

# Sarah Walters visits Lee Mingwei's unusual new exhibition

Build a living room anywhere, with fresh tea and coffee on the go, and people will come.



Build a living room anywhere, with fresh tea and coffee on the go, and people will come.

It's the experience that Lee Mingwei has learnt since he was first commissioned by New York's Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum to create a domestic parlour in the middle of the gallery.

Now, he's brought the concept to the Chinese Arts Centre, where he's taken over the new Project Space with The Living Room – a huge contrast to his main gallery show *Quartet*, which features four speakers playing in a blackened room that create a soundtrack influenced by the visitors in the space.

The two shows, then, share a thematic link of interaction but offer quite different gallery experiences. Far from *Quartet*'s spooky surroundings, Living Room is a cosy experience about collecting. 'Hosts' of collectors – from knitting enthusiasts to a lady who catalogued the objects left in her late-grandmother's home – will occupy the space on a rota and sit in the space to talk to visitors about their items.

"People who wouldn't have met otherwise get to have an intimate conversation with each other in this living room setting," says programmer Elizabeth Wewiora. "It's a very

familiar and comfortable setting.

“We have a rolling timetable of hosts – who do three days each – and the collections range from films and film reels to trinkets, ornaments and postcards.

“The public drops in, the host sits there with tea and coffee set up, and the visitors make themselves comfortable and talk to them about their collections.”

Several visitors have turned with their own collectables, including one who came along with a golden pigeon he’d won at a previous Chinese Arts Centre exhibition and which started off a fine art collection. School groups are also booked to call in with their own special pieces in the weeks ahead.

Visitors are encouraged to make short videos of themselves talking about their collections and upload them to [thelivingroomproject.co.uk](http://thelivingroomproject.co.uk). Short films with the resident hosts talking about their reasons for collecting are also available to view online.

Elizabeth adds: “What this show has proven is this is a piece that really can travel. We’re working with a lot of artists now who engage with the audience and facilitate them becoming part of the work and taking ownership of it.

“Because the host communities keep changing, this work will always be different but always have that familiar setting.”

**A Quartet & A Living Room is at Chinese Arts Centre, Thomas Street, until August 17 and until July 27 respectively, both free.**

---