

# BILLY

OR CAPITAL'S  
AUTOETHNOGRAPHY,  
OR THE PUTATIVE  
DISPENSABILITY OF  
MANUAL LABOUR, OR A  
REMARKABLE RISE IN  
CUSTOMIZATION, OR THE  
STRANGE FATE OF MEDIUM-  
SPECIFIC MODERNISM,  
OR THE DEMISE OF THE  
HISTORICAL NOVEL, OR A  
LINGUISTIC COMMUNITY,  
OR EROTICA TODAY



Design and Quality  
IKEA of Sweden

BILLY is an inexpensive bookcase, produced by IKEA and traded internationally. Dismantled or disaggregated for distribution, BILLY initially greets consumers as a slender cardboard container, imprinted with graphics and barcodes to evidence logistical peregrination. Once opened, the tattooed box unveils a medley of flat-packed, rectilinear planes: four or more canvas-like tablets, melamine-clad and ivory white, awaiting their construction. Customers slot these thumb-thick slabs together to obtain – through several choreographed manoeuvres – an image of BILLY, proud and erect: an agglomeration of once-individual parts.

In recent years, IKEA has published a series of *Life at Home* reports: ostensibly global ethnographic enquiries into the changing nature of domesticity. The publications, intended for a decidedly non-academic audience, contain photographs, testimonies, data and analyses. As literature, *Life at Home* hovers between an elongated advertisement, a malformed work of basic social science and a pedagogical resource, imaging the market from the perspective of a retailer reliant on working class demand. Addressing locations as remote as Mumbai and London, Paris and Moscow, *Life at Home* purports to illuminate the various rituals, practices and meanings that accompany private life across the planet. Of course, IKEA products surface throughout this literature: in Chinese kitchens, American bathrooms and elsewhere. As such, *Life at Home* projects a sense of universality – an ersatz spectre of solidarity – that carefully retains the promise of diversity, in the form of customization, whilst bypassing that of homogenisation. In the wake of 1989, *Life at Home*'s image of globality appears plausible.

The work here enclosed consists of designs for the panels of three IKEA BILLY products: a slim shelf, a height extension and a wide shelf. The designs contain various forms of found text and imagery, much of which was reproduced from IKEA *Life at Home* reports, later juxtaposed or redesigned. As designs, the images might be imprinted onto BILLY or might not; the potentially printed panels, in turn, might be assembled or might not. The work both levitates above and breathes through BILLY, a form that obstinately retains its metre.

01.08.2017



Front





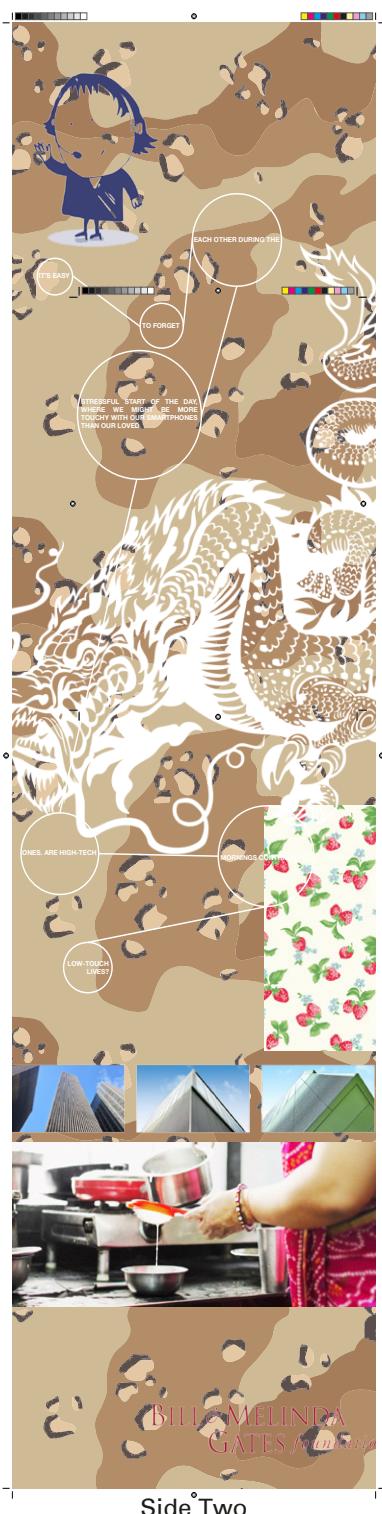
Back

Ten photographs, cropped and uncropped, from IKEA *Life at Home* reports; a "Before and After" diagram of cosmetic labiaplasty surgery; a stock image of a "hand drawn" arrow; a *Poké Ball* graphic; a logo used for a supermarket's organic foods range; an "African Tribal" tattoo design in white; black text from an IKEA *Life at Home* report, in Din, in black; a *Cath Kidston* pattern.



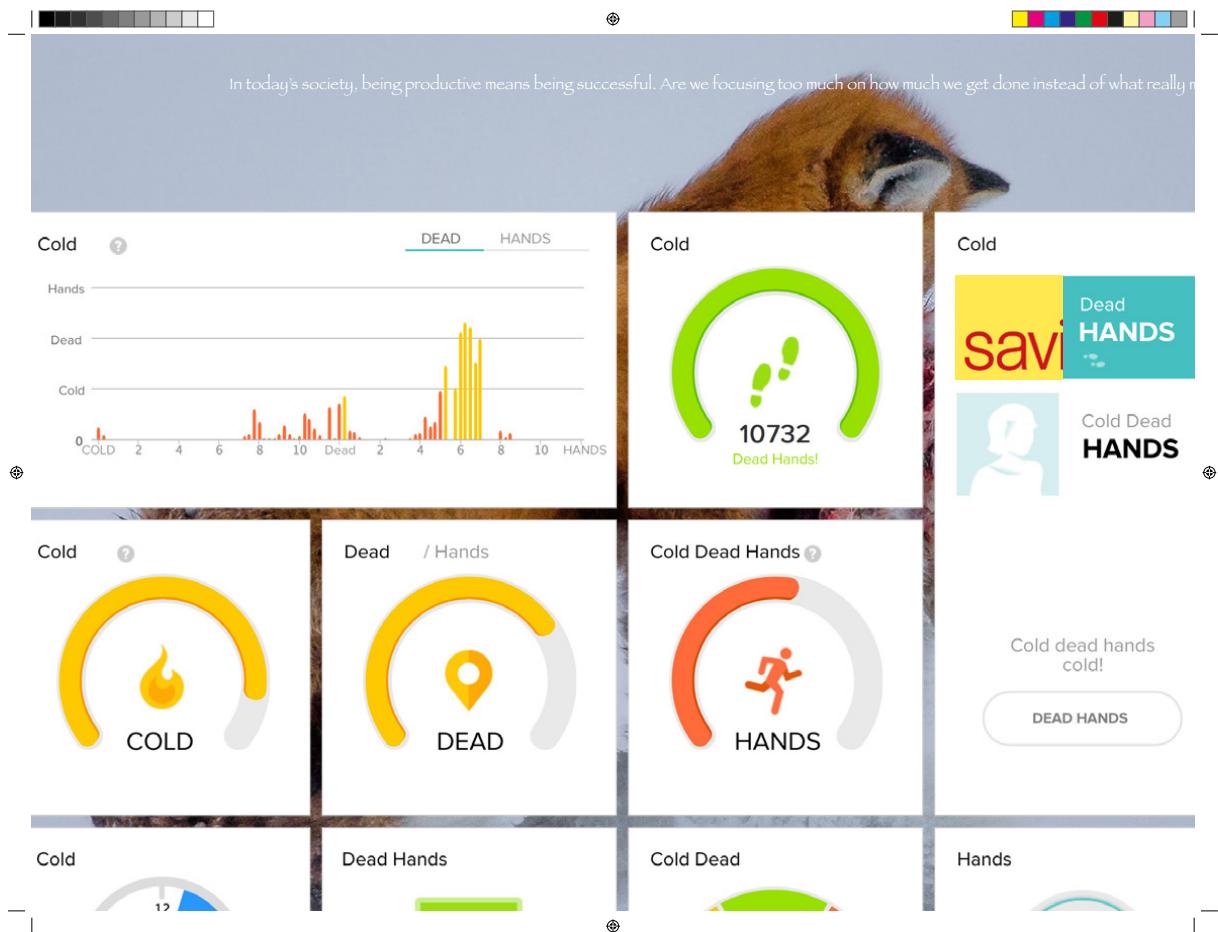
Side One

A text advertising “Favela Tours”, rendered in CMYK colours, in Helvetica; a stock photograph to illustrate accountancy; a photograph of Taylor Swift mid-performance; eight photographs, cropped and uncropped, from IKEA *Life at Home* reports; a stock photograph of hair removal; a screenshot taken from the mobile game *Candy Crush*; a stock photograph of a snake.



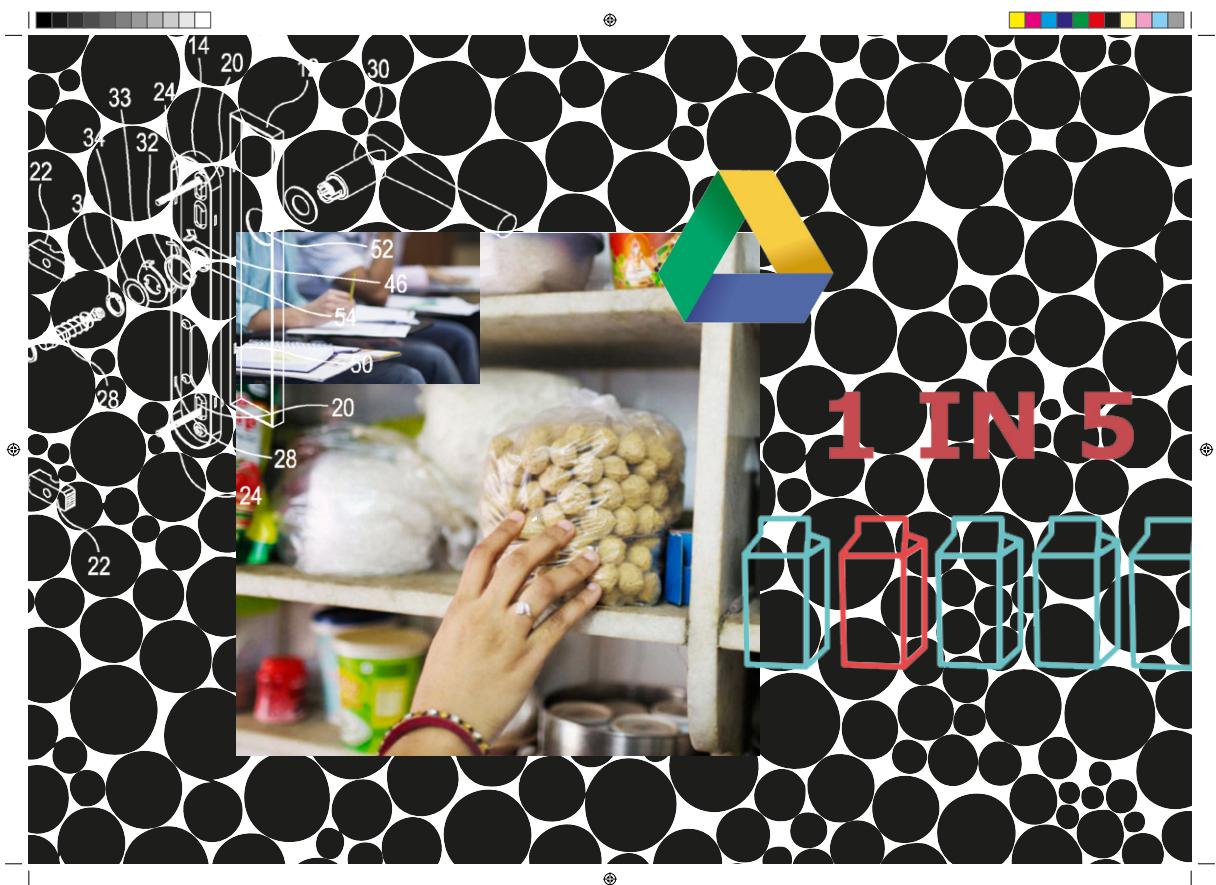
Side Two

A "Desert Camouflage" design; a blank PDF, A4 dimensions, printers marks included; the *Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation* logo; a "Chinese Dragon" tattoo design in white; three photographs of skyscrapers, shot from a low position, used in an investment bank's PDF; a hand-drawn illustration of a telesales worker, taken from an insurance company's website; a cropped photograph from an IKEA *Life at Home* report; text from an IKEA *Life at Home* report with circles and lines, in Helvetica, in white; a rectangular section of a *Cath Kidston* pattern.



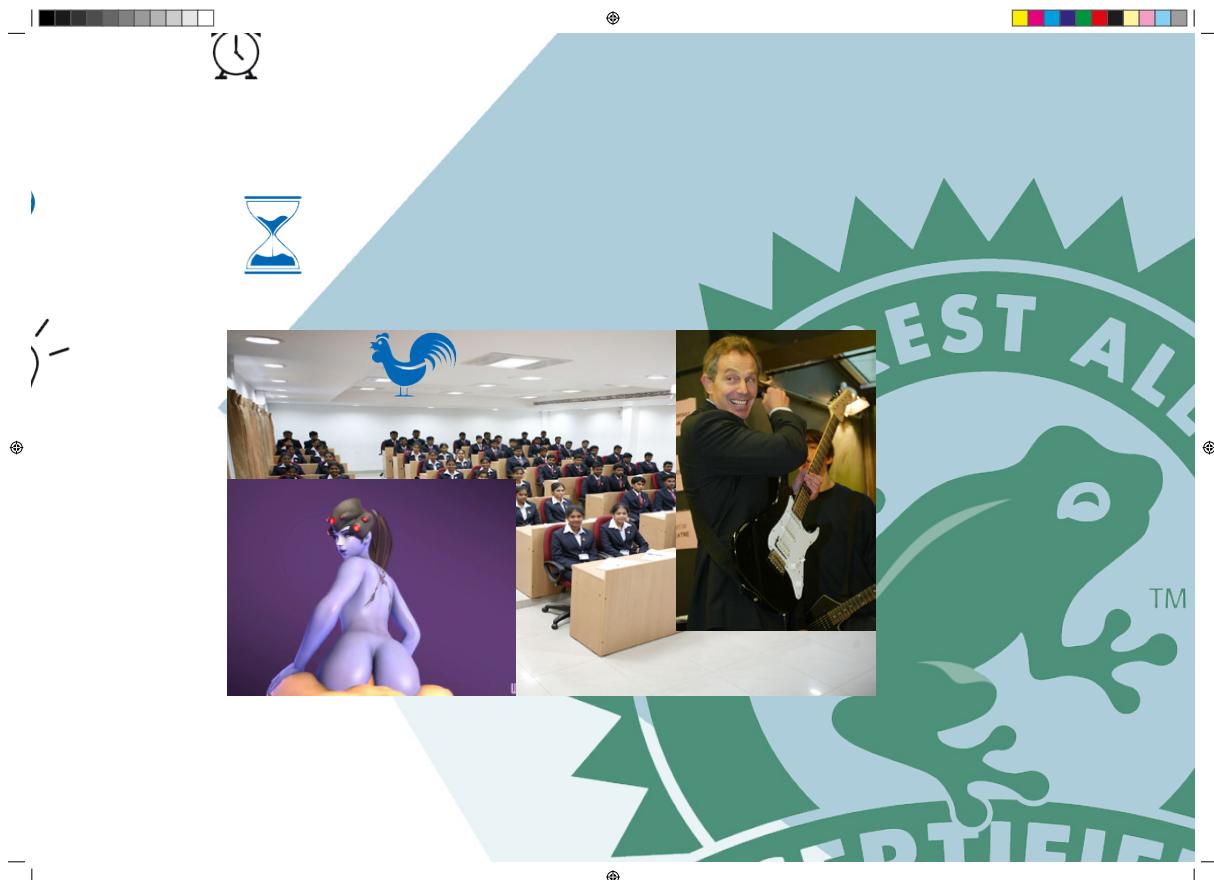
Top

A *Fitbit* data page, with all text replaced with the phrase "cold dead hands"; an award winning nature photograph; a short text from an *IKEA Life at Home* report, in Papyrus in white; a cropped image of an estate agent's logo.



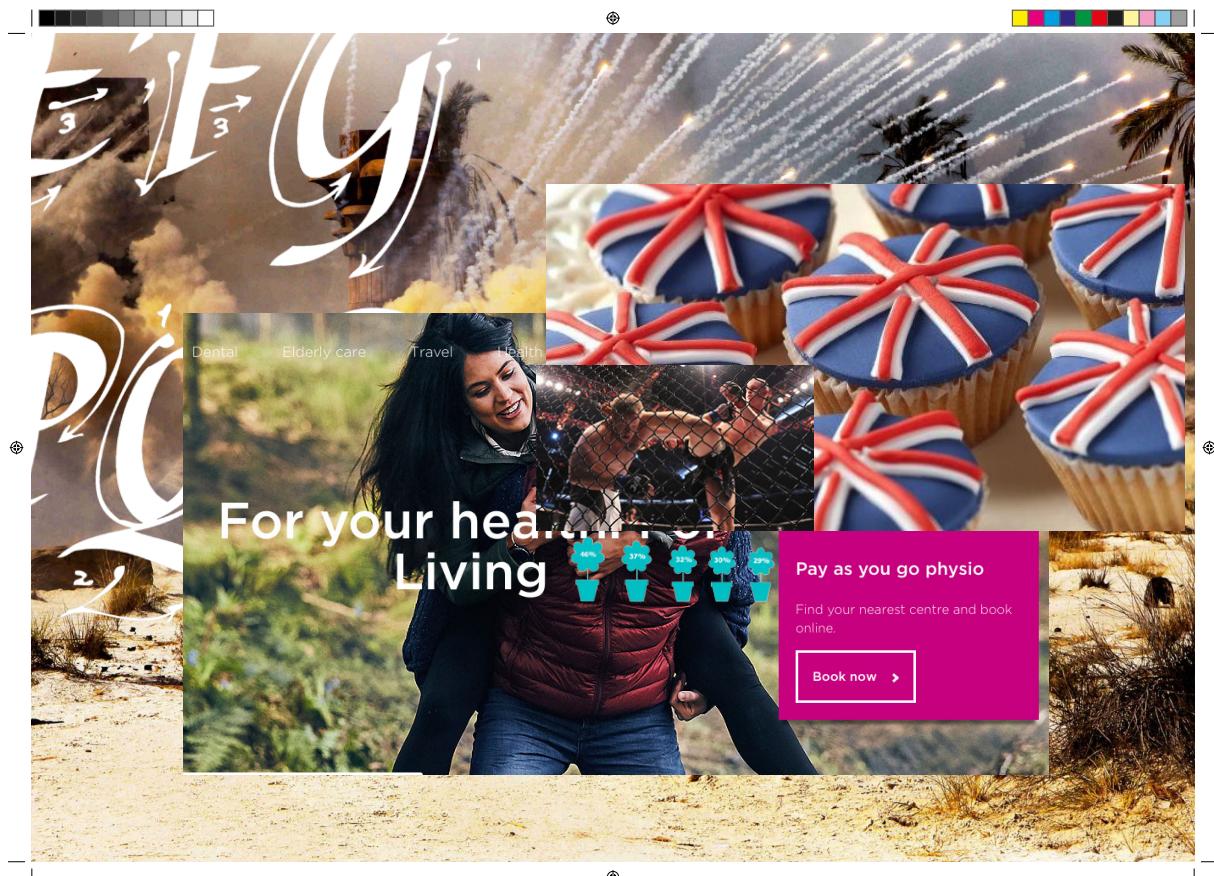
### Shelf One

A Yayoi Kusama black and white design; the *Google Drive* logo; a diagram of a door lock's mechanism in white; a stock image used to represent business school; a photo taken from an *IKÉA Life at Home* report, cropped; an infographic from an *IKÉA Life at Home* report.



## Shelf Two

A fan-made pornographic image depicting characters from the computer game *Overwatch* mid-coitus; a photograph of Tony Blair brandishing a guitar; a posed photograph illustrating business and management training in Asia; a geometric pastel background used in a financial services PDF; infographic icons taken from an IKEA *Life at Home* report.



### Shelf Three

A photograph of *UFC* fighters in combat; a photograph of union jack cupcakes; a screenshot of the website of a private healthcare business; an infographic taken from an *IKEA Life at Home* report; a still from the film *Transformers 2*, showing military-style conflict; a white line instructional image from a calligraphy guide.

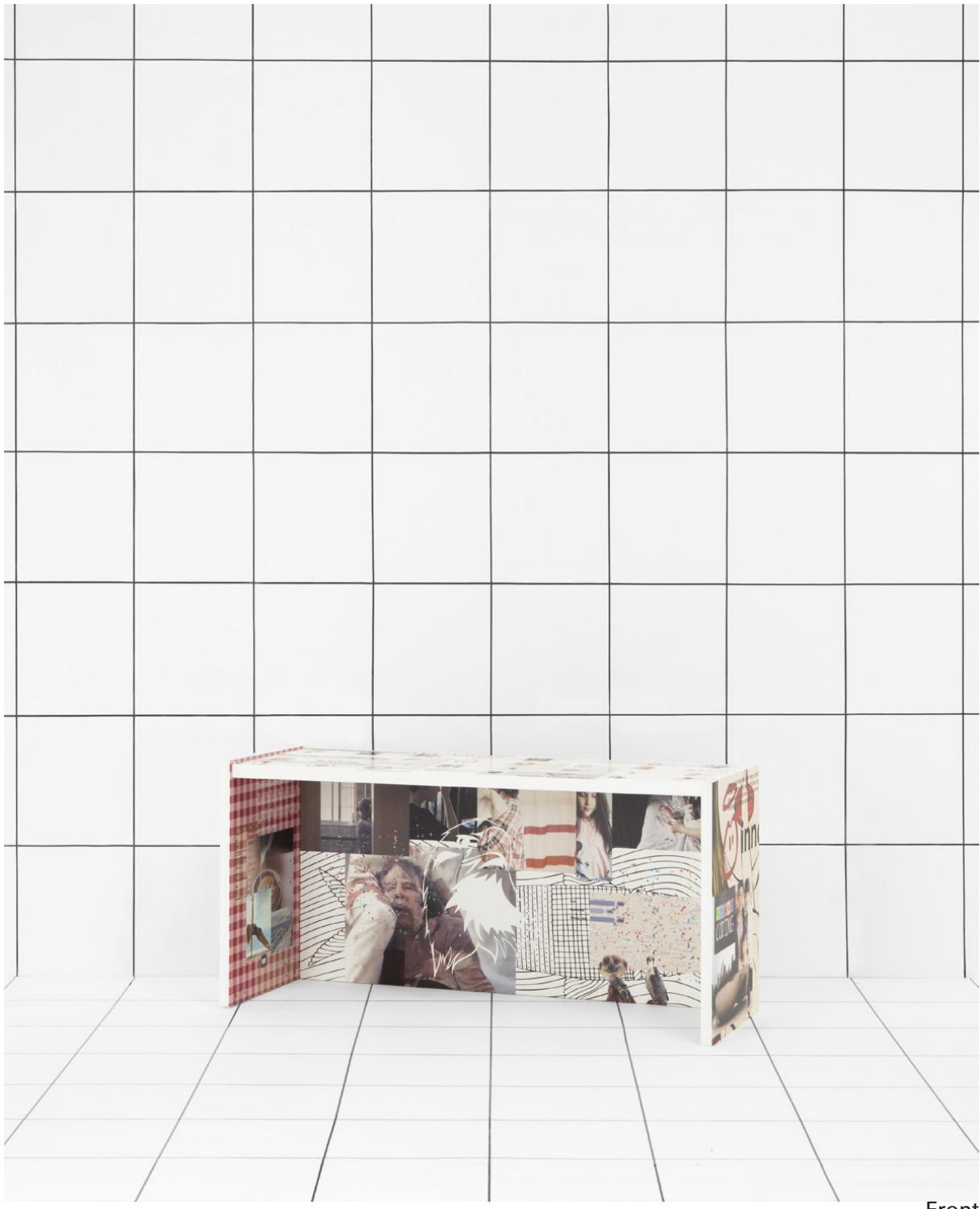


Bottom

A William Morris pattern; titles of IKEA products in black, in Verdana; sexual slang terms in black, in Verdana.

**Billy, or Capital's Autoethnography, or The Putative  
Dispensability of Manual Labour, or A Remarkable Rise in  
Customization, or The Strange Fate of Medium-Specific  
Modernism, or The Demise of the Historical Novel, or A  
Linguistic Community, or Erotica Today. Part One.**

Digital prints on IKEA BILLY panels  
40 x 28 x 106cm  
2017



Front

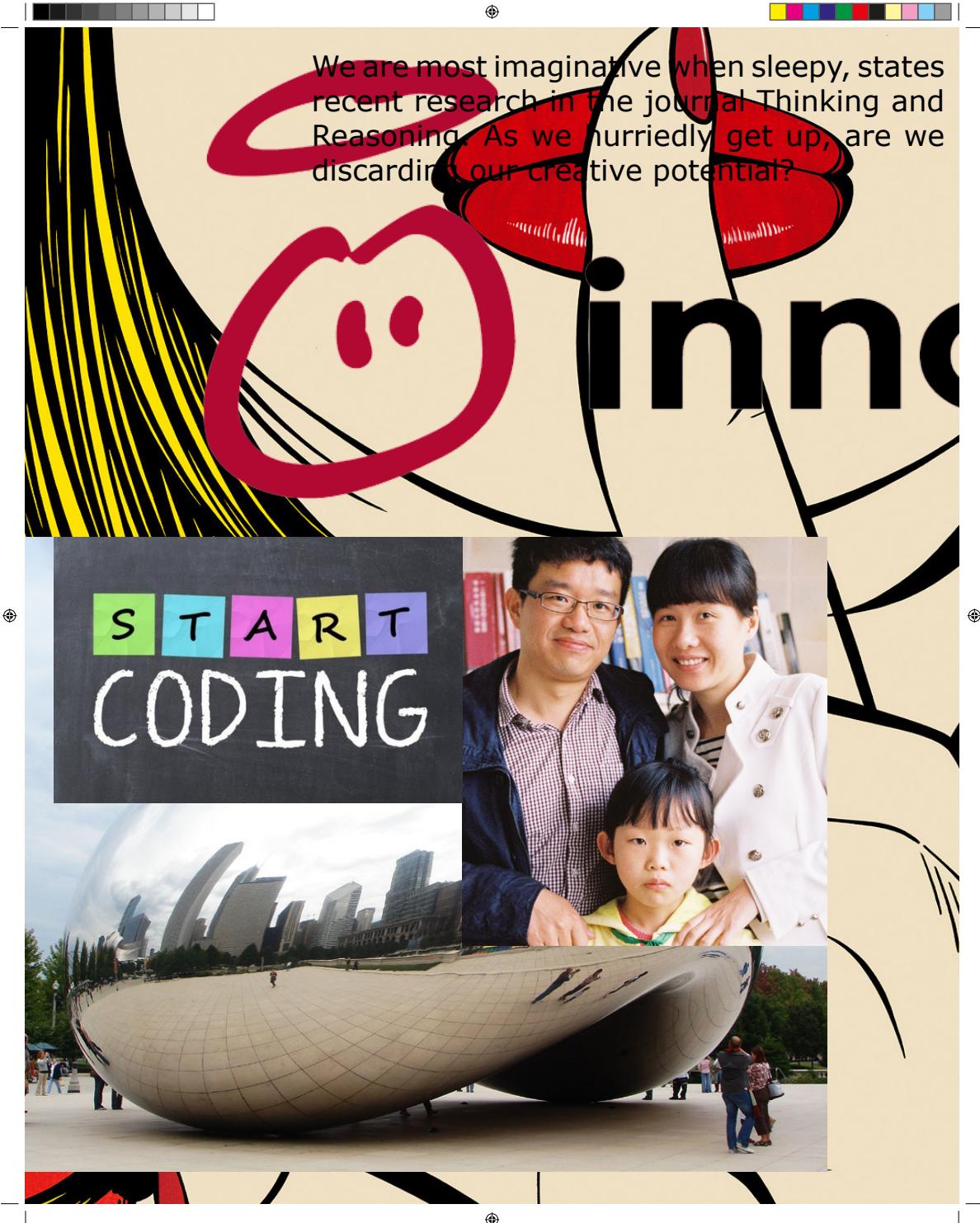


Back



Back

An amateur photograph of Muammar Qaddafi's mutilated body; an adult colouring book image, used for "mindfulness"; a vector "Confetti" graphic; a *Google Maps* image of the City of London; an image of the cartoon avatar of insurance comparison service *Compare the Market*; a white image of a "Bald Eagle" tattoo; five photographs, all cropped, from IKEA *Life at Home* reports; infographics from IKEA *Life at Home* reports.

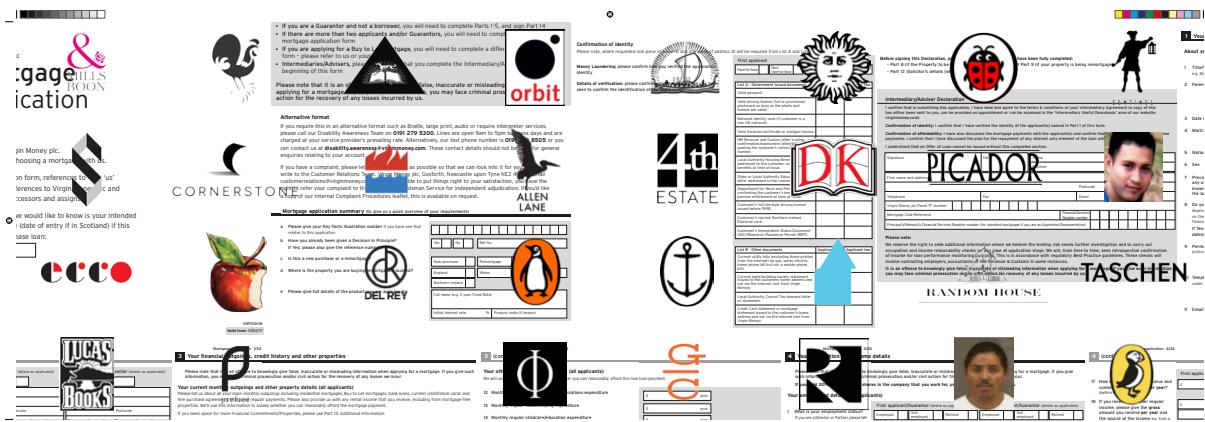


Side One

A photograph of Anish Kapoor's *Cloud Gate*; a reproduction of *Sshh* by Deborah Azzopardi; the *Innocent Drinks* logo; a cropped photograph from an IKEA *Life at Home* report; text from IKEA *Life at Home* reports" in Verdana, in black; a "Start Coding" illustration.



Text from a customer review of an escort's services, published online, reproduced in white, in Gill Sans italic; a photograph of latte art; a reproduction of a painted seascape; a photograph of Jennifer Anniston's exercise regime; a digitally produced "Red Gingham" pattern; infographics from IKEA *Life at Home* reports.



## Top

Pages of a British mortgage application form; logos used by major commercial publishing companies and their subsidiaries; two photographs of *America's Most Wanted*.

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Modernism, or The Demise of the Historical Novel, or A  
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Digital prints on IKEA BILLY panels  
80 x 28 x 35cm  
2017



Front

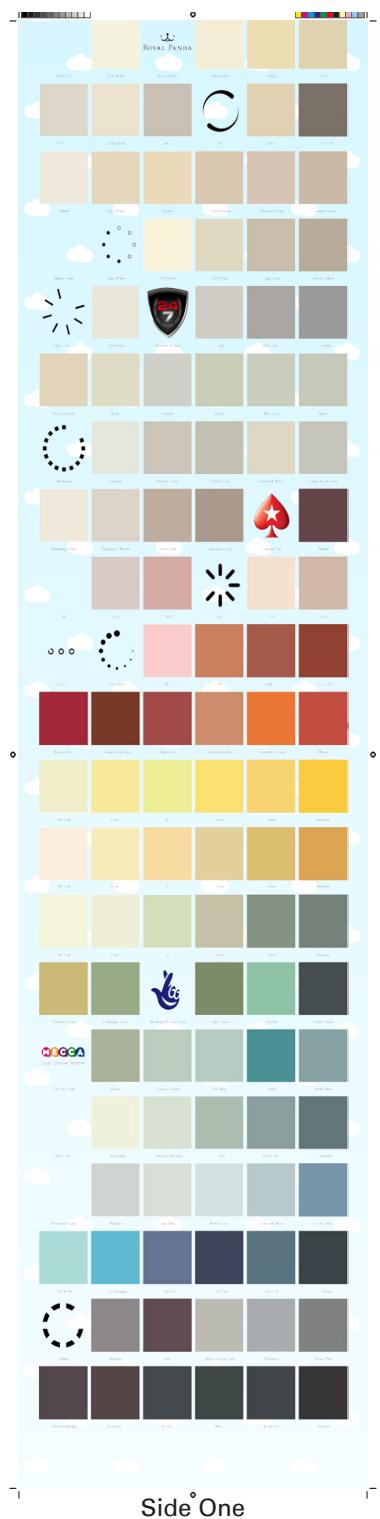


Back



## Back

Branko Milanovic's "elephant graph"; a white line illustration of correct exercise technique for a "Goblet Squat"; a photograph of Mark Zuckerberg visiting a car factory; a white "Maori" tattoo design; a digitally produced "Zebra Print" image; a digitally produced "Tie-Dye Print" image; text from IKEA *Life at Home* reports, in Helvetica bold italics, in black; thirteen cropped photographs from IKEA *Life at Home* reports.



Side°One

A *Farrow and Ball* colour chart; a blue cloud pattern; various loading and buffering symbols; logos used by online gambling outlets.



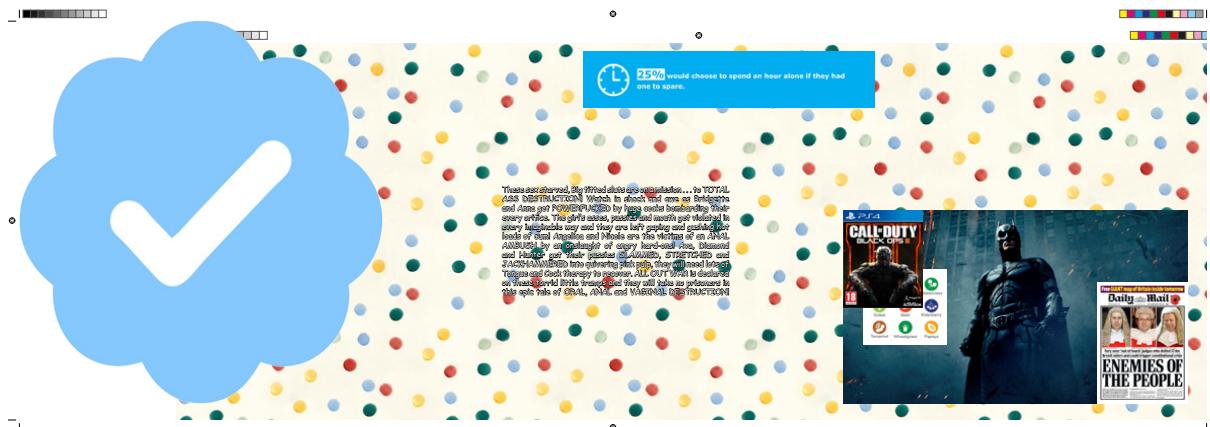
Side ° Two

Two “Celtic Band” tattoo designs in white; a digital print of wood laminate; an *Amazon* customer review of home surveillance equipment; an image from a *Gap* advertisement; a still from the film *San Andreas*, depicting the destruction of San Francisco; several heart emojis; a screenshot of home security tips posted online; a photograph advertising transparent underwear, with model’s hand placed to obscure genitalia; an investment bank’s guide to the rise of customization in Europe and America; a cropped photograph from a luxury car advertisement; six photographs from *IKEA Life at Home* reports; text reproduced from *IKEA Life at Home* reports.



### Top One

A photograph of Yosemite, used by Apple as a default desktop background; a white image of a "Mandala" tattoo design; two still images from the film *Cannibal Ferox* reproduced at different resolutions; text from IKEA *Life at Home* reports, reproduced as they rendered; text from IKEA *Life at Home* reports in, Courier, in white; a photograph from an IKEA *Life at Home* report.



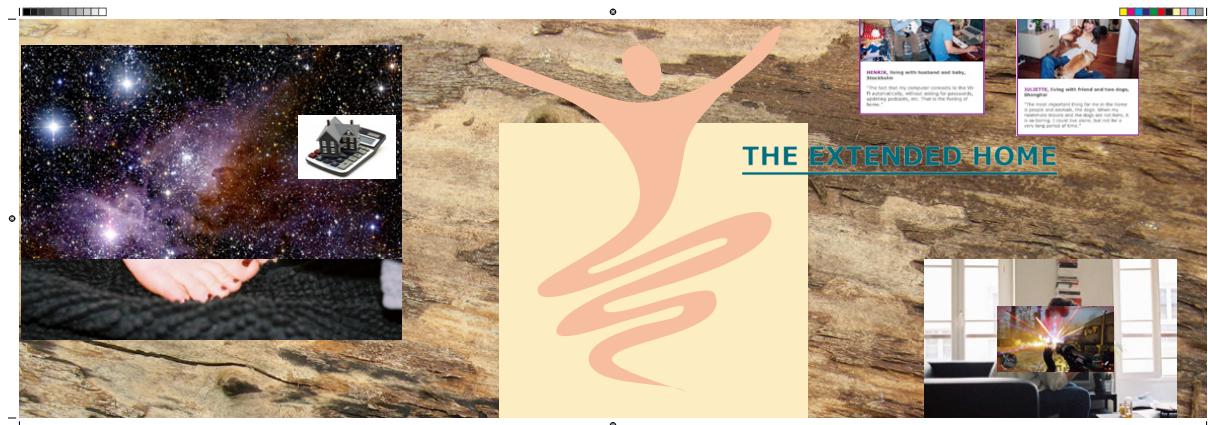
### Shelf One

A PDF of an *Emma Bridgewater* pattern; printers marks included; Twitter's "verified" icon; text and graphics from *IKEA Life at Home* reports; a publicity image used for the promotion of a *Batman* film; a *Daily Mail* front-page attacking legal figures in the light of Britain's exit from the European Union; an cover image for a *Call of Duty* computer game; a chart of "super foods"; text from the DVD jacket of pornographic film *Juggernauts*, rendered in Comic Sans, in white.



## Shelf Two

A *Laura Ashley* wallpaper pattern; two photographs, cropped, from IKEA *Life at Home* reports; a photograph of Barrack Obama holding an American football whilst on the phone; a photograph of McDonalds' McCafe range; text and graphic from IKEA *Life at Home* reports; text from IKEA *Life at Home* reports, in Din, in blue; Prozac logo.



### Shelf Three

A still from the computer game *Homefront*; a computer graphic used to illustrate mortgage application; an image of "Space"; cropped photographs from IKEA *Life at Home* reports; text reproduced from IKEA *Life at Home* reports; a photograph of wood intended for use as a computer background; *Celexa* logo.



Bottom

A *Keep Calm and Be Your Own Boss* graphic; instructional sex illustrations; Sainsbury's "Try Something New" text.

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