


Art: Alison Oldham

Domestic scenes show layers of history

Painter Naomi Alexander prefers interiors to landscapes because she can capture moments in time and reflect the past in old furnishings and buildings. Her new book *Domesticity* records homes with personal and historic significance

Painter and print-maker Naomi Alexander has always preferred depicting interiors, working alone, to painting landscapes outside where onlookers can be a distraction. "I find a sense of security working within four walls," she says. "I have a curiosity and love of the past reflected in old furnishings and I am nostalgic about buildings and want to capture specific moments so as not to lose them."

Her passion for documenting layers of history to be found in homes suffuses her latest book *Domesticity*, which would have wide appeal as a present. With its illuminating essay by Nicholas Usherwood and her own explanations of many illustrations, it is a fascinating record of interiors with personal and historic significance. Locations range from the kitchen of what is thought to be her ancestral home in Lithuania to the bedroom that Churchill occupied when staying with Macmillan.

Alexander first realised that she was attracted to the motif of domestic objects and interiors as a student at Hornsey Art School in the late 1950s when she encountered the paintings

of the Kitchen Sink School. But instead of emulating Bratby & Co's social realism, she evolved a style of flickering brushstrokes influenced by Sickert and the Post-Impressionist painters Vuillard and Bonnard.

Early works show her finding inspiration in her family – a sister

playing the piano in Mill Hill, her grandmother on a capacious sofa in Golders Green – and this was to continue. The section on London is largely of paintings set in Hampstead, including the Arts and Crafts home where Alexander has lived for over 50 years and her daughter Georgia's kitchen.

A remarkable screen has two portraits of her mother; sculptor Hazel Alexander, at her weekly Shabbos tea party in West Heath Road.

On the back Alexander later painted an empty interior, of Sabbath in a house with pointed internal arches in Ein Hod in the

Carmel Mountains in Israel. She stayed there in her twenties then rented it for a month in 2005: "I was so intoxicated by the unusual shapes of the rooms that I barely left the house and painted every day, coming back to London with more than 20 completed oil paintings."

Domesticity brings together adventurous projects undertaken over the last three decades. These include painting the grand and neglected spaces of Chatsworth House – a rococo four-poster in a state bedroom contrasting with derelict bedsteads in the attics.

In 2000 she took up a residency in Lithuania's Europos Parkas museum and recorded the architectural remains of Jewish culture and Jewish houses now occupied by peasant families. Recently she documented elaborate arrangements of kitchens in the Orthodox community in Gateshead.

■ **Shabbos afternoon tea party in Hampstead 1999, screen by Naomi Alexander**



■ **Earlier this year Alexander had an acclaimed exhibition of her interiors at the town's Shipley Art Gallery and this publication was produced in association with the gallery. It is available for £25 from Joseph's Bookstore, 2 Ashbourne Parade, 1257 Finchley Road, Temple Fortune NW11.**