**Domestic Perceptions** Natasha Mayo: Artist, Writer, **Researcher** Cardiff School of Art and Design

According to Mircea Eliade the term ‘*home’* originally meant ‘the center of the world’ - not geographically but in an ontological sense.[[1]](#footnote-1) The home was considered as the *foundation* from which the world arose. Eliade recounts how, in traditional societies, the home was considered as being ‘*at the heart of the real*’, how everything that made sense of and gave security to the world was *real*; chaos existed and threatened stability but it only posed this threat because it was *unreal*.*[[2]](#footnote-2)*

To be without a home, at the center of the real, therefore, meant that one was not simply without a shelter, but was lost in *unreality* - to be without a home meant that everything was untethered, vulnerable and fragmented.

Whilst the meaning of the term may have changed over time it is curious to consider how often we spontaneously, instinctively seek to (re) establish a sense of ‘the real’ in our domestic lives and in more temporary dwellings. We seek to create a site from which we can, with security, survey and make sense of the chaos of our surroundings.

It is as if, throughout the course of our lives, we gradually compile essential, irreducible components of an idea of ‘home’ and assemble them almost as a sensory shelter within the bricks and mortar of our houses. From our choice of a cinnamon and lemon air freshener to the sounds, textures, colours and arrangement of furniture, we overlay olfactory, audio, tactile and visual properties that approximate that subjective feeling of being ‘at home’ in our surroundings.

The sensory elements of a home can be both permanent and temporary, from altering the architecture of a building to creating an atmosphere that inspires mood and prompts particular activities to take place:

*Say if I was going to clean this morning I will put them (oils or candles) on, even if, because I like the smell of it myself, its something different and I used to like the Shake-n-Vac but now I’ve got the other hoover that your not supposed to use Shake-n-Vac. So I’m not using that. And that you see made a nice smell on the carpets. So I will have to have something to replace that smell, you know what I’m saying? That’s me![[3]](#footnote-3)*

Perhaps our idea of home arises from an entwining of sensory values with feelings of security. And this relationship of course raises fascinating questions concerning the value or ability of a home to nurture, preserve, recuperate and transform an occupant. [[4]](#footnote-4)

**Interpretation** of an art object**:**

And so it could be said that the items that sit upon your mantle piece can never be simply ornamental and decorative, as contained within each addition and arrangement in your home is a sensory approximation of your identity. The traces of sensory encounters taken from experiences throughout your life settle for a moment within each choice you make, each purchase selected for its ability to enable you to (re) establish a sense of ‘the real’ in your home.

As you walk around the exhibition, allow yourself for a moment the time to consider the sensory data contained within each artwork and its approximation to your own sensory shelter. In what ways do their properties align with your own feelings of the ‘real’, as properties that evoke comfort or security, and which evoke the ‘unreal’, chaotic and threatening or more interesting still perhaps, where the boundaries between one and the other are breached or overlap.

1. Berger, J. The Meaning of Home taken from *’And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos’*, Bloomsbury Publishing PLC,

   1984 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Mircea Eliade [*The Sacred and the Profane*](http://www.csun.edu/~rcummings/sacred.html)*: The Nature of Religion*, Pub. Harcourt Australia, 1959 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. pink. S. *Home Truths: Gender, Domestic Objects and Everyday Life,* Berg 3PL; English Ed edition, 2004

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   [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-4)