TEMPLE BAR GALLERY + STUDIOS WRITING COMMISSION 2026

Cathy Sweeney
(O-O-O)

Written in response to Vanessa Donoso López, *(O-O-O)*

Cathy Sweeney is a short story writer and novelist. Her fiction has been published in *The Stinging Fly*, *The Dublin Review* and *Granta*, and has been broadcast on BBC Radio 4. In 2020, her collection of short stories, *Modern Times*, was published by The Stinging Fly Press, Dublin, and by W&N, London. Her debut novel *Breakdown* was published by W&N in January 2024.

In 2026, she works on a novel based on the months Oscar Wilde spent in Naples following his release from prison in 1897.

The **Temple Bar Gallery + Studios Writing Commission** aims to expand ideas around writing about art by inviting Irish authors to create a series of pieces inspired by the exhibitions at TBG+S. In 2026, TBG+S has commissioned Cathy Sweeney to make a piece of writing inspired by each of the exhibitions in the Gallery Programme.

Over the last twelve years TBG+S has commissioned ground-breaking Irish writers to write on the gallery programme. Previous writers include Sara Baume (2015), Claire-Louise Bennett (2016), Gavin Corbett (2017), Doireann Ní Ghríofa (2018), Annemarie Ní Churreáin (2019), and Ian Maleney (2020), Nicole Flattery (2021), Thomas Morris (2022), Padraig Regan (2023), Nidhi Zak/Aria Eipe (2024), Gustav Parker Hibbett (2025).

The texts are available to download from www.templebargallery.com and printed copies are available in the gallery.

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When you move a lot, you lose sentimentality. Any object that manages to survive does so by chance. Occasionally you buy new things. A biscuit jar, another bookshelf, a mug that feels just right in your hands. These too seem to take on meaning but you won't miss them when they are gone.

When you move a lot 'home' does not refer to the life that preceded this particular apartment or house or to the one that will follow, but rather it refers laterally, in some way, to the life you live now, in the continuous present.

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In the last sixteen years I have lived in eleven rental properties.

I don't remember the exact addresses, or how the kitchens were laid out or whether the heating was gas or electric. What I can access is the states of feeling each home evoked in me and how in the end these are tied to colours and textures and shapes, the shadows of a tree wavering over a bedroom wall, the smell of old carpets.

To rent is to pass the baton of home from stranger to stranger - to encounter traces, to leave an imprint behind.

#1
There was heavy snow in the winter of 2010 when I trudged through an estate to view a house with a To Rent sign. Despite the shopping trolley in its back garden and the carpeted bathroom, I take it. T-shirts stained with hair-dye turn up in the hot press and beads or a hair clip or a stubby eyeliner pencil rattle through the vacuum cleaner. I am happier than I have been for years.

#2
This house has been properly cleaned but there are no beds. I buy two single beds and put a mattress on the floor in the main bedroom. There is a jacuzzi bath.

#3
This apartment has white walls with a giant clock, some framed prints, a glass topped table. Only later do I discover that there's an attic space stuffed with old clutter.

#4
This house has five exernal doors and is infested with mice.

#5
This house was once the kitchen of an army barracks. It is really three rectangles stuck together like pieces of Lego.

#6
This house has a weird energy. Nothing feels comfortable. Too many windows and a yappy dog next door.

#7
I stay four years in this apartment. The interior looks like a set from LOVE? HATE. Pleather couch, magnolia-painted walls, MDF coffee table, big TV. A previous tenant had a subscription to National Geographic and the magazine arrives every month.

#8
This house is by the sea. Tourists make the village appear bustling but the census records 300 permanent residents. When I move I leave behind a blackcurrant bush planted in a terracotta pot. The house is now an Airbnb.

#9
This apartment has sliding glass doors to a terrace overlooking the road. In summer, when the doors are open, it feels European. In winter, when the vertical blinds are drawn, it feels like a hostile office.

#10
This flat I live in for three months. The presses are full of washed out yogurt tubs and lunchboxes. The washing machine empties into the shower.

#11
This house is shabby but there are loads of rooms. I position my desk at a window from where I can see the comings and goings of the neighbours. They shout hiya hon as I stroll in and out of the estate.

In the spaces between one home and another, I feel more real, remembering again what I have forgotten: The essential thing is contingency.

I adapt to new homes, I resist them. I do both at once, a push-pull into the future.

When things are good I plant marigolds. When things are not good, I forget to water them and they die. Sometimes I take ages smuggling a spider back out the window. Other times, late for work, it is too much trouble to rescue a butterfly.

Before you leave a rental home you withdraw from your relationship with it. You notice its faults more and then you begin dismantling the strange Venn diagram you have made between you and it, until separation is complete. On one side boxes and bin bags for charity shops. On the other, empty walls specked with Blu tac.

With these the moves all that really changes is me. In the end, the homes I have lived in meld into one.

Things left behind by previous tenants:

A small mahogany table
Greaseproof paper, tin foil, cling film
Pint glasses stolen from pubs
Glass ashtrays
Unwanted cutlery and pots with burn stains
A holy water font
A pile of post
Dried pasta pieces
Children's drawings
Paint tester marks on the wall
Trinkets
Toys
Bleached cushions
Broken crockery
Spilled ink
Spools of thread
Buttons
Drawers full of odds and ends, bits and bobs, gewgaws, Sellotape , a bottle of cerise nail polish, pencils, pens, pennies, filter papers, a lighter with the Union Jack on it, a key.
Notes scribbled in a copybook – You are a good person. You deserve joy. 11 stone 3lbs – March 2018.
Christmas trees left outside to die in the rain.
Pyrex dishes, bowls.
An ugly vase.
Lamps from Ikea / pictures from Ikea / mirrors from Ikea /a bin from Ikea / a bathroom cabinet still in its flat pack.
A tin caddy full of old batteries.
Wires and cables and adapter plugs and old remote controls.
Lightbulbs.
An eggcup that came with an Easter egg.
Rock, paper, scissors.
Dream catchers with the remnants of other people's dreams still attached