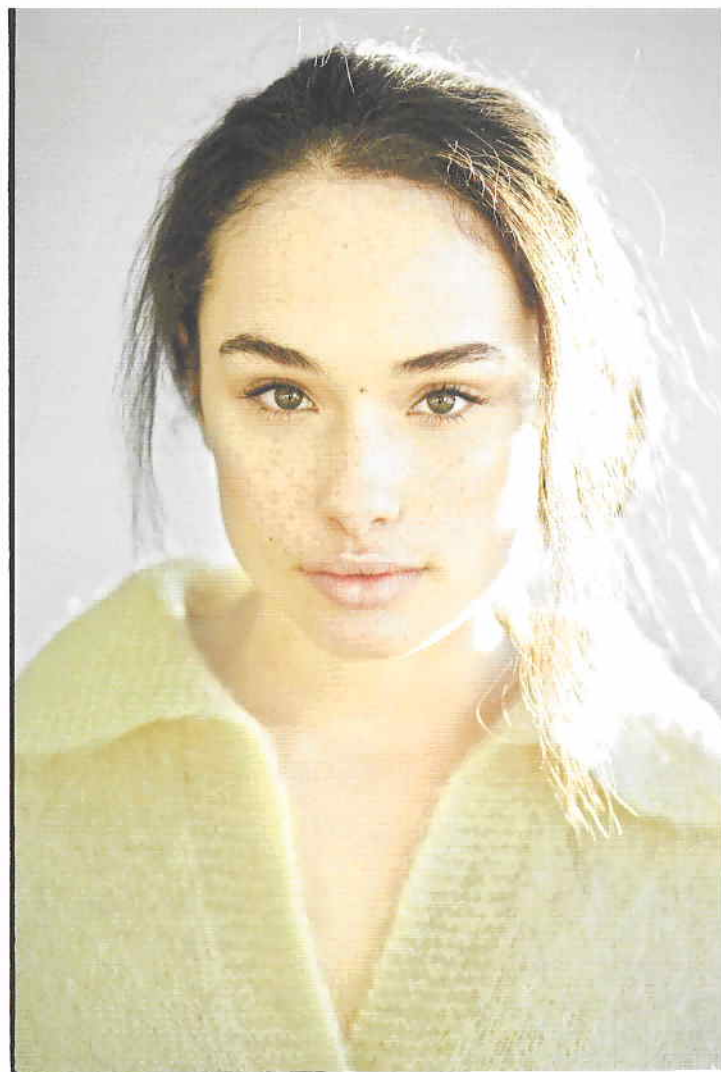


Oh comely

Keep your curiosity sacred



We built a book
with plywood &
tape, page 76,
illustrated dreams
we couldn't forget,
page 28,
played five scenes
in colours and
clothes, page 60,
wondered about
our old home
towns, page 86,
and tasted
porridge around the
world, page 120.



Portraits taken in Imogen Rabone's photo booth.
Self-portrait, opposite.



one, two, three, click

imogen rabone and her travelling photo booth

interview louisa lee

Imogen Rabone has the perfect toy: a travelling 1970s photo booth. She loved the idea of reintroducing these old-style photo booths to her native Ireland. So this year she imported her first, shipping the half tonne of metal all the way from Chicago. The restored booth now moves from a cosy Dublin pub on trips to festivals and events. Imogen invited us to step inside.

I saw quite a few old photo booths in Seattle and Portland this summer and I think it's a wonderful idea to bring old photo booths back to Ireland. Where did you first come across the idea?

I thought, "Wow, that would be the ultimate toy." I have so many old cameras, so it's almost a giant camera for me and it was a bit of a daydream to have one. I thought it would be nice to go and put one somewhere, maybe in a bar. And I got more and more up to my neck in it, to the point that I actually had one coming over on a boat. I shipped it over from Chicago and now I take it around to different events. In between outings it sits in a bar, which is great because people get drunk and climb into it. I hear stories from the bar staff after a party and they're like, "There were fifteen nurses in there yesterday!"

Do you just have to trust that they'll look after it properly for you at the bar?

It is quite vulnerable. I'm actually dealing with a smashed piece of glass today. I've told the bar staff to watch it like a hawk. But then, you know, last night somebody actually got in there with a pint and was a bit drunk and smashed the glass.

What are people's reactions to it?

I really couldn't believe my luck. People were laughing me out of the door when I came up with the idea. How ridiculous to buy an old broken piece of junk! I saw it as a labour of love, I suppose. It has one of those old-school seats and a little curtain. Mine's got lots of charm.

It's got nice bits of enamel, chrome and wood on the inside. It's much prettier than the modern ones.

Do you see them as artworks in themselves? They're like public sculptures as well, but much more fun and accessible.

I always saw them as wonderful machines that take brilliant photographs. Now I look at it more, and I'm getting more cynical because I do a lot of work as an artist and the more I test it ... I mean, people go bonkers for it. They're very nice photos that it takes. I think that people are captivated by the way that it looks—it does look extremely old—and the way the photos come out.

As a photographer, how does that feel? Does it feel strange handing it over?

It does make everything I do feel completely pointless: camera, darkroom, studio almost, all in this little box. It feels strange, but in a positive way. I love it. I like the fact that it is mysterious and I think that people who climb into it become little artists themselves. They're not affronted by the photographer. They're not alarmed that you're standing there in front of them with a camera. It's extraordinary. Friends of mine clam up whenever you put a camera anywhere near them and it takes brilliant photos in there, great poses.

Where might you install it next?

I can think of lots of big and grand and glorious places, but I want to take it around isolated places, like stick it on a village green in Yorkshire or outside a village shop and leave it there for a couple of days and let people really get into it. I always wanted to put it in a place where people could wander in or wander past.

I sometimes think people don't print enough of their photos. The number of stories where you've had someone say, "My laptop was stolen and it's got all my photos inside." I like the immediate security: when you press a button and in three minutes you have a memory.