

## Interiors

Eloise Calandre, Joan Cameron-Smith, Jayne Dyer, Anna Gilby, Bonnie Lane, Clare Rae

Curated by Simon Gregg

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*To live is to leave traces. In the interior these are emphasized. An abundance of covers and protectors, liners and cases is devised, on which the traces of objects of everyday use are imprinted. The traces of the occupant also leave their impression on the interior.*

— Walter Benjamin, 1935

*We've been in here too long. I feel unusual.*

— *Withnail & I*, 1987

In the British cult film *Withnail & I*, the two protagonists embark upon a holiday in the countryside to escape the intense cold and squalor of their small London apartment. In the film the interior becomes an oppressive space, leading to irritation, physical and psychological sickness, and a sense of feeling 'unusual'.

The ways in which we are moulded by our interiors cannot be underestimated, nor can their effects, veering from oppression to protection. As Benjamin observes, an inhabitant of an interior will leave residual traces, but the obverse is also true: the interior leaves an indelible stain upon our own being. Gaston Bachelard charted the anthropological imprint of the domestic space upon the developing psyche in his defining *Poetics of Space* (1958), and indeed, the rooms in which we dwell in our early years affect a mysterious and enduring influence upon our lives.

There are two notional divisions of interiority to be made here: the tangible interior of physical space and the unfathomable interior of the psyche. While the first is plaintively empirical and the second unchartable, they are both essentially contained and domesticated. Nevertheless, in this division we are reminded of Immanuel Kant's dialectic of the sublime as either 'mathematical' (such as the stars, the mountains, and the infinite) or 'dynamic' (which is governed by the emotions, terror and awe). While the domestic and the sublime are ideological polarities, each exerts a powerful influence over us. Of 'interiors' we think of the womb, of places of protection, of shelter. But the physical and the psychological interiors are interchangeable. One informs the other in a constant slippage of internal states.

Jean-Paul Sartre opens *Being and Nothingness* (1943) by declaring the duality between interior and exterior to be insolvent. 'There is no longer an exterior for the existent', he writes, 'if one means by that a superficial covering which hides from sight the true nature of the object'. Sartre declared that, theoretically, there were no walls behind which we may hide; all is transparent and discernable to others. In spite

of this – or perhaps in defiance of it – the phenomenon of interiority is flourishing as we drift deeper into the twenty-first century. Beyond the spatial interior we now have a digital interior in which to immerse. The internet has become an infinite labyrinth of cavities and nooks in which the contemporary 'existent' may dwell.

The polarities that divide interiors and exteriors are becoming more complex by the day. The relationship between inner and outer spaces, and physical and psychological interiors is a finely woven knot, whose threads the artists in the present project seek to untangle. In doing so they reveal the secret lives of everyday things, and the interiority of unseen spaces we routinely inhabit – or which inhabit us. These six artists do not seek to fully illuminate our interiors. Instead, they cast doubt and rupture logic. They guide us into unknown spaces and places we know all too well, to facilitate a dialogue between oppositional forces – the inside and the outside.

Currently based in Beijing, **Jayne Dyer** presents a series of reconstructed stories using the collaged remnants of the pages of books. Frequently using text in her practice, Dyer here again experiments with the idea of turning an objective material form, like the paper and ink of simple faded novel, into the expression of a subjective, psychological state. Words and phrases weave into one another to make subtle statements that allude to the vulnerability of communication and the impossibility of ever capturing it – all of which is spoken in a voice that belongs neither to the novel nor the artist.

British artist **Eloise Calandre** speculates on a sublimity resident within the domestic. Her liminal video works project an invisible void into the space. Grappling with matter, they render material what is palpably immaterial and transparent. While various details emerge from her blanket darkness, it is the void that dominates and ignites our imagination with fear, possibility and wonder. Whatever we imagine is lurking within these stygian shadows is a product of our mind alone, but Calandre nurtures this descent into drama with ambiguous fragments; limbs, ligaments and spectral lights that protrude tentatively from a dark, concealing all else within an interior of unknowable depth.

Another darkness inhabits the work of **Joan Cameron-Smith**, but here, it is internalised within a space that we cannot access. In each image we are presented with a character who stares vacantly into space, lost in a thought that may be pleasurable or painful. We cannot know, for their faces are as vacant as their bodies; it is as if they have stopped dead, no longer present in the world. The internal has thwarted the external, and Sartre's duality reasserts itself. Enveloped in darkness the characters are further submerged within an interior world, and we are left to ponder the nature of their absence.

Where Cameron-Smith presents the lonely drama of the single figure, **Bonnie Lane** heightens the drama by removing the figure altogether. Previous works have speculated on the fission of relationships, and the unimpeachable barrier between two disjoined souls. Captive within their own bodies, they long for one another; an impossible union of mind over matter. In her new work the lovers' boat drifts aimlessly across a vacant lake. Within the interior of the boat, and the interior of the lake, we enter a twilight space of unfulfillable dreams. We may climb into the boat and imagine, briefly, that we are gliding across the water, but the lake is an illusion and reality crashes back down around us. The interior world of dreams and longing is disrupted by the encroachment of adulthood and disappointment. While the boat is a physical projection into the space, its contents are located somewhere else entirely.

**Anna Gilby** similarly projects into space with a delicate sculptural work that moves and sways with the contours of the interior. This gentle, enveloping object bespeaks a quiet architectural rigour, but emits a warmth and tactility that defrost any empirical sterility. Like a barometer of an experiential encounter with space, its ebb and flow is dictated by movements of air, and its form is predicated by our movements in relation to the walls, floor and ceiling. This vessel enacts an activation of space, by leading our eyes upward and through the negative space around, while harnessing a tension between surfaces. Gilby's flaccid structure is a tool for manipulating space, and their purpose is to register the interior boundaries. Contained, and domesticated within this space, Gilby's parachute-like works – fashioned from paper and ephemeral materials – become mediators of spatial sensation.

The playful exploration of space we see in Gilby's sculptural practice becomes a sequence of performative acts in **Clare Rae's** engaging photography. Here, we watch the artist as she variously negotiates and traverses domestic terrain. She radiates a fascination with contained domestic space that would be foreign to most of us, and she awakens our senses to the physical possibilities that exist. Like a child discovering a piece of furniture for the first time, and not quite sure what to do with it, Rae submits her surrounds to a curious sequence of delightfully probing inquisitions. She navigates the unexplored frontiers above cupboards, rides obsequious chairs and seemingly flirts with non-gravity, in a performance that realises the theatrical aspirations of the commonplace interior.

From the six vantage points posited by each artist we may encounter the interior from a range of alternate perspectives. They reveal that while architecture is a man-made construct, it is spaces that ultimately control us. And whether activity occurs within our home or within our mind, it is this irrevocable state of 'within' that guides our understanding of the outer world.

**Simon Gregg**

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