

**Bristol, Leeds and Norwich, and online**

Exhibition: 24 November 2021

## **Unreal Estates**

*Online exhibition with real-life counterpart taking place next year*

Over the last year, artists and writers have been looking at three British cities through a magnifying glass – or rather through a property portal.

In this project part-funded by the Arts Council, 10 artists have each been paired with a writer and invited to make new works about a home or property on the market in their local area.

In the online exhibition presented in the guise of an estate agency website, viewers can browse these properties imagined through artists' and writers' eyes.

Focussing in on **NORWICH**, **BRISTOL** and **LEEDS**, these are the latest editions of a project that looks at property as a space of personal rather than of monetary value. Documenting Britain's changing attitudes to house and home, it has become especially relevant over the last two years when collectively millions of lockdown hours have led us to re-evaluate our feelings about the places we inhabit.

Ghosts of past and future haunt properties in **Norwich**, where we discover a vast yet claustrophobic country pile, a decaying church whose roof is opening up to the elements, and a 1970's terraced house's garden outgrowing its declining inhabitants.

The **Leeds** edition takes a more personal look at the aesthetics of the built environment. Suburban streets succumbing to weeds, subjective experiences of modernist estates, and a terraced house in desperate need of TLC, are places that feature.

In **Bristol**, memories of places play an outsize part in each of the collaborations. A freshly-renovated houseboat with a long, deep memory of harder times, a fine Georgian terraced house with a dark past, a Grade II Listed farm building whose age is evident in its crumbling beams, and a seemingly-ordinary maisonette with a chequered racial history, are properties that feature.

Next year, the exhibition of the artworks will be presented in an estate agency in each of the cities. *Sowerby's* in Norwich, *Ocean* in Bristol and *Linley & Simpson* in Leeds have each signed up to host the exhibitions.

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### **Artists and writers**

#### **NORWICH**

**Artists: Ingrida Bagdonaité, Anna Brass, Anna Townley**

**Writers: Linden Hibbert, Kathryn Simmonds, Ellison Skinner**

**Anna Brass**, an artist based at Outpost Studios, and UEA graduate (MA Prose Fiction) **Linden Hibbert**, were fascinated by the 18th century church on Princes Street, NR3. The building is on the market because the congregation cannot afford to fix the rusting nails holding the roof tiles on, the pair commenting, *“something as seemingly mundane as a nail undoing the two-century-old link between the congregation and the church moved us both”*. Their beguiling works for Unreal Estates explore this notion of the church as a box being opened to the elements, and how the sacred architecture of earlier generations recalls this link to the natural world.

Artist **Ingrida Bagdonaitė** moved to East Anglia from her native Lithuania, fell in love and never looked back. Or rather, she has been constantly looking back as her work is imbued with questions of ‘Where is home?’. Ingrida has been working with emerging horror writer **Ellison Skinner**, who recently graduated the MA in Creative Writing at UEA. Ingrida commented on the process: *“It was fascinating how the same visual material inspired both of us. But the writing that Ellison shared with me gave the soul to the house, a story, a feeling...our work carries more than visuals of the house, it talks about modern fears, abandonment, expectations and struggle, entrapment and loneliness.”*

Until recently, artist **Anna Townley** was a long-time resident of Norwich, but recently moved herself and her family to Portugal where her 3 children are now learning the language. Taking the idea of ‘remote working’ to extremes through her practice as a spiritual medium, as part of Unreal Estates she has attempted to contact poet **Kathryn Simmonds**’ recently deceased neighbour. Kathryn, a poet who won the Forward Best First Collection Award with her collection *Sunday at the Skin Laundrette*, has been ruminating on this change of hands that happens with every house move, reflecting that *“There’s always an onward chain. Our desire for the solidity of brick walls disguises the metaphysical questions of life, and the unsettling possibility that we’re only ever renting.”*

## BRISTOL

Artists: **Steve Burden; Merny; Stacey Pamplin; Ruth Wallace**  
Writers: **Georgie Bailey; Miles Chambers; KM Elkes; Rebecca Kosick**

Painter **Steve Burden** and playwright and poet **Georgie Bailey** draw on their working class roots in an exploration of a historic barge at Bristol’s City Docks. Delving into the barge’s history, they found that it was originally from the Netherlands and for the transportation of gypsum. In his five-part piece *The Waters of Brygstown*, Bailey has produced a striking and plaintive narrative poem dedicated to the ebb and flow of Bristol’s maritime history, which is more than matched by Burden’s swirling, moody evocations of a dank and turbulent passage. Burden describes their collaboration: *“From the minute we stepped foot on the barge you could feel the history seeping out of it... George’s text is all about memory – I wanted to take it back via paint to what it used to be - back to the future via whirlpools of paint.”*

Bristol’s first poet laureate **Miles Chambers** has contributed a new work about the *Black & White* cafe on Grosvenor Road, St Pauls. A focus of racial conflict in the early 1980s, the building has since been demolished, but is revived through Chambers’ lyrical take

commemorating an infamous site with both ambivalence and respect. Up-and-coming artist **Merny** (James Mernaugh), whose public works can be seen on an increasing number of Bristol murals, contributes with his trademark vibrant watercolour paintings that bring the controversial scenes to life. The focus for their collaboration lay in *“the different events which can take place on one spot over many years and the potential energy or influence, which can be left behind”*.

Artist **Stacey Pamplin** was astonished to find a Grade II Listed farm building in Hanham for sale, so old that it had never been registered on the Land Registry. She immediately set about physically documenting it, pressing wet clay to collect *“imprints of Bristol black rock, slate, abandoned shards of pottery and stone”*. American **Rebecca Kosick**, an academic who co-directs the Bristol Poetry Institute at University of Bristol, has cleverly mirrored Pamplin’s practice by selectively erasing words from the Listed Building’s planning application documents, to create three ingenious new poems that re-engineer the precise language of technical reports into forms more expressive and abstract.

Flash fiction specialist **KM Elkes** and master draughtswoman **Ruth Wallace** have taken as inspiration a house featured on historian David Olusoga’s *A House In Time*. The house on Guinea Street, BS1 was built on the proceeds of the slave trade, a fact that Elkes’ fictional estate agent is reluctant to discuss. Wallace’s haunting new drawings speak of the presences brooding beneath the building’s surfaces and within its nooks and crannies. Elkes comments, *“Do past human dramas leave indelible stains? Is a home furnished as much with memories and forgettings, as it is with sofas and tables and beds? What does the term property mean, when a house is built, like many in Bristol, on the profits of slavery?”*

## LEEDS

Artists: **Richard Baker; Alice Chandler; Rosie Vohra**  
Writers: **Julia Deakin; Wes Foster; Jonathan Orlek**

Multi-disciplinary artist **Alice Chandler**’s and writer-photographer **Wes Foster**’s conversations took them on long walks through Leeds’ terraced edgelands, where disintegrating red brick meets scrubby green overgrowth. *Patchwork Paint Work* is a psychogeographic trek through Leeds’ suburbs, where the artifice of human-crafted structures barely resists their dissolution into wilderness, and where visual experiences translate into a collage of feelings and sensations.

They comment, *“Personal research imagery, the mythology of weeds, and architectural floor-plan and city-mapping diagrams...create an abstract record that maps corners, spatial distances, and the memories of the area we both live in...Patchwork Paint Work is an exercise in looking at the overlooked.”*

When poet **Julia Deakin** visited artist **Rosie Vohra** at her recently purchased home, memories of her own rehabilitation of a similarly decrepid terraced house came rushing back. *“When first married,”* remembers Julia, *“we too took on a near-derelict Leeds terrace, sulking like a bad tooth between its neighbours. We too lived for years without heating, a kitchen, doors, banisters or fireplaces: you name it, we lacked it. Love me, says the house, batting its rotting windows at you and flashing its dodgy electrics. And you do. You take it under your wing and one day you realise it has taken you under its.”*

Painter **Richard Baker** is passionate about Modernist design; architect **Jonathan Orlek** is keen to poke holes in it. This was the starting point for their diaristic collaboration, taking in places that Baker has lived in Leeds and dreams of living.

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Alongside the individual commissioning of new writing and artworks, the project as a whole critiques the homogenisation of interiors – a concept described by writers such as Kyle Chayka in his description of ‘Airspace’, for example. Gathered as a collection, the works are a subtle commentary on the state of the property market and the trend of property as investment, rather than a place where lives are lived.

The organiser is architecturally-trained curator Amanda Lwin, who comments:  
*These evocative works bring together a few of the visions and memories of British cities beneath the bricks and mortar, clay and cobbles; past the standardised visions of domestic utopia we see in advertising and on TV. I’m delighted to present these new works by some of the most exciting artists and writers working in the UK today.*

– Ends –

**Editor’s notes:**

Online exhibition launches 24 November 2021

The works will be published on Instagram (@unrealestateagent) and Twitter (@unreal\_estates) but for the full experience visit: <http://unreal-estates.org/>

The physical exhibition will take place in 2022 at: Sowerbys, Queen St Norwich; Ocean Estate Agents, Whiteladies Road Bristol; Linley & Simpson, Dock St Leeds; subject to when business feel ready to open their doors to the general public again.

The first edition took place in 2018 in Hackney, London, and future plans are to visit every major city in the UK.

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