Phoenix News

An evening with Minty : Punkcity Comix

Minty is a longstanding Phoenix member (15 years) who now lives in Daubeney Road in Homerton, in a house he shares with three others.
We have come to speak to Minty after being shown one of his amazing comics by Enza when we visited her flat earlier this month. We were immediately drawn to the surreal hand drawn stories, featuring London Fields, east London pubs, crystal balls and Nick Cave (amongst other things) and wanted to meet the creator.
Over curry and tea, Minty told us a bit more about Punkcity Comix, a series of five stories as well as some one-off specials, including a Christmas edition that tells a tale of festivity and loneliness. The issue 'Mid Winter Spirit' was written as a kind of death bed vision around the time Minty got ill with pneumonia and subsequently had an operation on his heart.
He also showed us some his framed artworks and posters from the past few years which often feature elements of nature found in the parks and streets around his house.

Emma + Zahara: How did the comic book series come about and what is the significance of Nick Cave as a character?
Minty: It started as a running joke in the park really, when I decided he would be held captive as an imp in a bottle...A group of us had been drinking in London Fields in the summer for 15 or 20 years and one day about two years ago we went to Victoria Park for All Points East when Nick Cave and Patti Smith were both on the bill. I had to come home in the end because I was complaining so much about Patti Smith, the people I was with said I was doing their head in.

E + Z: Had you been an artist before?
M: No not really - I had to stop drinking after I got ill a few years ago and had to stay in a lot, I did a birthday card for someone and was thinking a lot about London Fields so that started it off. I was really bored staying in all day - someone said the comics are like prison art, when you've got a lot of time on your hands. At that time drawing was getting me out of bed every day.
I now use inhalers for my lungs so I'm in a high risk group and was furloughed very quickly and was drawing all day in lockdown too.

E + Z: What about the storytelling aspect? Where do you come up with ideas for narrative?
M: These ones were kind of autobiographical, about going to the park generally, how much I loved London Fields.

E + Z: Why do you use the skull / skeleton character?
M: I wanted to have a central character and upstairs I've got a folk art box that I brought back from Mexico. Its a kind of diorama with a papiermache desert with trees and a skeleton in the front so I used that. The first few stories were a bit morbid so it fit in well.

E + Z: Would you ever think about selling your work?
M: I've had a following of about 30 on facebook for a year and I didn't want it to get any bigger than that, stay underground, but now I'm thinking about whether I should put something in the local shops.

E + Z: When did you become involved in Phoenix?
M: 15 years I worked out - I'd had a really bad breakup of a relationship and was kipping on peoples settees for about 9 months I think. Then I got the flat in S? Close, a short-life by the go cart track on Burdett Road. I was in Spey Street for about 7 years and I've been here five years - this is the second longest I've been anywhere.
I've never been part of Management Committee but I know a lot of Phoenix faces because I always try to go to the general meetings.
I think about development sometimes, and wonder if Poplar Harca might give us give us a load of flats to look after because private rent is really dropping in London - a friend moved house recently and the movers told him all they'd done this year was move people out of London.

I've been looking and 1 bed flats are cheaper to rent than they have been in about a decade probably. They were putting Spey Street on at £1350 a month when they booted us out but I bet they're £800 or £900 now.
It's always been a gamble moving into short life in the co-op but a lot of people come to Phoenix because they're in a crisis and you jump at the opportunity of a flat for two years.
Phoenix is brilliant, it fills a niche and you wonder why it's not more widespread in London.

Quick fire questions
What was the last album you listened to?
I listened to a Black Sabbath album earlier.

Your top 3 albums?
One by Led Zeppelin
One by the Pixies, probably Surfer Rosa or Trompe le Monde
And probably a Black Sabbath album - I listen to a lot of heavy rock

What would you do as mayor of London?
I'd bring in a radical green transport policy, all cars would be banned apart from electric vehicles and you'd have an integrated transport policy where you could drive to the edge of London and get cheap trains and buses into the city. Public transport should be given to people on a plate - make it easy and cheap.
I really notice the poor quality in London - I was away for a few days by the sea which was great and then I was wheezing after I got back.

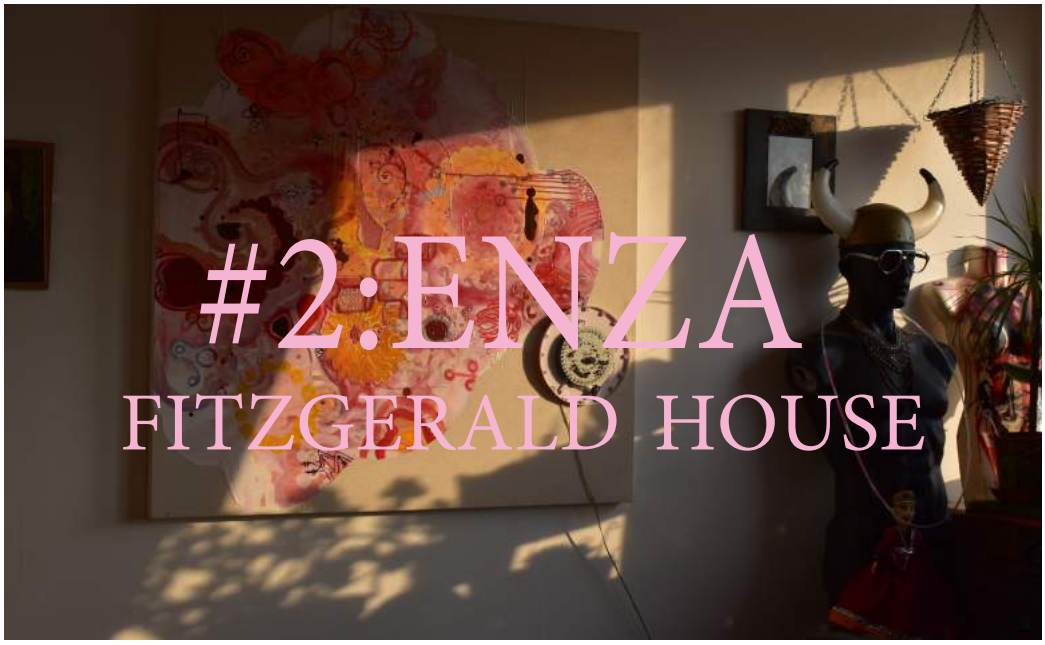
Do you have any dreams?
No, not really. I got really ill about 4 years ago when I started drawing a lot as a sort of recovery. I got pneumonia and I've got scars on my lungs now. The symptoms were similar to covid - I couldnt breathe. At the same time the doctor asked if I had any history of heart disease in the family and I told them my dad had a heart bypass around this age. They sent me to get my heart scanned at Guy's and afterwards said it was a miracle I was still alive. So I had a stent put in. But after all that I basically take it one day at a time.

Who would you like to see interviewed next?
Sam who you met here briefly - he has a few music projects on the go that are quite interesting. Or Paddy would be good.

You can find Punkcity's facebook page here - make sure you follow to access photos of all Minty's work.

Andrew Coram's TOP TRACKS 17 HERE

PHOTOGRAPHING PHOENIX #2



FAIRY METAL

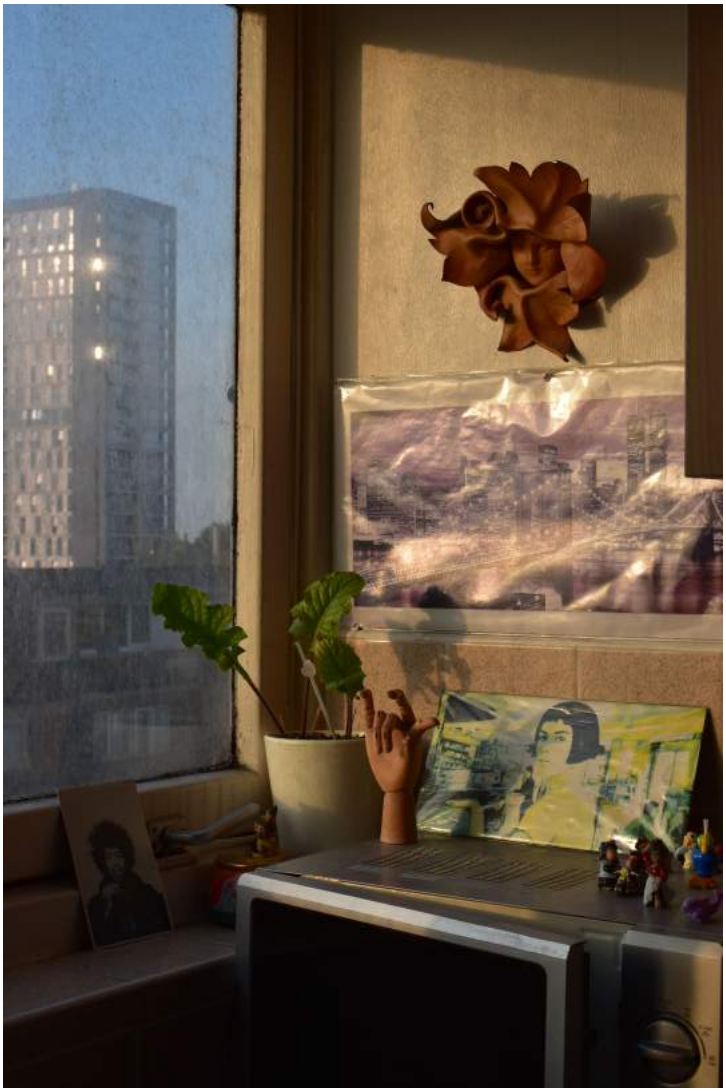
Cat lover Enza Ascione lives on the 4th floor of Fitzgerald House in Poplar although she is currently in the process of moving as the tower block is emptied.
Her home is full of the books, music and artwork that reflect her interests as well as her work as a translator.

Enza has been a Phoenix member since 2015, and has always lived in this flat in Fitzgerald House, E14. We arrive one evening as the sun is setting, casting light and shadows on all the interesting items in her home, particularly the Kandinsky inspired mural that takes up the entire sitting room wall. Enza painted this together with Sergej and it features in her film *The Fall of the House of Fitzgerald* (newsletter #12).

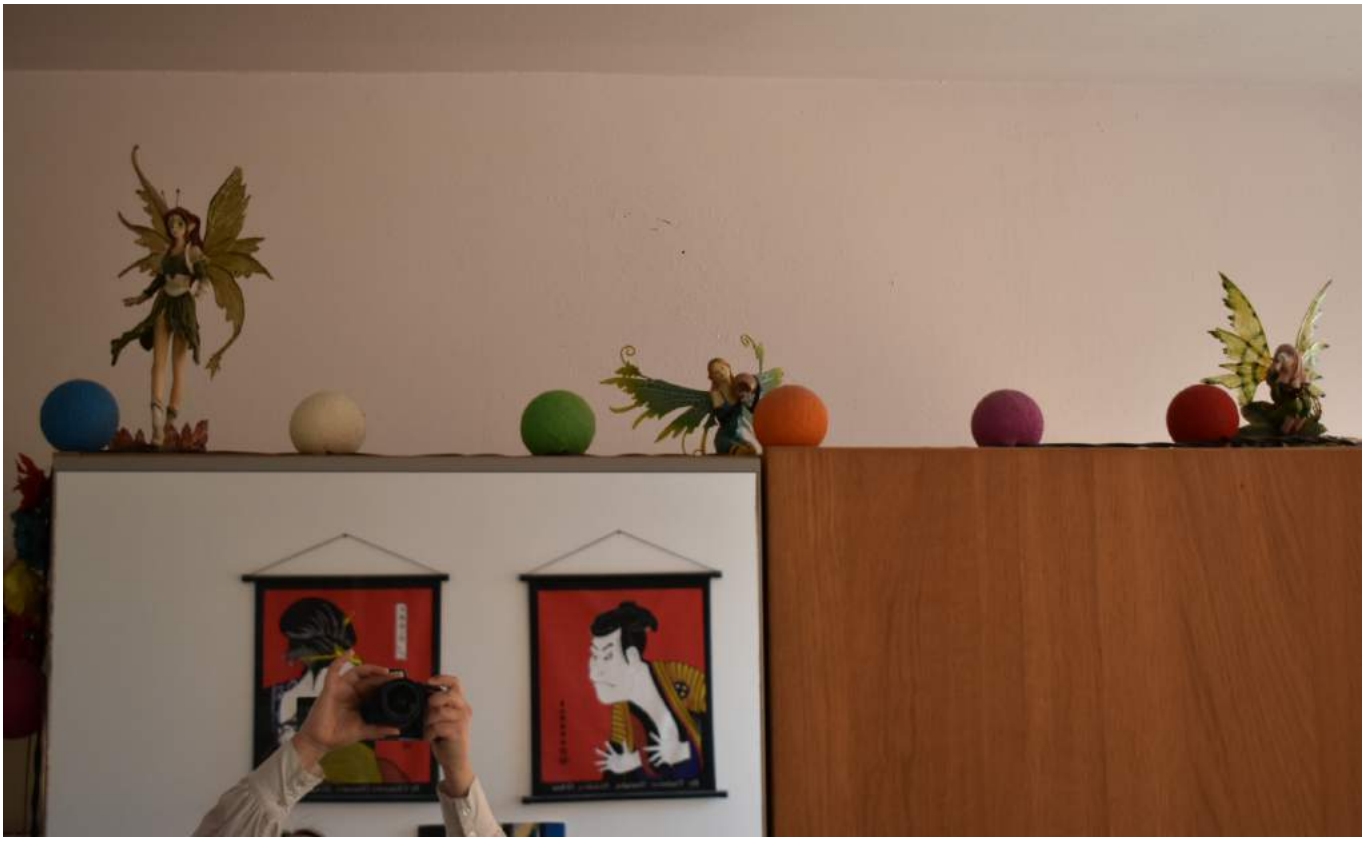
Enza's flat is colourful and dynamic and her love of both cats and heavy metal is evident throughout - particularly through some of Enza's own images that she takes as a gig photographer.
Like all other tenants of Fitzgerald, Enza has been served an eviction notice by Poplar Harca as the tower is emptied for demolition. Luckily she has being re-housed in a coop owned flat that she moved into last weekend. Of course being rehomed is brilliant, but she will now have to share and will have much less storage for her belongings as the flats in Fitzgerald are pretty spacious.

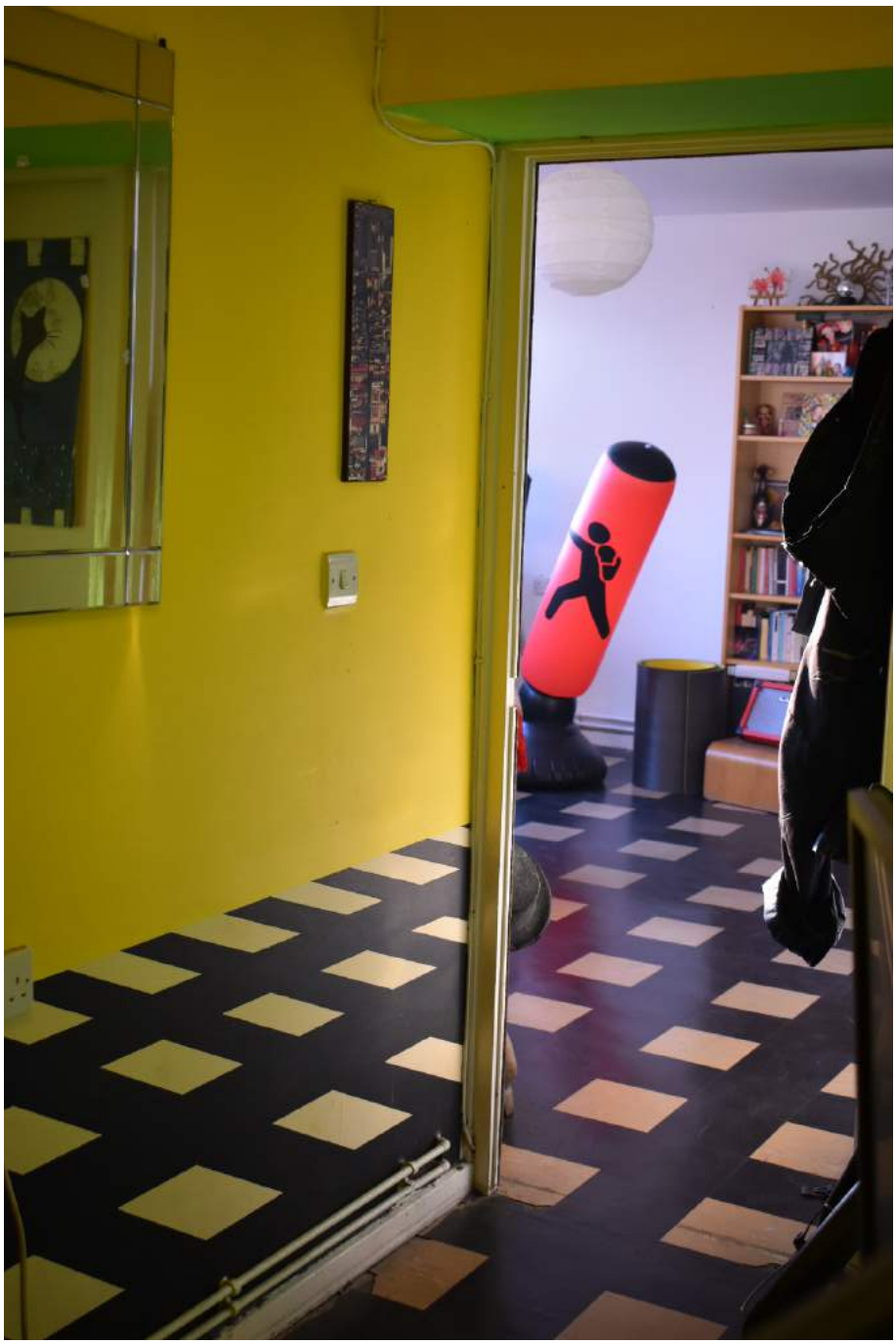
Over wine and cake we chat about lots of things but keep returning to the sense of community and the relationships made by tenants who share a space like this.
Despite various issues with the building, it's rare for Phoenix to house so many members in such close proximity which is a real bonus.
Although Enza is positive about the move, for her, leaving Fitzgerald is the end of an era, where she has had many good times with other Phoenix members and tenants of the block.

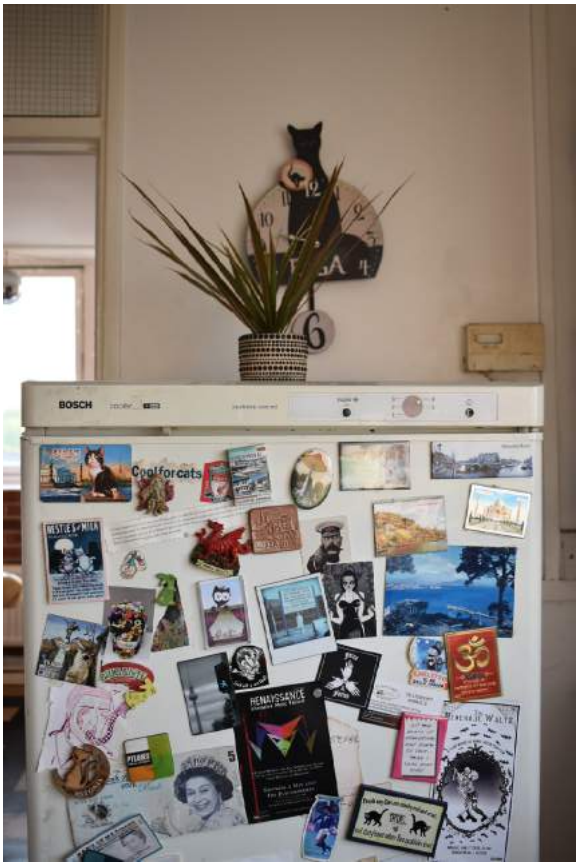
Enza's Kandinsky inspired mural (newsletter #12), a cat guarding the light switch and photographs and mementos



The view from the kitchen window, blood and gore on the bathroom tiles, and fairies sitting on the wardrobe with Japanese prints reflected from the wall opposite



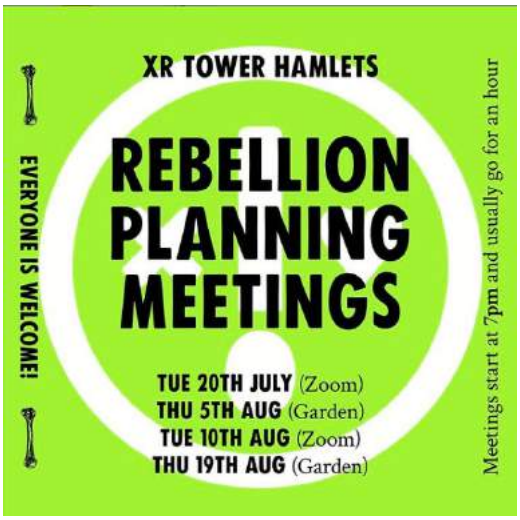




Enza and Sergej have painted a continuation of the living room floor on to the hall walls, creating an optical illusion. Music poster above the cooker and her fridge covered with photos and mementos

What's going on??

Now that the city is opening up a bit more , please share the places and events you are excited about re-joining - it would be great to have some meaningful (east) London listings compiled by Phoenix members. Contact details at the bottom of this page.



upcoming Extinction Rebellion meetings in Tower Hamlets

Ayo Akingbade at Whitechapel Gallery

until August 15

This free exhibition as part of the Whitechapel's youth programme includes a screening of Akingbade's meditative short film *Fire In My Belly*, exploring community, belonging and ideas of future amongst young people in London.

if you have a contribution for next month's newsletter, please email emmajrock@hotmail.com.
This could be art, music, opinion, recipes or anything else you wish to share.
And if you would be happy to have your home included in *Photographing Phoenix* please email Emma or Zahara (1zahara@gmail.com)