

STREET LEVEL PHOTOWORKS

MARGARET MITCHELL - AN ORDINARY EDEN

6TH MAY - 16TH JULY 2023

An Ordinary Eden is a major new solo exhibition by **Margaret Mitchell** which explores the importance of home and belonging through a series of striking portraits that reveal experiences that remain hidden to most - experiences of precarity, of instability, and of inadequate support that can damage lives. The project began in 2019 and extends her long-term and engaged documentary approach through environmental portraiture. To be without a permanent home is both a tangible and an emotional experience, where the necessity for safety and security accompanies a need to belong. Within *An Ordinary Eden*, individuals across Scotland give an insight into the psychosocial impact of past or current homelessness - offering a glimpse into lives that are not often seen; more often judged, frequently disregarded.

At the heart of *An Ordinary Eden* lies the assertion that we all need to belong, to have safety and stability, to have roots and meaningful connections with others. The work asks what happens when having a stable home is interrupted by circumstance, when life's journeys are somewhat complex and imperfect, and when people don't always lead a life they thought - or hoped - would happen. All of the people photographed had different stories on housing and home. All had been homeless at some point. All had different paths that brought them to their present, with histories that are multi-layered and nuanced. Some people were in various forms of temporary accommodation or recently moved into permanent housing, sometimes after many years. Others reflected on experiences with the distance of time and considered the impact on their lives or traces that remained. These experiences ranged from histories of profound inequality, to support needs for mental health, addiction and recovery. Other experiences came from places of enforced escape, to save their lives in some cases. From individuals fleeing years of domestic abuse to escaping a war zone and forced migration. To not have a home happens for many reasons, how society responds is the focus in this work.

'Home' can be both a sense of comfort, inside one's mind and place of residence, and a connection on the outside, in a community. For these individuals before you, 'home' is not a wish for an idealised scenario but rather, it is the ordinary, the everyday that is sought: safety, security, stability. As you look at these walls, at these faces, these stories, you are asked to enter these lives so generously shared, and to reflect if ours is a society that treats people with dignity, care, and compassion. Or is it clear from these individuals, these stories and emotional consequences, that a more timely response, a more targeted support, a more humane approach is needed. For this is not a search for utopia, an unreachable fantasy. It is the simple wish for a regular life. A pursuit for each individual's Ordinary Eden.

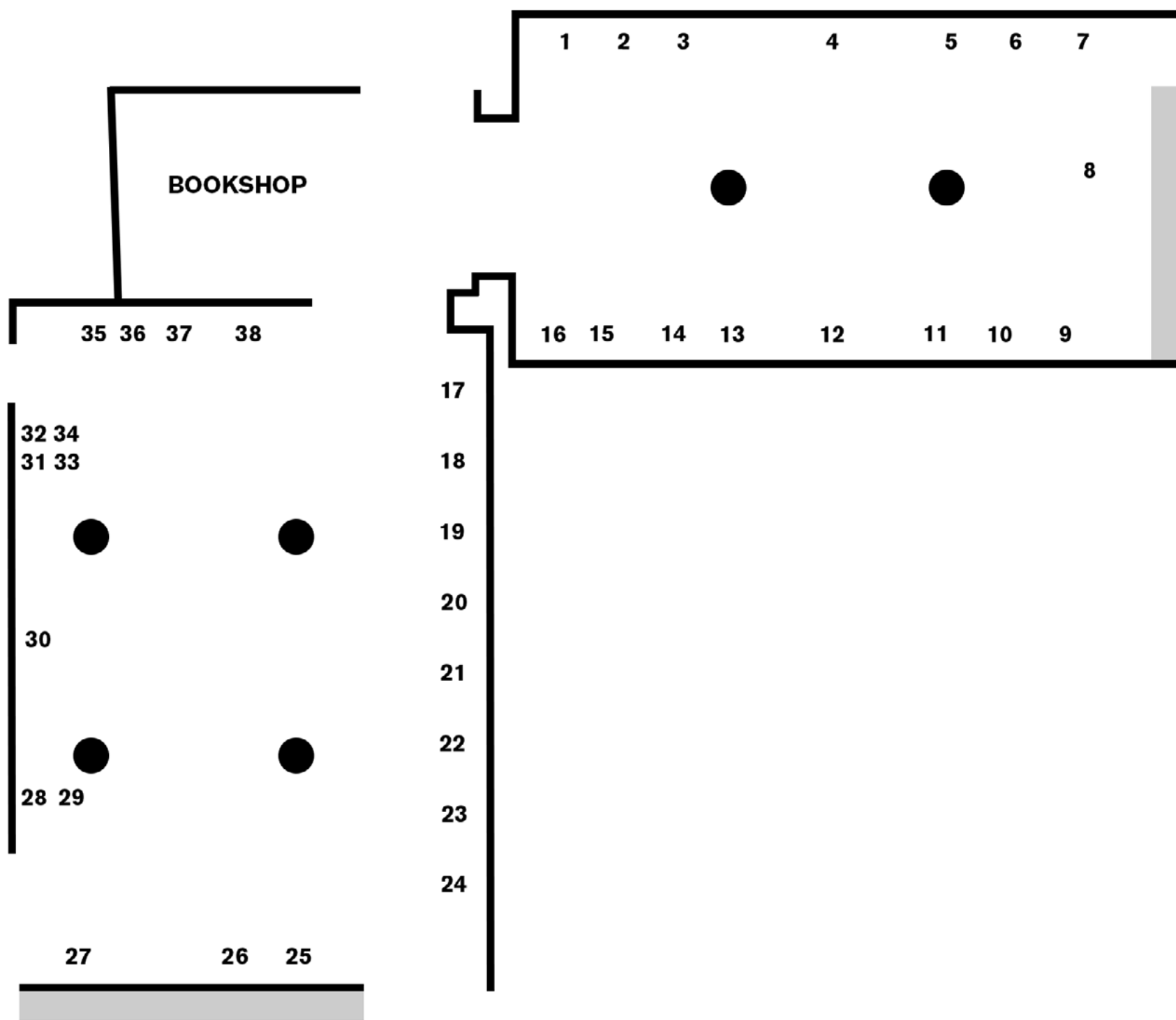
For this project, the artist worked with individuals and organisations across Scotland including Shelter Scotland and received support from Creative Scotland for the development of the work. The exhibition has been produced by Street Level Photoworks and is comprised of thirty-six new photographic works made between 2019 and 2023. Along with the main body of work, Mitchell invited those she photographed to have creative input resulting in the collaborative book **Stories on Finding Home**; with profits going to Shelter Scotland's Hardship Fund. There is an exclusive exhibition newsprint available and an accompanying exhibition minigraph with a commissioned text by writer and critic **Neil Cooper**.

Artist Bio

Margaret Mitchell is an award-winning photographer based in Glasgow. Her work ranges from exploring communities and children's worlds through to long-term projects on social inequality. Bridging the psychological and the social, her work explores the intricacies and complexities of people's lives with a particular emphasis on place and belonging. Her book *Passage* (Bluecoat Press, 2021) reflects on a cycle of inequality, asking questions on the nature of disadvantage and privilege in a study over three generations. She has exhibited widely including at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh (2017 & 2022), the National Portrait Gallery, London (2014 & 2022), and in *Ambit - Photographies from Scotland* at Street Level Photoworks in 2017. She has work in the collections of the National Galleries of Scotland and the Martin Parr Foundation. Recognition includes the Marilyn Stafford FotoReportage Award, the Sony World Photography Awards, and the Royal Photographic Society IPE. She works both on personal projects and commissions and work has been featured in the Guardian, De Correspondent, and the New Statesman amongst others.

<https://www.margaretmitchell.co.uk>

<https://www.ordinaryeden.com>



1	Andrew	19	Conaire	34	Billy
2	Marcus	20	Graeme	35-36	Lyndsey
3	MC	21	Ryan	37	Lyndsey & Summer
4	Lyndsey	22	Lyndsey & Summer	38	Final Thoughts
5-6	Graeme	23	Div		
7	Mark	24	Mark		
8	Display Case	25	From An Ordinary Eden		
9-12	Michael	26	Marcus		
13	Name Withheld	27	Narrated Stories (A/V)		
14	Ryan	28-29	Daniel		
15	Gary	30	Name Withheld		
16	Peter	31	Tam		
17	MC	32	Najib		
18	Tam	33	Conaire		

