



Welcome to my WORKROOM

Lived-in and loved, LOUISE O'HARA's workroom is used every day and packed with personal and professional collections, art supplies and an ever-changing gallery of artworks. By Janai Velez

When mixed-media artist Louise O'Hara shared a workroom with her husband (who also works from home), he had to climb over her paintings while trying to get in and out of the room, which was all the incentive Louise needed to relocate to (and fill) another space in the house just for her. You could call her room part art studio/part vintage-collections display/part art gallery, as Louise has utilised every square centimetre of space.

"I would definitely say I work in organised chaos. My shelves and desk space look like a chaotic mass of ephemera and work materials, but I know exactly where everything is,

from an old piece of lace to scissors and spare threads ... just ask, and I will find it. I would even go so far as to say if you blindfolded me, I could still put my hand on everything," she says. "My house is clean – don't get me wrong – but it's brimming with my little collections."

Home for Louise is an old farm-workers cottage dating back to 1881, in a small village called Davenham, in the heart of Cheshire, England. She called it Cobweb Cottage not only because of her crowd of belongings but because there was also a spider that made an appearance at almost exactly the same time every night in one of the rooms when they first





moved in. "I tell people when they ask that I don't clean and it's full of cobwebs ... a slight exaggeration!"

The cottage is located on a very social street. During summer, Louise's work spreads to the front courtyard. "These are the months when little work happens, as every passer-by stops for a chat! But I am not complaining," she says. And then there's the overload that finds its way to the dining room. "When we have guests round for meals, we do have to juggle to make the room available. But my friends and family all know what I am like."

You can find Louise in her studio straight after dropping her two daughters off at school right up until it's time she collects them in the afternoon. Plus, she's regularly in and out of the room during the evenings and on weekends.

In terms of decoration, all that's left of the room's previous living/dining

incarnation are the charcoal and silver wallpaper and crystal and wrought-iron chandelier, which is "oversized" but there to stay, since it is one of Louise's favourite features.

She never tires of the space, as it evolves on a weekly basis. Her artwork display along the shelves changes as pieces go out to galleries and customers and return from shows.

Louise's mixed-media textile landscapes feature classic, English cottages amongst flower-scattered gardens, rolling hills and coastlines. Most are based on photographs and memories of places she's visited (especially during childhood holidays in the Lake District and Yorkshire). The artworks are created with layers of paint, dyed, vintage fabrics and embellishments (such as text from old books, newsprint, buttons, lace and copper-wire-stemmed flowers with French-knot flower heads). These are stitched down by hand and machine.



Art and crafting materials are stowed in plastic stackable boxes piled under her desk and little Ikea wooden storage drawers. And her husband got busy and made her work surface and shelving from solid oak, all of which now have traces of paint, ink and the odd scribble from her daughters. Her laptop sits under her window and, at the opposite end of the room is her sewing machine, crowned with an inspiration board and an old railway clock face.

"I have not gone for a theme, as such," says Louise. "The style of my work space has just developed. It is an extension of my personality." The busyness of the room shows that it's used and adored, although Louise admits, "I probably should tidy a little more often ... or so some would say!"

My idea of minimal seems to be the opposite to most people's." However, the 'clutter' is vintage finds and overlooked everyday items that she upcycles into art. "I do de-clutter my workroom probably about every six months but I only ever throw away old paper, cardboard, broken paintbrushes, empty ink bottles and dried up paint tubes. I never throw away anything I can breathe new life into!"

You can find out more about Louise O'Hara, of Louise O'Hara Art, by visiting www.louiseohara.co.uk; uk.pinterest.com/louiseOHaraArt/my-work; www.facebook.com/LouiseOHaraArt; and www.etsy.com/uk/shop/LouiseOHaraArt. You can also contact Louise via email, art@louiseohara.co.uk.



A FEW OF MY FAVOURITE THINGS

GRANDAD'S CAMERA - Unfortunately, my grandad is no longer with me, so this makes the camera even more special. He was one of those people who never really let you in. I loved him dearly and spent my childhood days with him and my nana, but never really knew anything about him or his family, hobbies, etc. This is a huge regret of mine. Having his camera allows me to make my own memories of the life he may have had.

LINEN WASHING BUTTONS - I source them from charity shops and auction sites, and people send them to me. I just love to use them in my work. I think they are so understated and utilitarian; they remind me of the days gone by when my nan always washed her clothes on a certain day of the week and my auntie Joan had a washing machine and a mangle to get the excess water out. I just feel they are embedded with that 'make do and mend' philosophy that has been lost on a generation, although it is lovely to see that upcycling is now becoming fashionable.

EPHEMERA - A few years ago, I bought a bundle of ephemera at an auction site. I bought it with the intention of using it within my work, but when it arrived, I actually had tears in my eyes. It was a vast collection of travel documents, notelets and pamphlets documenting the early years of someone's wonderful life - a very lucky and well-travelled lady. This collection is something that I could never use or get rid of.

