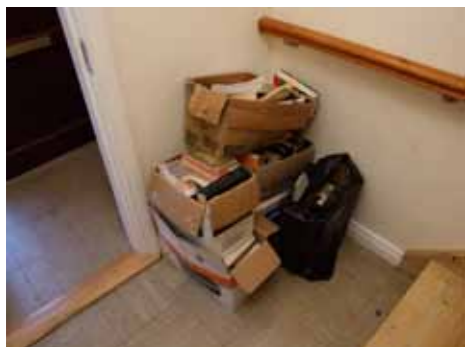
Shahid: When we moved here, one of the first rooms I really embraced was the kitchen. I came with a lot of stuff from the hostel. I had a toaster, all the pots...I even had a chopping board and saucepans. She used to joke that I was house-proud when she saw me come with all the stuff.

In the hostel we'd just a communal kitchen but this was problematic because you couldn't store anything in the kitchen, so you had to store your pots and everything in your room. And you'd take them down to the kitchen and when you'd be all done you'd have to wash it up and take it back up. So that in itself was a big mission.

And when you'd be cooking you'd get all these hungry fellas lurking around, trying to get some. Sometimes you'd be in a generous mood and you'd share it with them and that...but most times I'd wait for the right opportunity and run back up with my pots. There were times when I needed to be selfish...you know.







## Buy and Sell

Shahid: When we first moved in there wasn't very much here. Well, the basic stuff was there. But we didn't have any lounge furniture so she (Betsy) was offered some garden recliners from a friend of hers, otherwise we would have been sitting on the floor. Well, she is fine with that, but I don't like sitting on the floor...not all the time. (Laughs) But we eventually managed to find some stuff on Freecycle and Buy and Sell. I managed to find a lounge suite from that. It's quite nice. She doesn't like it as she likes low level Moroccan style sofas.

Betsy: Well it's okay. It's okay for now. When it comes to possessions I have a temporary view of things. Especially since I got rid of so much of my life when I took off to the desert last year, I am now kind of a bit slow about taking on material things.

Shahid: In that regard she is more Islamic than I am. (Laughs) I am a city boy. I can't be living like the Bedouins in the desert.





## New Lampshade

Betsy: I shed so much of my life in the past couple of years and I am slowly letting the bits back in that I want to keep. I have a fear.., well not a fear, an issue, 'cause I've moved such a lot, regarding being in the one place and putting up shelves and making a home. And part of me is in denial of doing that. But I would like to do the domestic thing a bit more.

Shahid: I'm actually quite the opposite to her. I see this as a home where we can settle and I am always looking at ways to make it more homely and that. I've had a rough life you know, lots of ups and downs and always on the move so I came to Ireland (from South Africa) to settle down.





My New Scarves



My Kids' Old Jumpers

Theresa, Bella, Jade, Merlyn and Jessie



## Charity Shop Bowl

Theresa: I got this in a charity shop. It's an apple. It folds down flat. I love buying stuff in charity shops.



## The Lemon I Grew

Theresa: This is one of the two lemons I grew. One was pulled off a while ago by some kids and squashed into the ground. This was pulled off the other day too but I rescued it and brought it in.



## The Girls' Bags

Theresa: The girls are handbag lovers and they must have at least twice the amount of those. They were just getting kicked about. So, if I hang them all up the girls can see which bag they want. They are really funny like that. Like, Jade who's only three, would have a certain outfit on and there is only a certain bag that she wants, you know? Like you say "there's a bag". No - it has to be X bag or Y bag. So I figured if I put them all up on little hooks or pins and you know, it's kind of making my life a little easier so that they can pull out the little stool and they can help themselves and they are not continuously looking for me to find them stuff. I've got the same if you look out in the hall. All on this side of one wall is hats, all up the other wall is scarves and all along the door is kids' coats. So everything is done on a miniature level that they can reach it.





## Jade's Blanky and Mammy's Pillow

Theresa: This is Blanky. She won't sleep unless she has her Blanky. When she comes home, especially if she has been upset, she runs in and just gets Blanky and stuffs it into her face and just goes...(sniffs) smells it and smells it and smells it. It's not even about the look or the feel of it, it's the smell. I think it just smells of home, it smells of safe, it smells of dinner; it smells of everything she loves. You can just see in her little face that the world is okay when Special Ribby and Blanky are around.

She loves my pillow also. It's my special pillow and I let her borrow it the night before last. And she slept from seven o'clock 'til nine o'clock in the morning. I couldn't believe it. It's the first night she hasn't got up in... forever, since she was born. I couldn't believe it and she reckons it was mammy's special pillow and could she have it. I am already in a battle of words over it with Bella. Every evening the pillow goes missing.

I've been dragging that pillow around with me for quite some time now. I don't run home and sniff it but when you lie down after a long old day, there's something about that pillow. It's different to every pillow I've ever come across. There's just something about it. It's been dragged from Billy to Jack, from Portugal and back. It's been everywhere.

I love it. I'm not sentimental about many things but that's a good nights sleep...just right there. You know, you could be on wet concrete, but if you had that you'd be laughing.

## Special Ribby

Theresa: When Jade was born, Bella gave her a teddy which she carried with her everywhere, and I mean everywhere. I would spend half the day looking for Teddy in the most bizarre places. In behind the toilet or wherever her little legs had taken her during the day. Everything was okay once Teddy was around but unfortunately he must have been left in a neighbour's house, or went missing, so she turned to Blanky instead.

Thing is, Teddy used to have a ribbon around his neck which she used to stick up her nose. She called this Ribby and you'd see her holding Teddy in one hand and Ribby would be just hanging out of her nostril. So when Teddy was lost she swapped the teddy's ribbon for the label on the blanket and she now sucks and sticks that up her nose instead. And because Teddy's ribbon was called Ribby she now calls this label Special Ribby.



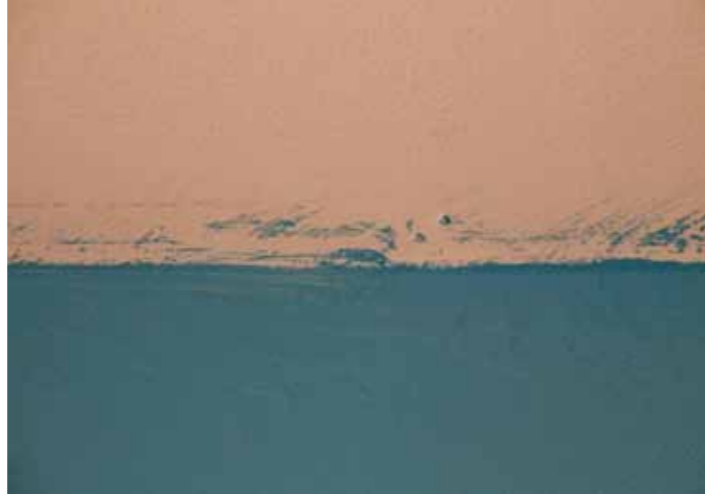
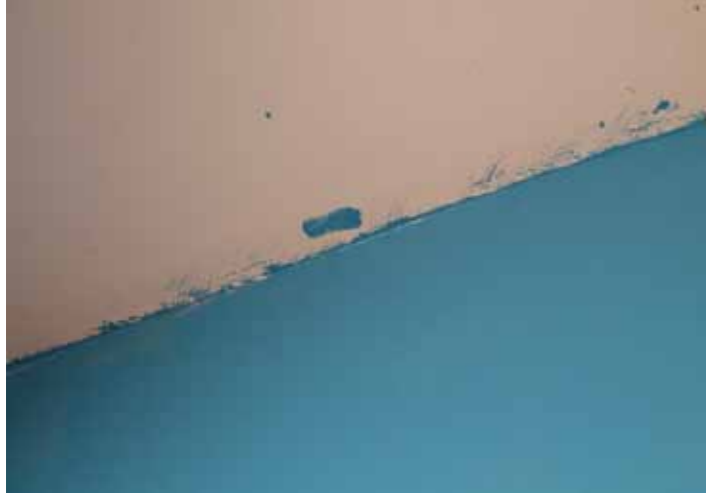




# “Lash it up, it’s four o’clock in the morning”

Theresa: The colour in the living room was a mushroom colour and I painted it that colour when I was pregnant with Jade. It was so not me. I don’t do mushy brown but when you’re pregnant there’s other things going on. You want to be nesty and warm and boring and plain. So as soon as I reawakened again...it takes two or three years after you have a baby to get back to yourself again and one day I kind of woke up and said “what the hell am I sitting in this brown room for?” So, I went out and that colour was screaming “buy me, buy me.” So when Jessie came home from work at eleven o’clock at night, we went “let’s do it.” We painted into the early hours of the morning. Like, if you look around the fire, it’s quite neat and tidy and all the edges are done. But that wall there was never meant to be painted so by the end of it, it was “lash it up, it’s four o’clock in the morning.”







## Merlyn's Scribble

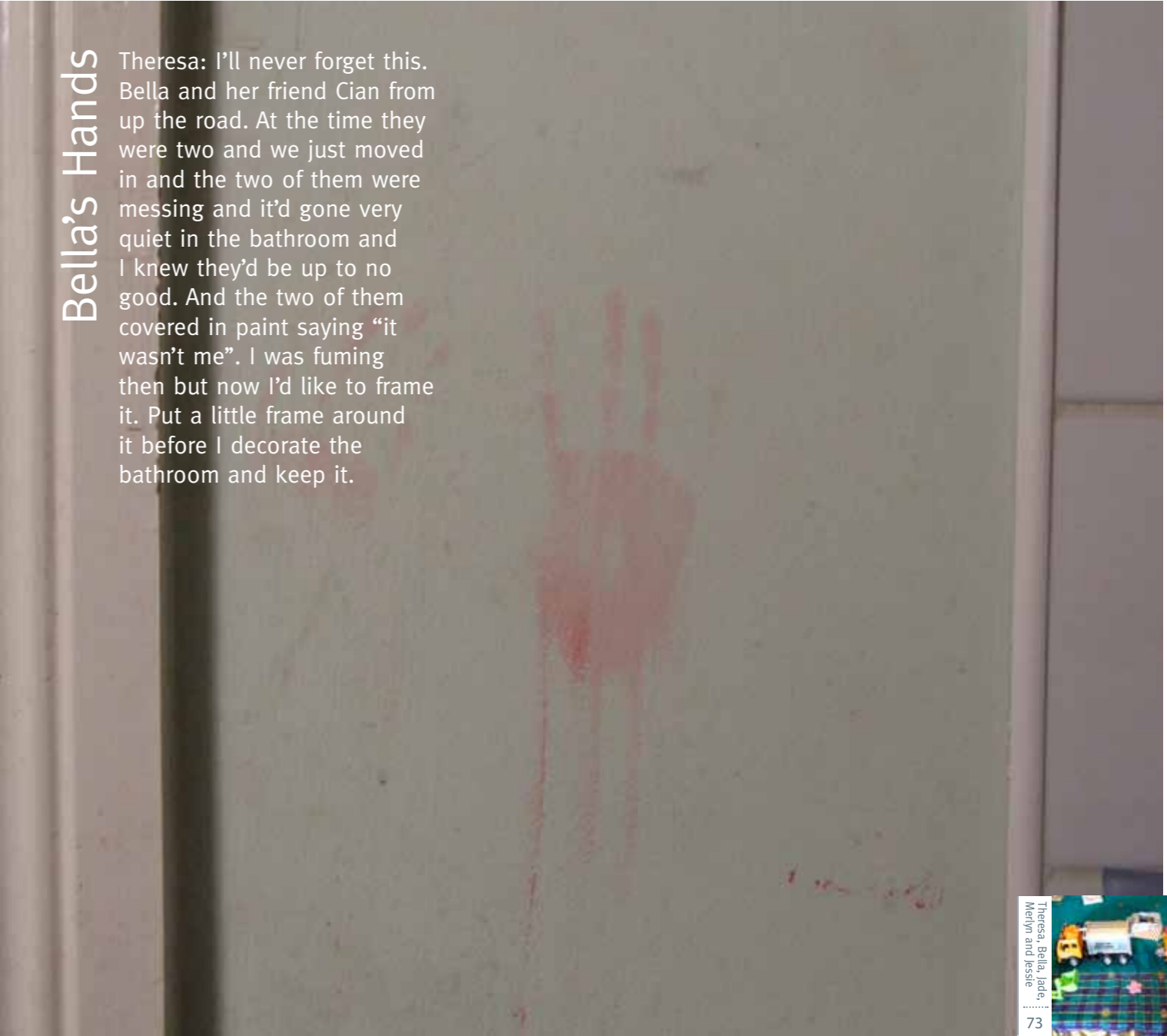
Merlyn: I was just standing there one day and there was a little chip in the paint. So I just started picking away at the paint. You can see there are little roundy bits from my nail. I just put me hand in my pocket and took out a pen and started scribbling on the wall. I started off with the eyes and the next thing I had the head and the whole lot of him done.





### First Written Word

Theresa: That was from about four years ago and the only word Bella could write was her name. So I think she was so empowered and so blown away by the fact that she could spell her own name. And it was a novelty, and it was so new that she needed to put it everywhere and anywhere, and then deny she had anything to do with the graffiti. “It wasn’t me”, yet strangely it says Bella everywhere.



### Bella’s Hands

Theresa: I’ll never forget this. Bella and her friend Cian from up the road. At the time they were two and we just moved in and the two of them were messing and it’d gone very quiet in the bathroom and I knew they’d be up to no good. And the two of them covered in paint saying “it wasn’t me”. I was fuming then but now I’d like to frame it. Put a little frame around it before I decorate the bathroom and keep it.





Love Theresa: That's Bella's work. She loves writing love. Specifically for me. Like Jade does it in that hanging off your skirt way but Bella does it with nail varnish, pens and pencils, even stickers... you know those little circular stickers. I never rub them out. They are all over the place, on mirrors and windows, but I never rub them out.



Marja and Dick





## The Solution

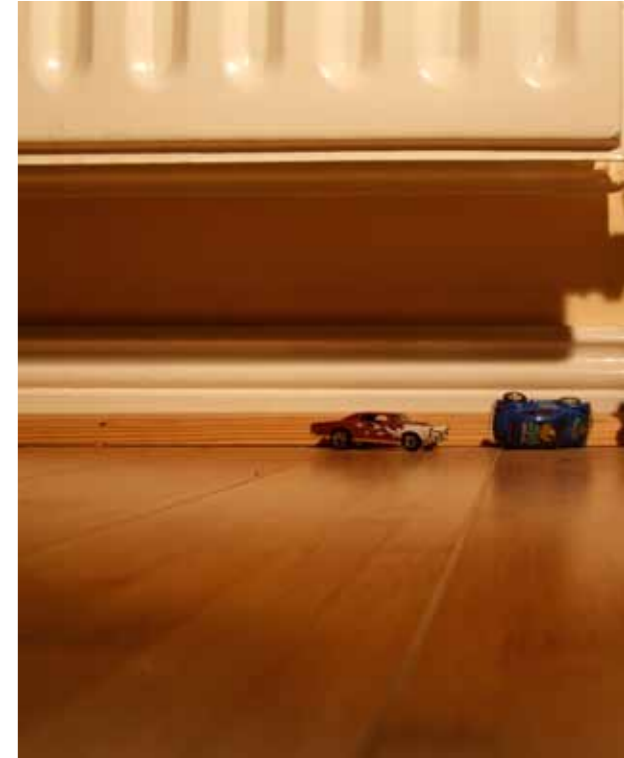
Dick: The chair I sit in is directly in front of this door handle. And the thing is, I got an ear infection and I couldn't figure out how I got it. Only in this ear. So eventually I narrowed it down to this...the key hole. So I put that sellotape over it to stop the draft and I never had that problem again. Simple.







**Toys** Marja: These are bits and pieces that we got. We used to have friends that came and brought their children with them. So we just bought bits and pieces for the kids.





## Different Views

Dick: I grew up in a small village and then moved to the edge of a town. So I lived a lot in the country. I spent all my teenage years in the country...all my spare time in the country. The country was behind my house basically and the town was in front of it. But I like the town and cities.

I like cities and airports and shopping malls, big ones. Multi-level if possible. I really love airports. There is a great sense in an airport of going somewhere else. Passing through, flying away. Coming home - no I don't like that. When I go away I like to go on somewhere else. I am not great for coming home.





## A Tidy House

Marja: When I lived in Holland my home was very ordered and so was my sister's. Even when they have little kids, my sister's house was never a messy one. In the evening all the toys were put away in the cupboard and everything was neat, you know what I mean? It is so different from there to here really.

Dick: The funny thing is I was born in Ireland and I am Irish, my parents are Irish but I never felt Irish. I always felt foreign. For some reason I always felt I was in the wrong country. I shouldn't be here. I should be somewhere else. Where it is I don't know. I think Berlin or New York or somewhere.





## Everything in its place

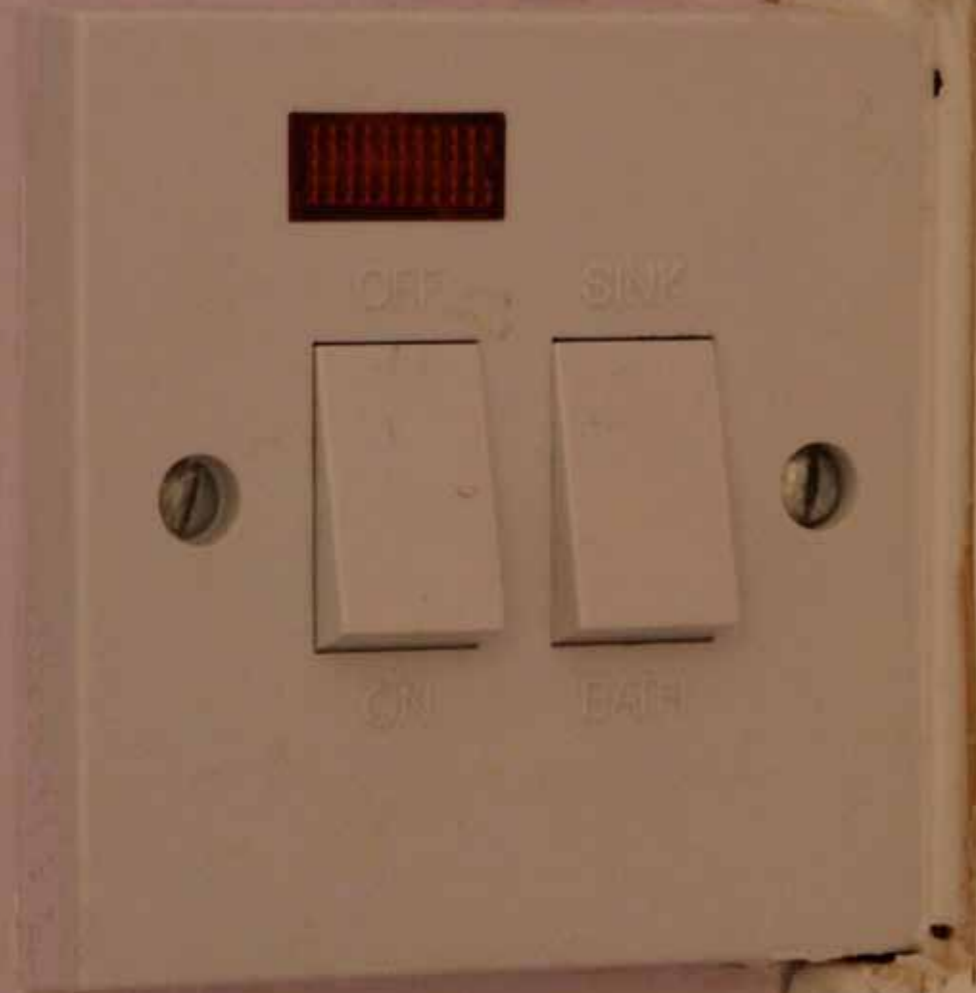
Marja: We always like things ordered.

Dick: Yes. We are very ordered. She orders me and I order her. (Laughs)

Marja: Also when you live together you have to be a little bit ordered.

Dick: You don't have to be...but we are. We just happen to be.





## Slight Imperfections

Dick: We have a foot print here. "Big foot was here." More than likely a young fella came in and varnished this...whatever it's called. And then the boss came in and went "are you finished that job yet?" and stood on it and left his mark.



Marja: I think it's not the only one. There are a few more.

Dick: That footmark has been there for five years and we left it there.

Marja: There are other funny things too if you look around.





## Rooted

Dick: Any plant in the house will only grow where it is exactly at the moment. We had been experimenting with the plants but they'd all end up dying. You go "why is that plant dying?" and then you move it somewhere else and it would just go "whoosh."

Marja: This one here used to be in the bathroom and it used to be always brown and dying but we put it here and it's fine. We're not going to move it again. It'll stay there for the rest of its life.

Wherever it grows, you leave it, because you don't want to be messing the plant around. The plant likes it there.





## “Water our plants please”

Dick: I grew up with pets. I had a lot of dogs and cats but we don't have any together. We haven't time for pets. If we had a pet and we wanted to go somewhere we'd have to get somebody to mind the pet. And we want to be able to go at a moments notice really because things come up and we can't be going looking for babysitters for dogs or cats. Plants are manageable.





## New Roots

Dick: The interesting thing which is happening with three of our plants is that there are different plants growing beside it.

Marja: Different babies.

Dick: We didn't plant them. We've had this plant for years and suddenly this new plant appeared this year, grew up beside it. And there's two more plants in the house that have a different plant growing up right beside it. 'Tis a mystery. (Laughs)





Clare, Iseult and Joe





## What's Left

Clare: The mirror was part of an old chest of drawers and wardrobe that came from a family friend. She gave it to mommy and mommy gave it to me. It was in my bedroom at home when I was a kid and teenager and then when I started

getting my own flats and stuff, mommy gave me bits of furniture and stuff. It's just that with all the moves around, especially from Dublin to Sligo and from there to here...the thing just gradually fell apart. So that's all that's left of it.



## A Frame

Clare: That's from an old ruined house me and Theresa came across once. Inside was a picture of the Virgin Mary but I took it out as I already had one. One's enough. So I thought I'd put nice pictures of the kids in it or find a nice picture for it. I just liked the

frame and I just hung it there to stop it from being broken really. I didn't put it there consciously. It's really to stop it getting broke.





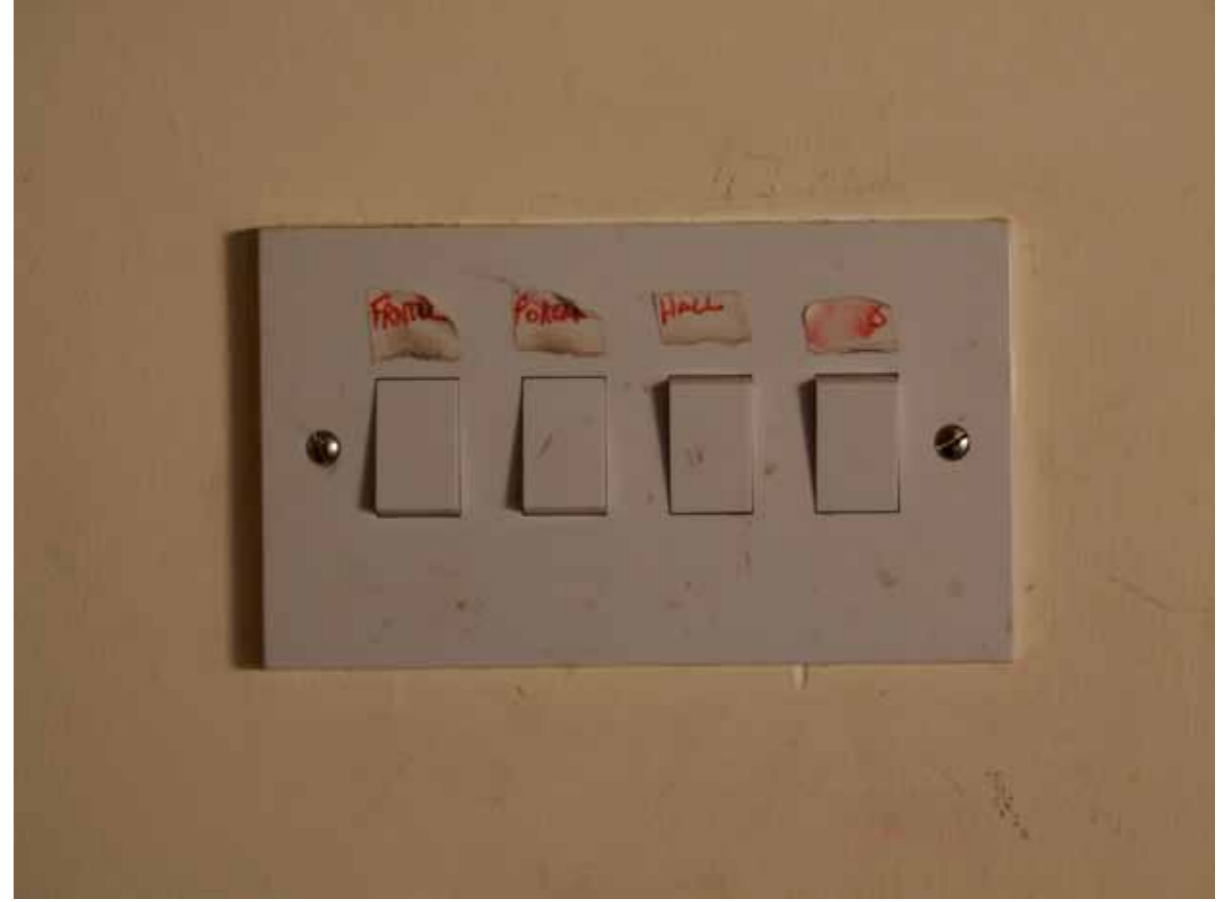
## Fake Fire, Real Sticks

Clare: My mother had that when she lived out in Kilcolgan. She bought it for her shed. She gave it to me soon after we moved in here but it's very expensive to run. It's kind of like a fan heater really. It's got pretend log things in it. I put those sticks there to see if it would look less plastic.



## Light Switch

Clare: Iseult had a nature book with different flower stickers in it so I was just messing one day and I did that.



## My System

Clare: I put them on there 'cause there were four different lights and I just never knew which light was what, you know. This was one of my organised moments.





## Hooks and Hangers

Clare: I got that from mommy's house. It's cast iron and the knobs are porcelain. I got someone to drill it in. When you are by yourself it can be hard to put up shelves and stuff so I use a lot of little hanger and hook things.





### My Smiley Faces

Clare: I put them up 'cause you don't need a drill and they're the only things that go into a hard wall. When you try and take them off they wreck the wall a bit. So that's where the smiley faces came from. Sometimes I get tired of things and I moved them. Sometimes you'd have to force them, but you always say to yourself "sure I'll be puttying them over one day whenever I paint the house" you know.





## Boys Out

Clare: Iseult's not very attached to her room. But if she sees Joe coming in, she types in 'Boys Out' and Joe wouldn't be allowed in. Other times when he'd want to come in she'd ask him for the password and if he didn't know it she wouldn't let him in.



## Nock Firs

Clare: Joe's put that there in retaliation for the password thing in Iseult's room.







“I specially for Mum”

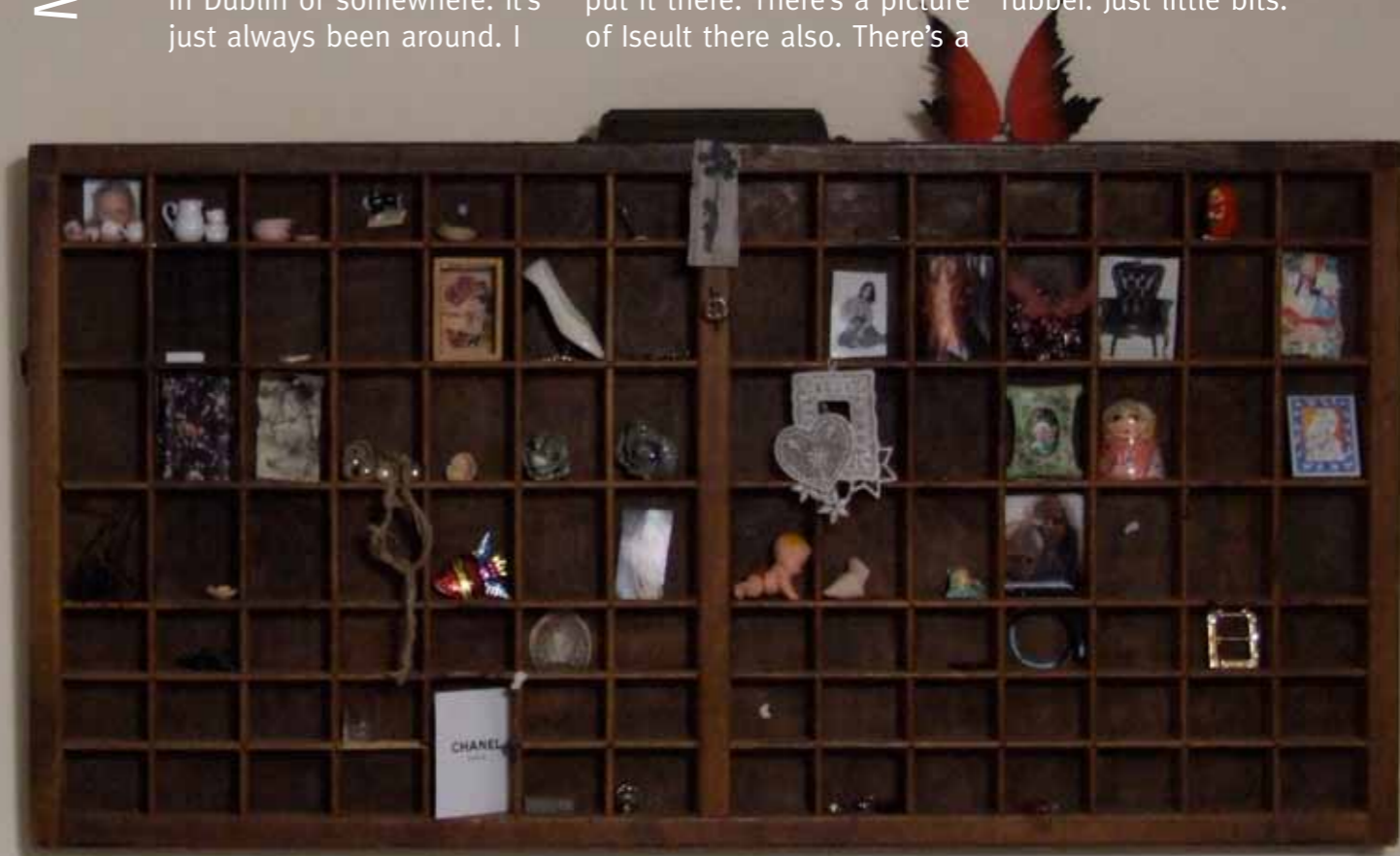
Clare: Iseult’s class last year recorded five or six songs with their teacher. He got them to sing the songs and gave them all a CD of it. Isn’t that great? So she gave it to me.

My Little Spaces

Clare: That’s just something I’ve had for years and years. I don’t know where I picked it up. It might have been in some flat I used to live in, in Dublin or somewhere. It’s just always been around. I

just put little bits in that I like, you know. Iseult’s got this tiny little miniature tea set that she was going to break and I loved it and I put it there. There’s a picture of Iseult there also. There’s a

lovely little present they gave me once with mother on it. A Chanel brooch. I love Chanel. A picture of my mom when she was young. A Picasso rubber. Just little bits.



## Three Hatch Place

Clare: That's me when I was about two and a half...three. We lived in Hatch Place. Three Hatch Place. It was about 1971 or something. It's mommy washing the dishes. She was friends with this photographer called Tony Higgins and he used to take all these photographs of her and me and all her friends around the place. It's a place that mommy talks a lot about still and the address just stuck with me.



## A Christmas Day Type Room

Clare: The sitting room was supposed to be the nice room. Kind of try and have it you know... posh...Christmas day type room. No toys in it and all that. But it hasn't really worked out like that 'cause you have to share all the rooms really. I didn't have one growing up but I've seen it in other people's houses. I'd kind of like a room where there would be no toys and maybe not even have a telly in it. Just odd notions of grandeur. But you know. (Laughs)



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Above: Image from the photographic series 'Granny's' by Michael Fortune, 2006

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Michael Fortune, December 2009

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For further information contact:

Megs Morley,

Public Arts Officer,

Galway City Council,

College Road,

Galway City,

Ireland.

Phone: 091 536400

Email: [Megs.Morley@galwaycity.ie](mailto:Megs.Morley@galwaycity.ie)

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