



PAMPHLET #3

DEIRDRE O'MAHONY

SPUD: PAMPHLET #3

Artist Deirdre O'Mahony began SPUD in 2009, initiating research that led to the development of collaborative and commissioned artworks, events and installations from 2011- 15. The potato is a potent image to evoke in relation to food and food security, exposing, as it does, conscious and unconscious attitudes to land and alterity within and beyond the nation state. SPUD began as a way of presenting a more nuanced understanding of the potato's role in Irish culture, in relation to food security and globalised food production.

SPUD research follows four strands; indicating unconscious attitudes towards rurality, the land, identity and otherness in Ireland; re-imagining the relevance and use-value of tacit agricultural knowledge to food production today; tracing the potatoes' importance to global food security; reflecting on new seed developments, seed diversity, seed sovereignty and cultural rights. By looking back to the Irish Famine, further back to the colonial violence that brought the potato to Europe, and connecting it to migration, famine and food security today, SPUD makes use of the potato to map controversies around these threads, providing an understandable and accessible entry point for a public discourse on sustainability, food security and tacit cultivation knowledge.

X-SPUD:

National Irish Famine Museum Strokestown, County Roscommon

Duration February – August 2015

X-SPUD was conceived by O'Mahony as a temporary Famine memorial and included in her artist presentation at curator Linda Shevlin's Workers Symposium at Roscommon Arts Centre in 2014. Shevlin then asked the artist to develop the idea for the Irish National

Famine Museum at Strokestown as part of her 2015 curatorial programme for County Roscommon. The artwork took the form of two intersecting potato ridges planted in an "X" to point to the most traumatic moment in Irish history and also to a form of agricultural knowledge considered obsolete and irrelevant today.

The "X" was strategically positioned on the church lawn between the Strokestown house and the McMahon Family mausoleum. By focusing on the potato and its cultivation in the context of the National Famine Museum, the 'X' draws attention to the intersection of space and time; to the Great Famine and its relationship and relevance to the globalised world we live in today.

The presence of the Loy Association was an unexpected bonus. On hearing about the project members of the Loy Association of Ireland generously offered to show participants how best to use the Irish foot-plough to make the potato ridges. The Big Dig took place on 29th March, and the ridges planted with blight resistant Sarpo Blue Danube potatoes. Over thirty participants joined in – the Loy association members passing on their knowledge of potato growing to the group. The ridges were then cared for by participants who earthed up ridges, and strimmered and weeded. Cold, wet weather during spring and summer was a concern, but the potatoes thrived – an indicator of the resilience of the crop and the method of planting in unfavourable climatic conditions. On August 29th the potatoes were harvested, followed by a celebration lunch of Hachis Parmentier inspired by A. A Parmentier, 18th Century pharmacist, scientist

and potato enthusiast cooked by the artist for the occasion. (see Parmentier Feast). The project was made into a short film which can be seen on the artists website.

Connor Ó'Gráda argues that unless the traumatic horrors of the 1840's are given their due, 'a more tourism-friendly, heroic, and sanitised version of the ugly history of the Great Famine is on the cards.'¹ Providing a counter-narrative to reductive, albeit well-intentioned, representations of the great famine, is something that artist and curator led collaborations and projects can instigate; by focusing on the cultivation knowledge still extant in Ireland X-SPUD was able to intersect in a meaningful way with the particular context of Strokestown House, providing a temporary space to think through the relationship between tacit knowledge, heritage, and present day, social and economic aspects of the Famine's legacy.

¹ Cormac ÓGráda, "The Great Famine and today's famines", in Crowley, Smith and Murphy, Eds. *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine*. Cork: Cork University Press, 2012. 657.

X-SPUD was curated by Linda Shevlin with the assistance of a Visual Arts Curatorial Residency Award funded by The Arts Council and Roscommon County Arts Office.



Right:
The Big Dig Irish National Famine Museum,
Strokestown Sunday 29 March 2015.
Photograph Padraig Cunningham 2015.



Right:
X-SPUD Strokestown Park 2015.
Photograph by by Tadhg Leonard.
Reproduced with the kind permission of the
National Irish Famine Museum.



SPUD: Jiwar

Deirdre O'Mahony was awarded a residency fellowship at Jiwar, Barcelona developed through links with artist networks made at the Anna Lindh Foundation Network Activity Morocco in 2014, which she attended on behalf of EVA international. SPUD: Neighbourhood research was an opportunity to demonstrate the use-value of potato container planting which produces a large crop within a limited space in urban gardens, apartment balcony's and patios. Workshops were held in Germanetes Farmers' Market in conjunction with a with community group, Espai Avinyo and in the Jiwar garden in Grasia district in Barcelona.

The residency culminated in a potato dinner re-enacting French pharmacist, A-A. Parmentier's potato 'feasts', catalytic actions that helped change cultural perceptions of the potato in France during the 18C and were used here to activate a conversation around the potato's relevance to food security today. Amongst those present was Antoni Miralda artist and founder of Barcelona-based, art/food collective FoodCultura who has also done potato projects across the world. Each dish was introduced by a reading that provided the topic for

discussion. Pablo Neruda's Oda a la Papa was read as Chairó soup, a dish believed to be one of the oldest in Andean culture and is made with chuño, (freeze-dried potatoes) and three other varieties of potato along with meat and vegetables. The main course was Hachis Parmentier, one of many dishes Parmentier is credited with inventing; a kind of Shepherd's Pie with extra cheese. This dish was introduced by the Pogue's Thousands Are Sailing pointing to migrations that have continued long after the Great Famine in Ireland. The dish was topped with Colcannon, an Irish dish traditionally eaten during the 'hungry' months before the new potatoes are ready. Dessert was Potato Apple, from Northern Ireland, a potato farl pocket filled with stewed apple. The focus for this dish, was on the use-value of culture in adding economic value to food production. The evening generated links with Peru and with Miralda's FoodCultura project as a member of the collective was sent to Ireland for the symposium that took place for the Potato/Batata Pan-Atlantic Parmentier event that coincided with exhibition at the BCA Gallery.

SPUD Jiwar was part-funded by Barcelona City Fellowship award, and Espai Avinyo, with the assistance of a visual arts award from Clare County Arts Office.

SPUD

Deirdre O'Mahony

<http://www.deirdre-omahony.ie/public-art-projects/spud.html>



Sac mig ple amb terra i adob. Plantar els tubercles a 8 cm. de la superfície.
Saco medio lleno con tierra y abono. Plantar los tubérculos a 8 centímetros de la superficie.
Half fill sack with compost and organic fertiliser. Plant tubers 8 cm deep.

A mesura que les plantes creixen, afegir més terra i més adob.
As plants grow, add more compost and fertilizer.
A medida que las plantas crecen, añadir más tierra y abono.

Regar regularment i brotaran en menys de 10 setmanes.
Regar regularmente y brotarán en menos de 10 semanas.
Water regularly and harvest in as little as 10 weeks



[SPUD Container planting instructions Catalan Spanish English Deirdre O'Mahony](#)

Top Right:
SPUD container planting workshop Jiwar gardens Barcelona.
Photograph Mireia Estrada 2015.

Middle Right:
SPUD Workshop at the Mercat de Pagès farmers market Barcelona planting bags with coconut compost.
Photograph Mireia Estrada 2015.

Bottom Right:
Chario Soups.
Photograph Deirdre O'Mahony.



SPUD: The Future is in the Bag

Callan Workhouse Union

M.O.P.E. Potato Bread.
Photograph Deirdre O'Mahony 2015.



Callan Workhouse Union was set up by artist/producers Hollie Kearns and Rosie Lynch to in part to de-monumentalise the workhouse and re-think its function in the context of Callan town and the wider region of Kilkenny/Carlow/Carrick-on-Suir. In this context O'Mahony spent a period of time doing research for the final stage of the SPUD project - a film, food and design project - SPUD Capital which will take place in 2016.

During the research project for Workhouse Union O'Mahony activated a conversation around food production, starting with a potato film and food event hosted at Fennellys, run by Etaoin Holihan. The film programme covered ways of growing potatoes, the cultural history of the potato and archival footage of planting and harvesting in Ireland in the 1950s and 1960s, and the work of the International Potato Centre in Peru, CIP, to develop new varieties of potato adapted to changing climate conditions. This was followed by a day of planting container-based potato garden on palettes with Callan residents living near the workhouse who cared for them until harvest in September.



Above:
Harvested potatoes Callan Workhouse Union.
Photograph Pauline O'Connell 2015

Right:
Planting Potatoes Callan.
Photograph Rosie Lynch 2015

Below:
SPUD Workhouse Union Apron Design.

Below Right:
Curator Hollie Kearns introducing SPUD Artist Deirdre O'Mahony at the Workhouse Union Film and Food event at Fennelly's Callan Co. Kilkenny.
Photograph by the other curator of the project Rosie Lynch.



SPUD 
THE FUTURE IS IN THE BAG
WORKHOUSE UNION 2015



O'Mahony also spent a month in Callan doing further research into local food production and planning a film project SPUD: Capital. The final event of this research phase, was a performative lecture on SPUD research that traced the history of capital through the potato, concluding with a tasting of two soups associated with famine times and the history of the workhouse; Quaker Soup and Soyer Soup. Both represent different ideological approaches to food aid. Soyer soup was designed to provide the minimum nutrition necessary to sustain a body for a day's work. Quaker soup had significantly more food value and taste and was intended to sustain and maintain health. These were served with bread loaves made with potato, seaweed and other flavourings and branded with M.O.P.E., Most Oppressed People Ever, a term coined in the 1990s to ridicule claims that the Irish were more ill-treated than any people at any time in history. The Workhouse was an entirely appropriate location in which to challenge the narrative of victimology and passivity that post-crash, has become a default political position both in Ireland, and in Irish representations to Europe. It points to the need to take responsibility for past failures and acknowledge the inequalities and injustices that are the legacy of unsustainable and excessive consumption.

SPUD: The Future is in the Bag, was a research residency curated by Hollie Kearns and Rosie Lynch as part of the Callan Workhouse Union project funded with a Project Award funded by The Arts Council.

SPUD: Potato/Batata

**Burren Annual exhibition BCA
Ballyvaughan, Co. Clare**

*Potato Batata dinner and Skype conversation with Frances Whitehead BCA Gallery.
Photograph Deirdre Power 2015.*



Potato/Batata was a collaborative project between Deirdre O'Mahony and Chicago artist Frances Whitehead, at the BCA Gallery in 2015, a reflection upon the artist's exchange of ideas since 2009. Based on the pan-Atlantic diaspora of new world tubers - the potato (*Solanum tuberosum*) and the sweet potato (*Ipomoea batatas*). The conceptual heart of the installation consisted of a simple mirrored pair of tuber plantings in the US mid-west and in Ireland, each containing the two important but botanically unrelated tubers. The sweet potatoes were grown by O'Mahony and installed in the gallery, mirroring a potato planting in Whitehead's garden in Gary, Indiana. The installation included, video works by both artists, prints, educational images and the SPUD project archive of artefacts and a library of potato books. A film of completed and incomplete SPUD projects including a 3-D animation guide to making a traditional lazy-bed and films made for SPUD London, by artist Nadege Meriau were projected in a separate space.

A key part of the collaboration was the production of decal ceramic plates that were used for a dinner that took place simultaneously in the USA and Ireland on 15th August 2015. At BCA, this took place in the gallery attended by more than 40 artists, activists and scientists at a conference organized by Green Foundation Ireland and at Whitehead's home with artists and local residents. The installation was surrounded by hubs featuring O'Mahony's projects and collaborations from 2010 – 2015, reflecting on rural planning, human and natural ecologies and changing rural/urban relationships and how, and in what way, artistic knowledge and practice can directly engage with these issues.

Potato/Batata was funded by Clare County Arts Office with assistance from the Centre for Creative Arts and Media GMIT.



Left:
Sweet potato plants and Spud Potato Batata
installation Deirdre O'Mahony and Frances
Whitehead.
Photograph Martina Cleary 2015.

Below:
Pallet display of Frances Whitehead's Potato
Heros, potato books from Deirdre O'Mahony's
library and Potato embroidery by Sadhbh Gaston.
Photograph Martina Cleary 2015.

Top Right:
Deirdre O'Mahony and Frances Whitehead
Potato Batata installation with Solanum
Tuberosum photograph by Nadege Merieu, BCA.
Photograph Martina Cleary 2015.

Below Right:
International Potato Centre (C.I.P.) Photograph
of Potato varieties and sweet potato plant.
Potato Batata installation, Deirdre O'Mahony
and Frances Whitehead. Photograph Martina
Cleary 2015.



SPUD: 2016



The final outcome of this research period is SPUD: Capital, an essayistic film which will go into production in summer 2016, tracing the history and legacy of the potato in global history drawing on the wider context of Kilkenny and its craft and design heritage.

This film will be on the re-imagining of a potato dinner hosted by French scientist AA Parmentier in the 18C to change cultural attitudes to the potato as an anti-famine food and filmed in the original dining hall at Callan Workhouse. Through the development of this meal, O'Mahony will work with Kilkenny craftspeople to develop craft objects including ceramic dinnerware and she will work with farmers and food producers to develop food products in terms that reflect their own priorities. The products; potato beer and bread, will be made in County Kilkenny by local food/beer producers. The trajectory of SPUD has been to challenge reductive readings of tacit knowledge and create space to engage in a public conversation about the politics of food production. Thus the potato, a crop with little or no significant economic value but embodying an emotional link to the past might become more economically viable, without, it is hoped, 'fetishizing', 'trivialising' or 'trinketising' local culture.²

2. Áine Macken-Walsh, *The Culture Economy, Authenticity and Power: a focus on the Wild Atlantic Way* presentation at the Inaugural Transatlantic Conference on Education, Research, and Community Engagement, Letterfrack, 2015

Thank you

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SPUD: Potato/Batata

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