

# Erasing Intimacy

---

My home is not being at home. As a contemporary nomad, I often leave my bed unslept in for a night, a week, a month. Sleeping on the couches of friends – living at various locations in the city – allows me to discover Brussels in new ways. When the opportunity arises, I seek destinations further afield, becoming a little refugee, curious to encounter other cultures. My home is mobile, it's the place where my private stories are kept. A collection of personal memories and little secrets, covered in a pile of warm blankets. It's a photo album without the album; a sketch book without the book.

'Erasing Intimacy', 'Warmth – Covered Memories' and 'Silence – Sounds of Insomnia', are part of the exhibition 'Home & Away'.

'Home & Away' is an exhibition by expats, immigrants and homeless refugees; people without permanent residence or contemporary nomads.

The constant 'being on the road' and 'being homeless' is what these people have in common and is also the theme of the project 'Home & Away'. Initiated by Ann Van de Vyvere (Irma Firma) these people have investigated privacy and intimacy, which are the foundations of a home.

For wherever one lives, in a house or under a bridge, one always creates that home feeling with a number of items. These items and objects have been collected and now find their way into the Cinquantenaire Museum.

The exhibition runs from 2 to 25 April 2010 in the Cinquantenaire Museum (The Royal Museum of Art and History), Brussels.



**Night Guard**



**Sleepy Satin**



## Translucent Insomnia

### Erasing Intimacy

It felt weird walking down the hallway stark naked. Although we didn't speak the same language, the woman had made it clear to me — with a few Russian words and a lot of body language — that I should continue to the baths with nothing on. No underwear, no towel, nothing. She did offer me a pair of old plastic flip flops which were too big and made me look silly as I shuffled down the hall.

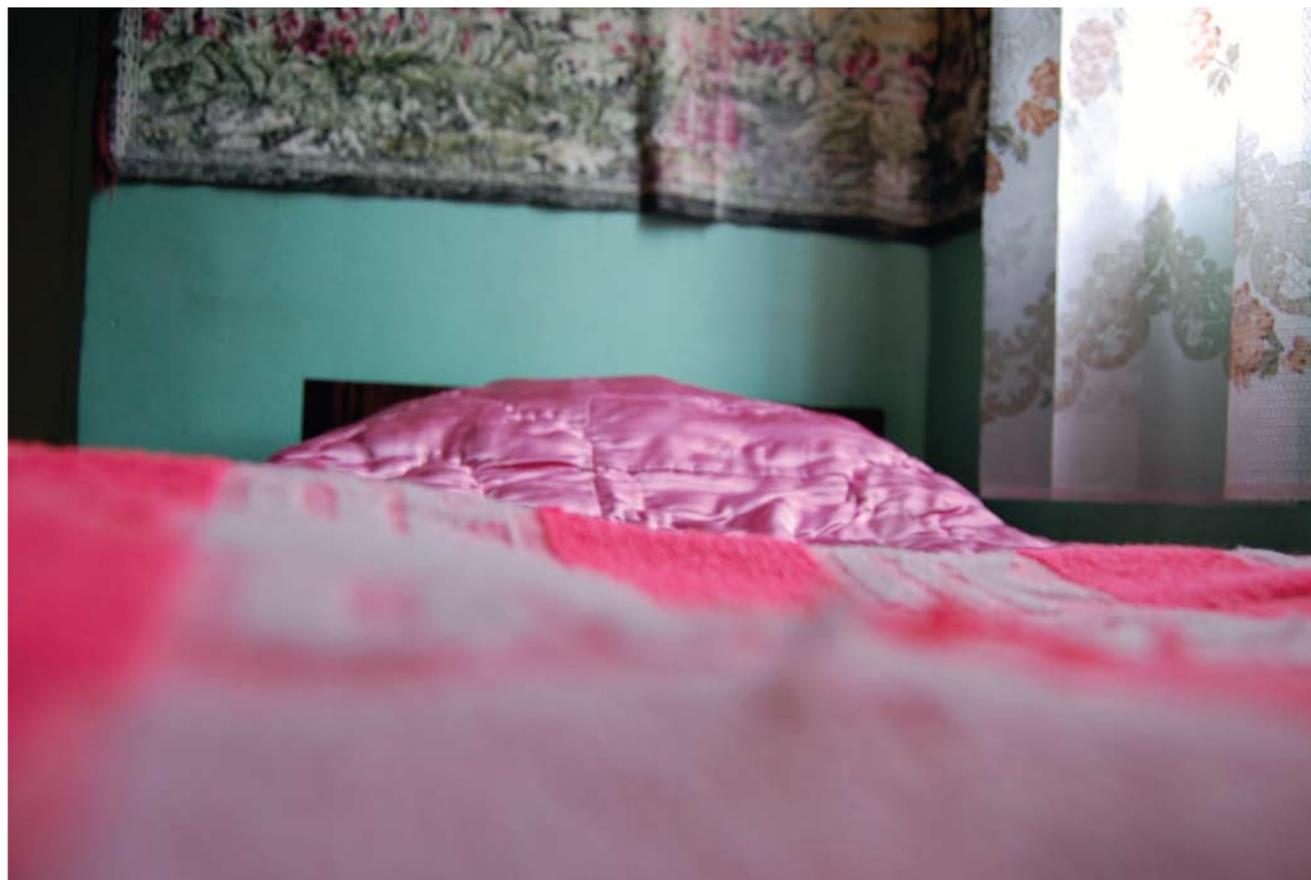
As I opened the door, I could smell the sulfur. The room had round windows in the ceiling which let in natural light and gave it a half-lit look. Large green marble tiles covered the entire space — floor, walls and ceiling. It was humid and warm. Someone grabbed my hand; an old lady guided me towards a shower. She opened both taps — hot and cold — and waited for the right temperature. She then pushed me softly under the shower and made a smile that said: 'So, do you like it? It feels good, doesn't it?' It was a little too hot, but I didn't mind. I let the stream of water pour over me, my head, my shoulders, my body. I closed my eyes and felt the world gently drifting away. My brain slowed down and the warmth induced a state of meditation. It felt good.

I don't remember how long I was in there. Five or ten minutes maybe. When I opened my eyes, I looked around. As I gradually got used to the dimness, I noticed other women in the room. Some of them were taking showers or soaping their bodies, some were shaving their legs and armpits, talking and scrubbing their skin with a special sponge. One woman was leaning against the wall and trying to keep her balance while another woman scrubbed her back. Although the women were of various ages, both young and old, they all had full, shapely figures. The older women were especially beautiful, their bodies sculpted in multiple layers of belly fat. I wished I had my sketchbook with me to draw them.

A woman — the only one wearing underwear — motioned for me to come. It was my turn to get a scrub and massage. I went over to the other side of the room and sat down on one of the tiled benches. She started to scrub my back, so vigorously in fact, that I had to brace myself in order to keep from sliding off the wet tiles. Eventually I lay down and let her get on with it. It was then I began to realize what was happening. Not only was she removing all the dead skin from my body, she was also deleting a part of you. She was erasing all trace of you, your smell that had perfumed my body, your sweat that had entered my skin, your sperm which had once coated my belly. They were the last remnants of all the intimate moments we had spent together during the past week. It was all gone now and I wasn't sure if I was happy or not, but the distance between us had grown.

After the massage, she left me alone — limp and spent — on the wet tiles. I had water in my ears and everything in the bath seemed muffled and far away — the stream of the showers, the patter of footsteps on wet tiles, the voices of women. I discerned the rhythms of a lullaby in the making, and slept.

Abanotubani, public baths (Tbilisi, Georgia)  
August 2009.



**Spoken Dream**



**Absent Neighbour**



## Covered Memories

---