

Household Festival 2012
Various locations, South Belfast
22 – 24 August, 2012

Household Festival 2012 incorporated over 80 artists and over 30 locations and events that included (amongst many others) performance and visual art, installation, sculpture, painting, posters, sound art, gigs, foraging workshops, architectural tours, new and site-specific theatre performances, film screenings, programmed talks, a free 'Ulster' fry-up in the local park (feeding over 100 people), Japanese and Irish language classes, and a protest party at Ormeau Park gates. Visitors found their way through the labyrinthine streets of the Ormeau with maps designed by Ormeau Road resident and graphic designer Tom Hughes. Each house was recognised by a cluster of balloons outside bearing the Household logo.

The project began as a response to the unique dynamic of the Ormeau Road, its increasingly large population of creative people and its village-like feel. Household initially approached ten 'households' of visual artists with the invitation to open up their homes as a space for public exhibition. After this received an enthusiastic response, the invitation was extended through an open-call to musicians, actors, graphic designers, a tattoo artist, filmmakers, a psychologist, a chef, and other creative people living in the area. As publicity grew around the exhibition, Household began to receive requests to take part from local residents. These events were all included in the programme.

The domestic space has a significant, if niche, presence in the ever-expanding sphere of contemporary art discourse. It is most notably discussed in the much-referenced exhibition *Chambres D'Amis* held in Ghent in 1986, in which residents of 58 privately owned houses hosted work by artists selected by the Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst, under the curatorial direction of Jan Hoet. In recent years, it has become more associated with a range of DIY initiatives that aim to challenge conventional exhibition spaces and actively reject the market-driven, hierarchical structures of the art world. However, more than merely providing a convenient solution to exhibiting art in a period of recession, it is one of the most complex and unpredictable environments in which to make and encounter artwork. The rich potential of domestic spaces was what attracted the five Belfast-based artists and curators (Sighle Bhreathnach-Cashell, Eoin Dara, Alissa Kleist, Kim McAleese, and Ciara Hickey) to organise *Household*, a contemporary art event held in artists' homes in the Ormeau Road area of Belfast on the weekend of the 24th, 25th and 26th of August, 2012.

The participating households presented a broad range of works and events. Artists used the opportunity to consider their practice in relation to their home environment and local surroundings and explored the unique dynamic of the private sphere made public. Many artists were drawn to the inherent drama and implied narratives that present themselves in abundance within the domestic space.

Household Festival in many ways functioned as a platform for the agency for both visitors and participants alike. It invited a neighbourhood community to experience a broad range of

contemporary art practices, view work by many local artists, meet their neighbours, and expand and share their knowledge of the local area. With no funding, and only simple agreements drawn up between the artists and organisers, the success of the project essentially hinged on the trust between the visitor, and the resident of the home whose threshold they crossed. Visitors were reminded that they were 'guests' in people's houses rather than anonymous strangers. The goodwill and generosity of everyone involved (including the visitors) were one of the most satisfying and valuable outcomes of the project.

The festival resulted in the formation of the Household collective and encouraged the development of new projects that further explore how people encounter contemporary art in the framework of hospitality and the alternative space.