

The Pink Palace

The pink palace sways and floats on the corner of Foley Street. A benevolent palace, not descended from an imperial lineage of fortresses and castles and settlements and cathedrals and towers and arrows and mines and booby traps and walls and surveillance posts and shields and statues and drones, but one of air channels and sun traps and clay pads and dancing womb-linings.

Majestic plastic billowing womb-lining twins that never got sick and tired and inflamed but rather grew more palatial and pink with each solar rotation. The lining twins never tore, the stitching held, the sheets swelled with optimum air quality conditions thanks to kind guardians that hold the door gently. The majestic, airy, smooth towering womb-lining twins, devoid of lesions and cysts, are the ideal thickness grade, measurement and form, dimensions and interiors to appreciate in an ocean of cavities and evacuations and floods.

The pink palace blueprints were sketched in the hospital site, in a cavity where the MRI machines and the waiting room and the magnet shell enclosure had been before. The hospital-grade, plastic laundry bags had been procured in bulk, after a lengthy tendering process, to ensure infection control and the safe containment and transportation of contaminated laundry in steel trolley cages across the colour-coded hospital corridors and operating theatres and wards to the basement tunnel washers.

In a past grey time, the tunnel washers had been humans, women and girls washing and ironing and stitching laundry from all the hospitals and from all the malevolent palaces and castles and cathedrals and government buildings, their washing and bleaching and stain-removing was involuntary and coercive and cruel and violent in all of the ways we fear. After a long time the grey slowly faded out of sight to the base layers, and the women and girls who had been imprisoned and enslaved and starved and marked and isolated for their lifetimes were replaced by a long and loud stainless steel machine known as a tunnel washer or a continuous batch washer, that vibrated all along the concrete hospital basement floor.

The hospital-grade plastic laundry bags were procured in bulk because they had been formally tested and approved by many health services and because they dissolved in water and left only harmless trace components with very little environmental impact and because they were puncture resistant. The bags were found under cement and dust and rubble in the cavity where the MRI machine had been, near to the shards from the magnet shell enclosure, and some were pierced somehow in spite of all the tests but some of the other bags buried in the pile were perfect. At first the bags were repurposed as sheets for sleeping and as tourniquets for bleeding and as barriers for resisting infection and later as windows and doors and walls for living after the most recent grey time.

The pinkness of the plastic laundry bags were noticed by a human who was utilising them to resist infection and then with time, to make walls from the wind on the site where the hospital had been before. The human was tickled by the pinkness of them around and in all of the grey everywhere that continued to drop down from above in powdery clouds and rise up in rubble and catch in her nostrils and all the way down to her lungs. In the time of laundry bags as barriers, this human started to sketch and mark the bags, layering and folding corners and tracing all sorts of things she knew had happened. Then later she ironed them flat through her own choice and decision and through her own hands because there was no electricity to use an iron or to use any of the hospital equipment. She hoisted and wrapped and knotted the edges of the laundry bags to build transparent walls that reminded her of paintings in a cave that she had visited once while on holidays before.

The pink plastic blueprint barrier walls were wrapped and folded and stored after the grey time dissipated slightly. The same human who was tickled by their pinkness was older now and she was with other humans who had also utilised the laundry bags as barriers and sheets and tourniquets and windows and walls and doors, on the same hospital site and on and in other cavities all across the city and region. These bags had been folded, hand-ironed and stored as reminders and containers of flashing images that came back often, and so they had never dissolved into sinks and pipes and soil and streams and oceans. These humans who had gathered with their collections of plastic laundry bag-containers of flashing images, decided to build a pink palace together that was not a palace of slit windows to shoot arrows and throw grenades. They stitched the sheets together and they did so with such love that the stitchings have never ripped since and the punctures from the time before, when the radiology suite in the purple section of the hospital was hit with such force to cause the magnet shell enclosure to completely collapse, somehow sealed themselves together again in a miracle, with a substance resembling slug mucus glistening at the puncture wound marks.

So many pink plastic laundry bags had been gathered and stored and held tightly that the humans realised they had stitched enough to create a double-lined pink palace. Once all the edges were hoisted and pinned, as they remembered doing a long time before in the very grey times, the linings started to billow and dance around, an effect they had not anticipated and one that was very different from the taut surfaces they had sculpted back in the past grey time when they were building walls and windows and doors for living again. The double-linings, that they jokingly referred to as the twins, allowed for hiding spaces and warm channels and they started to play in these passage ways and move the linings slightly this way and that to bring the sun inside.

The sun traps that appeared and disappeared in rhythm with the solar rotations were the ideal dimensions for lying beside and in between the pink, double womb-lining twins, and for suddenly remembering in bright flashes, the long faded marks they had made in a past time on these very sheets in the hospital site cavities and in cavities all across the region, that had reminded them of cave paintings from a now very distant holiday. They all remarked that since it was such an ideal palace to absorb the sun and light and optimum air quality conditions, they would bring their succulents and mosses, and the little clay pads they had squeezed in their hands and attached to metal lengths to hold the vulnerable plants upright, here.

Text by Laura Ní Fhlaibhín

Laura Ní Fhlaibhín, is an artist currently living between London and Wexford. She has been commissioned to write this text in response to an exhibition by Elaine Grainger *HOLDING ON Lightly* at the The LAB Gallery Dublin, 2023.