

# HOME, SAFE HOME

Hope Collinson

Bringing four artists together to show books made through solitary artistic practice at home during the Covid -19 lockdowns, the CouCou Home Books exhibition demonstrates the resourcefulness of the artists in utilising the confined domestic space for creative production. The imposed restrictions meant that the artists shifted their focus into the safe home space around them, a forced introspection of the familiar followed, leading to inspiration and adaptation, as well as compromise.

Conversation with the artists, from the perspective of an art writer, reveals that preoccupation with 'home' became a common theme for all, as the constraints of the lockdowns affected almost every aspect of the creative process. Another important theme that emerged was the re-assessing and re-presenting of work from their professional archives in new ways.

Rhiannon Evans uses her books as a way to 'translate' previous works, linking to other projects she has participated in. She deconstructs the idea of the book, stripping it back to the bare form of the folio and through its presentation maintains the freedom to reorganise differing aspects of it, so bringing a transient structure to archived works.

Annie Rapstoff drew inspiration from the sounds of chairs and tables in her home, marking a transition from looking for inspiration from the outside to deep listening to the inner. Creating books offers her a way of manifesting her practice in tangible objects, as representations of her art finding new directions.

Clare Carswell felt a deeper involvement with her home environment, incorporating sunlight through windows and objects such as dinner plates, mops and bedding into her photographic works. She took the concept of the studio out into her garden and the surrounding nature to make performance works for camera that harnessed the elements of wind, water and ice. Her books act as a portal to online records of those unique and private performative events.

Peta Lloyd used objects from within her personal environment in the creation of her books, as she made use of scrap paper from her PhD, finished in the first lockdown, as a principal material. Although it is usual for her to repurpose inexpensive and everyday materials in her work, the pandemic has brought about a transition to working smaller, focusing on the repetitive action of folding, that takes time to complete. These actions do not need a large space or studio, just the kitchen table for getting lost in the practice itself.

A number of the artists drew attention to the welcome distraction of the time-consuming nature of creating the books. Art making and crafting at home can be a casual activity which does not require formality or intense concentration. It can be dipped in and out of, and smaller everyday pleasures can find themselves becoming part of the creative process.



## FURNITURE UNDERTONES

still from a handmade artist's book

Annie Rapstoff 2021



fragmented  
dynamic  
unbound  
archival  
folio  
series

Rhiannon Evans 2021

The pandemic has changed the way we perceive our home space as it has become a multi-purpose environment. For artists, the same is applicable to a studio space through its hasty and temporary relocation. This can both consciously and subconsciously infringe on privacy, as what may be a quiet studio space during the day needs to become a dining space in the evening. Lockdown has introduced the idea of the studio as an ever-changing space, that is flexible according to the needs of the artist and perhaps their cohabitants. It is clearer than ever that there is no 'right' way to practice art at home.

Despite the pandemic driving us physically apart, technology is bringing us closer together, and the importance of communication with others as part of the creative process has become pertinent for these artists throughout the solitary period of the lockdowns. Undeniably, lack of social interaction and physical sharing of spaces is one of the most noticeable impacts of the pandemic not just on artistic practice, but daily life in general. The regular online conversations between the artists provided a sense of community for them, creating a trusted space within which to share, discuss, and feedback on work. Brought together by the online CREiA course, this group of artists found focus and structure through their mutually supportive connection that has enabled growth in their work during the hardest of times, some of which is evidenced in the Home Books exhibition. As we configure our lives to be more compatible with technology, the virtual 'new normal' has allowed us to network with others, opening up the world by enabling global communities to form. This seems to be a new world where we are able to look outside of our usual networks and communities and extend connections further afield. All artists speak of the importance of such connection and the benefits of working with other artists to facilitate their creative process and provide a structure to their working week.

Shared project working towards deadlines invariably facilitates the processes of creating and completing work. At a time where artists are working at varying levels of 'observable' productivity, sharing practice with like-minded artists has motivated them while working through the constraints and challenges that lockdown presents. The dynamic conversations between the artists, at a time of great anxiety and isolation, is enabling new ways of working for all. The creation of these diverse artists' books asks what 'the book' might be and offers varied and individual propositions to us.

The isolating experience of lockdown has been personal to each individual, and its impact on artists has affected the creative process through the relocation of studio space to the domestic realm, increased reliance on new technologies to sustain networks and changes to shared practice. In a pre-pandemic world, the practice of retreat, of sabbatical, and its benefits of solitude for research were embraced as a means of enabling focus and reflection. Part of the meaning that we have attached to lockdown lies in the linguistic signifier, and it is worth considering how our perceptions of this time would be changed if 'lockdown' was 'respite'.



**‘The Weeks Rush By as the Hours Linger’**  
(7 books each made with one sheet of scrap A4 paper on the kitchen table)  
Peta Lloyd 2021



**ARENA**  
book of a performance  
Clare Carswell 2021

CouCou is pleased to present the Home Books exhibition of artists' books by Peta Lloyd, Annie Rapstoff, Clare Carswell, Rhiannon Evans in May 2021

The artists came together in early 2021 during the third Covid-19 lockdown as participants on Root-Home, a CREiA::: Creative Attentive Studio for a mindful art practice (online course) led by artists paula roush in London and Inês R. Amado in Lisbon. These workshops were created and piloted during the first lockdown in 2020.

“The experiential course focuses on deep listening and creative exercises which have been inspired equally by mindful art practices and relational domestic crafts. The project addresses issues of self-confinement, isolation and the need for tools that support a reflective creative practice and guide us, tuning in to the wealth of resources both spiritual and material surrounding us.”

Shared processes of engagement, immersion and development, as well as consideration of the space of confinement and the artist's book, encouraged the four artists to find ways of developing embodied art practices and to make dummy books on the theme of the home, some of which are shown here.

CouCou would like to thank Inês R. Amado and paula roush of CREiA for their inspirational course and support of all the artists; art writer Hope Collinson for her insightful catalogue essay, and all the artists for their work, resourcefulness and good heart as this project came together whilst all were living through such a challenging time.

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