

BOBBY BAKER'S GREAT & TINY WAR



Bobby Baker's *Great & Tiny War*

Introduction

In 2013, the Director of **14–18 NOW**, Jenny Waldman, offered Bobby Baker a commission to make a new artwork to commemorate the First World War. Baker knew she wanted to make a major piece investigating and celebrating the everyday life of women who run houses, cook, clean and care for children and generally act as the mainstay of family life – whether there is a war going on or not.

She began re-imagining the First World War in her home, designing key artworks to mark each year. The commission evolved into a series of domestic reflections that consider themes of emotional, manual and intellectual labour, transgenerational trauma and survival.

Baker was keen to shed light on the often hidden repercussions of war and loss on mental health, particularly in subsequent generations. The psychological impact of combat on soldiers, now described as PTSD, has recently become widely acknowledged. What is less discussed is the legacy this creates for families, and the impact it has on life in the home.

Conversations about family history and future generations were threaded throughout the project. The resulting artwork, *Great & Tiny War*, is in part inspired by the lives of Baker's mother and grandparents, who lived in Newcastle during the war. This influenced the location of the work, in an entire house in Newcastle, which also enabled Baker to further develop her creative collaboration with Wunderbar, with whom she had worked previously, in 2012. It also influenced Baker's decision to work with her son, Charlie Whittuck, on parts of the artwork, and to invite women with experience of conflict, who now live in the north east, to contribute.

Ultimately, *Great & Tiny War* is about family life, women, and the hidden value of their skill and strength during, and in the aftermath, of war. It offers a timely invitation to open new dialogues that can begin to shift the current discourse of war, and art, towards a more diverse understanding of society. This publication, with its newly commissioned essay by Sarah Lightman, offers a glimpse into the experience of this ambitious project.

Bobby Baker's Great & Tiny War

An essay by Sarah Lightman

*"Real social change comes from the ageless process
of people thinking together in conversation"*

– Margaret J. Wheatley

It is a cold November day and I am visiting Bobby Baker's remarkable *Great & Tiny War*, housed at 133 Sidney Grove, Newcastle upon Tyne. In this two-storey terraced house, using photographs, paintings and peppermint creams, conversations within families are both avoided and nurtured – with powerful consequences. Upstairs, Baker discloses the undiscussed breakdown of her grandfather. Downstairs, in the warm kitchen over tea and biscuits, I participate in *Great & Tiny Conversations*: curated moments of intimacy and personal connection, where I share stories of my own family's intergenerational trauma.

Baker is an artist and performer, and her pioneering autobiographical artwork foregrounds themes of mental health alongside women's lived



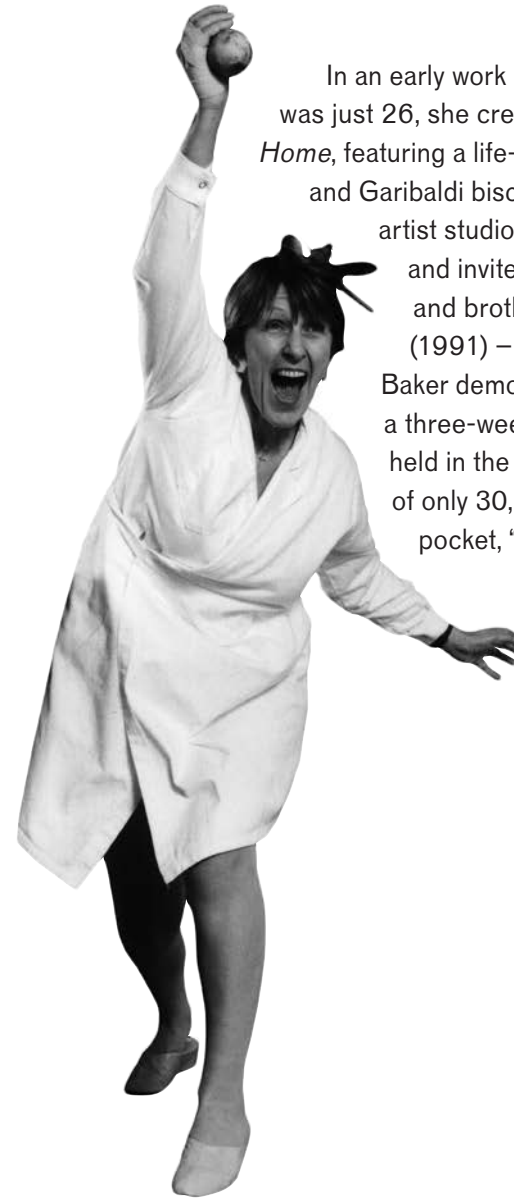
Photo: Caroline Dawson, 2018

experiences, often in intimate settings. *Great & Tiny War*, commissioned by *14-18 NOW* and co-produced by Wunderbar, develops many of Baker's leitmotifs. In it, she draws attention to overlooked domestic labour of the First World War and the impact that undiscussed war trauma and suffering can have on families for generations.

14-18 NOW was "a five-year programme of extraordinary arts experiences connecting people with the First World War". These included Danny Boyle's *Pages of the Sea*, on 32 beaches around the UK; Peter Jackson's colourised original film footage that he converted into 3D; and *Processions*, produced by Artichoke. For the latter, my four-year-old son and I, alongside tens of thousands of women, marched through the streets of the four political capitals of the UK – Belfast, Cardiff, Edinburgh and London – to celebrate 100 years of women's suffrage.

Baker's contribution to this programme challenged the mainstream media response to the First World War, which she considers often clichéd and male-focused. Speaking to me after my visit, she said: "A great deal of the commemoration the War, or the way it is talked about, relates to the soldiers and the trenches and not the whole of society. This is the predictable approach to talking about war and trauma. It is all about men, men and their experiences, and war memorials." Baker's artwork adds a new layer to public memory of the War, with a focus on "domestic labour and childcare, which women carry on doing whether there is a war or not, and which continues to hold little or no status". Baker explained to me that several generations of her mother's family lived and worked in Newcastle, and the show focused on the lives of her grandparents during and after the First World War: "I wanted to create a major work of art that investigated and celebrated the everyday life of women who run houses, bring up families, cook, clean and care for men. This includes the hidden lives of the women in their family homes between 1914–1918."

Autobiography has always been a central part of Baker's work, and this is especially true of *Great & Tiny War*. "I wanted an artwork that showed what I know happens in families," she said, adding with emphasis, "in my family". I have known Bobby Baker and her work for over ten years and have come to expect this deliberate creative momentum that begins within her own experiences and then moves outward, from the personal to the political and universal.



Kitchen Show, LIFT, London, 1991
Photo: Andrew Whittuck, 1991

In an early work by Baker, produced in 1976 when she was just 26, she created *An Edible Family in a Mobile Home*, featuring a life-size family made out of cake, meringues and Garibaldi biscuits. Baker opened her Acme pre-fab artist studio, in East London, to the public for a week and invited the audience to eat her mother, father and brother. In another work, *Kitchen Show* (1991) – the first of five LIFT commissions – Baker demonstrated one dozen kitchen actions over a three-week period. These performances were held in the artist's own home in front of an audience of only 30, with Baker keeping a pear in her breast pocket, "like some ammunition".



An Edible Family in a Mobile Home, Stepney, London, 1976. Photo: Andrew Whittuck, 1976



Roving Diagnostic Unit, Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park, Shuffle Festival, London 2015
Photo: Andrew Whittuck, 2015

More recently, Baker has also challenged the mental health system and the interpretation of mental distress. There was an extensive exhibition of her drawings at the Wellcome Collection in 2009, and the publication the next year of *Diary Drawings: Mental Illness and Me*, which won the MIND Book of the Year award in 2011. Baker has also produced (with her arts organisation, Daily Life Ltd.) *Roving Diagnostic Unit*, first piloted in 2015 at SHUFFLE Festival in Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park, where she and her team lead a series of mini expeditions to 'diagnose' the park. However, it is important to remember that Baker's *Diary Drawings* project (1997–2008) began as a diary-drawing ritual: artworks were often completed on, and photographed against the background of, her own kitchen table. This emphasises the extent to which their stories were embedded in her life and home.

The domestic setting of *Great & Tiny War* was one of the most powerful aspects of the exhibition, according to Professor Edgar Jones, of King's College London. Professor Jones's research has focused on military psychiatry: how individuals cope during periods of intense stress and the

Opposite: *Day 579*, Bobby Baker's *Diary Drawings: Mental Illness and Me*, 1997–2008. Photo: Andrew Whittuck, 2009

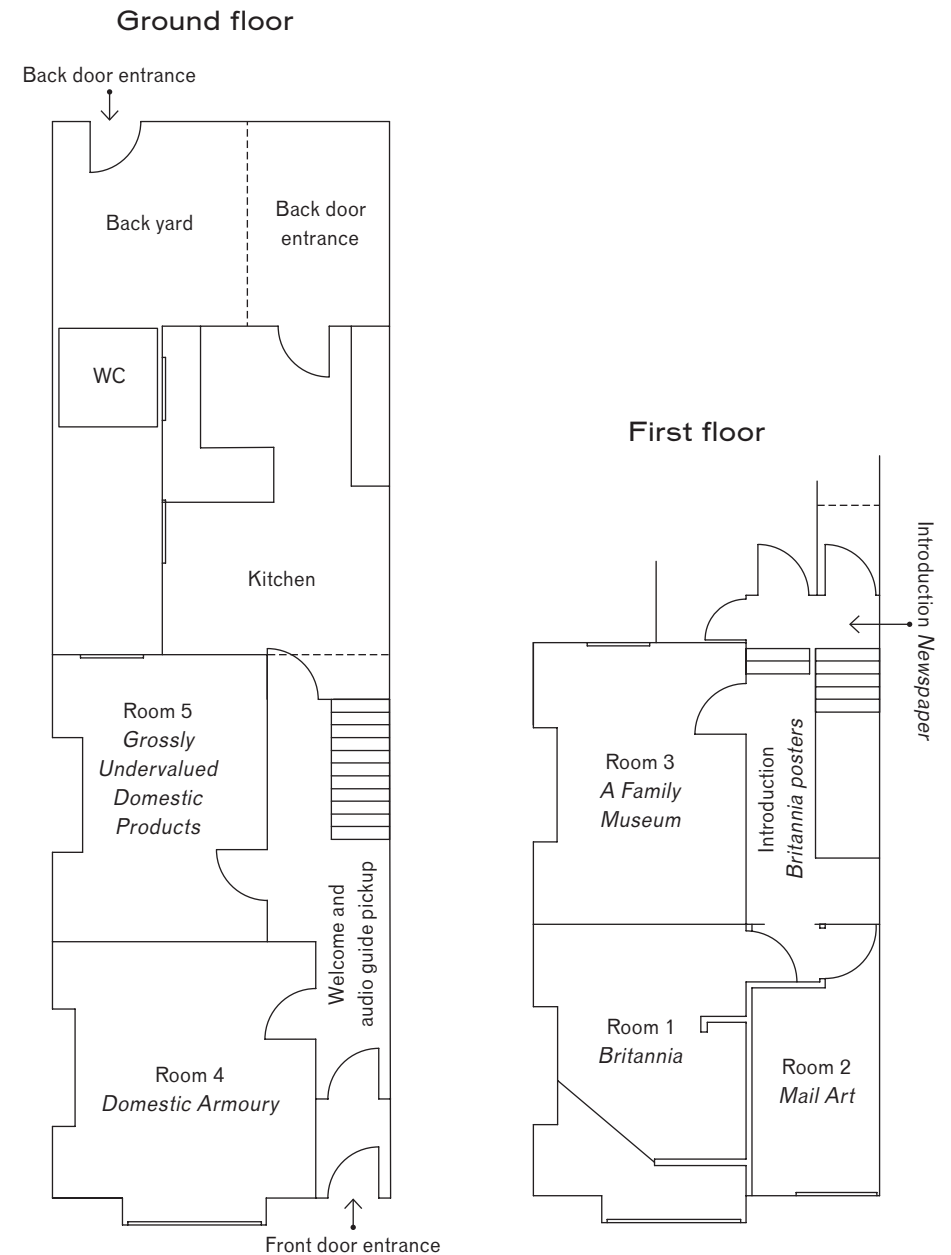




Day 711, Bobby Baker's *Diary Drawings: Mental Illness and Me*, 1997–2008
 Photo: Andrew Whittuck, 2009

impact of traumatic experiences on their wellbeing. He explained that: "Having the exhibition in a house is disarming. You go in, and you immediately feel comfortable. It is a welcoming space with none of the formal barriers of a large national museum. *Great & Tiny War* shows you that war doesn't only occur on the battlefield, it occurs in people's minds, in their private lives."

Great & Tiny War Layout 133 Sidney Grove



The Tour



Visitors entering the *Great & Tiny War* house. Photo: Andrew Whittuck, 2018

So here I am in Sidney Grove, Newcastle, visiting *Great & Tiny War* in November 2018. Number 133 looks very much like all the houses on Sidney Grove and is only identifiable by an estate agent-style sign with Baker's face on it. I press the bell, the door is opened by one of a dozen hosts of the project, and I am welcomed into the house. This intimate and humane gesture introduces the visitor into one of the most extraordinary and important aspects of this exhibition: the human encounter. Ilana Mitchell, Artistic Director of Wunderbar (the co-producers) has described the hosts: "They are really the custodians of the project. Each host had a different style, but collectively we all became a family." Each host is responsible for one group of visitors, and these groups consist of one to six people. Artist Helen Shaddock, who has been a host since the beginning of the project, explained that this experience "has been an absolute honour. I know Bobby's work and have an affinity with it, and I wanted to be an ambassador for it."

The exhibition is arranged around a tour of the building, so once all the visitors have arrived and their coats are hooked on pegs by the door, we are each given an earpiece and a mobile device to hold. We are introduced to how these operate, and then, all together, we press our buttons – a shared experience, which we all experience as individuals. Baker's engaging voice appears alongside the sound of a banging front door. Her voice feels very present, as if she were beside me throughout. Baker tells us to go up the stairs, and as we do this she discusses the bannisters, the carpet and the drying rack above the stairs. This helps to imprint on the viewer's mind that we are in a home, not a gallery – more specifically, a home lived in by people during the war. When we reach the top of the stairs, we see an original newspaper from 5th August 1914, the day after Britain declared war on Germany. The newspaper introduces us to war from the top down, with a series of black-and-white photos of many generals (all men). On the landing Baker guides us round a series of posters, such as one of Britannia calling for all men between the ages of 18 and 61 to sign up for national service.



Original copy of newspaper published on August 5th 1914 announcing the start of the First World War, 1914

Our earpieces now fall silent and we are led to the first room. Here there is a film, but with no sound. It feels very quiet after Baker's chatting in our earpiece, and I initially find the film disconcerting. Baker is a slightly ghostly figure, waiting at the start with a fully laid table of food. She has almost become part of a still life in the dark room with her white jacket on. Here, *Great & Tiny War* develops Baker's exploration of the domestic universe and again gives a high-profile role to foodstuffs. Baker continues to sit politely next to the food on the table. Waiting. Waiting. Home alone, what can she do? After the images of generals and the call for men to enlist, how can she contribute to the war effort? Baker then stops waiting for someone to appear, for something to happen. The artist seems to slowly find a role for herself. There, in her kitchen of peas and puddings, she transforms herself into Britannia with a cake on her head, brandishing a broom. She is upright, active, but also in character and assuming a regal yet impersonal role, majestic yet ridiculous, a self-saviour to her home.

We are then roused by a loud version of "Rule Britannia" that greets us and this resplendent Baker. Not only is the music loud, but we hear crowds yelling and whooping in the background. We are in a fantasy, a dream. Baker/Britannia is an ideal and outside time, but you cannot fail to be caught up in the jingoism of the rousing song. War is an act of triumph and glory. Rule Britannia! Onwards! This is the same emotion that many of those men felt when they signed up so eagerly to be soldiers for the war. The shouting crowds suggest that we can only win, conquer and rule.

In her embodiment of Britannia, far from being useless to the war effort, Baker has made her act of food preparation into something of national importance, which is vital to national survival. It is her food that will ensure that the country does not become a nation of slaves. This marvellous momentary vision makes food production central, and the theme is also prevalent in the other rooms of the house. But, as history has taught us, war is never really that magnificent. It was unnerving to have felt such strong emotions from that music, and from Baker's pose. And so I am left bemused and uneasy. A semi-edible national figurehead is very funny, but I feel a little manipulated, and I am bracing myself for something darker, for the reality of war.

Opposite: Room 1, 1914 / 2014, *Britannia*
Photo: Andrew Whittuck, 2018



Now we are moving to the next room, entitled Mail Art. This is a room of contemporary visions of war and family: "During the First World War, families on all sides made great efforts to keep in touch by sending letters and gifts. [...] My son Charlie Whittuck has lived in Brussels for the past ten years. The two of us have imagined how we might have kept in touch then, while thinking about the messages we want to send to the people we love now." This artwork brings the experiences of the First World War to life today, and Baker has entitled her work *Ordinary Heaven* (after George Herbert's 1633 poem "Prayer 1", which contains the phrase "Heaven in ordinarie"). On one wall, in the shape,



of an altarpiece, we have 14 biscuit tins decorated with gold leaf and painted with a series of key messages about the importance of relishing everyday life.

These are three-dimensional worlds, visual postcards featuring sizzling sausages, showers, swimming and countryside walks, mundane moments that hold the key to the divine. Exquisite and life affirming, these momentary experiences of pleasure are like panels from a comic book of Russian icons, a sequence of prayers of gratitude for the everyday. There is the shininess of optimism here, which winks at the viewer in an effervescent technicolour world. After a film that feels far away and that fixes on an isolated and ghostly figure, now we come back to the family, albeit an ideal family, existing in discrete perfection.



This page and opposite: Room 2, 1915 / 2015. *Ordinary Heaven*, 2018
Photos: Andrew Whittuck, 2018

In the same room are kinetic sculptures by Charlie Whittuck, made of metal and constantly moving with small motors, holding tea lights. Engraved with the names of Baker's grandchildren, here is a more abstract memorial to love and family – future and past, circulating. This is not the first time Baker has included family in her work. Dora Whittuck, her daughter, was a co-curator of *Diary Drawings* at the Wellcome Collection.

Charlie Whittuck's explanation of his work, sheds light on its background: "When we were young we had a Christmas decoration made of wood and lit by six candles. The heat from the candles made these wooden propellers spin, and the whole nativity scene revolved. This one object has inspired much of my work for years." Whittuck explains that his sculpture "creates a contemporary take on a shrine. Mum is a bit religious. The rest of us aren't, but I have always been interested in the idea of shrines. The Ferris wheels, slowly revolving but ever upright, are this foundation. Above them, my wife and I orbit our three children that sit between and above us." I am struck by how well his shrine idea resonates next to Baker's golden icons, and Whittuck's Ferris wheel family reflects a different constellation to that of Baker's biscuit-tin family tree.

We now move on from this gold and glossy present and future, back through Baker's family herstory. We have seen how her family *might* handle being separated by war, but what really happened to Baker's family during the First World War? Here, the political becomes more intensely personal, and the historical journey becomes real. This next room is entitled A Family Museum and consists of a gallery of black-and-white family photos, enlivened with Baker's entertaining commentary from our earpieces. We hear about her grandfather, George Herbert Taylor. Taylor was a brilliant man, who received a double first in Mathematics from Cambridge University, whilst also having been captain of rugby and a rowing blue (the highest rowing award). In one photo he sits on the laps of his sisters in a charming family shot (were these sisters equally brilliant but underinvested in, I wonder?). There is the wonderfully happy wedding photo with Baker's grandmother, Dorothy Pybus, in 1913 (she was from Gosforth, descended from wealthy alkaline merchants).

Taylor graduated from Cambridge and became a ballistics engineer at Armstrong Whitworth, an arms manufacturer during the war. There was great family pride in Taylor's success, and excitement at the increasingly

Opposite: Room 2, 1915 / 2015. *Untitled*, Charlie Whittuck, 2018
Photo: Andrew Whittuck, 2018





Room 3, 1916 / 2016. Baker's grandparents on their wedding day in 1913.
Archive picture credits: from family album



Room 3, 1916 / 2016. Baker's grandfather with a group of unidentified colleagues at the Armstrong Whitworth shooting range. He is the only one wearing plus fours.
Archive picture credits: from family album



Room 3, 1916 / 2016. The eight children of Baker's great-grandparents, the Vicar of Byker and his wife, taken outside the parsonage. Baker says: "My grandfather George is second from the left, sitting on his eldest sister Alice's lap. My great-aunt Dorrie, who I am meant to take after, is in the middle wearing a jaunty hat. My great-uncle Ronnie is second from the right. He was killed in the Battle of the Somme in 1916."
Archive picture credits: from family album



Room 3, 1916 / 2016. Baker's grandfather and two unidentified colleagues standing in front of the barrel of a huge gun. Archive picture credits: from family album



Room 3, 1916 / 2016. Another typical photograph from the family album – testing a gun. Archive picture credits: from family album

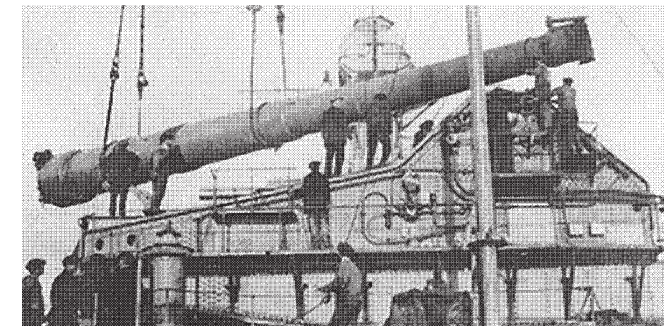


Room 3, 1916 / 2016. Test firing of the 18" Howitzer from a pontoon in 1917. Archive picture credit: Tyne and Wear Archives



Room 3, 1916 / 2016. 18" Howitzer
Archive picture credit: Tyne and Wear Archives

big guns he helped produce. But those guns also exploded his gilded future. For whilst he was photographed enjoying the delights of a countryside shoot with other members of his company after the war, his life was changed for ever. He had a breakdown, but it was only later in Baker's own life that she learnt this: "My mother told me, when she was 90, that my grandfather had suffered a major breakdown at the end of the First World War." At the end of the war, Baker's grandparents disappeared for a few months to the south coast for "a cure" and left her mother and her siblings with their grandparents. When Baker asked her mother why this happened, she said, "Oh, because he designed all those guns that killed all those people, of course".



Room 3, 1916 / 2016. 18" Howitzer
Archive picture credit: Tyne and Wear Archives



Room 3, 1916 / 2016. Photos: Andrew Whittuck, 2018

It is here that Baker's commentary finishes, and we are left in the room, absorbing this information. Suddenly, from the window, something appears. Long and in grey plastic, it shoots in from the window and starts to fill the room. It is the gun, that enormous gun – the gun that waylaid the brilliant man's potential and had a profound impact on Baker's family. Edgar Jones explained: "The gun symbolises the intrusive nature of psychological trauma and the fact that it continues to have an impact on veterans and their families in the aftermath of conflict when they have returned to civilian life. It reminds us that war not only affects combatants but also the families of those who suffered from physical and psychological wounds."

Baker later explained to me a central reason for focusing on her grandfather's story. She said that *Great & Tiny War* was an opportunity to re-author the family stories she had grown up with, to disregard some post-Freudian theory that blames the mother for the family's mental health issues, including those of the children. "My grandmother was a life-long anorexic and was blamed for having three depressed children. I tried to make sense of my own sadness in later life in relation to what I knew of my grandmother and mother." Baker's mother was mostly unsympathetic to her daughter's mental health issues: "Pull yourself together!" she admonishes her child during her times of deep unhappiness. Baker's grandfather's history had been "hushed up", but learning about his depression was when Baker started to understand her family history. Even though Baker herself never had the opportunity to speak to her grandfather, as he only invested in conversation with her brother and the other men in the family, the impact of his breakdown had huge repercussions on the whole family.

Yet there is no denying how funny this gun looks. In fact, after the initial shock it just looks even more absurdly phallic: a long, grey, collapsed, huge elephant's penis in the room. In addition, the host then rolls it up, zipping it back into its hidden place, for it to be exposed to other unknowing visitors. I was thrilled at Baker's use of humour – it infiltrates this room, where the most distressing part of her family story is unveiled. In *Great & Tiny War* the edible Britannia and this enormous inflatable/deflating gun are both subversive and liberating acts, as Baker acknowledges: "There is a risk though, that your art can backfire and also the reception of the serious message in the work can backfire," but this does not occur with an inflatable gun that cannot fire.

Baker knows that humour in art is a gendered terrain: “Women being funny is perhaps alarming. I realise when I used humour as a young woman, I would end up feeling ashamed when people laughed about my work. But then I would feel relief. I had to get used to how it felt, gradually, over a number of years.” But humour was also a way to feel empowered: “The way women laughed was fairly forceful in my family. They would make fun of a situation that had taken control of their lives.” And so Baker uses humour in many ways, with different impacts: “Whilst people may laugh initially and immediately at the humour, it is only afterwards that the serious message of the art filters through. My artwork uses wit as a way of seeing complex situations in a new light, so laughter comes in early on, but the central concept takes root a long time afterwards.” And she is right.

Later, as I wrote about the show and remembered that room, it made new sense to me. The photos were the past, but the gun happened now, in real time. This all fitted with another statement from Baker: “I wanted to make a show about the hidden secret sadness in families. I can tell, from all the time I spent in the mental health system, that everyone’s family has some sort of ‘war’ in it: everyone’s got some sort of trauma. It’s called transgenerational trauma and it’s how things can get passed down if they’re not resolved.” In her family it was this gun. But at the same time, the gun stands for all the unresolved traumas of everyone in my group, right here in A Family Museum. Whilst the initial impact has gone, it was that low, slow, limping plastic gun that was handed down across the generations. And at this point, in this room, I am thinking of my own grandfather, whose naval ship was destroyed and who had a breakdown after the Second World War. I am thinking how his mental health issues impacted my own mother, and how this, in turn, impacted my own childhood and adulthood, and my understanding of myself.

As I begin to think of my own family stories, I am also, unknowingly, preparing myself for the rooms downstairs. The *Great & Tiny War* programming included bread-making projects as a way to open up the project to the public, through workshops with local women’s organisations such as West End Women and Girls Centre, Arabic Women’s Group, Angelou Centre, Nunsmoor Centre, and Forward Assist with their women veterans’ scheme called Salute Her. The sessions were run in the centres and other safe spaces, and Baker would often introduce the project through a story about her grandmother’s rock cakes. As the participants learnt about the

artist, they were also inspired to think about and share their own experiences. What they produced is displayed in the downstairs room called the Domestic Armoury. There are amulets and other accessories made of dough, created by women who have lived through war conflict: “objects and items that give them the strength to live day-to-day through difficult times”. The vitrines around the room transform stale bread into fine art.



Room 4, 1917 / 2017. “Barbed wire kept the lions out of my army base camp in Angola”, Anon. Photo: Andrew Whittuck, 2018

One contributor to this room was Dr Thuraya Shami, who described how “when I attended the workshop, the dough was surprisingly difficult to use, but I could still make what I wanted. It was therapeutic while using my hands, balancing my inner self, kneading and making it in my hands, making me feel better”. Dr Shami is a refugee from war in Libya. She escaped to the UK with her three children, enabled by getting a place on a Master’s degree programme. During the bread-making workshop she wanted to think of “something positive while thinking of war. I thought about bombing and shelling and rockets that went on during the last six months, on a daily basis. At the same time, I wanted to think of the positives about the war but not the war itself”. Dr Shami rejected some of her initial ideas: “I thought I would make a gun out of dough, then that I wouldn’t go for the gun, instead let me show the great things I have done, let me think of my education and all I have achieved.” Dr Shami’s time



Room 4, 1917 / 2017. “Making a piece of toast, just for myself, is a great comfort”, Anon. Photo: Andrew Whittuck, 2018



Room 4, 1917 / 2017. "My 'therapy belt' would hold all my gardening tools – including scissors for cutting satisfyingly neat lawn edges", Anon. Photo: Andrew Whittuck, 2018

in the UK has been a journey towards autonomy: "Living my life, the way I want, the way I think is best for me. Not what my society dictates. I won't accept it anymore." Dr Shami made her graduation mortar board out of dough, along with two plaits and a moustache "because [as a single mother] I needed to be both parents now".

Whilst Dr Shami has made bread ornaments to celebrate her own significant

achievements, the artwork in the next room is about overlooked achievements and is entitled *Grossly Undervalued Domestic Products*. If the war lasted 1,567 days, then at least 4,701 meals had to be prepared, and, as Baker points out, "in most houses one woman did all the work unaided". The writer, broadcaster, actor and producer Sandi Toksvig OBE, in her Adam Smith Lecture in 2018, noted that "Grossly Undervalued Domestic Product is an integral part of the economy, not separate or tangential or even a drain on so-called 'productive' work". Baker and her team produced 4,701 miniature, handmade peppermint cream "meals" to celebrate the "undervalued, unseen and unacknowledged domestic labour that continue everyday – even through wars and conflicts". There was a fruitcake, a cooked breakfast,



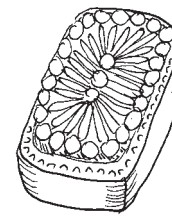
Room 4, 1917 / 2017. "This is my Eritrean clay coffee pot and cup. Every day I make coffee in this pot, using freshly-roasted coffee beans, ground and mixed with cloves and other spices", Anon. Photo: Andrew Whittuck, 2018



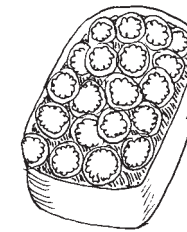
Photos: Janina Sabaliauskaite, 2018

a roast leg of lamb, a shepherd's pie and mince pies – these exquisite moulds, like doll's-house meals, are displayed on a moving cake stand constructed by Charlie Whittuck.

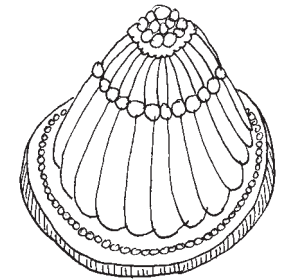
The cake stand is huge and takes over the room, again contrasting with Baker's smaller, handmade drawings, and the tiny hand-moulded peppermint creams. Baker explained to me that the inclusion of her son's work reflected his own working life: "He's a modern parent and cooks daily, does lots of the



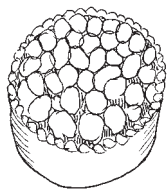
Dish of vegetables



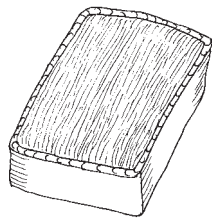
Mince Pies



Blanc mange



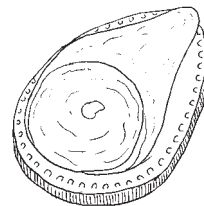
Dish of potatoes



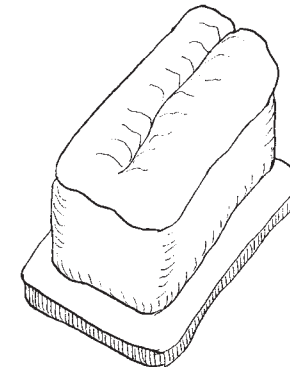
Shepherds Pie



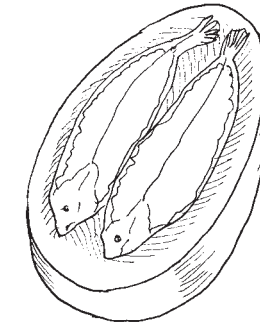
Bowl of porridge



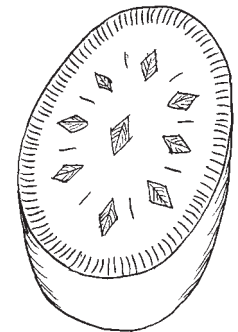
Roast leg of lamb



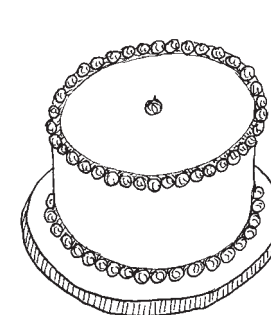
Loaf of Bread



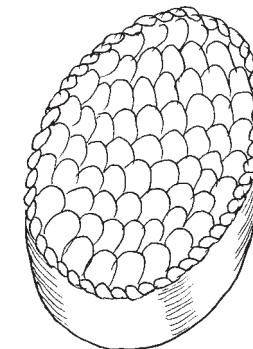
Kippers



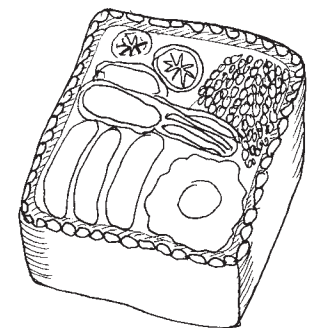
Meat pie



Fruit cake



Pan haggerty



Cooked breakfast

fetching and mopping up of children during the week as his hours are more flexible, and he is paid less, so this is about domestic labour male or female." The huge beam and internal workings of this cake stand reflect industrial aesthetics and the emphasis on engineering in the north east of England. I recall a conversation I had with Baker, when she described how strong the maths and mechanical genes were in her family. Whilst her grandfather's talents had been shoehorned into a gun of mass destruction, with a traumatic aftertaste for generations, his great-grandson, Charlie Whittuck, had been given the chance to use his talents as an artist. Here, in *Great & Tiny War*, he could celebrate his own family and domestic accomplishments. I remember the text in the Mail Art room: "100 years ago he [Whittuck] would most likely have been drafted into service and could easily have been fighting on the front line in Belgium." Whittuck's contributions to this exhibition reflect the outcome of diverse opportunities and gender roles given to similar talents, in very different generations.



This page: Room 5, 1918 / 2018. *Grossly Undervalued Domestic Products* (detail), Bobby Baker and Charlie Whittuck, 2018. Photo: Wunderbar, 2018. Opposite: *Grossly Undervalued Domestic Products*, Bobby Baker and Charlie Whittuck, 2018. Photo: Andrew Whittuck, 2018



Great & Tiny Conversations

We are now led to the final room, the kitchen. *Great & Tiny War* ends with tea and ginger biscuits here, with their consumption accompanied by an opportunity to share personal and family stories. After rooms of artwork, this space “breaks down the institutional frame whilst providing a framing that is gentle and inclusive”, according to Ilana Mitchell. I find it enlightening to know that Mitchell and Baker visited numerous National Trust properties before the show, to help cement their ideas for the space of this kitchen that hovers somewhere between museum café and support group. The conversations, inspired by Baker’s artwork and family story, nurtured by the intimacy of the exhibition and the vital role of the guiding host, expand so easily into the audience’s own family experiences. However, Mitchell has also acknowledged: “No matter how long you plan a project, it never really comes to life until audiences interact with it. What happened here was something unique. We knew it should happen, and we set it up so it could happen, but you also can’t plan for it – the art [of *Great & Tiny War*] was a catalyst for conversations that just don’t happen in other gallery spaces.”

In my mind, what is most remarkable is the care with which this whole project has been orchestrated. The alchemy of comfort, empathy and consideration creates an atmosphere that elicits remarkable responses from the audience, as they become vital and willing participants in the project. In the past, Baker’s exhibitions often provided various spaces for participation at different levels. I recall the beautiful curation of *Diary Drawings*, with a small box where you could write notes directly and confidentially to Baker. In the kitchen in Newcastle the role of the host is vital, as Helen Shaddock explained: “The room has opened up conversations, and people feel a lot more comfortable like a visitor in someone’s home, as opposed to an art gallery. As a host, my role is being able to just tease out a few things that they already have in their heads. In the kitchen, there is an absolute wealth of stories that come out. People are so willing to have a conversation, by now they feel they know each other. It is really pleasing that when they leave, they often make a point to say, ‘It has been a pleasure to share this experience with you.’” Ilana Mitchell explained to me that she ensured that there was sensitivity to all those involved in the experience, and this was essential in participation of this sort

of project. “In whatever way people are involved – here from bread-makers, to hosts, to audiences visiting the house – taking care that their experience at every stage of involvement is sensitively and generously considered is paramount. This approach is core to how we produce all our projects.”



Visitor watching the access video in the kitchen. Photo: Wunderbar, 2018

The tour is now over. I am taking my coat off the peg and digesting the stories I have heard. To help me review the show, I have been busy photographing artwork on my phone and recording conversations, but now that feels the antithesis of what this show is about. In a world of social media, where we are so often being filtered and separated from those we are communicating with, this is a house where time and physical

presence are essential – from the time it took for the work to be made and the team to be developed, to the time needed for the audience to experience it. This approach to time parallels the central themes of the work itself. *War* has an impact not just during the conflict itself but also, crucially, afterwards – for generations.

I close the door behind me. It is easy to forget how the house looks from the outside, the very uniformity, how it fits in, attached to the terrace, and how it gives so little away about what happens on the inside. Inside Number 133 is a story that might be happening elsewhere, but we might never know the inflatable guns that traverse their generations and interrupt their family photographs. *Great & Tiny War* reflects the balance between remarkable and quotidian, national and domestic, the ignored and the insistent, golden moments of joy and heavy lingering depressions, all flavoured with a most remarkable use of humour. Reflected in my taxi mirror is Baker, smiling on the billboard. In her hands, I now notice, is a delicately decorated gingerbread house. *Great & Tiny War* is an artwork of domestic heroism, generationally indigestible hell, edible hope through a dance of scales, world war, huge guns and tiny meals. And more than just an edible house and a red brick home, *Great & Tiny War* is also, like another type of home, snail-like, leaving behind it trails of conversations.



Grossly Undervalued Domestic Products really hit me. Made me cry. Make me feel more determined not to be undervalued.
– *Great & Tiny War* visitor

This is the perfect way to experience art. Everything was just right – the pace, the duration, the lovely host and the design of the tour as a whole.
– *Great & Tiny War* visitor



About time that ordinary women's huge contribution to keeping the home fires burning is beginning to be recognised and also the continuing call on women and girls all over the world living in different kinds of conflict. Really thought-provoking and imaginative.
– *Great & Tiny War* visitor

Bittersweet sensation to have finished at the #GreatTinyWar house today. It has been such a blessing and a great joy to work with such generous and powerfully creative people. Thank you all. May our great and tiny conversations continue!
– *Iris Priest*, Host

Great & Tiny Conversations event, October 2018
Photos: Wunderbar, 2018

Biographies

Bobby Baker is an artist and activist acclaimed for producing radical work of outstanding quality across disciplines including performance, drawing and installation. In a career spanning four decades, Baker has been widely commissioned, including by WOW – Women of the World Festival, LIFT, and the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad. Baker's touring exhibition *Diary Drawings: Mental Illness and Me* 1997–2008 premiered at the Wellcome Collection, London, in 2009 and continues to tour nationally and internationally. The accompanying book of the same name won the MIND Book of the Year 2011. In 2019, a major retrospective of Baker's work was held at La Casa Encendida, in Madrid. Baker holds an Honorary Doctorate from Queen Mary University London. She is Artistic Director of Daily Life Ltd.

Sarah Lightman is a London-based artist and writer. She attended the Slade School of Art for her BA and MFA, where she won The Slade Prize and The Slade Life Drawing Prize and has a PhD from University of Glasgow in women's autobiographical comics. She edited *Graphic Details: Jewish Women's Confessional Comics* (McFarland 2014), that was awarded The Koppelman Prize (2015) and The Will Eisner Award (2015), and a Schnitzer Book Award (2016). Her graphic novel, *The Book of Sarah* (Myriad Editions and Penn State UP 2019), has been shortlisted for a 2019 British Book Design & Production Award.

Great & Tiny War was a Daily Life Ltd. and Wunderbar project commissioned by 14–18 NOW. The artwork won the Best Event Tyneside 2018 at the 2019 Journal & Gazette Culture Awards.

Wunderbar makes stand-out creative projects that bring audiences and artists together on journeys of intrigue and wonder. For ten years they have been turning the everyday upside down to inspire, challenge and nurture new ways to work, think and play.
wunderbar.org.uk

Daily Life Ltd. is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation that produces Bobby Baker's artworks. Founded in 1995, it creates powerful art that changes the way people think.
dailylifeltd.co.uk

14–18 NOW was the UK's arts programme for the First World War Centenary that ran from 2014–2018.



Photo: Andrew Whittuck, 2018

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Great & Tiny War was made by:

CREATIVE TEAM

Bobby Baker: Artist and Artistic Director
Charlie Whittuck: Associate Artist
Ilana Mitchell: Artistic Director, Wunderbar
Miranda Melville: Production Designer
Steve Wald: Technical Director
Kate Bland: Audio Producer, Cast Iron Radio
Chris O'Shaughnessy: Audio Producer, Cast Iron Radio
Johnny McGowan: Filmmaker, Room 1
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Elle Clark: Studio Assistant
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Emma Cahill: Production
Caroline Dawson: Production and Access
Rose Sharp: Consultant
Louise Alexander: Finance Manager
Claire Greenhalgh: Fundraising consultant

WUNDERBAR

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Sallyanne Flemons: Communications Director
Sarah Churlish: Producer (2015–2017)
Hannah Kirkham: Producer (2018–)
Ree Collins: Participation Producer
Kate Pawley: Marketing and Social Media Officer

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Iris Priest: Production Assistant
Mat Fleming: Technician
Jemma Hind: Technician
John Smith: Technician
Jack Richardson: Technician
Liam Murray: Technician

DESIGN / DOCUMENTATION

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Joe Hales: Graphic design
Sally Pilkington: Website and graphic design, Morph Creative
Alastair Cummings: Filmmaker

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Sarah Pickthall: Cusp Inc

PR

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14–18 NOW

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Nigel Hinds: Executive Producer
Sarah Goodfellow: Producer
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Katy Cole
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Sarah Degger
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Hannah Kirkham
Lindsay Nicholson
Marwa Omar
Iris Priest
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All at 14–18 NOW
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Hannah Marsden
Andrew Rothwell, Newcastle City Council
Philip and Vanessa Bond, Creating The Impossible
Mark Shears, ABC Inflatables
Angela Savage
Danella Downer, Orpheo Group
sean burn
Rob Prouse
Kevin Nicholson
Pete Evans

Epilogue

- *Great & Tiny War* was open for 80 days, extended from the original 60 due to popular demand
- Over 1.7k people visited the *Great & Tiny War* house during this time
- Across social media platforms and via local and national press campaigns, the project reached 4m people
- Over 60 women joined workshops prior to *Great & Tiny War*, contributing to the artworks on display in Room 4: 1917 / 2017
- *Great & Tiny War* won the Best Event Tyneside 2018 at the annual Journal & Gazette Culture Awards.

The conversations in the kitchen, the comments in the Visitor's Book and on social media testify that *Great & Tiny War* had a huge impact both on its visitors and those who were a part of its development and presentation. A new project, *Great & Tiny Conversations*, is now being developed by Daily Life Ltd. and Wunderbar, inspired by and building on the knowledge and experience of *Great & Tiny War*.



Great & Tiny War

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Bobby Baker's *Great & Tiny War* was a major site-specific artwork that took over an entire house in Newcastle upon Tyne from 7 September to 28 November 2018. Commissioned for 14–18 NOW – the UK's arts programme for the First World War centenary – *Great & Tiny War* was co-produced by Daily Life Ltd. and Wunderbar.

In this publication, artist, curator and writer **Sarah Lightman** reflects on the experience of visiting *Great & Tiny War* and, through interviews with Baker and her collaborators, discusses the multiple layers – of family history, transgenerational trauma, domestic, emotional and intellectual labour – that underpin this award-winning artwork.

Great & Tiny War is an artwork of domestic heroism, generationally indigestible hell, edible hope through a dance of scales, world war, huge guns and tiny meals.

– Sarah Lightman

So thrilled that this is part of the 14–18 NOW programme. Important + profound... a surprising, powerful, thought-provoking installation.

– Jenny Waldman, Director, 14–18 NOW

Great & Tiny War is immensely considered, beautifully realised.

– Anthony Roberts, Director, Colchester Arts Centre

Bobby Baker is a beacon of joyous insurrection in what feels like a very mad world.

– Meg Rosoff, writer

Absolutely heartbroken thinking about all the effort that goes into fighting and hating each other, not just on the front line. Vital, jaw dropping work.

– *Great & Tiny War* visitor

wunderbar.org.uk/greattinywar
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