

Something from there



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In 2018 Evgeny Shtorn approached the Education Department of the National Gallery of Ireland with a concept. At the root of the proposal was the significance of objects, specifically personal items brought from home, by people seeking asylum in Ireland.

The project evolved and in June 2019, artist Dragana Jurišić began working at the Gallery with a group of people seeking asylum here, having arrived from a diversity of locations and countries. The group considered some of the objects that they had brought with them, and the value and meaning that these subsequently came to hold. Through creative sessions connecting to the Gallery, its collection and archive, and other relevant cultural spaces, they explored personal expression and the meaning of language.

Each member of the group produced a piece of writing that brings us closer to their experiences and the significance of their object. The texts, and the items that inspired them, are reproduced here.

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Diaa's steel cup

My Sister's Stainless Steel Coffee Cup

Suzanne bought me a long time ago, and kept me all this time, because I was made of stainless steel, unbreakable. So, I became a prized object of her daily coffee ritual. Sometimes I was alone with Suzanne in the mornings. Sometimes we met with other cups, other members of the family.

I used to keep the last bit of coffee for long hours, and sometimes traces dried on the edges of my lips, until the next day when she poured fresh, hot coffee inside me again.

During the war, I was used sometimes without being washed. There was no water for this. Sometimes the coffee had a sour or too bitter taste.

On a few occasions, I smashed into other things, blown by the air pressure after an explosion.

More recently, I hear repeated conversations about the dangers of life, war and politics. Sometimes there is crying in the background.

This year something unexpected happened: I was kidnapped by Suzanne's younger brother Diaa. I've been with him, and away from the family home and Suzanne, for a few months now...

But not much has really changed. Diaa uses me a lot like Suzanne did. I still hear talk of war and the future, and sometimes, the sudden crying.

Evgeny's t-shirt

I don't remember Malaysia, where I was made. I spent barely a month there, then, pretty soon, I was bought by a guy who then never wore me. Well, maybe just once, I forget.

Then I was given to Evgeny. I remember that day so vividly: I was in my wardrobe, among hundreds of others; it was lovely, dark and warm in there. Then, suddenly the door of the wardrobe flew open, and the guy - I'm struggling to remember his name, I tell you I forgot everything - anyway, he took me and gave me to Evgeny. You see, the guy and his husband were moving from St. Petersburg back to their home, and he remembered some T-shirts that were too small for him, and he wanted to give some of them to Evgeny. He was so happy. We all are real treasure. Expensive, fashionable, unique.

Evgeny took me and the others to his home. I spent all winter and a cold Russian spring in that wardrobe. Too cold to wear me, so I remained like new, despite the fact that I was already several years old - almost ten, actually, a very serious age for a T-shirt, even one that's fashionable and posh.

August 2017 arrived. I heard Evgeny saying to Alexander that he was very tired of his hectic job and stress, and that he wanted to go to the warm sea, to spend some days eating fruit and sleeping in the shade. He stuffed me into his backpack with some other clothes and we went to Anapa, a small southern Russian city on the coast of the Black Sea. We arrived pretty late, but the guys immediately went to swim. They were so happy. They hadn't been on holidays in a couple of years.

The next morning, Evgeny put me on. I was so lovely, so new, this unique lilac colour that only real artists can achieve. I was starting to attract the gazes of happy Russians (you only see them that happy on holidays). The guys went to swim again, and Evgeny left me on the sand. The sun was so bright, I wasn't used to it, having lived peacefully for years inside of wardrobes. I got burned and lost my colour, my attractiveness. Evgeny was very upset, I remember.

Then he wore me from time to time under his turtle-necks, or instead of pyjamas. Not so often, though. And then that winter came: he grabbed me, he was in a real rush. He put me into his backpack and we all went Moscow. They were so stressed. I didn't understand anything. I just felt something bad was happening to him. They barely spoke. They were very scared.

I was left in that backpack for a month or so. It was very cold. All I knew was that we were in Ireland. Eventually, Evgeny took me out of the backpack and suddenly started crying, giving me hugs and crying. I didn't understand a thing!

Now I'm in the National Gallery of Ireland. People are looking at me, surprised. But I always knew I was made for glory, glamour and gold!







Ola's iro

Owodunni Ola Mustapha

**The Yellow Wrapper,
or My Yellow Sister**

1.

I'm my sister Ola's keeper.

I'm made of cotton, 60cm long, fashionable,
glamorous.

My sparkly colour radiates.

The feel of my skin against your skin brings
comfort.

I feel so majestic, adorning your body while
assuring you of my support.

I might be old and wrinkled, but I'm here
with you through the ups and downs.

I'm the custodian of your ancestral culture,
passed down from generation to generation.

Match me with your buba and gele and I
transform you into an African goddess.

The black, shining beauty of the melanin
in your skin penetrates my horizon.

I'm the shield for your naked body, protecting
you from the preying eyes of vultures.

I'm your yellow ray of sunshine, your paw paw
that can't be hidden.

I'm your companion, your yellow sister.

2.

For 13 years I have been among her collection of treasured items, bought modestly, though Ola's mum could barely afford anything extra for herself.

Still, I was cherished, made of fine cotton, inherited from mother to mother.

When my sister Ola got pregnant, I was given to prepare her departure to her matrimonial home, as is the Nigerian custom; an intended bride dresses in native attire.

My sister had none, but mum came to her rescue, retrieved me from her treasured collection, handed me over.

At first she didn't feel comfortable wearing me, but eventually let me hug her body.

She adorned me with her buba and gele
- I looked amazing on her!

I was her first traditional companion.

I was with her when she met her new family, her brown and shiny skin peering through me.

I also accompanied her on her journey to motherhood, representing the bond between a mother and her child.

The baby was 9 months old when we left Africa, I helped to harness her, relieving some of the stress of holding the baby.

I toured Dublin's city centre with her, so many people staring, judging us awkward, the way I held the baby.

I didn't mind the looks on peoples' faces,
they just didn't know, or wanted to ask
questions but were afraid to ask.

I represent an integral part of African culture,
custodian of a woman's virtue.

I bring respect to other African women who
have one like me.

Some days I get wet from all the rain here,
other days, I get a bath, doused in sweet
smelling perfumes, my rumpled skin is
smoothed with warmth.

I know what my sister Ola is thinking:
I feel safe when it's close to me. A tiny bit of
where I come from, it acknowledges my origins
and my existence. Bittersweet memories of
places long forgotten, or just hidden in tiny far
away places in my mind, raw and rusty places.



Mary's stone

I Am a Stone

Rough stone,
harsh on the skin.

The stone has cracks,
blackened forms.
I pray it will not crack.

I am cracking, falling apart
inside; my heart as heavy
as a stone, the stone I hold dear
to my heart.

The weight of the stone
as it sits in my hand,
its harshness as it scrubs
the dead skin on my foot.

I can hear my mother commanding:
Scrub your feet! Scrub your feet!
To her that was pure pedicure.
Her voice remains in my head.
May she rest in peace.
This piece I will keep.



Leo's cross

Through the eyes of humans, I am a cross, a symbol of great religious power. This symbol has brought either much pain, or comfort, to many. I am just ordinary metal, but my sentimental value exceeds any gold or diamonds.

I have been with Leo for a long time. A long time ago, I lay in a mouldy drawer of an old cupboard of Leo's grandpappa in the forest in South Africa. This grandfather was a religious man, from a very strict culture, but he was a good man. This was over 30 years ago.

Suddenly, I felt a change, from the mouldy drawer, to being in a moving pocket. I felt warm sweat dripping on my smooth surface many times, and changes in temperature, shrinking with cold, expanding with the warmth. Travelling all around the world, I heard many different tongues of cultures I'd never encountered before.

All along, I knew I had a very important meaning to Leo, and this was because he always kept me in a pocket close to his heart. I began to love the early mornings, when he cleans me and holds me tightly in his hands, sometimes just in ordinary prayer for comfort, while other times I can feel his immense fear and anxiety, the way he squeezes me so tightly, like I am his last and only hope. I am always close to my keeper. I hear his heartbeat like the rhythm of Africa dancing in his soul.

I am a small silver cross, so tiny, so simple, but so powerful and so precious. I accompany Leo in the search for security and acceptance, reflecting memories of better times among days of hatred and abuse. Hold on to me, my human friend. Together we shall find that place called home for you.

Love without judgement and know everything will be ok.

From your little cross with love.



Precious's bracelet

Noooooooooooo not the strange liquid!

Born in the exquisite lands of Ghana, alongside thousands of my siblings, I must have stood out, to be chosen to be taken in the big moving box to the huge house where planes live. Such a weird place, with humans hugging and crying and acting funny – why would anyone cry getting on the big flying bird, I wondered, as I lay there in the hands of the ebony lady. I was hoping she would be flying on the bird with me. I couldn't wait to be flying on the bird! Yes, I flew all right, but with a strange lady; how could the ebony lady give me away like that?! Did I mean nothing to her? Didn't she care about who I

wanted to be with? Was she going to give me away to my family members? Where was I going? Questions with no answers.

Wow, this bird is very big – how can so many people fly with this bird? Strange humans and their strange ways. My new owner is rather strange. She sits there gazing at me like she has never seen such beauty. She beams with pride, like she has just won a contest, and then she tosses her medal in the safe darkness of a stylish sack.

Finally, freedom! I've been in that darkness for I don't know how long. Out, finally, and I'm being transferred again, this time to a very excited person! She must have missed me – even though, she's just meeting me? – she's raining down kisses on me. I like her already.

Days have turned into weeks, weeks into months, months into years, and we are all still holding on; been through shrubs and tall trees, we are hanging still, hopeful sometimes, helpless and confused most times. We fled our home. We have had midnight conversations, searched for answers, asked questions, but still, we are here. She still bathes me with kisses, and on other days she takes me with her to a fountain inside a box. There she bathes me with the strange colourless liquid, with herself. I don't like this liquid, but I do like the way she looks at me affectionately, like I'm a priceless stone. She loves me! She loves the one who gifted me to her! I love her as well, but no more strange liquid, please!!!



Abdulai's bank note

European contacts within Sierra Leone were among the first in West Africa in the 15th century. In 1462, Portuguese explorer Pedro de Sintra mapped the hills surrounding what is now Freetown Harbour, naming the shaped formation Serra da Leoa or "Serra Leoa" (Portuguese for Lioness Mountains). The Spanish rendering of this geographic formation is Sierra Leona, which later was adapted and, misspelled, became the country's current name. Sierra Leone was geographically key to the trans-Atlantic slave trade, a legacy that continues to this day. (from Wikipedia)

In 2018 something bad happened to my owner, a young man called Abdulai. Worried for his life, he had no option but to leave his family and friends in Sierra Leone, run for his life and travel to Ireland to seek protection. Even at that painful and stressful moment, Abdulai thought of me and placed me nicely in his wallet. Thank God Abdulai and I arrived in Ireland safely. But Ireland is very cold compared to Sierra Leone. There, the hot sun shines all the time. There, I'm like a king, of the highest currency; I'm just a very small amount here in Ireland, no more than one Euro - not even a note, but just a coin, what a shame. I'm sad because I'm not valued here compared to Sierra Leone, where I'm treated with great respect. I know I'm very nice looking and have a great texture.



Abid's talisman

1. My creation

I was created on May 17th 2012, at 6:30am by a religious scholar for my holder, who also had to leave his own country in a painful situation, to say goodbye forever to his family, and to the place where he had spent his whole life.

2. What I am made of

What I am: some piece of white paper with some holy verse written on it with a blue fountain pen, covered with a red piece of leather and with a long thread, which makes a link from the neck to the heart of my creator.

3. Meaning I have to my holder

Since the date of my creation I have experienced the pain and loneliness of my holder. He has a strong belief in me and thinks that I am a part of his life and soul. This is why he never separates me

from his life and his body, except, of course, when he needs to take a shower. I am the only one who can feel his pain. I am very near his heart, every second I can hear and feel his heart beats.

One time he forgot to take me with him after a shower. I was left on a hanger in the bathroom. All day he was stressed and feeling insecure, so he came home early, and the first thing he did was to find me and kiss me and hug me. It was then that I recognized my importance in his life.

4. Feelings I have for my holder

I have great regard and empathy for my holder because I have experienced his stress, anxiety and loneliness several times. He is a man of 43 who has been single all his life. He has no life partner to share in his troubles and joys, and I am worried about his survival. He needs to take care also because I depend on him. If he is not alive, I will also not be alive.

5. Prayers and wishes

With the help of holy verse, I pray every second for him, and I have been doing this for more than 7 years. I will continue until he has other alternatives, or a partner. He has not slept calmly and peacefully for a long time.

GOD, please bless him with all he desires, and especially bless him his sincere, honest and loyal life partner, because sometimes I also become stressed and think to myself, who will give me courage to encourage my holder? This is my true wish for him. He is a very good and simple man with a beautiful heart, and, my GOD, you live in peoples' hearts and listen to the voices of their hearts, so hear his too.



Theo's laptop

My Friend, the HP9000 Computer

I'm an HP9000 computer, and I was bought in the US in 2012 so that I could be used by Theo in South Africa. Theo collected me from the Johannesburg Post Office, we went to his place and, as he switched me on, my new life started. I was so fresh, fast, everything working as intended, the sound, the whizzing hard drive... I was perfect. I was immediately useful to Theo by doing whatever he needed me to do. I was always ready to work, and he took care of me by cleaning me, updating my software, scanning me for viruses, keeping me in a cool, dry place. In return, I do all this web research, connecting Theo to the world through the network. I still do it well, even though I am kind of an old-fashioned computer at 8 years old. No, I'm not like those new touch screen computers, but I get the job done, and I know Theo loves me because he's held on to his old friend all this time.

Something From There Group:

Diaa Lagan

Abdulai Mansaray

Owodunni Ola Mustapha

Abid Nadeem

Mbiya Theo Ngandu

Precious Omorogbe

Evgeny Shtorn

Leo Snygans

Lelo Mary Thebe

The Gallery extends heartfelt gratitude
to every person who has been involved
in this project.

For further information, please visit

www.nationalgallery.ie

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