

Ethelburga Tower: at home in a high-rise

Photographs by Mark Cowper

Tuesday 7 April – Monday 31 August 2009



This exhibition shows Mark Cowper's photographs of his own home and also those of fellow residents in Ethelburga Tower, Battersea. Residents allowed Cowper to photograph their homes as he found them - with little or no time for tidying up. These images are not styled in the way that shots of interiors often are.

Taken from the same position within the same room (usually the living room) in 46 flats, this series of photographs provides a life-affirming view into one of the ways we live now – cheek by jowl, but often quite isolated from one another, trying to create spaces which celebrate our tastes and individuality. Indeed, the photographs show a wealth of approaches to home-making and decoration, even when contained in the same architectural shell.

Over the period of a year, Cowper approached his neighbours on spec, assuring them that he wished to represent their homes as 'found' spaces: he moved nothing within the spaces that showed within the frame. Occasionally, items were removed in order to allow him to set up his camera in the same place in each flat but this was the extent of the 'styling'. He neither encouraged nor discouraged people to be in the picture and the owners made their own choice about this. Cowper notes that 'there are a total of 98 flats in the block. I shot 45 of the 68 that face east and west, and one that faces south as a test to see the difference in light and room size.' This attention to detail regarding light and aspect, and also the consistent position of the camera in each space, gives the resulting series of images a mesmeric effect. One feels quiet admiration for the owners who allowed Cowper to photograph the space as he found it, and also a sense of respect for this photographer who gained the trust of such a wide cross-section of people. This interchange between the photographer and his close urban neighbours, and the careful framing of these documentary pictures, contribute to what is an exceptional and rare record of people's homes today.

Notes to Editors/...

NOTES TO EDITORS

- 1) For further information or images, please contact Nancy Loader, PR and Press Officer, on 020 7739 9893 or nloader@geffrye-museum.org.uk.
- 2) Mark Cowper has a Master of Arts in photography and lectures at University of the Arts, London.
- 3) Built in 1967 on a World War II bombsite, Ethelburga Tower, a fifteen storey reinforced concrete tower block, has witnessed great social, political and economic change throughout its forty-year history. Situated near Battersea Park, the block, although not architecturally significant, commands stunning views across London. The “Right to Buy” scheme of the Thatcher government has led to its demographical change over the past 20 years, with 90% of the block now privately owned. Many of the tower’s maisonettes changed from being council let, to privately let accommodation at three times the cost, resulting in a widening of the social mix of people living in the block.
- 4) The Geffrye explores the home from 1600 to the present day. The museum’s focus is on the living rooms of the urban middle classes in England, particularly London. A chronological sequence of period rooms show how homes have been used and furnished over the past 400 years, reflecting the changes in society and patterns of behaviour as well as style, fashion and taste.

The museum is set in the former almshouses of the Ironmongers’ Company, Grade I listed, early 18th-century buildings. It is surrounded by attractive gardens, which include an award-winning herb garden and a series of period gardens showing the changing style of town gardens (open Apr through October).

- 5) Admission: FREE
Address: 136 Kingsland Road, Shoreditch, London E2 8EA
Tel No: 020 7739 9893
Web: www.geffrye-museum.org.uk
Email: info@geffrye-museum.org.uk
Opening Hours: Tuesday - Saturday 10am - 5pm,
Sunday and Bank Holiday Mondays 12noon - 5pm
Travel: Buses: 149, 242, 243, 67 or 394
Tube: Liverpool St, then bus 149 or 242/
Old St (exit 2), then bus 243

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