

FINANCIAL TIMES

Opinion **Life & Arts**

Home truths: how our domestic spaces shape the way we live

Whether as a sanctuary or as a place for candid discussions, our homes influence our thinking and behaviour

By Enuma Okoro July 8, 2022

Excerpt..

I love the work of Polina Barskaya, a Brooklyn-based contemporary artist. Born in Ukraine in 1984, Barskaya paints small-scale works that include self-portraits and images of her family. They are like visual diaries of her life, with many of the paintings set in domestic spaces. In her 2019 work “Bloomville”, she sits naked on her unmade bed, her hands raised, holding her hair in a bun. The light grey palette gives the bedroom a soft, quiet feel. We can see trees and green pasture through the windows behind her, and light pours in through the sheer curtained window on the right of the canvas. It is a stolen scene from what looks like an early morning alone.

Bedrooms started becoming separate rooms in the house only from the 17th century. And even then they were used not just for sleeping but also for entertaining close or important guests, and for conducting business.

But for us today, bedrooms are the most private parts of our homes. So much energy passes through a bedroom: it is a place of intimacy that is also the room to which many of us retreat when we are battling physical or emotional illness. It is where we weep and grieve, where we lie awake in worry or fear, where we dream

or nurture our desires, where we feed babies or cuddle with toddlers. Or where we might be reminded that we are alone.

In Barskaya's painting, the way the woman is seated on the edge of the bed reminds me that a bedroom is also the setting for the start of any new day, the place from which we can check in with ourselves anew, and gather our thoughts — all of which can affect how we handle whatever the day brings, how we meet the world outside.



In Polina Barskaya's 'Bloomville' (2019), we have an intimate view of a woman's bedroom just after she appears to have risen © Courtesy of Monya Rowe Gallery, New York