

# Zine Verschenken

#20 | march 2024 | a room of one's own



# Editorial

In a busy city like Berlin, we are often overlapping each other without awareness. Our trains are infrequent enough that we need to squish in against others rather than wait for the next one. The supermarket queues are so long they block the aisles for those still shopping. And rarely do I find myself completely alone anywhere. This was not the case in Berlin 10 years ago. I never craved for that extra inch to put an invisible layer between me and the next person on my travel to work, never silently begged the staff stacking tomatoes to open the second cash register and I did not feel observed in every moment of my day. Our theme this month is a room of one's own. And to me this means space.

A room is subjective, and especially in this ever-growing city, not many of us have the luxury of an additional room just for our enjoyment. Every space within our spaces is occupied by function. So what does that leave us with? Where do we occupy a private space for ourselves? And if we are unable to find that, does it have an effect on us?

These are simply the thoughts I find myself pondering and putting to paper when I consider this topic and I am curious to find out where our artists take the theme this time.

## Nomadic displacement

The world as we know it seems to grow larger. Never before have all corners of our planet been so accessible. There are daily flights, trains and buses to take us to any region we can imagine. In my life, I have never uttered the words, I cannot find a way to get there.

In contrast, for many, the world seems to be getting smaller. Communities of people are being pushed from their homes for reasons such as gentrification, inflation, war, racism and even genocide.

As our world pushes the limits of these two extremes, it is interesting to find that there are some similarities between the two. After all, we are all human and the one thing that truly binds us to each other are our basic necessities.

Aside from physical sustenance, human needs extend to clothing and shelter. But looking closer into how us humans view a shelter, we can see that no matter what the exterior is, each one is personalised to the owner's taste.

From apartments and houses, to tents, cars, tunnels, caves or any other shelter, the longer one stays in this space, the more they tend to make it their own. Nick-nacks, artwork, fixed areas for this or that. It is human nature to make their space their own.

On a recent trip to Portugal, I came across a walkway through a train station that had been turned into a temporary home. Metre-wide edges along a tunnel on both sides provided shelter for what looked like upwards of 50 people. Mattresses and bedding were placed one after the other. As I walked by I saw the way each space had its own personal style. Some had photos around, others prayer beads and some even had a small cooking area. Somewhere on my journey to the bus station, I had entered a home. For however long each individual needed this space as theirs, each person had personalised a small piece of it for themselves.

On the other side of the spectrum in Portugal, exists the vast expat community. Now bigger than ever, the pandemic has given many the choice of working remotely and the ability to drift from place to place with little more than a laptop and the dream of living nomadically.

As someone who had given up an apartment (by choice) and taken to living on the road for two years, I too became a part of this community and after experiencing this chosen lifestyle, I have begun to hear the calling for a space of my own once again. This realisation came as a surprise to me, since, for years I had dreamed of this nomadic existence. I had always felt that I was performing at my best through travel and applying critical thinking to my day to day life.

The beginning did feel exactly like what I was chasing and I felt myself grow with each challenge. This did not last because the constant change in environment did not allow me to keep up with the everyday parts of life. Only a select few belongings could be taken on the road, paperwork would be stacking up back at home which could

not be seen to until I returned and cooking a simple yet favoured dish would have to be put on hold until I would be in a place where I would have the resources. I began to crave some of the mundane things I had left behind.

This unsettled feeling started to grow stronger, it grew into a sense of not belonging which started to feel something like displacement. I turned to online chats and forums to see if others had experienced similar feelings. As it turned out, it seemed that many had begun to feel the same. What started out as a luxury, the ability to work remotely and travel extensively to escape the monotony of everyday life had become its own burden. Comments and discussions all over the world were discussing things like travel burnout and questions were asked where these modern day nomadic travellers could settle down with all their required needs to be met.

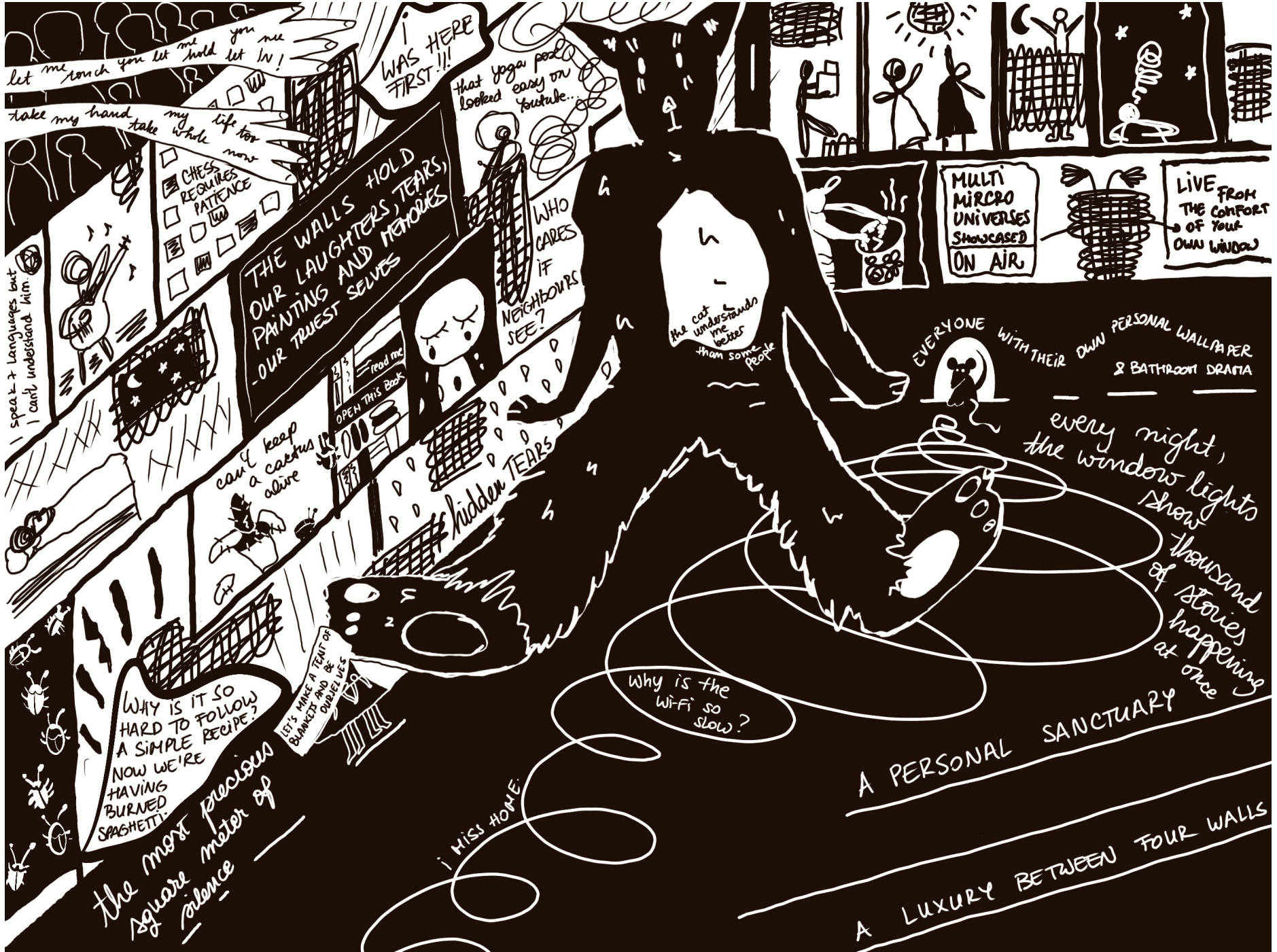
These needs were much more extensive than the basics mentioned earlier. There were requests for towns with enough excitement, though not too busy, with a beach or water, digital nomads but not tourists, English-speaking, specific temperatures, child-friendly, less children, the lists were extensive.

Humans are complex creatures, who are constantly evolving. But is there a way we can control the direction of our evolution? From a first world perspective, the simplicity of our basic needs never seems to be enough while those who were displaced by force rather than choice are struggling to even cover those essentials.

I cannot compare the two as I have not lived through any of the struggles that displaced people have experienced. I can only observe both a chosen nomadic lifestyle and one of survival from both extremes and recognise the human needs from both.

No matter where we find ourselves in life, the four essentials; food, water, clothing and shelter are our most primal needs. Through my own short nomadic journey, I discovered just how privileged I am to have access to them. But this experience also led to my discovery that there is one more necessity that humans require. I saw it in that train station in Portugal and it was what I had become to crave during my time as a nomad. Community.

Though my love of adventure and the chance for new experiences and challenges will still be there, I have now taken to living in a community. The sense of belonging has been such a welcome change, one that I had never thought I would have missed. It is one that no one should ever need for. A basic essential for human life and I hope that those suffering with displacement will find their community again.





MY ROOM: OASIS OF CALM AND COLLECTED 'TREASURES'

AN ARMCHAIR IN THE CORNER, WAITING JUST FOR ME IN A POOL OF LIGHT UNDER THE STANDARD LAMP, COVERED WITH SOFT FURS AND CUSHIONS. AN OASIS OF CALM BESIDE THE CARVED MANTELPiece, ITS SURFACE BRISTLING WITH CANDLESTICKS AND TAPERS, LONG AND SHORT, PERFUMED AND PLAIN - FRAMED BY A MYSTERIOUS, MOTTLED MIRROR TO REFLECT THEIR FLICKERING LIGHT. A CHIMING CLOCK TO PUNCTUATE THE SMALL HOURS, ASSORTED SCULPTURES, MADE AND FOUND. ON THE FLOOR, A HUGE JAR OF SPRING BLOSSOM, AUTUMNAL TWIGS OR BERRIED HOLLY AND FIR - DEPENDING ON THE SEASON - NEXT TO THE OPEN FIREPLACE AND A RUG FOR MY DOG (YET TO MATERIALISE!), AND WICKER BASKETS OF PINE CONES AND LOGS. A LARGE TABLE WITH ANGLEPOISE LAMP AND SWIVEL CHAIR, OVERLOOKING MY CHERRY TREE IN FULL BLOOM. OVERHEAD A NOTICEBOARD PINNED WITH PHOTOS, POSTCARDS, POETRY AND BITS OF THIS AND THAT, COLLECTED OR RECEIVED. OPPOSITE, A THROW-STREWN SOFA FOR LOUNGING, SLEEPING AND LISTENING TO MY JAZZ COLLECTION. WITHIN ARM'S REACH, THE SPIROBOUND NOTEBOOK THAT NEVER LEAVES MY SIDE: AT THE READY FOR NIGHT TIME MUSINGS, DAYTIME MEMOS AND RANDOM JOTTINGS IN THE BATH OR ON PUBLIC TRANSPORT. ALL AROUND, LOW LIGHTS, FAIRYLIGHTS AND LAVA LAMPS - ATMOSPHERE IS EVERYTHING! SOMEWHERE, A TOWER OF PAINTED BOXES CONTAINING MEMORIES, SECRETS, LETTERS AND OTHER TREASURES TO SHARE AND REDISCOVER. PAINTINGS PROPPED UP ON SILLS AND BOOKCASES: ONES I'VE COLLAGED FROM INDIAN FABRICS OR NATURAL MATERIALS, GIFTS FROM ARTIST FRIENDS; IN SHORT, ANYTHING I LIKE THAT CAN HANG FROM A HOOK. IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROOM, A MOTHER-OF-PEARL COFFEE TABLE LAPEN WITH KNICK-KNACKS AND EXOTICA: A BOWL OF SEED PODS AND SHELLS FROM HOLIDAY BEACHES, FOSSIL FINDS AND PEBBLES TO SIFT, SORT AND SMOOTH IN IDLE MOMENTS; PAINTIES TO NIBBLE ON: NUTS, CHOCOLATES, DRIED FRUIT, A SNOW GLOBE TO SHAKE AND WONDER AT, A MUSICAL BOX TO WIND UP AND DISTRACT, MY BURGEONING COLLECTION OF CRYSTAL-GAZING PAPERWEIGHTS... A POT POURRI OF STAR ANISE, NUTMEG AND CLOVES TOASTING ON THE RADIATOR, FILLING THE AMBIENCE WITH EASTERN FRAGRANCE! AN UPRIGHT PIANO IS A VALUED COMPANION, SO I CAN TICKLE THE IVORIES WHENEVER THE MOOD TAKES ME. ABOVE MY HEAD, A FLOCK OF PAPER BIRDS. AND PILES AND PILES OF BOOKS: OLD WORN-OUT FAVOURITES, RANDOM SOURCES OF INSPIRATION FOR MY WRITINGS, CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOKS SO I CAN DREAM, NEW PAPERBACKS WAITING TANTALISINGLY IN THE WINGS FOR A FREE MOMENT AND A CUP OF COFFEE, OR MAYBE SOMETHING STRONGER...

KAREN (TEACHER, EDITOR)

PART STUDIO, PART LOUNGE AND BATHHOUSE

LIVING IN A SMALL FLAT FOR THE LAST 12 YEARS, IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE CREATING THE IDEAL ROOM. IT WOULD HAVE TO CONTAIN SO MANY DIFFERENT THINGS TO INSPIRE AND SUPPORT MY CREATIVE PRACTICE.

THE FIRST AND MOST IMPORTANT FEATURE WOULD BE A VERY LARGE WINDOW OPENING ONTO A TILED TERRACE, GIVING ME AN EXPANSIVE VIEW OF TREES OR MOUNTAINS, A BEAUTIFUL GREEKIAN COASTLINE OR A TROPICAL GARDEN WITH A WATER FEATURE. ANY OF THESE WOULD DO! THIS WINDOW WOULD AFFORD A HUGE AMOUNT OF NATURAL LIGHT FOR WORKING AND A VIEW PROVIDING ME WITH A CONSTANT SOURCE OF INSPIRATION. AN AIRY AMBIENCE WITH HIGH CEILINGS, CONTAINING A LARGE WORK TABLE AND A COMFORTABLE CHAIR. PART STUDIO, PART SITTING ROOM, FEATURING MOROCCAN ARCHITECTURE, FURNISHINGS AND LIGHTS AND AN UNLIMITED SUPPLY OF ART MATERIALS AND BOOKS. IT WOULD BE MY SAFE SPACE, QUIET, COMFORTABLE AND WELCOMING. FOR THE COLDER MONTHS THERE'D BE A WOOD BURNING STOVE AND A BEAUTIFUL ARABIC BATH. PART STUDIO, SITTING ROOM AND BATH HOUSE (!) WITH MUSIC PROVIDED BY A RECORD PLAYER AND A DIVERSE SELECTION OF VINYL, KEEPING THIS AN ANALOGUE SPACE WITH NO WI-FI OR LAPTOP!

KAREN (ARTIST)

A ROOM TO CREATE AND ENJOY

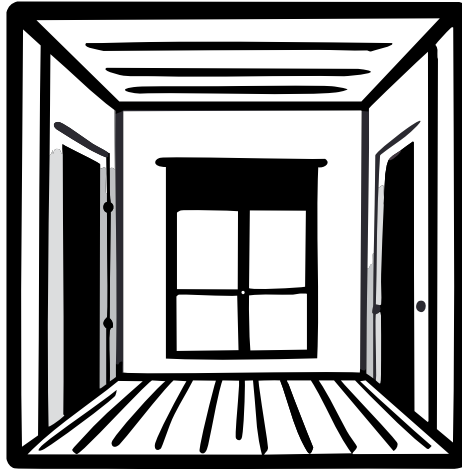
A ROOM WITH WHITE WALLS AND BIG WINDOWS SO NATURAL LIGHT CAN FILL UP THE SPACE. A ROOM WITH THE DOOR OPEN AT ALL TIMES SO IT'S AN INVITING SPACE, FULL OF TEXTURES AND VOLUMES: CARPETS, CUSHIONS AND COLOURFUL TEXTILES. A ROOM THAT TELLS A STORY: MY OWN AND THE ONES OF THOSE I LOVE, BUT THAT'S ALSO AN OPEN BOOK-CUM-BLANK CANVAS FOR OTHERS TO JOIN AND MAKE THEIR MARK. A ROOM WITH A BIG TABLE IN THE MIDDLE, AND A GARDEN VIEW THAT SMELLS DIFFERENTLY IN THE MORNING AND AFTERNOON, BASED ON THE FLOWERS AND PLANTS GROWING OUTSIDE. THE KITCHEN REFLECTS ME AND IS THE HEART OF MY HOME. AN OPEN SPACE WHERE CHEFS AND GUESTS FACE EACH OTHER (NO COOKING FACING THE WALL) SO IT BECOMES A COLLABORATIVE EXPERIENCE. A ROOM WITH A LIBRARY OF PRESERVES, FERMENTS, SPICES, HERBS, TEAS, BOOKS AND UTENSILS, DRINKS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD. TABLEWARE AND GLASSWARE FOR EVERY OCCASION: SPECIAL AND ORDINARY. A ROOM WHERE I CAN PLAY ALONE AND WITH OTHER PEOPLE. A ROOM TO CREATE AND ENJOY.

MIRIAM (CONTENT CREATOR)

A PLACE TO BE

A MOVEABLE FEAST - A SPACE WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF CHANGE AND FLUX, ELEMENTS AND JUXTAPOSITIONS TO BE ALTERED AT MY WHIM. OR NOT. A ROOM WITH ENOUGH LIGHT, IDEALLY WESTERLY LIGHT, IDEALLY REFLECTED OVER WATER, IDEALLY OVER THE SEA, SO THE LIGHT IS ALWAYS SHIFTING. A ROOM WITH FRENCH WINDOWS LOOKING OVER A GARDEN - TO NOTICE THE CHANGES IN THE VIEW OUT AND THE WAY THE LIGHT PLAYS AND MOVES AROUND THE INTERNAL SPACE, TOUCHING THE ELEMENTS OF THE ROOM. A ROOM WHICH HAS SILENCE AT ITS HEART. A ROOM TO WELCOME OTHERS BUT TO BE COMFORTABLE ALONE. A ROOM WHICH BLURS THE BARRIER BETWEEN EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL, BETWEEN 'NATURE' AND 'ART'. A ROOM WITH AMBIGUOUS FUNCTIONALITY - MOST OBVIOUSLY A BED THAT IS A SOFA, A PLACE TO REST SUPINE AT ANY TIME, NOT ONLY IN THE DARKNESS. A ROOM WITH BOOKS AND FOUND OBJECTS AND THINGS OF BEAUTY. THEIR VALUE BEING THEIR ABILITY TO FREIGHT MEMORY AND THE SHIFTING SIGNIFICANCE OF BEING ALIVE IN THIS WORLD, NOT ANY MONETARY VALUE IN TERMS OF ECONOMIC SCARCITY. A ROOM WITH SOOTHING JUXTAPOSITIONS, BUT ALSO CONFRONTING JUXTAPOSITIONS THAT CATCH THE EYE AND THE HEART. A ROOM THAT ALLOWS YOU TO WEAVE THREADS OF THOUGHT AND REFLECTION BACK THROUGH IT. ROOM/WOMB. A ROOM WITH A THRESHOLD TO STEP OVER AND BEYOND. A ROOM WITH THE BREEZE BLOWING THROUGH AND FRESH, CLEAN AIR. OPTIMALLY WITH A FIREPLACE AND THE POSSIBILITY OF A FIRE WHEN IT IS COLD. A ROOM WITH PLENTY OF HEADROOM, TO ALLOW PLENTY OF HEAD ROOM AND HEART ROOM. A PLACE TO BE. ME.

CAROLIN (PRIEST)



A SMALL, SERENE SPACE

OPEN AN OLD DOOR TO A HIGH, LIGHT AND AIRY SPACE, WITH FRENCH DOORS THAT GIVE ONTO A GARDEN FILLED WITH A TUMBLE OF FLOWERS AND FOLIAGE. TO ONE SIDE, AN AREA FOR FOOD PREPARATION AND COOKING WITH A BIG STOVE AND RUSTIC SPANISH-STYLE TILES ALONG THE WALL. SHELVES DISPLAYING WHITE CHINA PLATES AND BOWLS, MUGS, AND A MIXTURE OF GLASSES. OLD JUGS FILLED WITH SPOONS AND IMPLEMENTS AND BOTTLES OF OILS NEAR THE COOKER.

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROOM, A LARGE, OLD WOODEN TABLE FOR EATING, TALKING AND WORKING ON. VASES OF FLOWERS, BOWLS OF FRUIT AND VEGETABLES AND PILES OF COOKERY BOOKS. VARIOUS CHAIRS WITH CUSHIONS MADE FROM INDIAN FABRICS ARE AROUND THE TABLE.

TO THE RIGHT, A PAIR OF VELVET SOFAS IN BRIGHT PINK AND ORANGE, PILED WITH COLOURFUL CUSHIONS AND THROWS. THERE ARE FLOOR-TO-CEILING BOOKSHELVES ALONG ONE WALL AND PAINTINGS, PHOTOS AND PRINTS COVER THE LAST WALL: SOME OF THE FAMILY, SOME FROM MY TRAVELS, OTHERS JUST ACQUIRED.

LASTLY, A SMALL DESK AT THE WINDOW LOOKING OUT AT THE TREES AND FLOWERS, WITH SKETCHBOOKS, PAINTS, BRUSHES - A SMALL SERENE SPACE TO WORK AT.

MIRANDA (TEXTILE DESIGNER)

A CREATIVE SPACE FOR HOBBY STATIONS

'A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN' - FOR ME, WOULD BE A CREATIVE SPACE TO ACCOMMODATE MY MANY HOBBIES! IDEALLY, IT WOULD HAVE A COMFY CHAIR TO CURL UP AND READ IN, OR A WINDOW SEAT WITH BUILT-IN BOOKCASES ON EITHER SIDE. EITHER WAY, THERE'D BE PLENTY OF SHELVES TO DISPLAY THINGS OF BEAUTY. A CD PLAYER GOES WITHOUT SAYING, ALSO A COFFEE TABLE AND BRIGHT RUG. MY OWN WALLHANGINGS OR PAINTINGS TO INSPIRE. FAMILY PHOTOS, FLOWERS, MY BELOVED ANTIQUE DESK AND GRANDMA'S OLD CHAIR!

THERE WOULD BE AN ART TABLE, AN EASEL AND STORAGE FOR PAINTS AND BRUSHES WITHIN EASY REACH OF A SINK SET ON WIPEABLE FLOORING. A DESIGN WALL WOULD BE USEFUL, WITH A NOTICEBOARD AND PEG TO HANG AN APRON. THEN A SEWING STATION, PURPOSE-MADE WITH CUTTING AREA, IRONING BOARD, SHELVING FOR FABRICS AND SEWING MACHINES. PLUS A PEACEFUL NOOK FOR BIBLE JOURNALING.

TO BE SURROUNDED BY INSPIRATIONAL OBJECTS IS IMPORTANT TO ME, AS IS TASK LIGHTING AND SOFTER, RELAXATION LIGHTING.

FINALLY, A CLOCK AND TIMER SO I DON'T LOSE TRACK OF THE TIME!

ROSIE (ARTS AND CRAFTS ENTHUSIAST)

## The Writer's Desk

It was the novelist Virginia Woolf who coined the phrase 'A Room of One's Own', and with it her view that women should be of independent means to write 'good fiction'; this, she pointed out, would ensure freedom to muse and to write as they chose. In her opinion, creative genius hinged on intellectual freedom, and that was a luxury few could afford.

Woolf was as much her own person as was possible in her day. Essentially a privileged woman with a bob or two, her lifestyle was neither frivolous nor idle. She and her husband set up and ran the Hogarth Press, which hand printed books. This freed her up from the 'drudgery' and 'sweat' of being at the whim and fancy of publishers, but she still had to stick to deadlines. She knew only too well what side her bread was buttered on.

Woolf's writing routine was disciplined and her timetable, carefully structured and pigeonholed. Yet the room she wrote in was the exact opposite: messy in the extreme, littered with letters, manuscripts, ink bottles and 'filth packets': broken pen nibs, rusty paperclips, bits of string. It would take her all of 10 minutes to find a pen!

Her aristocratic friend and lover, Vita Sackville-West, was also a writer with private means. Her creative space was the top of a rickety tower in the garden, where no one else dared to tread. On her writing desk she kept a stone from Persepolis, a pair of crystal rabbits, Pepita's dancing slipper, arts and crafts furniture and exotic embroideries. Filled with romantic relics, her 'room of one's own' was a shrine to her complicated, colourful life.

Writer-illustrator Beatrix Potter, required a stage and a setting in order to pen her little water colour storybooks. Props and tangible visuals. Hence her writer's home was full of little animals brought in from the wild, living as pets in her room - a pair of lolling rabbits, a prickly hedgehog, a froglet, a velvet-skinned mole, a harvest mouse - rather than written notes. Not for her the blank canvas. Bare walls would only have been a distraction - what on earth to put there, etc. So she brought the outside in. Potter's fame in her own lifetime allowed her to become a wealthy landowner in her own right, enabling her to break free from Victorian conventions.

The Brontë sisters wrote their literary masterpieces in the parlour of Haworth Parsonage, 'exquisite in its cleanliness and neatness.' In contrast to the bleak cold colours of the Yorkshire moors outside, 'the crimson room looked the perfection of warmth, snugness and comfort' wrote their fellow novelist Elizabeth Gaskell. Certainly, the Brontë's world was a lonely, sheltered one, at times even claustrophobic, but their creativity was unfettered and wild.

Jane Austen, much admired by Woolf, had no room of her own. She sat at a small and spartan desk in a very public drawing room and had to hide her work from prying eyes under blotting paper. Yet the drawing room was where she made her

razor-sharp observations and exercised her formidable wit. She may not have had her own room, but she did have her own mind. She didn't need money as she was able to set her mind free from the social restrictions of her environment.

And that was probably what Virginia Woolf meant... that in the rooms of our own, we as writers should look for our own place, our own reality. Only then, from our writing desks under the window, will we see the open sky.

# Zine Verschenken

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**Artists** Bianca Cheung  
Erin Johnson  
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NINANIÑA

Do you want to contribute to the zine?  
Have any questions?  
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