

A photograph of a tree branch with green leaves against a blue sky with white clouds. The branch is in the foreground, and the background is a bright, slightly hazy sky. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

**Earth Writings:**  
**Bogs, Forests, Fields & Gardens**

**Edited by Karen E. Till**



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**Maynooth University Department of Geography**



*The Grafter: Grafting heritage fruit trees in studio 468 with Kevin Kenny.  
Photograph by Jason Sheridan. © Seoidín O'Sullivan, 2019.*

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## Curator/Editor's Note

### Learning to Live Well Together: 'Staying with the Trouble'

By Karen E. Till

You Cannot Climb a Hedge.  
Production still, variable dimensions.  
© Pauline O'Connell, 2018.



*The task is to make kin in lines of inventive connection as a practice of learning to live and die well with each other in a thick present. Our task is to make trouble, to stir up potent response to devastating events, as well as to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places.*

– Donna Haraway, Distinguished Professor Emerita<sup>1</sup>

We live in an earth facing ecological crisis, changing weather systems, species extinctions, and global pandemics. As humans, we are largely responsible for these crises, for having ‘wounded’ our home and the places in which we live.<sup>2</sup> Rather than resign to what may feel like an inevitable path towards destruction, how can we begin to ‘rebuild our collapsing environments’<sup>3</sup>?

Inspired by the wisdom of Donna Haraway, *Earth Writings* invites readers to learn to live well together by considering the creative practices of four female artists who ‘stay with the trouble’ and make ‘kin in lines of inventive connections’.<sup>4</sup> This collection of essays, artwork, and exhibition vignettes highlights the work of Monica de Bath, Cathy Fitzgerald, Pauline O’Connell and Seoidín O’Sullivan whose slow and engaged work of caring for places in southeast Ireland invites us to collaborate towards the possibility of rebuilding healthy and more inclusive human and more-than-human (plants, animals, insects, fungi) communities with others. Their relational work in bogs, forests, fields and urban gardens create ‘unexpected collaborations and combinations in hot compost piles’.<sup>5</sup>

Monica de Bath’s paintings, place-based actions and notebooks draw upon and question the complex stories of ‘a people’s relationships to the Land’.<sup>6</sup> Through *Creative Rathangan: Meitheal*, her creative practice also explores the ‘transformation of Rathangan’s people and environs, its boglands, streetscapes and waterways’ together with former peat workers, Bord na Móna representatives, ecologists, school children, educators, historians, librarians and other community members, to rediscover and heal the formerly mined peatlands of the Bog of Allen in Kildare County.<sup>7</sup> Cathy Fitzgerald’s eco-social practices include transforming a monoculture forest into becoming a mixed-species continuous cover, permanent forest. Hollywood Forest of County Carlow is a success story of ‘Earthly wellbeing’ that included contributions from Pro Silva foresters, ecologists, timber experts, community members, and other supporters. Building upon her doctoral research and ongoing activist blogging work, she also has developed Haumea Online, an ecoliteracy educational platform for creatives and arts professionals to support others ‘co-create regenerative cultures’ for the ecological emergency.<sup>8</sup> Pauline O’Connell, living off the official electoral map in County Kilkenny, instigates projects with unknown outcomes and possibilities – tug-of war play-offs, an excavated ‘milk and tea-well’, a hedge-climbing challenge – to co-create

‘community fields’ with others. By ‘gathering stories’ from farmers, neighbours, artists and other local experts, her explorations of the physical and ephemeral, human and natural in the material world question what is taken for granted in local identities, cultural practices and borders to reimagine and generate new possibilities.<sup>9</sup> Seoidín O’Sullivan’s art projects brings people together ‘to protect or develop an aspect of their local commons’.<sup>10</sup> Collaborating with cultural and arts community groups, she facilitates community gardening projects, pedagogical exchanges, field schools, ecological walks, green mappings, and the grafting and planting of heritage trees that create shared and sustainable multispecies places in the capital city of Dublin.

To live well with others, these artists ‘think and create in action words’<sup>11</sup> in their distinctive home environments: Monica plots, Cathy (re)forests, Pauline enacts, and Seoidín grafts. As hybrid, place-based artists, they also work as educators, researchers, writers, and, more often than not, as good neighbours. Their creative practices call attention to the diversity of ways that human societies are mutually constituted ‘within dynamic eco-natural processes’.<sup>12</sup> By carefully navigating the various strands of their embedded practices and allowing their work to slowly unfold into more healthy relations, they ‘settle troubled waters’<sup>13</sup>



*Meitheal na Cruthaíochta Rath Iomgháin.*  
Composite poster, A3.  
© Creative Rathangan, 2019, image courtesy Monica de Bath.

by encouraging humans to tread more lightly when mingling with others in their local environments. Inviting neighbours and diverse publics to consider the possibilities of living well within their communities and caring for our mother earth may seem a straightforward task. But ‘staying with the trouble’ means also to ‘make trouble’<sup>14</sup>: their work is political and not easy, as it means rejecting dominant growth-based strategies of neoliberalism and even forms of sustainable development.

Hence the necessity of making 'kin in lines of inventive connection',<sup>15</sup> in this instance, with Geographers and Irish Studies scholars who similarly seek to realise better futures through their research. *Earth Writings* invited Monica, Cathy, Pauline and Seoidin to pair up with Patrick Bresnihan, Nessa Cronin, Gerry Kearns and Karen Till respectively to exchange ideas, knowledges and practices.<sup>16</sup> The interdisciplinary



*Scion Harvest: Cutting scion of heritage fruit trees for our community orchards from orchard at Rosemount Research Station, UCD. © Seoidin O'Sullivan, 2018.*

humanities and social science scholars were also tasked with considering and writing about what a broader public might learn from the artists' respective work. This meant we ended up going on walks, engaging in conversations, participating in exhibition and symposia events, sharing meals, and exchanging ideas and written work. The period of our exchanges ran longer than any of us anticipated due to the effects of Covid-19. The written works in the pages that follow offer glimpses into our exchanges. An introductory essay by Lucina Russell, the Arts Officer of the Kildare County Council Arts Service, a long-standing partner in other artist-scholar initiatives with Maynooth Geography, (re)launches *Earth Writings*.

As the curator and editor of this project, I wish like to thank the generous support by the Irish Research Council New Foundations STEAM grant, Kildare County Council Arts Service, Creative Ireland, and Maynooth University's Department of Geography, Library, and Social Science Institute (MUSSI). Highlights included joint presentations at 'Tírdhreach Feasach: Irish Environments in Transition' (20 November 2019) at the Maynooth University Department of Geography, as introduced by Maynooth University's President Philip Nolan. Multi-media installations by the four artists were on display in the *Earth Writings* exhibition I curated at the Maynooth University Library during Geo- and Science Weeks (18-29 November 2019), which was supported

by the Geographical Society of Ireland. Additional support came from the Ómós Áite and Space&Place Research Collaboratives, in particular by co-directors Nessa Cronin at the Centre for Irish Studies, National University of Ireland Galway, and Gerry Kearns, Maynooth Geography. As a result of our various collaborations over the past ten years, including Mapping Spectral Traces international symposia, 'Art and Geography' sessions and exhibitions at the annual Conference of Irish Geographers, and IRC-funded projects, this publication also announces the launch of a new book series by the same title, 'Earth Writings', to be published by Cork University Press (forthcoming in 2021). As co-edited by Nessa Cronin, Gerry Kearns and myself, the book series will include contributions by artists, scientists, humanities and social science scholars, community leaders and civil society partners. We wish to thank CUP for their support of our vision to inspire awareness about our earth emergency, to draw upon lessons from Irish environments, and to, again borrowing from Haraway, 'stir up potent response to devastating events' in ways that motivate readers to change their daily actions and learn to 'live and die well with each other in a thick present'.<sup>17</sup>

We now invite you, the reader, to immerse yourself in the images, words and environments that follow. The artists highlighted in *Earth Writings* offer us lessons in how to 'relate with the world, make appropriate ecological choices, and rebuild collapsing environments' in Irish bogs, forests, fields and gardens.<sup>18</sup> The contributors ask that you not give up, do not pretend some easy technological-fix is possible, and do not focus on the future at the expense of being in your present moment and place. Instead we ask that you imagine and enact healthier relations where you now live. Begin caring for your earth and the others with whom you share your place in the world.

*'We become-with each other or not at all. That kind of material semiotics is always situated, someplace and not no place, entangled and worldly'.*

– Donna Haraway<sup>19</sup>

Fledging robin in *Hollywood Forest*. Photograph from The Hollywood Forest Story. © Cathy Fitzgerald, 2014.



## ENDNOTES

- 1 Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Duke University Press, 2016), p. 1.
- 2 Karen E. Till. 2008. 'Artistic and Activist Memory-Work: Approaching Place-Based Practice'. *Memory Studies* 1 (1): 95-109; Karen E. Till, 'Mapping Spectral Traces 8: The Place of the Wound: Attending to places wounded by the legacies of historical violences' (Maynooth University Symposium, 2016). Webpage available at: <https://theplaceofthewound.wordpress.com/>.
- 3 Robert Lovelace, 'How Indigenous Forms of Governance Can Help the Modern World', In *Reclaiming the Great Lakes As a Commons*, Ed. Alexa Bradely and Julie Ristau ('On the Commons' webpage, 29 November 2012, np). Available at: <https://www.onthecommons.org/work/reclaiming-great-lakes-commons-0>.
- 4 Haraway, *Staying With the Trouble*, p. 1.
- 5 Haraway, *Staying With the Trouble*, p. 4.
- 6 Monica de Bath's artist's webpage: <https://monicadebath.wixsite.com/monicadebath>.
- 7 Creative Rathangan: Meithal webpage: <https://www.facebook.com/creativerathangan/>.
- 8 Cathy Fitzgerald, 'The Hollywood Forest Story' webpage (<https://hollywoodforest.com/>) and 'Haumea Online' webpage (<https://haumea.ie/>). Haumea's vision contributes to the goals of 'co-creating a regenerative culture' stated by the #Culture Declares Emergency movement, to which Fitzgerald was the first Irish signatory and Haumea her contribution.
- 9 See Pauline O'Connell's artist's webpage: <http://paulineoconnell.com/>.
- 10 See Seoidín O'Sullivan artist's webpage: <http://www.seoidinosullivan.com/>.
- 11 Lovelace, 'Indigenous Forms of Governance'. Lovelace is the retired Chief of the Ardoch Alogonquin First Nation. The importance of action rather than complacency from an Indigenous perspective is tied to language and the Holy Wind, which exists everywhere and in which all living creatures participate, rather than arising from individuals. See, Mishuana R. Goeman, 2008, 'Notes Toward a Feminism's Spatial Practice', *Wicazo Sa Review* 24 (2), Native Feminism (FALL 2009): 169-187.
- 12 Lovelace, 'Indigenous Forms of Governance'.
- 13 Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, p. 1.
- 14 Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, p. 1.
- 15 Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, p. 1.
- 16 I adapted the format of *The Geographical Turn* (2015), developed by Gerry Kearns, and the artist-scholar pairings ran over a number of months in 2019-20. See Gerry Kearns, *The Geographical Turn* webpage: <https://geographicalturn.wordpress.com/>.
- 17 Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, p. 1.
- 18 Lovelace, Indigenous Governance.
- 19 Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, p. 4.

# Looking Out From The Short Grass

By Lucina Russell



*Don't be worried. Be ready.*

– Mícheál Ó Muircheartaigh<sup>1</sup>

*The Hollywood Forest: Trees marked for removal to alert foresters.  
Photograph by Cathy Fitzgerald, 2012, courtesy of the artist.*



Local authorities in Ireland are responsible for social, economic and cultural development in their jurisdiction. It is a lofty remit – spanning across planning, roads, housing, environment and animal control to parks, heritage, library and arts services. The portfolio is weighted with legislative requirements and statutory obligations, juxtaposed alongside community development and citizen engagement. Enforcer, but also community enabler. Seemingly insoluble issues and the big ideas.

The Culture and Community Departments coordinate numerous fora including Comhairle na nÓg,<sup>2</sup> the Age-Friendly Alliance<sup>3</sup> and Public Participation Network,<sup>4</sup> that actively encourage citizens of a county to participate in decision-making processes and to inform policy. While the processes can be tedious and the outcomes slow, I have borne witness to the value of this way of working.

In recent years, local authorities were charged with a Climate Action portfolio that includes a programme of work around community engagement and community and sectoral capacity building, to support climate change adaptation and mitigation. These responsibilities are underpinned by the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015<sup>5</sup>, and subsequent policy documents such as the National Adaptation Framework, 2018<sup>6</sup> and the 2019 “All of Government Climate Action Plan – To Tackle Climate Breakdown”.<sup>7</sup>

The National Adaptation Framework called for each Local Authority to develop a Climate Change Adaptation Strategy in order to ensure future resilience to the negative effects of climate change. Four Climate Action Regional Offices were established, to coordinate and facilitate the delivery of the local Climate Change Adaptation Strategies and the development of climate change expertise at a regional level. Kildare County Council was appointed as the host authority for the Eastern and Midlands Climate Action Regional Office (CARO)<sup>8</sup> in 2018.

Meanwhile, also in response to the Climate Action Plan, the national Creative Ireland programme commissioned a report, ‘Engaging the Public on Climate Change through the Cultural and Creative Sectors’, *exploring how the arts, culture and heritage sectors can be used to promote dialogue around this pressing issue*.<sup>9</sup> Already heavily immersed in this field, it is expected that this sector will be involved in creating engaging work that will be an essential part of a transformational process.

At times, publicly-funded national cultural resource organisations, such as the Arts Council, Creative Ireland and local authorities, have funded artists and other creatives to develop work that shines a light on inadequacies and anomalies in local and national government provision. This could be said of each of the four artists who have participated in *Earth Writings*.<sup>10</sup> But rather than point a finger of blame, each artist researched, observed and listened, documented and recorded and then, responded – offering provocative thoughts and creative solutions that actively engage individuals and communities, nudging them, urging them to think differently. The seed is sown (sometimes, quite literally).

*Earth Writings* is one manifestation of a long-standing relationship between Kildare County Council Arts Service, the Department of Geography, Maynooth University and artists, presenting work and providing platforms for discourse on mutual issues of concern, including climate change. With assistance provided by Kildare’s CARO, alongside Kildare’s Creative Ireland programme<sup>11</sup> and the ongoing support for local artists working on ecological and environmental issues provided through awards and bursaries,<sup>12</sup> we have a real opportunity to act as conduit for change. The ultimate goal remains, the reduction of impacts on, and development of resilience to, climate change at local level.

The publication of *Earth Writings* seems timely, within the global conversation on climate change, but on reading the essays herein, I cannot but feel a sense of urgency.

*Planting an orchard with Mercy College School, Inchicore with Hard/Graft grafted trees.*

*Photograph by Seoidín O’Sullivan, 2019, image courtesy of the artist.*



- 1 From a keynote speech by broadcaster Mícheál Ó Muircheartaigh at the Kildare Age-Friendly Roadshow 2018.
- 2 <https://www.comhairlenanog.ie>
- 3 <https://agefriendlyireland.ie>
- 4 <https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/b59ee9-community-network-groups/>
- 5 <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2015/act/46/enacted/en/html>
- 6 <https://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/climate-action/topics/adapting-to-climate-change/national-adaptation-framework/Pages/default.aspx>
- 7 <https://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/climate-action/topics/climate-action-plan/Pages/climate-action.aspx>
- 8 <http://www.kildarecountycouncil.eu/CountyCouncil/PressReleasesAdverts/KildareCountyCouncil-committedtoleadingonclimateaction.html>
- 9 <https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/en/news/climate-change-and-the-cultural-and-creative-sectors/>
- 10 This *Earth Writings* publication and the 2019 seminar and exhibition *Earth Writings: Bogs, Forests, Fields and Gardens* received grant-aid from Kildare's Creative Ireland programme (other sponsors are included in the credits).
- 11 <https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/en/kildare/>
- 12 <http://www.kildare.ie/ArtsService/Grantsandopportunities/>

*The Hollywood Forest: Army of ash tree seedlings.*  
Still from video *Transformation* © Cathy Fitzgerald,  
2011. Image courtesy of the artist.



# Cneasú creathí: Healing the Wound

By Patrick Bresnihan and Monica de Bath<sup>1</sup>

*The Irish word for plot is ceapach; it means a small holding. I love that sense of, you know, holding something, about taking care of it. And traditionally a person's plot is where and what they would have lived from. So, I suppose that was the beginning of the plot, ceapach, and it began really because I was living in Rathangan and had two small children and I needed a space to work in.<sup>2</sup>*

Monica de Bath

Ballydermot Sphagnum. Digital colour photograph.  
© Monica de Bath, 2019.

The plot is not part of the domestic sphere; a different type of work is made possible there. The plot is not open to everyone and everything, but it does create an opening for others, a place of encounter. The plot is a place in which things can grow when they are cared for, a place of sustenance and nourishment – a way to make a living but more that, a way to make other forms of life possible.

The literal and the metaphoric are hard to separate in Monica de Bath's work.<sup>3</sup> Bord na Móna provided Monica with a dis-used room at a local industrial peat excavation site. This has served as Monica's studio for ten years, a place to work. Who knows what this old work room was built for or how it was used in the past; now it has been repurposed into something new. Monica's work is about the future of the midlands after the peat industry has gone. This is as much a material and imaginative question about the affordances of defunct buildings, infrastructures, and bog, as it is about policy or funding. What can be done with the material remnants of an entire industry? How can the land and communities that have been made and broken through industrial peat extraction be healed?

A plot is necessarily separated from what surrounds it. Creating such a space means shutting some things off in order to focus attention and energy on what is important. This is more important than ever. Information about climate and biodiversity breakdown is everywhere. Cast in such all-encompassing terms, it has become hard to find any relief. A plot provides some relief from the bad news.

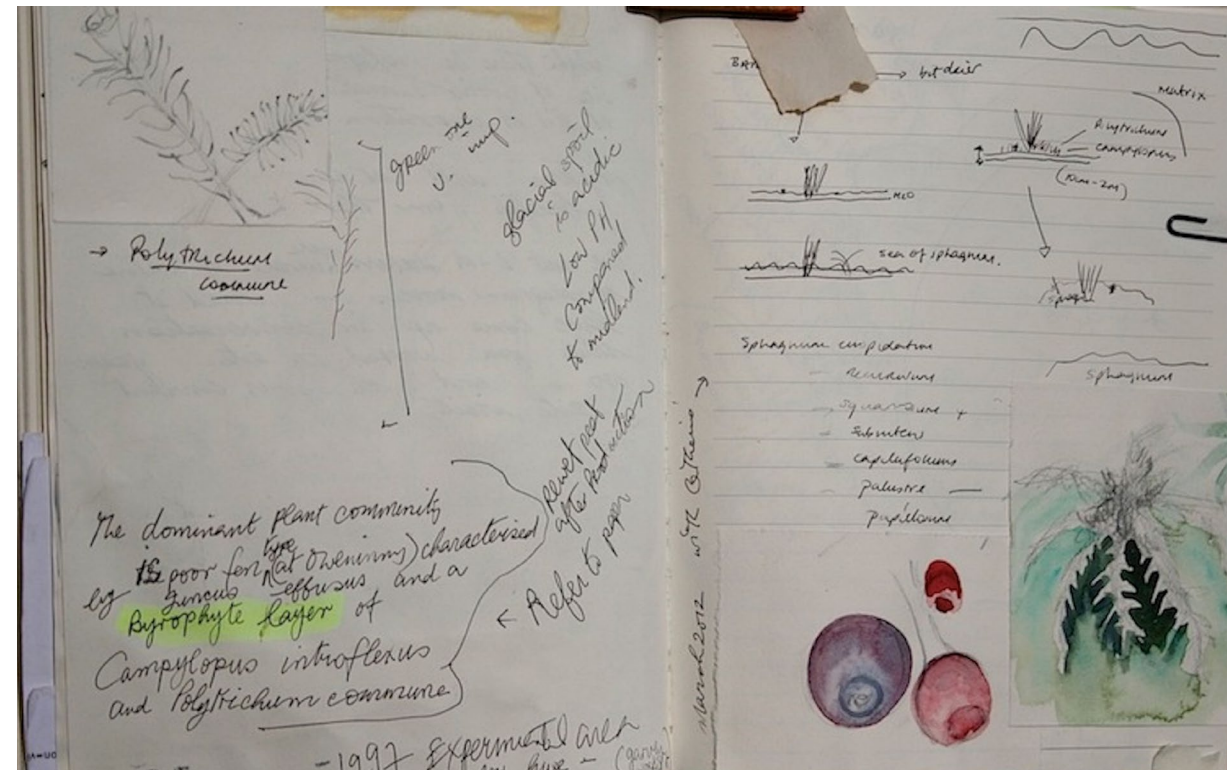
From her plot, in a disused industrial building, certain things come into focus and other things to surface. To begin with: a landscape. Not abstract numbers, hectares or emissions, but a physical landscape, man-made and, in her words, magical. Marvel at the work and workers, their skills and histories, that have made this place – mountains of milled peat in the pancake flat midlands. In her hard hat and hi-vis, Monica talks to the workers – curious about this artist woman in their midst. A plot serves for novel and unexpected encounters – facilitated by the sharing of tea and gifts of bread. From this, conversations begin, forgotten histories and new possibilities take shape.

When Monica asked some of the workers: 'Well, what do you think could happen to this place? What would you imagine?', their response was perhaps unexpected: 'Well, it could be used if they left a few meters, it could actually be used to grow stuff again...[W]hen our fathers would have worked here, they would have grown spuds and carrots in the plot if there wasn't too much water'; the same bog that was drained, cut and mined, was also used by workers to grow vegetables.

Informed by research with local expertise, I made a series of miniature paintings to reimagine and open up more conversations about the future of these mined peatlands. Pulling a small painting out of my pocket, I would have more conversations about what could be tried. I went out on a site visit with a local ex Teagasc worker who had planted an area of Bord na Móna lands with blueberry plants for a pilot project. Though overgrown, the plants had survived. Negotiating the transfer of them from one place to another place. Painting became a way into accessing a piece of partial cut away with two metres of depth that allowed for growing trees within a place of tension and of collaboration. The paintings which followed the planting of the blueberry plot explored the process and the collaboration with the workers in a poetic way.<sup>4</sup>

Artist's  
Notebook:  
Conversation with  
Ecologist.  
Pencil and  
watercolour.

© Monica de Bath,  
2012.



There are other communities of practice and expertise in the midlands besides the workers: land managers, ecologists, historians. These each throw light on different aspects of the bog, most telling in their conjunction with one another. Monica has a tremendous capacity to absorb the specific wonder that different experts communicate about their bog.

**The impact of listening to people's stories who are living a very different life, that would have impacted on me a lot both from the inner imagination and then obviously finding things like Sphagnum moss, not being totally aware of how they grow and how precious they are. How fragile and delicate yet resilient they are.<sup>5</sup>**

Each encounter with a different field of expertise, transforms Monica and her painting, not just what she paints but why she paints. Monica's art practice is part of the experimental future of the bogs. Her paintings are not final expressions of something, but rather speculative interventions, an invitation – blueberries cultivated on the bog, imagine!



*Iarsma / Remnant.*  
Oil on canvas,  
60 x 60 cm.

© Monica de Bath  
2019-20.  
Image courtesy of  
the artist.

The plot is an opening to confront troubling questions. The making of different futures in the midlands, or anywhere, most likely requires relinquishing existing attachments. Monica's work tries to broach this discomfort with those most affected: commitment to the workers and their communities, commitment to the bog ecologies, all so affected by the out-workings of peat mining. What can emerge in such damaged landscapes, beyond the call of industrial promise and ruin?

**The Sphagnum moss is an amazing little plant. And there are many of them in Ireland. You've got Magellanicum, Cuspidatum, Auriculatum (all of these wonderful Latin names). There are at least thirty species of Sphagnum within this country. And within this country we have many remnants of sphagnum moss. Raised bog remnant, even in the mined areas near Rathangan, you can walk along an edge and you can actually still see banks that haven't been totally cut away. You can still see hummocks of different types of Sphagnum mosses. These beautiful pinky-reds, bright lime greens, and they absorb so much.<sup>6</sup>**

Anna Tsing is an anthropologist who writes about the possibility of life in capitalist ruins.<sup>7</sup> She shows how the 'blasted landscapes' that follow the economic decline of timber plantations in the Pacific North West provide the unexpected conditions for new forms of life to emerge: mushroom ecologies. The Matsutake mushroom is the most expensive mushroom in the world, perhaps because it cannot easily be cultivated. In the remnants of these abandoned pine plantations, it thrives. Mushroom pickers are drawn here too, often migrants establishing precarious livelihoods and communities in a new land. These unexpected ecologies are not entirely positive, but nor are they nothing. They shouldn't make us naively hopeful, but nor should they be glossed over as unimportant; they are imperfect realities we have to work with.

The closure of the peat industry in the midlands will have untold repercussions for the workers that rely on it and the communities that relied on those workers – the exponential effects of unemployment on families, local economies, and culture that are not so easily measured. It is possible to care about this and at the same time believe that a decent living shouldn't entail destroying the earth; it is possible to care about this while also recognising that workers and peat are not the only things of value in these places. In fact, it may be that paying attention to these other presences may offer clues on how to escape the see-saw narrative of promise and ruin, promise and ruin that Anna Tsing warns us about.



*Túr Feamainne,  
Port Aillinn,  
Watercolour  
and pencil on  
fabriano paper,  
67 x 73 cm.*

© Monica de Bath,  
2016. Image  
courtesy of the  
artist.

While Working in Mayo I was shown how a Gas Project made room for a landfill site, by digging up Atlantic bog and moving it to a peat deposition site. I then witnessed the same Sphagnum reproducing spores and healing a wound in the first mined peatland in Ireland. I began to notice something very alike between Sphagnum and the green, purply red, creamy seaweeds. Not just visual association around colour but both of their abilities to absorb 90% of their weight in water. Might Sphagnum have evolved from seaweed? I once heard a plant expert talk about how all land plants evolved from green seaweed. Research suggests that land plants including Sphagnum moss evolve from green algae such as Spirogyra, which invaded land during the Silurian period of the Paleozoic era.<sup>8</sup>

Sphagnum moss, the ‘bog builder’, is depicted by Monica as uncanny, supernatural, and monstrous, outflanking industrial infrastructures and buildings. This has the effect of turning a relatively brief industrial history into something minor when compared to the deep time of moss. What happens if you consider the bog through plant history, rather than Bord na Móna history? What happens if you consider the future through the slow mend of the moss, rather than the

quick fix promise of a new industry, like tourism - what Lucy Lippard describes as the ‘straw grasped by desperate economies ravaged by extraction’<sup>9</sup>? There have been victims all along the history of the bogs – some preserved within like meat in aspic. How might the future of the bogs reckon with the different histories that are held there? Could the bogs become a new kind of geo-historical archive that leads us somewhere different?

Robin Wall Kimmerer, Professor of Biology and member of the Potawatomi Nation, describes how difficult it was to find any written references to the uses of Sphagnum moss amongst indigenous peoples of North America<sup>10</sup>. White, male anthropologists were not so interested in women or children, or else too embarrassed to record what they observed. Eventually she found an entry documenting how mosses were widely used as nappies and sanitary pads. Moss is absorbent and anti-septic, ready-made for these basic yet vital functions – what is more important than the health of babies?

During World War I, with cotton supplies exhausted, Sphagnum was harvested on a large-scale by volunteers across Ireland; the bogs provided a global resource for healing the war-wounded. Long before bogs were identified as potential ‘sinks’ for society’s fossil fuel addiction, the absorbent, healing properties of Sphagnum were known to those who lived by them. The lack of knowledge and value invested in bog plants like Sphagnum is not accidental, it reflects a hierarchy of knowledge and value that has long marginalised women, indigenous, peasant and non-human nature.

Working as artist/educator with Creative Rathangan Meitheal involves walks on the ‘out of use’ narrow gauge railway track, encouraging children to observe, listen. Notebook drawing games encourage them to make thinking drawings about this land shaped by milled peat piles and remnants of Sphagnum bog. Moving indoors to lab-studio space they use magnifiers to see beyond the eye and re-imagine this miniscule universe in paint. A child recently asked me: ‘If Sphagnum healed wounds during WW1, could it heal Coronavirus?’<sup>11</sup>

There is something powerful about these tiny plants that make the bogs – they literally terraform the world through their patient, collective work, a geological agent long before geoscientists thought to anoint humans as an era-defining species. There is growing interest in the magical properties of moss for healing bodies and polluted environments. Restoration of Sphagnum bogs looms large as literal and metaphoric salve. But this work of remediation and healing works on near unimaginable scales of time and space, which is why we need art to make that sensible. Not sensible in sense of appropriate, but sensible as in perceptible, thinkable, imaginable.



Untitled  
30 x 30 cm mixed media on canvas (PLOT 1)

© Monica de Bath 2019–20.  
Image courtesy of the artist.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 This text developed out of ongoing conversations, correspondence, and exchanges between Patrick Bresnihan and the artist Monica de Bath in 2019–20, as tied to the Tírdhreach Feasach symposium at Maynooth University Department of Geography, 20 November 2019 and subsequent exchanges. It includes new writing by Bresnihan, and edited extracts from conversations and correspondence by de Bath.
- 2 Monica de Bath, in conversation with Patrick Bresnihan, Tírdhreach Feasach, 20 November 2019.
- 3 For more about Monica de Bath's artistic practice, see exhibition publications *Plot 1 / CEAPACH 1*, Ed. Fiona Fullam (Kildare County Council Arts Service, 2010) and *Plot 2 / CEAPACH 2*, Ed. Laurence Fullam (Kildare County Council Arts Service, 2012), with essays by Maeve Mulrennan and Catherine Farrell.
- 4 Monica de Bath, in conversation with Patrick Bresnihan, Tírdhreach Feasach.
- 5 de Bath, in conversation with Bresnihan.
- 6 de Bath, in conversation with Bresnihan.
- 7 Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. *The mushroom at the end of the world: On the possibility of life in capitalist ruins* (Princeton University Press, 2015).
- 8 Monica de Bath, email exchange with Patrick Bresnihan, 14th March 2020.
- 9 Lippard, Lucy R. *Undermining: A Wild Ride in Words and Images through Land Use Politics in the Changing West* (The New Press, 2014).
- 10 Kimmerer, Robin Wall. *Gathering moss: A natural and cultural history of mosses* (Oregon State University Press, 2003).
- 11 Monica de Bath, email exchange with Patrick Bresnihan, March 2020.

A photograph of a woman with short, wavy brown hair, wearing a bright red long-sleeved shirt and dark blue pants, walking through a dense forest. She is looking down and to her left, surrounded by lush green foliage and young trees. The background shows taller, more mature trees with light-colored bark. The overall scene is a vibrant, sun-dappled woodland.

## ‘The little wood that could...’: Cathy Fitzgerald in conversation with Nessa Cronin

by Nessa Cronin and Cathy Fitzgerald <sup>1</sup>

*In this conversation, we address the need for expanded creative practice, innovative ecoliteracy education for the arts, and for new ways of engaging different publics with the question of how can we live and care for our communities and places in a time of ecological crisis.*



**Nessa Cronin (NC):** Go raibh míle maith agaibh go léir agus tá an-áthas orm a bheith ar ais san Ollscoil Má Núaid chun an chómhrá seo a reachtáil le Cathy Fitzgerald anseo inniú. Cathy and I were speaking a little earlier and realised that the first time we met was about four or five years ago here in Maynooth?

**Cathy Fitzgerald (CF):** I think it was for *The Place of the Wound* symposium that Karen Till organised in 2016 – which was a fabulous programme of events where international and local artists and academics, who deal with troubled places and lands that have been degraded, presented their work over a few days.<sup>2</sup> So, it was great to meet you then and to have been subsequently invited to speak at NUI Galway afterwards.

**NC:** We had Cathy back in Galway with us again for a special joint seminar on ‘Carbon Cultures’, with Dr Iain Biggs, emeritus Professor, University of Bristol, UK, at the Moore Institute<sup>3</sup>; Karen Till and Gerry Kearns also joined us along with some postgraduate students from NUI Galway and Maynooth University. So, I thought today you might tell us just a little bit

about your own academic and artistic background, and your own creative practice and interest in developing an eco-philosophical understanding of the world.

**CF:** I came to Ireland almost twenty-four years ago. I have Irish ancestors and, as you can hear, I am not from this part of the world – I am from *Aotearoa* New Zealand. My interest in this area has been long-standing. I have a background in research biology. So I was thinking about the world, through science, for ten years. But from childhood, I always loved art too and I was inspired growing up in NZ.

When I came to Ireland in the 1990s there was 22% unemployment. Even though I applied for jobs in laboratories, I couldn’t get work anywhere. I joined an organisation spearheaded by the Australian Jan Alexander – founder of the Irish tree organisation, Crann<sup>4</sup>. She ignited a national conversation on the *Late Late Show* in the 1980s with Gay Byrne, asking why Ireland was not planting broadleaf native trees. She also started talking to Coillte, the Irish state-owned forestry company, about re-envisioning forest policy.

I was also very lucky to meet some people when I first arrived in Ireland who advised me on Irish art colleges. I decided to go to the National College of Art and Design, Dublin (NCAD). Through Fine Arts degrees there, I was slowly able to weave these different interests of mine together – art, science and ecological thinking, with my particular interest in ecological forestry. However, developing my work was actually quite problematic – in terms of how to bring ecological, social, and artistic activities together as a recognisable creative practice.

*The Hollywood Forest: A close-to-nature continuous cover forest growing under the Blackstairs Mountains, South County Carlow, the site of Cathy Fitzgerald’s long term eco-social art practice. Photograph by Martin Lyttle, 2015, courtesy of Cathy Fitzgerald.*



**NC:** I am sure it was! Could you say something about how your more recent doctoral research navigated both ecological principles and creative practice? And how you developed your own ideas of collaborative practices as well?

**CF:** I have known for quite a while that since we are facing a catastrophe in Western civilisation, that a corresponding cultural response must be much more than bringing a 'nature' theme into an artwork. Through my time at NCAD, I was very inspired in the late 1990s coming across pioneering US ecological and eco-social art practitioners, such as Helen and Newton Harrison,<sup>5</sup> who in their joint creative practice, invited other creatives, non-art collaborators, including scientists, local knowledge holders, and communities, to work, create and talk together – to develop new values of living well with environments. Ecological art practices are multi-constituent practices, consisting of artistic activity to translate the specialness of place, gathering knowledge from many disciplines, facilitating people's lived experience of place using social skills of mutuality and respect, which over time, evolves a collective awareness of new values to safeguard our places.

I was really inspired by these expanded eco-social practices, but also quite daunted! I had never worked that way before. And being quite introverted, it took another ten or so years for me to figure out my own way. My PhD considered the unprecedented and exponentially accelerating ecological emergency and why these practices were not more well-known, and why art colleges were not really embracing eco-social art practice. I was alerted to these questions before many others in the art sector because of my earlier career in science. I am still very thankful to have had the long-term guidance of Dr Paul O'Brien at NCAD, who deeply appreciated the urgency of this emergent field of contemporary art practice, and then to have the expert practice guidance from Dr Iain Biggs, who supported my disciplinary and lifeworld voyaging.

Cathy Fitzgerald  
*Marking a Conifer  
Tree: Alerting  
foresters to retain  
for permanent  
continuous cover  
forestry in The  
Hollywood Forest.*

Photograph by  
Martin Lyttle,  
2015, courtesy of  
Cathy Fitzgerald.



**NC:** I think the idea of traversing boundaries between the arts and the sciences is really critical in your work, but also the need to create space to have those kinds of conversations across various disciplinary areas as well. Can we move now perhaps onto *The Hollywood Forest Story*, begun in 2008, which you describe as 'The little wood that could!'? How did you start that project and practice, and how did it evolve to where you're at currently today?

**CF:** I suppose I got a lot of inspiration about fifteen years ago by joining fledgling online art and ecology networks in Britain. I then started a general art and ecology blog trying to write about other people's similar creative practices. This later blog later became *The Hollywood Forest Story* blog about my forest work of learning how to transform the small monoculture tree plantation that I live within, with my husband in South County Carlow. The project was slow to evolve and arose one afternoon eight years after living within the tree plantation, a plantation of Sitka Spruce, planted fifteen years earlier by my husband's late father. I remember I was walking through our trees and I suddenly thought: 'Oh my goodness – I have all the elements for an eco-social art practice! I know

one of the best foresters in the country, I know about situated ecological art practice, I have worked with local Green politicians, so I can start a long term eco-social art practice, a “slow art” residency – right outside my front door to promote permanent forestry!’ At first I didn’t tell anybody – I just started taking pictures. Building confidence, bit by bit, I organised a workshop with Jan Alexander and a forester, well versed in new-to-Ireland continuous cover forestry, for neighbours and friends interested in managing biodiverse forests in perpetuity.

Over the last decade, I also gained much ecological forestry knowledge as the public relations officer and webmaster for Pro Silva Ireland, the leading voluntary organisation promoting continuous forest cover in Ireland since 2000.<sup>6</sup> My Pro Silva Ireland colleagues often smile at *Hollywood Forest Story* – about the smallest ‘Close-to-Nature’ forest in Ireland; as expert foresters, tree-harvesters, ecologists and woodworkers, they give me ongoing advice about transforming our small monoculture tree plantation. Also, observing the many beings in a forest gave me an appreciation of networks of mutuality for a thriving forest. Similarly, ecological art practices depend on my social skills that foster mutuality for shared conversation and learning. I refer to ecological art practice as ‘eco-social art practice’ to highlight the social skill required for these often long-term projects.

I also see my practice responding to what recent international cultural policy confirms – that culture is the fourth pillar of sustainability. But it is not really a part of the discourse nationally in Ireland or in our art sector yet.<sup>7</sup> I think this *Earth Writings* project could be the start of a really rich discourse to appreciate how co-creative practices, informed by ecological principles and skills of mutuality, can foster new societal values on how we can live well with our environments.

**NC:** Could you say something about how you engage philosophically and methodologically with a wide variety of people and practices across the country here in Ireland and also internationally?

**CF:** I think the collaborative nature of my work has been a sort of gentle reaching out and opening up of discussions with people; my blogging, with pictures and video, has been an essential part of my creative practice to convey *The Hollywood Forest Story* to others near and far. I contact people when I need to: foresters, ecologists, philosophers and politicians too. I think culture is not really recognised as a critical forum to talk about these things yet. But I think that time will come.

**NC:** And with regard to *The Hollywood Forest Story* as well, do you see connections between what’s happening in Ireland and internationally?

**CF:** In Ireland in the 1950s, plantation monoculture forestry with non-native tree species – a industrial forestry model developed outside of Ireland – initially helped alleviate rural poverty. But industrial forestry practices unfortunately limit wildlife, degrades rivers, compacts and acidifies soils, and so forth. A change in forestry is happening and across the world but it is slow. In New Zealand, the government has announced a big plan to plant two million trees. But again, it is just conifer plantations and so the wider ecological benefits will be limited. Imagine instead if the multiple environmental, social amenity and economic returns if New Zealand was to whole-heartedly reimagine forestry to re-establish its rainforests in perpetuity? So, I share with some foresters in New Zealand about what we’re doing here in Ireland. Of course, there are huge pressures to produce timber for building, but our futures will be threatened if we continue to promote industrial forestry.

**NC:** I think one of the advantages that we have in Ireland is that we're very quick to critique ourselves, but sometimes we need to give ourselves a break every now and then! Cathy and I were just chatting about this over coffee that one of the advantages of Ireland is that a local conversation becomes a national conversation very, very quickly. With the way things are going now, with the inter-connections between place and planet, there's now a planetary conversation going on across Ireland.

You have found your own work has become the subject of another planetary conversation through a talk that you gave earlier this year as part of a series of 'Art and Geography' sessions we co-organised through the Space&Place Research Collaborative and Omos Áité for the EUGEO/Conference of Irish Geographers international conference in Galway in May 2019.<sup>8</sup> You positioned your eco-social art practice as a critical

contribution to an ecological era, the 'Symbiocene', a concept devised by Australian eco-philosopher, Glenn Albrecht. And then, through subsequent events and your Haumea ecoliteracy for creatives and art educators workshop<sup>9</sup> later in the year, you have been the subject of a lot of public attention internationally as well. How have you been dealing with that?

**CF:** Well, this year has been very busy. And I must say that I am very grateful for people like Greta Thunberg and Extinction Rebellion that environmental concerns are increasingly recognised. So, it's been quite a turnaround!

**NC:** I think our time is drawing to a close and so I would like to say thank you very much for our conversation today Cathy. Míle buíochas!



*Reimagining Forestry in Ireland in The Hollywood Forest: Cathy Fitzgerald in conversation with Carlow IT Wexford art students and tutor Dr Orla Ryan.*

Photograph by Gwen Wilkinson, 2014, courtesy of Cathy Fitzgerald.



A Walk in the Hollywood Forest. Art and Science conversation,  
Blackstairs Film Festival, County Carlow.  
Photograph by Gwen Wilkinson, 2014, courtesy of Cathy Fitzgerald.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 This edited conversation draws on our extended discussions in 2019–20 as part of the Tírdhreach Feasach symposium at Maynooth Geography in November 2019.
- 2 Curated by Karen E. Till, 'Mapping Spectral Traces 8: The Place of the Wound' (Maynooth University Department of Geography, 2016). For details see: <https://theplaceofthewound.wordpress.com/>.
- 3 Cathy Fitzgerald, 'Raising the Shining, Reflective Shield': The Urgent Need for Cultural Policy to Engage Irish Civil Society Toward Eco-Social Well-Being. Paper delivered at 'Carbon Cultures' symposium, organised by Nessa Cronin. Moore Institute, NUI Galway (May 2019).
- 4 Crann is a membership-based organisation, centred around raising the environmental importance of trees, hedgerows, and woodland in Ireland. See: [www.crann.ie](http://www.crann.ie).
- 5 Material from her ongoing *Hollywood Forest Story* eco-social art practice (2008–present) and on the Harrison's forest work, *The Serpentine Lattice*, is available in: Cathy Fitzgerald, 'The Ecological Turn: Living Well with Forests To Articulate Eco-Social Art Practices Using a Guattari Ecosophy and Action Research Framework', PhD dissertation (Dublin: National College of Art and Design, 2018). Available as an audio-visual ebook at: <https://ncad.academia.edu/CathyFitzgerald>. Cathy's work was also featured in: Paddy Woodworth, 'Art at the frontline of the environmental crisis', *The Irish Times* (7 March 2020): <https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/travel/ireland/art-at-the-frontline-of-the-environmental-crisis-1.4186881>.
- 6 ProSilva is an organisation that prioritises the need for long term, permanent, mixed-species forestry that is both ecologically and economically sustainable. See: [www.prosilvaireland.com](http://www.prosilvaireland.com).
- 7 Cathy Fitzgerald, 'Irish Art and Sustainability Policy Review' (Hollywood Forest webpage, nd): <https://hollywoodforest.com/portfolio/irish-art-and-sustainability-policy-review/>.
- 8 Cathy Fitzgerald, 'Goodbye - Hello Symbiocene: Eco-Social Art Practices for a New World'. Paper delivered at the EUROGEO/Conference of Irish Geographers, NUI Galway (May, 2019). Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y4vkte25>.
- 9 Cathy offers workshops, mentoring, and online ecoliteracy learning for creative workers, art educators, art administrators and cultural policy writers. For more information, see: [www.haumea.ie](http://www.haumea.ie).

# Fields and Hedges: Pauline O'Connell's You Cannot Climb a Hedge

By Gerry Kearns and Pauline O'Connell



*The field becomes a place where new rural vocabularies can emerge, vocabularies which do not further re-inscribe the same politics of narrative that previously prevailed.*

- Pauline O'Connell

*You Cannot Climb a Hedge.* HD video installation exhibited in The Community Building, The Community Field, Castlewarren, AKA Fringe, Kilkenny Arts Festival 2018. Projection size 14' x 9'6".

© Pauline O'Connell, 2018. Image courtesy of the artist.

A man is on or in a hedge. The hedge is twice his height and impenetrably broad. It is difficult to find a footing and painful to be putting any of the weight of his body against the thorns. Only the vigour of the main branches hold him up as his feet test each spiky possibility. On another screen, in vertiginous perspective, the man spreads, silhouetted against his bed of nails, distributing his weight like a fakir.

This is Pauline O'Connell's *You Cannot Climb a Hedge*, one of a series of works in which the artist incites reflections upon place and the politics of identity in modern rural Ireland. O'Connell explicitly rejects the notion that there is anything like a stable rural community:

**On the surface, community suggests cohesion and conviviality – applied to the rural, this perception is fed by outside narratives informed by the Enlightenment, whereby an idealized rural landscape (even in the mind's eye), on the one hand, celebrated man's domination over nature, and, on the other, God's mastery over a landscape and the insignificance of the individual within it. Beauty, transcendence, correct taste and the sublime became the markers of how the rural was depicted. This implicates art history whereby constructed pastoral scenes (in stasis) still inform the image landscape today.**<sup>1</sup>

Recognising instead that both the rural and the urban rest upon what Doreen Massey called 'power geometries,' O'Connell follows Chantal Mouffe in acknowledging as many communities and as many dimensions to identities as there are sets of agonistic social relations.<sup>2</sup>

**My interest lies in revealing this uneven geography, to scratch the surface, to dig underneath, to reveal the politics of narrative that has subjugated the rural such that when we think of it, we think through the frame as mentioned above. By addressing the rural as site of representational struggle, my aim is to speak back to these disciplinary narratives by asking how the rural is constructed and, how it is performed.**<sup>3</sup>

In this sense, O'Connell approaches community more as a verb than as a noun.<sup>4</sup>

In 2003, O'Connell left Dublin and re-settled near the village of Castlewarren in rural north-east Kilkenny, up a hill, 650 feet above the city of Kilkenny, some fifteen kilometres away, 900 feet above sea level and 200 above the local

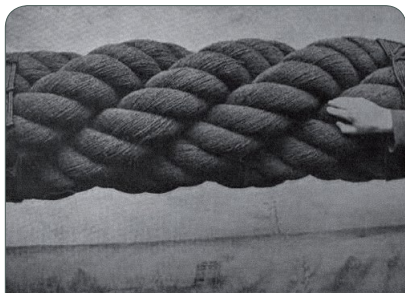
snowline. When O'Connell first went looking for her new local community she found few social relations outside those convened either by the Catholic Church or the Gaelic Athletic Association. There was a sense of neglect dramatised for her by the electoral map which showed her polling station but did not stretch far enough to include the houses of her neighbourhood. 'We were literally cut off the map,' she says, and 'this cartographic erasure [...] annoyed me.'<sup>5</sup> It also reminded her of Dublin's working-class north east inner city, another 'zone of social abandonment', to use anthropologist João Biehl's suggestive phrase; a place, in O'Connell's words, 'where the attitude is such that no one gives a damn about us, so we're not going to give a damn about anything or anyone else.'<sup>6</sup>

O'Connell's art summons the traces of community to serve what geographer Karen Till calls a 'place-based ethics of care': in caring for a shared place, we care for each other.<sup>7</sup> One of the ways to care for and about a place is to share its history, and in its history, many of O'Connell's projects perform memory to pass forward local tools for conviviality. This is not mere nostalgia, but artistic practice that both performs and anticipates a community to come. Reflecting on her approach, O'Connell follows Félix Guattari in suggesting that an artwork might aspire to 'insert itself into a social network.'<sup>8</sup> And this describes her practice, as with the *Heave-Ho* projects, which brings us to Castlewarren and the enacting of community.

Wondering how people communed in her neighbourhood, O'Connell began asking older people thereabouts 'where did they meet [...] and it turned out there was a famous tug-of-war team on the hill', that, in 1971, had been part of the all-Ireland tug-of-war championship.<sup>9</sup> Five of the team were still around and they told of another nearby team, from Coan, county Kilkenny who had practised by throwing a rope around a tree and then took the strain of a tractor tyre. The scar, chafed into the tree by the rope is still evident.<sup>10</sup> Tug-of-war gave O'Connell a visual metaphor for community. The teams rested upon local allegiances but she anticipated an agonistic space where they could contend in friendly rivalry with others. Each of the three pub teams were comprised of eight customers plus a coach and two substitute 'pullers'. In *Heave-Ho, Invitation to Community* (2012), O'Connell recorded: the origin of the game, the history of the local team, an account of the 1971 Tug O'War All-Ireland Final, and details of the Coan Pulling Tree. An invitation to put the 'u' into community was imprinted onto beer mats – acting as artworks where the art is embedded in the social relations

they afford the participants – that were distributed around local pubs so as to solicit interest and perhaps rekindle contention. This new community archive was animated with the publication, *Hypomnemata, A Memory Trace*, as an inscribed artistic reflection on the project.<sup>11</sup>

This project needed a ground on which to stand and once again the utopian rather than nostalgic element is clear, for O’Connell wanted ‘somewhere neutral – a place to play out these rural agonisms’ that became ever more apparent to her upon searching for such a place. But ‘it didn’t exist [...]; everything is privatised in the rural’.<sup>12</sup> Once again, one of the elder’s stories told of a field nearby that had been acquired for community use as a sports-field in 1980’s, an event of re-commoning in the face of ubiquitous enclosure and one significant enough to have been snapped for posterity when a photograph was taken that captured the moment of ‘signing from private to public ownership’.<sup>13</sup> The field was impressed to serve the tug-of-war, and, on 9 December 2012, some 350 people came into the field for the *Heave-Ho, Pub-Pulling League*. The seed and the harvest ‘people came to me afterwards and said, “I want to do something in the field,” and I said, “Well, let’s set up a group.”’<sup>14</sup> And so was born the Castlewarren Cultural Development Group for which O’Connell serves as cultural advisor and grant-writer, stakeholder and local artist. And it had its field: ‘While I didn’t know what its future usage would be, it was necessary to shift the frame from having the sole focus of sport to something more than that. By calling it “The Community Field” within local earshot, I reiterated “the community field, the community field”’, and in this way O’Connell hoped she was ‘embedding it in people’s psyche’.<sup>15</sup>



**Heave-Ho 2012**  
*An invitation to community*



**Coan Pulling Tree**  
52° 46' 24" N 7° 12' 49" W  
Heave-Ho

*Heave-Ho: An Invitation to Community. Two of a limited edition set of five beermats (1000 each).*

© Pauline O’Connell, 2012.  
Image courtesy of the artist.

*The signing of the Sports Field (now The Community Field) from private to public ownership (26 April 1982). l-r: Matthew Corr Snr, Jack Foley, Mary Molloy (solicitor), Mattie Corr Jnr.*

Photographer unknown.  
Courtesy of the Castlewarren Cultural Development Group.

In 2015 the community field was gifted a portacabin, and arrived since then are electricity and planning permission. The community field is used for social and educational events played out through sport, music, and art,



and oftentimes, together. In 2018, O’Connell had an exhibition of *You Cannot Climb A Hedge* as a non-narrative, triptych HDV within the cabin. The installation was of museum quality: ‘however, there was a dichotomy between the outside, with the sports day activities, dog shows, bouncy castle, children’s games and barbeques, and what was presented inside – where, in a darkened space there were three enormous high definition projections arranged.’<sup>16</sup>

The screens were installed such that the viewer could not see all three together with any coherence: the two landscape format projections – left and right – fall outside of your peripheral vision whilst you are confronted by a life-sized moving portrait in real-time, a one-take negotiation/attempt at the title provocation as you enter through the centralised doorway. The viewer moved between the three visual narratives, they could: walk into and amongst them, becoming part of the narrative; interact with, perform with or simply witness the negotiation between man and hedge/ human and nature singularly; or negotiate a similar difficulty between the three, as the protagonist is, in his attempt to find a way to balance himself. The risk for him is high as he negotiates his thorny support, but the stakes for us are even higher.<sup>17</sup>

O’Connell’s neighbours some farmers, local tradesmen, fellow Community Field committee members, friends, artists, many of whom she had worked with since 2012, along with both art and non-art audiences, were invited in. Outside remained the field, a clearance hedged in.



O'Connell calls this piece a 'cine-poem film project'. For me it throbs with literary, political and historical valences. In his poem 'Mending Wall', Robert Frost talks of those things in nature, in local society and in his own ethical disposition that 'does not like a wall', and for himself, after repairing the wall that he inherited as a division against his neighbour, he proposed: 'Before I built a wall I'd ask to know? | What I was walling in or walling out, | And to whom I was like to give offense.'<sup>18</sup>

*You Cannot Climb a Hedge* was adapted to and exhibited in Maynooth University's Library lobby for the 2019 *Earth Writings* exhibition. In this second iteration of the piece, a two-screen installation, O'Connell created an entrance banner that cited Martin Heidegger: 'A boundary is not that at which something stops but, [...] is that from which something begins its presencing.'<sup>19</sup> Heidegger was writing about a society making a clearing and within that making a dwelling. In which case, what makes its presence at the boundary is the non-cleared and therefore cannot possibly give offense, in Frost's sense. Yet Heidegger's own personal history as intellectual in service to National Socialism immediately reminds us that any notion akin to living space can only temporarily isolate a society in space before immediately plunging it back into a world where fields are already made an exclusive domain in the form of property, wherein territory is already made an exclusive domain in the form of a state. O'Connell knows we will reflect on the hedge as a 'boundary or barrier or wall' and that 'it resonates on a global scale' where it is 'troubled by geopolitics. And I did want to say that it isn't by accident that I used a Heidegger citation'.<sup>20</sup>

So, here at a different community field, suspending the relations of ownership and with an invitation that extends beyond the territorial limits of parish or village, O'Connell asked her guests to think about the difficulty of finding our footing in a world of hedges: where a hedge is a protection (a hedge against ...) and a reserve (extending to one third of Ireland's complement of woods they are home to many living things), but also where a person such as she, a counter-urbanist refugee from the city and a non-farmer with little inclination to let her rural social art practice take its agenda from Catholic Church or Gaelic Athletic Association, can yet retain a link with the city and think through this 'post-rural, urban-inflected practice'.<sup>21</sup> In this sense: 'The field becomes a place where new rural vocabularies can emerge, vocabularies which do not further re-inscribe the same politics of narrative that previously prevailed.'<sup>22</sup>

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Pauline O'Connell, email to Gerry Kearns, March 2020.
- 2 Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) 3-4; Chantal Mouffe, 'Radical democracy: Modern or postmodern?', in Andrew Ross (ed.), *Universal Abandon? The Politics of Postmodernism* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1988) 31-45.
- 3 O'Connell, email.
- 4 O'Connell, email.
- 5 O'Connell in conversation with Kearns at Maynooth University, 20 November 2019.
- 6 João Biehl, *Vita: Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); O'Connell in conversation.
- 7 Karen E. Till, 'Wounded cities: Memory-work and a place-based ethics of care,' *Political Geography* 31:1 (2012) 3-14.
- 8 Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-aesthetic Paradigm* [1992], trans. Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995) 130.
- 9 O'Connell in conversation.
- 10 Pauline O'Connell, *Hypomnemata: A Memory Trace* (Cassagh Press, 2012); [http://paulineoconnell.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/DS\\_heave\\_ho\\_24pp.pdf](http://paulineoconnell.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/DS_heave_ho_24pp.pdf) (accessed 16 March 2020) 8.
- 11 O'Connell, *Hypomnemata*, 3.
- 12 O'Connell in conversation.
- 13 O'Connell in conversation.
- 14 O'Connell in conversation.
- 15 O'Connell in conversation.
- 16 O'Connell in conversation.
- 17 O'Connell, email.
- 18 Robert Frost, 'Mending Wall' (1914), ll 32-34.
- 19 Martin Heidegger, 'Building, dwelling, thinking,' trans. Albert Hofstadter [1971], in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Perennial, 2001) 141-160, 152.
- 20 O'Connell in conversation.
- 21 O'Connell email. O'Connell discusses her work in the context of the 'new rural' here: Caroline Allen, 'Co. Kilkenny artist reels in the reality of the "new rural,"' *AgriLand* (26 August 2018); <https://www.agriland.ie/farming-news/co-kilkenny-artist-reels-in-the-reality-of-the-new-rural/> (accessed 17 March 2020).
- 22 O'Connell, email.

# Community Orchards in Dublin 8: Planting Feminist Urban Ecologies of Care through Hard/Graft

By Karen E. Till and  
Seoidín O'Sullivan<sup>1</sup>



How do we repair our landscapes, our cities and our relationships? In the current political climate, it feels like it is going to take a huge amount of collective graft to get there.

Artist Seoidín O'Sullivan: Grafting towards future orchards with Hard/Graft.  
Photo documentation by Jason Sheridan, 2019. Image courtesy of the artist.

- Seoidín O'Sullivan<sup>2</sup>

We need to 'reworld, reimagine, relive, and reconnect with each other in multispecies well-being'. ...'The Earthbound can take heart, as well as action.'

- Donna Haraway<sup>3</sup>

Grassroots activists and artists face a tough moment in imagining more just cities in which to live. These 'hard times'<sup>4</sup> include: our climate crisis; Trump's 2014 election and possible re-election; the rise of right-wing governments in Europe, the UK and Brazil; austerity measures in times of 'recovery'; the rental, housing and homelessness crises; and now the COVID-19 pandemic, all of which change expectations of 'normal' in our world. Reflecting upon this moment, artist Seoidín O'Sullivan asks: 'How do you respond with care and bring people along?'<sup>5</sup>

*Hard/Graft* offers Dublin's residents an invitation to work with multispecies others through learning about heritage fruit trees and planting a commons together. Located in a former inner city working-class area marked by decades of disinvestment and displacement, and now housing a mixed demographic, the project has initiated a journey of reworlding and repair. As framed by a feminist ecological approach to commoning, residents are asked to reimagine the city 'and reconnect with each other in multispecies well-being'<sup>6</sup> at the very 'place of the wound'.<sup>7</sup> In grafting, planting and caring for their trees, they also reclaim the places, communities and city where they must grow.

**Community Orchards are a commons, they are green spaces in the city where communities are able to access free food .... They create spaces where people can relax and meet and provide a place for pollinators. ... The orchard space becomes a place to observe and stay connected to the seasonal cycles – something often quite invisible for numerous city dwellers surrounded by glass, brick and concrete.**<sup>8</sup>

Neoliberal cities are, quite simply, unsustainable, as are the dominant geographical imaginaries that maintain them. Planning solutions to crises are market-based, driven by desires of future profit, and justified by 'rational' decisions, all of which maintain systems of disaster (petro-) capitalism.<sup>9</sup> Western urban theories that classify ground as property assume that time is inevitable and space is absolute, rather than co-created, experienced, remembered and shared. Strategies of privatisation, possessive individualism, sorting, segregation, and disavowal make invisible and silence past and ongoing forms of oppression, as well as the stories and places that offer more just alternatives.<sup>10</sup>

With other feminist activists, arts and scholars, we reject the desperate belief that neoliberalism defines the entirety of our lived realities, subjectivities and shared worlds.<sup>11</sup> Instead we stand as allies with Indigenous leaders who understand place as part of our shared heritage and responsibility, and work to decolonise our minds, bodies and lands/waters.<sup>12</sup> In so doing, we acknowledge how places and their multi-species ecologies (at multiple scales) have been and continue to be 'wounded' by past and ongoing legacies of colonialism and other forms of state-perpetrated violence.<sup>13</sup> We also collaborate with others to realise 'spatial justice' through imagining and enacting the healthy places in which we want to live.<sup>14</sup>

*Hard/Graft:*  
Seoidín O'Sullivan  
holding a grafted  
apple tree.

© Seoidín O'Sullivan,  
2018, image  
courtesy of the  
artist.



Some places may be created to function as ‘fields of care’<sup>15</sup>, such as community gardens and orchards, as Seoidín describes above. These fields provide shared spaces for residents to relax, for pollinators to be protected, and for multiple species to connect, such as through seasonal change. We understand such places according to a feminist ethics of care and feminist ecologies of communing. Joan Tronto understands caring as ‘a species activity’ that ‘conveys both a disposition and a set of actions’,<sup>16</sup> and María Puig de la Bellacasa describes care as ‘a thick mesh of relational obligation’.<sup>17</sup> Tronto, with Berenice Fischer, defines care broadly to include ‘everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our “world” so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web’.<sup>18</sup> Webs of care are related to feminist ecological practices that draw upon relations of cooperation with and responsibility for ‘each other and the earth, the forests, the seas, the animals’, and reject forms of life and reproduction based upon the suffering of others.<sup>19</sup> As Silvia Federici describes, creating feminist commons entails struggle and hard work, but the result might teach the importance of community, including those of liberation and solidarity, of awakening and care, and multispecies relations of social-ecological repair and regeneration.<sup>20</sup>

How might feminist ecologies of care and responsibility become possible in Inchicore, a gentrifying, former working-class part of Dublin that has experienced waves of disinvestment, stigma and ‘chronic urban trauma’?<sup>21</sup> *Hard/Graft*. At a time of extreme housing crisis, when city authorities offer gentrification rather than social housing, a small group of people have begun to make ‘food forests and urban orchards’.<sup>22</sup>



*Planting the grafted trees into Flangan’s Field Community Garden, Fatima with Dougal Hazel.*

Photograph by Seoidín O’Sullivan, 2019, image courtesy of the artist.



*Planting an orchard with grafted trees for Dolphin House, with Common Ground and Dolphin House Community Association. Grafted trees, mud, raised bed, human labour.*

Photograph by Seoidín O’Sullivan, 2019. Image courtesy of the artist.

**There’s also something about trees and public space. I feel trees have more agency than a flat piece of lawn, especially if people take ownership of that space or those trees. There are laws around getting permission to cut down trees ... It’s a way of holding onto public land by putting in trees. If you can bring people around to take ownership of the trees then maybe they identify with that space and protect it.**<sup>23</sup>

For *Hard/Graft*, Seoidín O’Sullivan received a ‘Citizen Artist’ award from the community-based arts organisation Common Ground and Studio 468.<sup>24</sup> Common Ground ‘values art and culture for all in Irish life’ and has worked for the past twenty-years to develop community-based arts practices that include residencies for artists to work with residents in Dublin 8.<sup>25</sup> This is an historically economically disadvantaged part of the city, where, in 2019, local proposals for affordable housing were rejected by Dublin City Council in favour of gentrification initiatives, such as ‘purpose built student housing’ and the privatisation of green spaces. Along with sociodemographic change, this form of ‘urban renewal’ is resulting in high-rent zones, increased displacement, a rise in homelessness, and overall social instability.<sup>26</sup> In this context, *Hard/Graft* becomes even more of a challenge. Seoidín noted that the project would not have been possible without Common Ground’s commitment to supporting respectful relationships with local residents.<sup>27</sup>

*Hard/Graft* begins with seeds and fruit tree grafting, and extends Seoidín’s history of ecological arts collaborations in Dublin: ‘Thinking about community gardens brought me to heritage seeds, seed saving, and how we need to protect multispecies’.<sup>28</sup> Seoidín met with community groups, Men’s Sheds, and interested residents from Rialto and Inchicore, who learned from UCD Rosemount Research Station experts how to graft heritage apple trees. Grafting is a process of binding and waxing the join between the cambium layers of scion and rootstock. For Seoidín, the graft, as the tree’s rhizome, offers ‘a different organisational form’ generating ‘local, organic modes of democracy in the face of more hierarchical, even authoritarian forms’.<sup>29</sup> Grafting together as a new community, stories and memories emerged in the process, including how, as young boys, some participants robbed the priest’s orchard. The fragile grafted trees initially were protected and allowed to heal in the safe spaces of the area’s community gardens, after which they were planted out as new community orchards in Rialto and Inchicore. Reclaiming these new and old community spaces for trees asserts residents’ rights to their imagined common city.

'Imagining city streets as delicious'<sup>30</sup> and claiming land for trees are political acts in Ireland, a country which has the least forested woodland cover in all of Europe reflecting the legacies of colonial violence.<sup>31</sup> At once a play space, a tree library, and opportunity for renewal, the orchard offers its residents fruits of shared labour, solidarity and 'becoming with'.<sup>32</sup>

**I see the graft with all its rhizomatic potential and the *Hard/Graft* project as creating a counter narrative to the depressing, narrow-minded, ecologically and socially damaging politics of this moment. ... The future orchards are spaces that are held in common ownership; no single individual owns the trees. The trees are there for any resident who cares to picnic under, climb on, or harvest from.**<sup>33</sup>

*Hard/Graft* acknowledges the historical and ongoing difficulties we share in facing our urban/earth crises, while enacting a feminist urban ecology of 'thick copresence'<sup>34</sup>, multispecies well-being, and collaborative knowledge practices. To make 'oddkin'<sup>35</sup> of grafted heritage, a new network of people learned to work with others – learning about heritage seed archives and how to graft, collaborating with other community groups and residents, and planting orchards together – all of which contributed to the labours of repairing and reimagining our city. The project created 'hot compost piles'<sup>36</sup> of new life, transforming the orchard from a space of privilege to a hybrid field of care in areas considered by city officials as socially diseased. Through grafting, a gardening practice that offers the possibilities of abundance and healing,<sup>37</sup> residents now care for their trees, their places and each other, and in the process may grow together with their future orchards in shared and more sustainable futures.



*Woman Grafting.*  
From a community  
grafting workshop  
2018.

Photo by Jason  
Sheridan © Seoidin  
O'Sullivan. Image  
courtesy of the  
artist.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Our essay results from conversations and presentations in Maynooth, Inchicore and London and we wish to acknowledge the friendly feminist comments supporting our revision of earlier drafts. We wish to thank especially Kate McMillian for inviting us to present our work at 'The Lost Girl: Feminism, Creativity and Climate Change' in Kings College London in January 2020, to Siobhan Geoghegan for her invaluable feedback, and also to Gerry Kearns for his editorial prowess. Our work has been generously supported by Common Ground and the Irish Research Council New Foundation STEAM grant.
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- 3 Donna Haraway, *Staying With the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016). Quotes p. 51, 53.
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- 5 O'Sullivan, in conversation with Till, Tírdhreach Feasach.
- 6 Donna Haraway, *Staying With the Trouble*.
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- 16 Joan Tronto, *Moral Boundaries* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 103 and Tronto, 'There is an alternative', 31.
- 17 María Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).
- 18 Cited in Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*, p. 103.
- 19 Silvia Federici, *Re-Enchanting the World: Feminist and the Politics of the Commons* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, Kairos Series, 2019).
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- 22 O'Sullivan, in conversation with Till, Tirdhreach Feasach.
- 23 Seoidín O'Sullivan, in conversation with Ciaran Smith, 'Hard/Graft: Semiotic System', October 2019, p. 3. Transcript courtesy of the artist. See also: Seoidín O'Sullivan, *Hard/Graft: Conversations on Planting a Commons* (Dublin, 2020).
- 24 Siobhán Geoghegan and Glenn Loughran (eds.), *Studio 468: Citizen Artist 2016-2018* (Dublin: Common Ground, 2018).
- 25 Common Ground webpage, nd (available: <https://www.commonground.ie/news/>).
- 26 Common Ground, The Just City: a new residency award (27 September 2019), available: <https://www.commonground.ie/the-just-city-a-new-residency-award/>. For this call, Common Ground invited artists to focus on 'forms of spatial injustice through the acquisition, development and management of neighbourhood housing, private rented accommodation and public space'.
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- 29 O'Sullivan, in conversation with Smith, pp. 4, 5.
- 30 Margaretha Haughwout and Guerilla Gardners, Grafting the Sterile Tree, Lunch 13 (Mischief, 2019), 254-265 (available: <http://lunch-journal.com/lunch-13>)
- 31 Ireland has only 2% of semi-natural broadleaf forest tree cover compared to the 87% across Europe. Darragh Murphy, Ireland's Native Woodlands are Quietly Disappearing, *Irish Times* online (19 June 2018), <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/heritage/ireland-s-native-woodlands-are-quietly-disappearing-1.3529317>. See also Mapping Green Dublin webpage: <https://dublintreees.wordpress.com/>.
- 32 After Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*.
- 33 O'Sullivan, *HARD/GRAFT*, pp. 22, 27.
- 34 Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 4.
- 35 Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 2.
- 36 Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 4.
- 37 O'Sullivan, *HARD/GRAFT*.

Earth Writings: **Bogs**

**Monica de Bath**

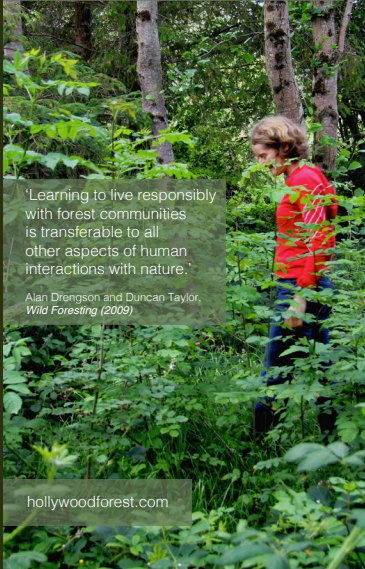


**PLOT / CEAPACH**

[monicadebath.wixsite.com/monicadebath](http://monicadebath.wixsite.com/monicadebath)

**The Hollywood Forest Story**

An ongoing Eco-Social Art Practice



'Learning to live responsibly with forest communities is transferable to all other aspects of human interactions with nature.'

Alan Drangson and Duncan Taylor, *Wild Forestry* (2009)

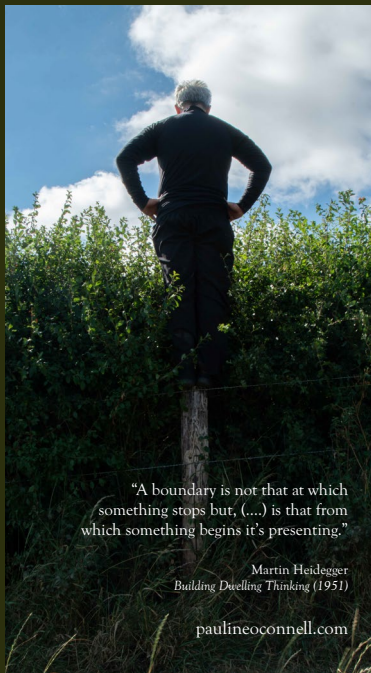
[hollywoodforest.com](http://hollywoodforest.com)

## Earth Writings: Bogs, Forests, Fields, Gardens:

### Exhibition Details and Artist's Statements

18-29 November 2019  
Maynooth University Library

Curated by Karen E. Till



"A boundary is not that at which something stops but, (...) is that from which something begins it's presenting."

Martin Heidegger  
*Building Dwelling Thinking* (1951)

[paulineoconnell.com](http://paulineoconnell.com)

Earth Writings:

**Gardens**  
**Hard/Graft**  
**Seoidín**  
**O'Sullivan**



"To graft is to create unlikely encounters, hybrid mixes, and novel surfaces."  
Michael Madors, *Grafts Writings on Plants* 2016

[seoidinosullivan.com](http://seoidinosullivan.com)

*Earth Writings*  
exhibition banners:  
Monica de Bath  
Cathy Fitzgerald  
Pauline O'Connell  
Seoidín O'Sullivan

## Earth Writings: Bogs

### Monica de Bath: Plot/Ceapach (ongoing)

Two vitrine installations with: moss, seaweed, peat pilings, and other artifacts; oil paintings; sketches; artists' books; posters. Film: *BRÍD Ag saothrú cois farraige / Living by the Sea* (2014, MPEG-4 movie, conceived and directed by Monica de Bath, in conversation with BRÍD, camerawork by Deirdre Tracey and technical support by Michael Fortune, with support from Kildare Local Authority Arts Service; excerpt available: <http://youtu.be/69zAkzAtgco>). Two banners with artist's images.

*Plot/Ceapach Glossary of Terms:*

Ceapach, Cutaway, Rehabilitation, Sphagnum Moss, Capitulum

My practice is shaped by understanding Land as more than a physical but also discursive, phenomenological and poetic site. PLOT / CEAPACH frames work that explores peoples' relationship with land, sea, each other, and the urgent need to make a living at contested sites such as the Bog of Allen and the Atlantic Blanket Bog of Ireland. Echoing the 'contrapuntal thinking' of Edward Said, PLOT attempts to reveal the many distinct voices around contested land use. Painting, drawing, notebook conversations, and film create imaginary spaces where traces of diverse views are pulled together; art and language establish a position from which to look at things differently. Exhibited works reference conversations with workers and with a changing habitat at this time of critical concern about climate change and the loss of ecosystems. Engaging with the Bord na Móna Ecology Team has opened up a world of interdisciplinary art and ecological thinking. Sphagnum moss, a miniscule plant and known as the bog builder, offers a lens through which to look at the fragility of raised bog remnants. PLOT / CEAPACH now moves between cutaway bog, raised bog remnants, workers, wetland communities – all facing urgent challenges as Bord na Móna, a semi-state, transitions to a post-mining role.



*Earth Writings: Bogs. Monica de Bath: Plot/Ceapach.*  
Installation at Maynooth University Library. November 2019.  
Photographs: Karen Till.



# Earth Writings: Forests

**Cathy Fitzgerald:**

## *The Hollywood Forest Story: Living Well with Forests: An Ongoing Eco-Social Art Practice*

**Videos:** *First Decade of The Hollywood Forest Story* (2019, slideshow of blog posts and artist's images on video, 7 mins); *Transformation: Notes on a Conifer Plantation Becoming a Forest* (2011, non-narrated audiovisual 'interview' with the more-than-human Hollywood Forest inhabitants, 2 min: 33 sec). Audio-visual Ebook station with *The Hollywood Forest Story: Living Well with Forests* to explain Eco-Social Art Practice (2018, available iTunes <https://tinyurl.com/y5xc7mao>). Two banners with artist's images.

*The Hollywood Forest Story: 'Learning to live responsibly in forest communities is transferable to all aspects of human relations with nature'. – Alan Drengson and Duncan Taylor, Wild Forestry (2009).*

*The Hollywood Forest Story* is an ongoing 'eco-social art practice'. It explores a new story for Irish forestry in transforming the short-rotation conifer plantation I live with, in south Carlow –'the little wood that could'– to a species-rich, permanent, productive and beautiful forest. Place-based creative practice-led work fosters transformative insights on how to live well with forests and the wider community of life (Fitzgerald, 2018). Begun in 2008, and featured in *The Irish Times* (7 March 2020), *The Hollywood Forest Story* explores new-to-Ireland continuous cover forestry ecological forestry practices, transversal dialogue, visual art activities, and activism. Blogging is a key creative activity and over the years my transversal practice evolves ecoliteracy, soliphilia (love for this and other forests), and hence confidence and agency for ecological forestry: in 2012, I advocated continuous cover forestry for Irish Green Party forest policy and unanimous Green Party support for the developing international law against the crime of ecocide in 2013. As a longstanding committee member of Pro Silva Ireland, I work with professional foresters and ecologists currently advising the Irish Government on permanent forestry see: [hollywoodforest.com](http://hollywoodforest.com) For the international #CultureDeclares Emergency movement, I offer ecoliteracy to creative workers and art professionals via online courses at [Haumea.ie](http://Haumea.ie)



*Earth Writings: Forests. Cathy Fitzgerald: The Hollywood Forest Story. Installation at Maynooth University Library. November 2019. © Cathy Fitzgerald, 2019.*

*Visitors to Hollywood Forest, 2015. Photograph: Cathy Fitzgerald.*

## Earth Writings: Fields

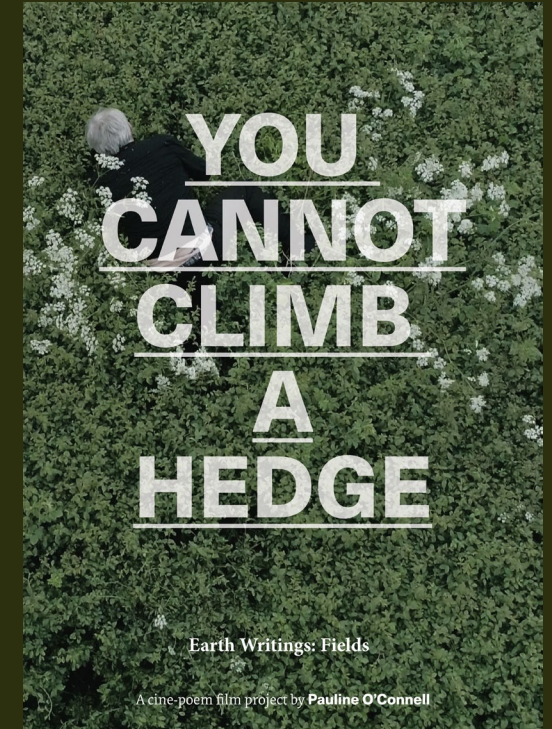
**Pauline O'Connell:**

*You Cannot Climb a Hedge:*  
*A Cine-Poem Film Project*

Dual channel HDV video screens, variable dimensions (2018).  
Two banners with artist's images.

*You Cannot Climb a Hedge:* 'A boundary is not that at which something stops but, (...) is that from which something begins its presenting'. – Martin Heidegger, *Building Dwelling Thinking* (1951).

In response to the singular narrative that has created an homogenous and flattening out a rural identity, *You Cannot Climb a Hedge* reflects on a changing rural identity where tangible and intangible boundaries are at once local and global, material and immaterial. In 2003, I realised that the upland area where I live in County Kilkenny was a blank on the electoral map. The area was given up for the key; referencing common landmarks such as rivers, hills, roads, towns, and villages throughout the rest of the county. Thinking through this cartographic erasure more broadly – whilst working creatively on my doorstep – this 'gap' (in the map) provides an aperture through which to reveal the conceptual disinvestment, critical neglect and subordination of the rural in general in Ireland. This 'gap' motivates my practice-led research which aims to speak-back-to its historical and political basis. 'Gaps' such as these incite us to ask how the rural is constructed, and what the cultural politics of identity are that go into these constructions. The hedge (here) becomes an allegory for how we explore, relate to and engage with human/nature environments and with each other when *rooted* in places of transition. This allegory illuminates the zone where the so called *old* rural - as myth, and, *new* rural - as multiple, fragmented and contradictory or post-rural, meet. Research for this project was funded by The Arts Council of Ireland, CREATE Ireland and ArtsLinks Kilkenny County Council.



*Earth Writings: Fields. Pauline O'Connell: You Cannot Climb a Hedge.*  
Installation at Maynooth University Library, November 2019.  
© Pauline O'Connell, 2019.

# Earth Writings: Gardens

Seoidín O’Sullivan:  
*Hard/Graft*

Two vitrine installations with: artist’s sketches, images; heritage tree branches dipped in gold; garden plant/activist garden signs; artefacts from grafting workshops; ‘Larceny of Apples’ reproduced pages of Kilmainham Prison archives. Two *Collective Grafting* video art works, each 5min 20 sec looped, by Seoidín O’Sullivan, 2019, filmed and edited with Laine Alcantara. Two banners with artist’s images.

HARD/GRAFT: ‘To graft is to create unlikely encounters, hybrid mixes, and novel surfaces’. – Michael Marders, 2016, *Grafts: Writings on Plants*, back cover.

Towards community orchards and food forests for inner city Dublin, HARD /GRAFT is a collaborative arts project developed and initiated through a Citizen Artist Award with Studio 468, Common Ground, in 2017. The projects research interests include sustainable and just cities, feminist cities, reproductive labour, care, land access, biodiversity, food access and common public space. The orchard, once a space of privilege, here becomes a hybrid space where the domestic, agricultural, community and critical moment meet. HARD /GRAFT begins with fruit tree grafting. The Graft is the tree’s rhizome. By cutting branches (*scion*) we are quite quickly graft and reproduce many trees. By collectively grafting, planting and meeting, we create solidarity and alliance. Working with community groups in St Andrews community centre, heritage apple trees from UCD were collectively grafted towards future orchards for Dublin 8. In the studio, I worked with local groups and residents including D8 Men’s Shed and Rialto Men’s Gardening and Social Group, resulting in 80 grafted heritage apple trees from UCD Lamb-Clarke Collection. These trees are currently housed in a tree nursery in Richmond Barracks and will be planted across orchard sites in the coming weeks. The exhibition is a collection of material making and moments across the project.



Earth Writings: Gardens: Seoidín O’Sullivan: *Hard/Graft*.  
Installation at Maynooth University Library, November 2019.  
Photographs: Karen Till and Seoidín O’Sullivan.

## Contributors' Biographies

**Patrick Bresnihan** is a Lecturer and Co-Director of the MA's in Geography and Spatial Justice in the Department of Geography at Maynooth University. His work is highly interdisciplinary, spanning the fields of political ecology, science and technology studies and environmental humanities. His research interests are in the broad area of nature-society relations as examined through water, wind energy, waste, infrastructure, and questions concerning life after fossil fuels. His publications include articles on the financialisation of water services, urban commons in post-crash Dublin, and the poetics of John Clare. His book, *Transforming the Fisheries: Neoliberalism, Nature and the Commons* (University of Nebraska Press, 2016) won the Geography Society of Ireland Book of the Year in 2018. <https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/people/patrick-bresnihan>

**Nessa Cronin** is Lecturer at the Centre for Irish Studies and Associate Director of the Moore Institute of the Humanities and Social Sciences at the National University of Ireland, Galway. She is a member of the National Committee of Future Earth Ireland at the Royal Irish Academy. She is co-editor of *Anáil an Bhéil Bheo: Orality and Modern Irish Culture* (2009) and *Landscape Values: Place and Praxis* (2016), and her forthcoming book, *Making Space: Cartography and Colonial Governmentality in Ireland*, explores the intersection between maps, language and power in the production of modern Irish space. Nessa convenes the interdisciplinary network, *Ómós Áite*, and she is co-convenor of the *Mapping Spectral Traces* international collaborative. She is Director of *Iarsma: Fragments from an Archive*, the Tim Robinson Artist-in-the-Archive Project. <https://www.nuigalway.ie/our-research/people/geography-and-archaeology/nessacronin/>

**Monica de Bath** is an artist and arts educator, whose practice incorporates research, drawing, painting, short films and seminars. Her work is shaped by two languages. She studied Painting at NCAD and has an MA in visual arts practices from IADT. Her Temporary Studio within an industrial Bord na Móna peat excavation site, launched an ongoing project PLOT / CEAPACH. Ecological and socially engaged arts projects currently include Creative Rathangan

Meitheal, 'Tar Isteach' Bealtaine Commission 2019/20 with Ground Up Artists Collective and Creative Associate with Creative Schools, an Arts Council and Department of Education Initiative. <http://monicadebath.wix.com/monicadebath>

**Cathy Fitzgerald**, originally from New Zealand, is an eco-social artist, researcher and educator. Her Creative Practice-led PhD, *The Ecological Turn: Living Well with Forests*, awarded at the National College of Art and Design in 2018, articulates eco-social art practice using Guattari's ecosophy and action research. Her ongoing *Hollywood Forest Story* includes the publication 'The Hollywood Forest Story—Eco-Social Art Practice for the Symbiocene' (*Minding Nature Journal*, Fall, 2019). She was awarded a EUGEO/CIG Conference Enrichment Grant for: 'Good-Bye Anthropocene – Hello Symbiocene: eco-social art practices for a new world', which was published in the book *Plasticity of the Planet: On Environmental Challenge for Art and Institutions* (Contemporary Art U-jazdowski Castle, Warsaw, 2019). She is sharing her unique and sought after ecoliteracy learning to other creatives and art professionals at Haumea Online at [www.haumea.ie](http://www.haumea.ie). Cathy is the first Irish-based signatory of the international #CultureDeclares Emergency campaign, a StopEcocide Earth Protector and a signatory to the UNESCO-endorsed Earth Charter.

**Gerry Kearns** is Professor and Head of the Department of Geography at Maynooth University. He works on issues in medical, political and historical geography, and teaches on geopolitics and global environmental change. His book, *Geopolitics and Empire* (2009), won the Murchison Award from the Royal Geographical Society as the most significant contribution to geographical scholarship that year and he was honoured as the 2015 Distinguished Historical Geographer by the Association of American Geographers. His book in progress is *Making Space for AIDS*. His collaborations with artists include the Irish Research Council funded *Geographical Turn* project (<https://geographicalturn.wordpress.com/>) and Fearghus Ó Conchúir's Casement Project (<http://www.thecasementproject.ie/>). <https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/people/gerry-kearns>

**Pauline O'Connell** is a visual artist, curator and educator based in rural County Kilkenny, Ireland and Amsterdam. Born in Dublin, Pauline studied Fine Art, Mixed Media at Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art Design and Technology (1988-92), and received a 1st class M.A. in Social Practice and the Creative Environment at Limerick School of Art and Design (2012). She is completing a PhD at the University of Amsterdam, School of Heritage, Memory and Material Culture where her practice-led, trans-disciplinary research utilises visual art and (auto) ethnographic methodologies so as to creatively animate the rural from within. Pauline's projects utilise a range of media including sound, video, photography, drawing, installation, and text to explore post-rural identity. She initiated 'The Community Field' cultural project in 2012 (ongoing) set around a 2.5 acre field close to where she lives – a context in which the cultural politics of identity, place and community, connectivity and disconnections can be situated and explored. [www.paulineoconnell.com](http://www.paulineoconnell.com)

**Seoidín O'Sullivan** is an artist, arts educator, and interdisciplinary researcher. She has a MA in Fine Art Media from NCAD, and is Art Lecturer in DCU's department of Education. Seoidín's projects are collaborative and focus on people joining together in action to protect and develop an aspect of their local commons. Her creative and collaborative practices explore sustainable models within urban ecological contexts to addresses issues of land use, lost knowledge, social justice and biodiversity. She was awarded the Next Generation Arts Council Bursary in 2018, and the Chicago Hyde Park Residency Award with IMMA and CREATE in 2017. Through a Citizen Artist award with Common Ground, in 2018-20, Seoidín has grafted fruit trees and worked with local groups in Dublin 8 on a shared project of establishing future community orchards through *Hard/Graft*. Building upon this collaboration, Seoidín and Common Ground are partnering UCD's School of Geography in *Mapping Green Dublin* (2019-21), an action project funded by the Environmental Protection Agency to map the territories of trees and green space across Dublin 8 by identifying their location, local identity and future creation. [www.seoidinosullivan.com](http://www.seoidinosullivan.com)

**Lucina Russell** was appointed as Arts Officer for Kildare County Council in 2000. With overall responsibility for arts policy and programme in the county, she established a number of long-term arts initiatives including community dance training and summer schools. Instrumental in the establishment of a groundbreaking Arts, Health and Wellbeing programme for Co Kildare, she was a founding member of artsandhealth.ie. In 2014, she produced 'All About Eva', a feature film involving local talent and continues to support filmmaking in the county through the Short Grass Films commission. Lucina is committed to supporting strategic partnerships that provide meaningful opportunities for artists, including a Writer in Residence programme with the Department of English, Maynooth University. A member of Kildare's Creative Ireland team and Kildare's Readers Festival committee, Lucina also sits on the board of Riverbank Arts Centre, Newbridge. Lucina was Chairperson of the Association of Local Authority Arts Officers (ALAAO) from 2009-2012 and currently represents ALAAO on the advisory group for [www.artsineducation.ie](http://www.artsineducation.ie). A graduate of Textile Design, Lucina has a Masters Degree in Art and Design Education from NCAD and received the *Irish Times award for Outstanding Achievement* on the Post Graduate Dip in Art and Design Education from LIT.

**Karen E. Till** is Professor of Cultural Geography and Co-Director of the MA's in Geography and Spatial Justice at Maynooth University. She is an interdisciplinary research scholar and ethnographer, curator, creative writer and activist. Karen is inspired by projects that invite a range of publics to imagine, explore and enact more just and sustainable futures through place-based memory-work. She regularly collaborates with artists and civil society groups on research, teaching/learning and creative projects that acknowledge and advance a place-based feminist ethics of care, and work in solidarity to decolonise lands, bodies and minds. She convenes the Space&Place Research Collaborative, an informal network of artists, scholars, activists and community leaders in the Dublin area, and co-convenes the international network of artists and scholars, Mapping Spectral Traces. Her book in progress is *Wounded Cities*. <https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/people/karen-till>

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*You Cannot Climb a Hedge.* Composite image  
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