

## Breaching the Doll's House

The first act of bestowal<sup>1</sup> in the story of *No-one to Bestow* by Emma Scutt is a paternalistic gifting from grandfather to granddaughter of an exquisitely constructed space. A doll's house has walls, and even furnished, is essentially empty, a blank canvas, a stage set awaiting happening. Any tenants, cast members physically present within, are likely to be psychologically absent, awaiting animation.

This most potent of female childhood vessels is its own interior world. It has boundaries, is physically complete, existing independent of exterior space. The effect of the charming constraint of this vessel for the child, who is physically present and psychology engaged, is to enable unconstrained play and experimentation. It is a safe space for the child (here female), to inhabit. She can be her own protagonist(s), imprinting aspects of the self on her own cast of character vessels to animate them. So, stuck space elicits, releases endless fluid imaginings which blur the boundaries between imagined and real space, and flow and leak whither they may, as story.

Time passes. At conception of the artistic project, the doll's house has attained the status of cherished object for the artist.<sup>2</sup> It is a slightly faded maquette for an idealized domestic space that may or may not be replicated, mortgaged, in the now. The battery lights have died, the paper has peeled, and it presents as an uninhabited, somewhat dead space, placed in the gallery on a white sheet that might as well cover it in mourning. As object, rather than an inhabited space it has reasserted its boundaries, which must be held, protected from the outside. The air in the vessel has become stale and the story, like the hands of the clock has stagnated, is stuck inside, needing release by retelling, via gifting to new hands.

The space for creative potentially has become empty enclosed object. The vessel for story has lost voice, disempowered its narrator. However, rather than accepting impotence, our brave *auteur* elects to air it, risk all, reassert her self and very private story within another space as part of the *Art Trail 2012*. At this stage the doll's house itself remains object, is absent, too precious to be breached or played with in a new untested environment.

Instead a clock, signifier of time subtly defines the space of telling, with sound providing a permeable boundary defining the art space within a bigger container of *St. Barnabus'* Church. Is this to be fairytale or nightmare? The hands are set perpetually to almost pumpkin hour. The drama is no longer taking place within the small world of the past, the doll's house. The viewer is not asked to peer in like overgrown *Alice*. Here the viewer, might experience hints of tiny *Alice* awed by the ecclesiastical setting, but is primarily adult, in the here and now, meditatively present with the tick of the clock, active reader, reciprocal participant in the new story.

The use of a church as vessel to house this chapter encourages the viewer to revere the now multiple female narrators of the story. A series of portraits are presented on canvas, slightly smaller than life size. Each is a depiction of head and shoulders only. The bodily physicality of each woman is absent. The smooth, uniform flatness of the style of painting surely owes much to the illustrative training and

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<sup>1</sup> **be·stow** (b-st)

*tr.v.* **be·stowed, be·stow·ing, be·stows**

1. To present as a gift or an honor; confer: *bestowed high praise on the winners.*
2. To apply; use:
3. To place or stow:
4. To store or house.

<sup>2</sup> **cher·ish**

/ˈCHeriSH/

verb

1. Protect and care for (someone) lovingly: *he cherished me in his heart.*
2. Hold (something dear).

muralist expertise of the artist. These are composed, calm heads that betray not a hint of emotional inner landscape in their expression. The sense of two-dimensional anti-perspectival fresco is enhanced by the use of gilt ground. It gives universal non-space to each, raising all to the status of praiseworthy *Mary's* who have not conceived immaculately or otherwise. Each woman has become a vessel for praise, a cherished icon or object in abstract space.

Displayed beneath the head, where the absent body should be are the words of each, expressed in the hand of the artist, voiced in first person. Even removed from the church, within the gallery space, the gilding and use of a scrolled drop of paper to hang head and textual body retains this suggestion of physical form. The absent maternal body or vessel, is inhabited by writing. A second thinking, body sits beneath the hub of thinking, the head. A double minding, but still no visceral form. Each text is a privy insight into much about filling life space around the core absence of child to create the woman space, and the space this woman fills in life.

The story is transformed to a multiple retelling of *T*, a dynamic composite text, which is spatially open to animation by many hands. Blank cards are offered to be filled with story in conducive confessional space. These are hung, tied with ribbon by gold thread, which criss-crosses in loose aerial boundaries, agitated by passing bodies.

These wafting *billet doux* suggest a tiny white layette, pegged anticipating small visceral bodies. In fact they are textual bodies which speak of the child presences and absences of many who elect to birth their story, sometimes breaking anonymity, telling tales in their own words of that f\*\*\*er *Fate*, of fertility time thieves and cheats, secret transvestites and seed sowers elsewhere, of errant ovaries, plagues of cysts, trails by IVF. Childish hands love the clock and no doubt want to lay siege to the dolls house. Occasional men, gay, straight, *Victor*, want to lead the play, fill the gap with male story. They do that don't they?

Ultimately the story is alive and dynamic, is uncontrolled in a public space, in dialogue outside of the confines of the doll's house. In the latest chapter, told within the space of *Tokarska* gallery, the portraits, transcribed stories have grown in number and a discrete space has been provided for writing to fill blank space with further story progeny, populating this white space.

Progress in terms of artistic working through - the doll's house is present, and controlled private viewings are allowable. The life of the story is no longer contained and purely dependent on it. It is now a private and public, multi-voiced body of writing made manifest in art space and no doubt quietly recited in private soundings of response by the childless in spaces beyond the structured event.

Opening and breaching the cherished dolls house no longer risks leaking out and loss, but inspires reciprocal acts of bestowal, allowing a restorative flowing in of new life, fresh story, in shared space once more.

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