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Sophie founded **B+B**, a curatorial partnership, with Sarah Carrington in 2000. As well as organising exhibitions and discussions, *B+B* work with artists and their collaborators in situations ranging from residencies and community-based projects to acts of consultation and activism. Sophie also researches and writes on socially engaged practice as part of her curatorial practice. www.welcomebb.org.uk

'Home: laughing, resting, fighting, weeding, drinking, singing, moaning, cooking, screaming, sleeping, listening.'



Photo: Barry Sykes

Meet the Home-Makers

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'In years to come there will be nothing in a man's house which has not given delight to its maker and does not give delight to its user'
Oscar Wilde *Miscellanies*, 1908

'Apparently trivial matters of taste, when peered at carefully, reveal crucial expressions of private and social identity. As Martin Parr's photographs testify, they also say much about the exercise of domestic and cultural power in contemporary Britain'
Nicholas Barker on *Signs of the times*, his 1992 BBC documentary.

Homemaker plate: Enid Seeneey



In 1956 Enid Seeneey designed the **Homemaker** plate pattern while working for the potters, Booth and Colcloughs in Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent in Staffordshire. The following year Enid left to become a full-time homemaker: a wife and mother. The

Homemaker plate inspired Jeanie Finlay's project of the same name. At the time of developing the project, Jeanie was looking to buy her own home in Nottingham and was pregnant with her first child.

Florrie, Roy, Betty, Lilian, Aiko-san, Emi-san and Monji-san are the hosts in Jeanie's series of interactive panoramic portraits. These men and women are elderly and housebound. Four are based in South Derbyshire, England and three in Tokyo, Japan. They have never met each other. They all live alone. Jeanie went to visit them in their respective homes. She got to know her hosts and filmed her conversations with them and the rooms they live in. The resulting footage is projected in a life-size doll's house installation. The two rooms recreate fictional English and Japanese home interiors. You sit in a large armchair or kneel on a floor cushion and meet your hosts by navigating your way around the rooms using a mouse, clicking on hotspots to reveal hidden footage. You can also visit them from the comfort of your own home via the online version of *Home-Maker*. I have chosen to call the people portrayed in *Home-Maker* hosts rather than participants or subjects because I want to signify involvement in the act of inviting Jeanie into their homes whilst acknowledging the position Jeanie retains as guest.

This publication aims to place *Home-Maker* in a wider context of contemporary art and notions of domesticity. It marks the shift in Jeanie's practice towards a heightened awareness of the constructed space of home and the relationship between the guest, host and camera. François Matarrasso describes this in his text as a form of contemporary portraiture. Contributions from Emi-san, Monji-san and Roy are continuations of conversations with Jeanie about the changing state of their homes. Heather Delday and Anne Douglas write about homemaking as a metaphor for making art. Gareth Howell interviews Jeanie on the origins and process of *Home-Maker* and how the project has influenced the direction of her practice. Hitomi Hasegawa writes on the reading of Japanese homes and the appropriation of Western styles. While Japanese homes fill up with Western furniture, sensitive homemakers in the UK have appropriated the ancient art of Feng Shui.

In this introduction I place the *Home-Maker* project in relation to other people, practices and ways of living that have dealt with the ambiguity of homemaking. *Home-Maker* challenges the viewer's perceptions of being housebound, living alone and growing old. The significance of 'home' is made obvious by the fact that nearly one half of older people admitted to residential or nursing home care die

within 18 months of admission (*Excluded Older People*, Social Exclusion Unit Interim Report, 2005). While *Home-Maker* could slip into a nostalgic trip down memory lane and dwell on lost families and communities, Jeanie's hosts come across as being very much in control of their self constructed environments; they are the overseers of their domestic kingdoms.

The art of making a home

Home-Maker simultaneously celebrates the domestic as self organised and deconstructs the home as a staged scenario and container of burdensome ornaments. It is on to this stage the artist steps to translate these ambiguous props. The viewer of *Home-Maker* navigates through a selection of ornaments, photos and other paraphernalia. Rooms are portrayed as cabinets of curiosity, echoing the doll's house-like installation from which you intervene into these mini-museums. The objects themselves become windows onto the outside world, portals to a different time and space. This sense is enhanced when people have difficulty participating in the world beyond the confines of their own home. The interior of an apartment becomes a replacement world and offers an imaginary vision of outside. In Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, for example, we see a housebound man obsess over the goings on of a life beyond the

confines of his own space. The inaccessible outside becomes even more vivid than the immediacy of inside.

The hosts in *Home-Maker* are the curators of their own living environments. Tim Putman in his writings on the art of homemaking and the design industries, describes how the aesthetics of the home are inscribed on its inhabitants (*Contemporary Art and the Home* edited by Colin Painter, 2002). Perhaps this harks back to the arts and crafts movement in Victorian Britain where art, daily life and the domestic were spaces for social reform. John Ruskin was a key voice in this movement and his influence endures today in the house-proud neighbourhoods of suburban Britain. Perhaps the proliferation of DIY and home-improvement television programmes could be a twisted legacy of William Morris's ideals for 'artistic homes'.

The obsession with the home has become a staple diet for the TV nation and was one inspiration for *Home-Maker*. Home is advertised as a uniquely private space, your own palette and playroom to do what you want with. *Home-Maker* picks up on the gap between the ideal home blaring out of the TV and the reality of people's lived-in homes.

Photo: Everett Collection, Rex Features



Rear Window, 1954 by Alfred Hitchcock

The design of our own living environment is to some extent socially constructed. The proliferation of advice on how to furnish, decorate, arrange and clean your own home has been contested over the past century to the extent of abandoning more traditional living in order to seek out the pre-conditioned consumer self. Before I go on to some specific examples of this, however, I will address the modernist aversion to domesticity. I go on to reclaim the domestic as we see it in *Home-Maker* where ornamentation as an expression of self is apparent in the interiors and conversations in the home.

Machines for living

Home-Maker as an art project does not fit the modernist ideal of art as it deals with domesticity and relies on conversation as art practice. It is important to contextualise *Home-Maker* in feminist art histories and theories of the everyday. I want first here to outline the other, more dominant trajectory of modernism in order to highlight how *Home-Maker* breaks away from this male-dominated phenomenon. Christopher Reed has written on the suppression of domesticity in modernism (***Not at Home*** edited by Christopher Reed, 1996 and ***Domestic Disturbances: Challenging the Anti-domestic Modern*** in *Contemporary Art and the Home* (2002) edited by Colin Painter). Reed describes how modernism hailed the domestic as the antithesis of

art. Focusing on domestic life did not live up to the ideal of the wandering artist as flâneur. The home represented the everyday, the mundane, feminine and unimportant and this was too lowly for the avant-garde artist. The modernist architecture of Le Corbusier, for example, was defined by the eradication of the clutter of everyday life. Adolf Loos in his text ***Ornament and Crime*** (1920) thought ornamentation was a symptom of degeneration and inappropriate to a forward looking modernism.

The burden of ornaments and a socially constructed home life is illustrated in JG Ballard's short story, ***Enormous Space*** (1989). Perhaps in pursuit of a modernist clarity, the protagonist Mr Ballantyne whose wife has just left him decides to change the course of his life by creating a self-imposed housebound state, slowly getting rid of all of his household possessions to create a feeling of expanse, openness and freedom:

'In every way I am marooned, but a reductive Crusoe paring away exactly those elements of bourgeois life which the original Robinson so dutifully reconstituted ... Margaret had taken with her most of the ornaments and knick-knacks, and the rest I have heaved into a cupboard'. (J.G. Ballard 'The Enormous Space' War Fever, 1999, p.121)

In 1845 Henry David Thoreau also attempted a life of solitude in a self-built hut on the shores of Walden Pond in Massachusetts. He rejects the social life of work and family in order to become more self-aware in a basic environment living a minimal existence:

'At present our houses are cluttered and defiled with it, and a good housewife would sweep out the greater part into the dust hole, and not leave her morning's work undone ... I had three pieces of limestone on my desk, but I was terrified to find that they required to be dusted daily, when the furniture of my mind was all undusted still, and I threw them out the window in disgust.' (Henry David Thoreau, **Walden**, 1999 edition, p.34.)

This attempt at cleansing the desk in order to cleanse the mind is witnessed more recently in the mass destruction of one man's belongings. The artist Michael Landy performed **Breakdown** (2001) in an empty C&A department store on Oxford Street, London, where he made an inventory of all his belongings and systematically destroyed each and every one with a team of helpers. In the same year artist John Freyer began to sell everything he owned on eBay via his **www.allmylifeforsale.com** website. He then went on a trail to document his former possessions in their new homes. If we embellish our belongings with sentimental values and a sense of ourselves,

what happens to our self when they are all gone? By getting rid of all your possessions, as Ballard, Thoreau, Landy and Freyer attempted, you are on a lonely quest of self discovery, abandoning the security of home.

Real Kitsch

Instead of abandoning the security of home *Home-Maker* instead on the cluttered, lived in microcosm of the home. The objects and stories depicted do however, hold the dreams of escape as described above. Aiko-san's daily ritual of photographing the sky from her apartment, for example, is a gesture of connecting to a place beyond the everyday. Contemporary homes have come to represent a compromise between comfort and escapism as the ideals of modernist architects to create homes that people cannot personalise have proved futile.

Artists have explored the ways in which the clutter of everyday life jars with modernist plans for living. In **Villa Savoye** (1997) by Nathan Coley, a female narrator describes Le Corbusier's **Machine for living** over a slide show of a detached suburban British home. There is a stark contrast between talk of minimalist interiors, straight lines and images of fluffy bathroom carpets and flowery wall paper. Kitsch always comes back to haunt the modernist dream.

In 1993, artist Renée Green attempted to live in a semi-deserted housing project designed by Le Corbusier as one of his **Unité Habitations**. She described it as 'a compartmentalised life, each part with its purpose ... there was no room for idleness here'. (**Scenes from a group show: Project Unité, in Site-Specificity: The Ethnographic Turn**, edited by Alex Coles, 2002, p.130) *Home-Maker* relishes that idleness and kitsch in the contemporary home. These portraits highlight the environments of elderly housebound people in a way *Hello* magazine portrays the rich and famous. Nicholas Barker and Martin Parr did however portray people in their homes, *Hello*-style, for their 1992 BBC documentary, **Signs of the Times**. The programme acted as a window into the strange world of individual taste in the home. Val Williams describes the series: 'What Parr and Barker chronicled was what happens when design becomes transmuted into popular taste. They reported on the death throes of the ruched venetian blind, the mug tree, the dried flower and the pine kitchen. Barker chose people for his films that, try as you might, you could not help but laugh at, even if you felt a bit ashamed when you did so ...' (**Martin Parr** by Val Williams, 2002, p.212)

Reclaiming the domestic

Parallel to the dominant modernist ideologies in art and architecture in the 20th Century, there has been an important shift in art practice

that aims to reclaim the domestic and the everyday in art, significantly through feminist theory and the development of a social art practice. Martha Rosler in her 1975 performed **Semiotics of the Kitchen** The performance is set in Rosler's kitchen where she gives an A-Z run through of kitchen utensils, picking them up, slicing the air to outline the letter it begins with and shouting its name. While Rosler is reclaiming the domestic as an active, feminist space, in the UK, Steven Willats had been investigating the housing estates of north England in his project **Man from the Twenty First Century** (1969/70). Incidentally, Willats developed this project in a part of Nottingham where Jeanie lived for three years as a student. The project investigated the individually constructed signs and symbols present on the facades and visible on the window sills of two different areas of the city to see how they contribute to people's perceptions of the communities living there. In a similar way to Rosler and Willats, Jeanie is activating the domestic space while looking into other people's homes in order to understand how people live. It is a process that both revels in voyeuristic pleasure and documents a sociological experiment.

Anne Douglas and Heather Delday in their essay, discuss the home as a metaphor for the everyday and process based, collaborative or participatory practice. *Home-Maker* enjoys a reliance on both

dialogical and representational forms of production. The authorship of the piece is confused as Jeanie directs and the protagonists speak. The relationship between the host and the visitor is crucial. While the trust grows between Jeanie and her hosts, there is still the factor that the room is like a set, designed by both the host before Jeanie's arrival (the host tidies up before the visitor arrives and the ornaments are 'on show' and meant to be seen), and by Jeanie through her direction of the film. Perhaps Jeanie shares some of Renée Green's motivations for trying to live in *Unité*:

'She didn't think she would change the lives of the inhabitants during her short stay, nor did she imagine she could document their existence in anything more than a journalistic way. She'd already attempted to do social-service related work in her own metropolis and realised how much time and devotion are necessary to make any meaningful connections, and even then the effects can be other than hoped for, especially if one's hopes are projected onto others, rather than created through a mutually ignited dialogue.' (Scenes from a group show: *Project Unité*, in *Site-Specificity: The Ethnographic Turn*)

In *Home-Maker*, Jeanie does not project her hopes onto her hosts, nor is there a mutually ignited dialogue, although dialogue is crucial to the development of the project and the trust between them. The

Image: *Signs of the Times* ©Martin Parr, Magnum Photos, 1992



"When I looked at the wallpaper and the wallpaper looked at me we instantly fell in love"

relationship between Jeanie and the host remains paramount to the success of the project.

It is significant that, through the process of making *Home-Maker* Jeanie has undergone a shift in her practice. While she has practised as an artist on participatory projects before, she wanted to move beyond this approach and retain an element of autonomy while shifting perceptions of an artist who works with people. The expectation of the artist to heal social problems reflects current cultural policy in the UK which proposes art can be good for you. Artists are employed as agents for change in areas of social deprivation to empower a disenfranchised community. In *Home-Maker*, Jeanie is reclaiming her rightful position as a visitor without pretending to be a voice-giver. Colin Painter expresses this dynamic between the invited guest and the host in his description of the research phase of *At Home with Art* in which he invited nine sculptors to make an object for the home for mass production to be sold in Homebase:

'We all think we know what homes are like – we live in one, grew up in one – but it is illuminating to enter a strange home with a specific purpose of observing the visual surroundings, to talk to the householders about the things around them, how they came to be

there, what they're doing.' (Colin Painter, *At Home with Art*, 2002, p.8)

Domesticity is not lived in but staged. Just as in reality TV programmes such as *Big Brother* and *Wife Swap*, the camera affects people's modes of behaviour. It is exactly this intervention which creates the ambiguous place we call home. *Home-Maker* is not attempting to present an ideal, sublime state, it relishes in the chaos and mundanity of home. As in the portraits by Martin Parr and Nicholas Barker for *Signs of the Times*, by inviting in a stranger, you present a picture of who you are by the images on your wall, the ornaments on the mantelpiece and the books on your shelves. Our relationship to home is like an on-going conversation with the self. *Home-Maker* extends that conversation into other people's homes, telling us as much about us as guests as it does about the hosts we visit through the camera lens and click of the mouse.



Big Brother Bedsit, 2004. (left) *Ivana Trump* at home, 2003. (right)