

Impressions and ideas from my visit to MEAT & POTATOES,
as an art student, and as a retired farmer.

Marie Bryan, 24th August, 2022



Including excerpt from **Geraldine O'Neill's** mouth-watering *Still Life – Leeks and Red Cabbage*,
oil on canvas, 36 x 48cm

I availed of art materials provided, and I enjoyed participating in the Crawford Gallery project, in the drawing area on the First Floor.



Previously, learning to paint from a photo, in oils: my theme of food, with bull horns

Art makes itself seen and heard. As a multi-faceted form of expression, it communicates, and it inspires one to contemplate the context. I viewed the Meat & Potatoes Exhibition with an open mind, and in the following pages I present **my musings and my own personal artistic interpretations**, as inspired by the Exhibition artworks. I would recommend this Exhibition as offering a particularly rewarding opportunity for you to actively engage with the artworks, to allow your conscious to become aware of what is relevant to you, and to value **your own well-thought-out opinions, as your own confident contribution to debate**. My ideas are a mix of the artistic and the scientific. Enjoy your Gallery visit!



Edith Anna Ænone Somerville, *The Goose Girl*, 1888
oil on canvas, 95.5 x 132cm

The uncomplicated company of an animal can be significant solace to an upset or lonely child, who may not have sufficient other resources.

Adults find satisfaction in the loyalty of a pet dog. A purring cat can reduce blood pressure. Each animal is worthy of our interest, and brings something special.

Economically, geese are more than just fluff. Their eggs and their meat are worth a try. Market demand will ensure continuity of breeding, as animals pay their way. They are a resource to be kept.



Deirdre O'Mahony, *The Persistent Return*, 2018
photograph by Tom Flanagan

Having farmed, myself, I recognise the important functionality of short fingernails. I myself had calloused skin areas to support work with both hand implements and machinery operation. Having come from 40 years of city living, my body adjusted satisfactorily to the practical demands of a new career in farming at middle-age.

The perception of farming as hard work may prejudice career choice towards alternatives. Personally, I found it very enjoyable, fulfilling, and both physically and emotionally healthy. The variety every single day meant it was always interesting. Working with animals is very satisfying. The long hours during Springtime calving seasons were the only downside to work on my dairy farm: but they were worth it!

My farm, average-size by present-day standards, used to have a diverse produce, and supported a family of about 15 for several centuries. It is only in the last 20 years that we specialised in dairy. Potatoes were sold at the Coal Quay Markets. This was a big day out for all involved. Logistics included the hammering of long nails into the cart horses' shoes, so that they could grip the road surface, on descent of Dublin Hill, with a full load behind them.

Even in my time, I have known local farms ruined by horticultural specialisation. Organic farming is particularly sensitive, in this way. Weather varies, as does susceptibility to disease. People on my farm at the time of the famine had the good fortune to get through by diversification.

Potato plants are very easily grown in our climate, usually. Even one or two in your flower bed would be a fascinating dig with children, when mature. Home produce for home cooking!

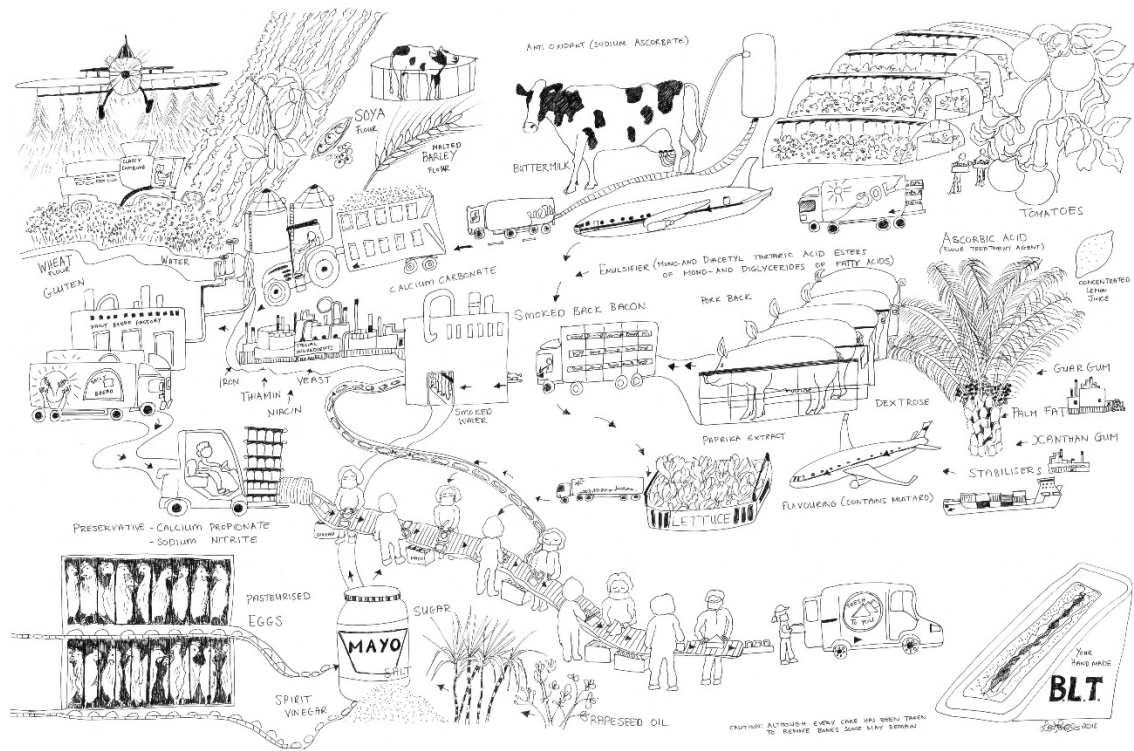


Comhghall Casey, *Fifteen Potatoes*, 2011
oil on linen, 36 x 41cm

Every potato is different. The most non-uniform potato is quite likely a healthy one. We need to value food, and to choose not to waste it, just because we have not seen or eaten similar before. A well-planned shopping schedule for the household, combined with sufficient refrigerator space, can result in a low refuse quantity. Given organic-waste disposal regulations in Cork City, and particularly during our hot summers, it can be beneficial to reduce wastage.

Potato skins are a large component of the potato and are safe to eat if the potato is healthy and does not have a green tint. Wash them well, and remove the sprouts and spots. Skins are nutritionally valuable, with B vitamins, vitamin C, iron, calcium and potassium, in particular. They also contain roughage, necessary for our digestive systems.

Purchase of 'minority' potato varieties secures continuity of production, and preserves that variety into the future. Buying locally and shopping around also ensures other wise choices, in supporting the best aspects of the local economy.



Lisa Flannagan, *The Sandwich Project*, 2018
Large mural on 1st Floor in Crawford Art Gallery

‘The Big Picture’ mural, on the 1st floor of the Meat and Potatoes Exhibition. Sandwiches are an Irish staple, often comprising most of one of our three main meals of the day. Sandwiches are typically thrown together in minutes, or picked up from a deli. It is important that we take responsibility for our own nutrition and that of others, that we inform ourselves of the sourcing, and also, preferably, that we be aware of the primary producers’ payment, as this decides continuity of supply. Having sold dairy milk myself, I saw the low co-op price as allowing feasibility of the business, but I was aware that other agricultural options for my farm may not be economically feasible, even though I would have been very interested in diversifying into horticulture and non-dairy animals.

We ourselves decide what we eat. If we are dissatisfied about pesticides used, or transport distances, or disposable packaging, we can influence by lobbying, and by shopping around. Sustainability of nutritional health, and economies in transport fuel and packaging are issues relevant to all. Follow the arrows on Lisa Flannagan’s mural, and see the journey of a BLT (Bacon, Lettuce & Tomato) sandwich, around the world, through the ingredients! Be an online hunter-gatherer: find out where your food comes from!

“The project raises lots of questions for the viewer:

- **How far does your sandwich travel before it reaches you?**
- **How many ingredients make up your average sandwich?**
- **How much of your sandwich is made up of ‘real food’ and how much of it is manufactured ingredients, made to taste like ‘real food’?**
- **How much fossil fuel is used by the planes, boats and trucks?**
- **How many women, men and children are involved in picking vegetables and minding animals, around the world?**
- **Is there really such a thing as ‘cheap food’?**
- **How can we become more resilient, in the face of climate change?”**

The Sandwich Project is featured in Fingleton’s book “The Local Food Project”, available to purchase in the Gallery Bookshop. The Sandwich Project was first exhibited at VISUAL Carlow in 2018. www.lisafingleton.com

Project Space on 1st Floor



One and all are welcome to use the art materials in the Project Space. And be sure to display your finished work on the Meat and Potatoes Exhibition Drawing Wall!



Browse the Meat and Potatoes Exhibition-related books at the Project Space. Inform yourself and enjoy! Educate and entertain your children!



**Abigail O'Brien, *Paula Rego*,
Lambdachrome print, 88 x 120cm**

Paula Rego, who died earlier this year, was Portuguese-born; she studied and worked in London. My attention has been drawn to her work by the above-named photo being named after her, as I questioned the connection.

With a convenient smart-phone internet search, I viewed Paula Rego's popular painting *The Policeman's Daughter*, and saw its subversive symbolism. Rego confronted stereotypical male views of women and of women's sexuality: in response to life in patriarchal society, and in response to personal experience of men to whom she was close.

Abigail O'Brien named her *With Bread* photographs after various women artists.

A close-up photo of bread baking, we see form/shape, created primarily by yeast. This interesting image, lacking the colour of baked crust, is striking in that it is not immediately clear what we are looking at: we are drawn in. Colour could be described as skin tones; form/shape seems organic, at first glance.

A function of art is to record. I had not thought, myself, to open the oven for a photo, while the contents are still baking. It caught my eye, as an image new to me; a time caption of an event which I don't baby-sit. I like it.

Bespoke baking has much demand, with a noticeable bounce recently: there had been much home baking pursued for entertainment during Lockdown, and, with society re-opened, we are now enjoying our treats from shops and cafes. Why not be adventurous in your home baking: layer and twist the dough; include a surprise filling. Cakes in Cork bakeries are no longer just the well-known staples. Art in baking is part and parcel of the food presentation.

As part of the cookery genre of TV programmes, baking is now established as very fashionable. These programmes make accessible viewing and have mass followings. Follow through, and bake it yourself!

Feast your eyes now on the spread of bread silver sculptures, also displayed at Meat & Potatoes!



**Mary A Kelly and Abigail O'Brien, *How to Butterfly a Leg of Lamb*, 1999,
still from video**

I love the smell of meat, cooking. I quite like the taste of meats. I eat meat regularly as part of my healthy diet. With my busy lifestyle, I do not have the time to ensure I get these essential nutrients adequately elsewhere.

This video imagery was new to me. I found it uncomfortable viewing. This ritual, and similar, is happening, the world over, whether I inform myself about it, or not. I feel it is important to be open to freedom of expression, and also, for me, to face up to how some of my food arrived on my plate.

Art has the power to make an impression. This video did.

Having farmed bovines, and having treated them well, and having loved the return I got from most of them, I always found it hard to retire them to the factory. It makes sense that food is not wasted, and after giving my animals a good life, I trusted the next in line to give them an easy death. None of us live, healthy, forever, and I justify my meat eating, believing that an easy death is what anyone would want.

I wouldn't make a good victualler, and I've never enjoyed meat preparation, in cooking. I don't think I would like to work as a surgeon either.

This is an attention-grabbing video, and it opens many worthy debates, particularly as international agriculture is hit by climate change droughts, and by war. Roughly twenty-five times more energy is required to produce one calorie of beef than to produce one calorie of corn for human consumption. Nobody keeps bovines for a hobby: if they do not pay their way, bovine numbers would greatly reduce.



Pigs at Brian Boru Street,
Picture Courtesy of Irish Examiner Archive

This print is large-scale and attention-grabbing. Trinity Presbyterian Church and other buildings are immediately recognisable, in Brian Boru Street. We have not witnessed Brian Boru Street so open, without road markings, traffic lights, or traffic jams!

Such grandeur of space for the pigs. This looks like herd movement for a valuable and significant sale. The pigs have the clean street almost to themselves.

Present-day pig farming in Co. Cork involves indoor management, which can be a high-density lifestyle for the pig, and pigs are now a farm animal rarely seen, other than at Open Farms. Farm families may still keep a pig or two, for their own supply. As with all animals kept in small numbers, farm families can grow quite attached to their pigs.

Pigs, found and raised all over the world, provide valuable products, including ham, bacon, pork, lard, leather, glue, fertilizer, and a variety of medicines. Where has your football come from? Where have the artist's paintbrush bristles come from?

Visit an agricultural show or village festival. See a live pig. Talk to the owners.



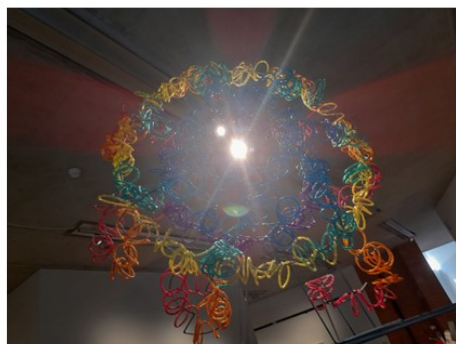
Maria McKinney, *Sire Series: Longevity/Apoptosome, Black Water Lad (HE2-67)*, 2016

Archival pigment print, 125 x 225cm



Maria McKinney, *Sire Series: Management/Polled Doon just the job (CH2305)*, 2016

Archival Pigment Print, 125 x 225cm



Maria McKinney's large sculptures and photographs need to be seen in person!

Maria McKinney, *Longevity/Apotosome*, 2015, 126 x 120 x 40cm

Maria McKinney, *Management/Polled*, 2015, 70 x 85 x 55cm

Semen straws, glue, cable ties, 3D printed objects (PLA – polylactic acid), powder coated steel frame



Through the Eye of a Needle (aka The Herf)

'Whiteheads', or Herefords, are beef animals. Hereford Bulls are popular in Co. Cork for breeding with dairy Friesian cows: their calves are generally robust, producing half-breed heifers suitable for dairy, and half-breed bull calves suitable for beef. As a work animal, in regular proximity with farmers, as part of the dairy herd, they are safer than Friesian bulls.

A working bull amongst the herd is more likely to get a cow in calf than Artificial Insemination. The bull trails a cow in heat for up to 3 days, until the cow finally stands still for the bull, when the time is right. I have known bulls to go to great lengths to get cows in calf, including cows to whom they should not have access. They are almost guaranteed as reliable, to do their job.

If a cow is not in calf, she is not economically viable for that year, and the farmer may retire her to the factory. A milking cow may be worth around €1,000, and she sells for much less, for beef. It is also a big disappointment for the farmer, after personally breeding and rearing her.

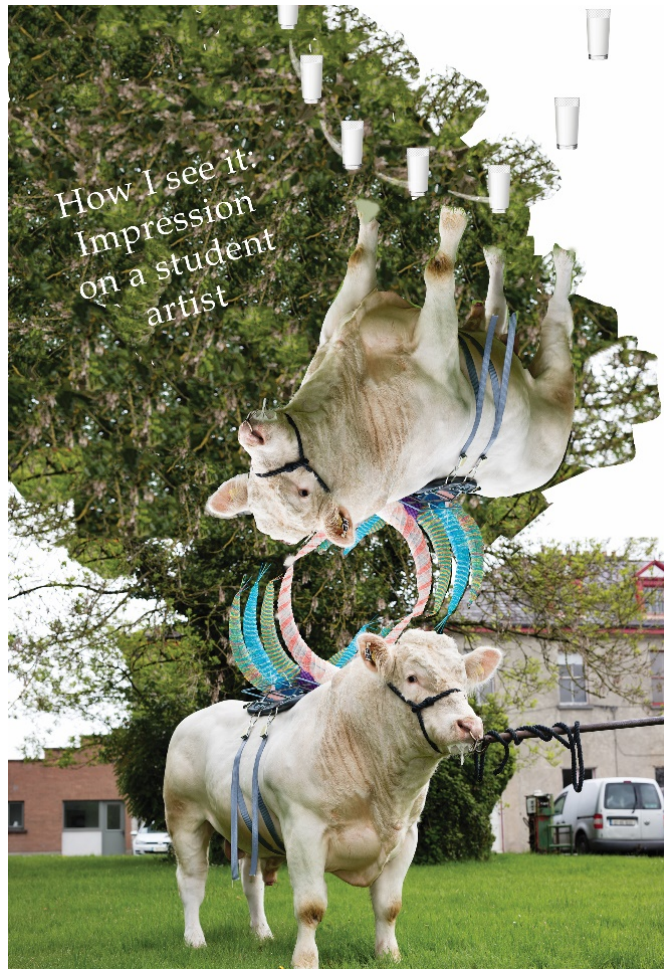
The sculpture on Black Water Lad's back winds circularly, leaving a central gap. To my art student eye, this space is visually unmissable. I can envisage it, representationally, as a gap through which a bull might compel himself, to mate with a cow.

Bovines are curious animals. They would find this coloured sculpture irresistible for investigation. I find it hugely attractive myself; and it inspires me to consider the merits of Artificial Insemination versus the future prospects for the traditional bull in the field.

I, myself, was going to do a Teagasc AI course, so that my farm might not need bulls indefinitely, into future years. For older farmers, dealing with bulls can be quite dangerous.

Breeding bulls work hard and need to have exemplary good health and fitness. All metabolic processes are working well, including apoptosis: the elimination of unwanted cells. And these valuable animals are given the best of care by their farmers. The breeding bull "has it all".... He attains everything else....

I photoshopped *Sire Series: Longevity/Apoptosome*, as my pictorial representation of this Bull Ability.



Charlie, Superbull (CHYYY)

Charolais are a popular beef animal. They are reared as bullocks, for beef. The bull kept for breeding is the prime animal. Above, I have photoshopped Maria McKinney's photograph of Doon just the job, with her **Management/Polled** sculpture on his back. He is a magnificent animal to look at, and, no doubt, has full health, great genetics, and proven functionality: he is the select bull.

There is a gender imbalance on dairy farms. A bull may mate with up to 100 adult cows, and another bull may be kept to mate with the smaller heifer herd. Recent increases in Artificial Insemination usage inspire me to contemplate the future roll of the bull in reproduction.

Bovine genetic research, and subsequent selective breeding, is funnelling the natural evolution of the survival of the fittest towards human requirements for efficient food production. Traits of high fertility, traits of good health, and traits of quantity and quality of meat and milk are deciding the Grand Dams and Grand Sires of future pedigree bulls and cows. And whilst robust – and healthy – animals are being produced, variety is diminishing.

More efficient AI techniques will undoubtedly result in widespread loss of the traditional bull on the farm, unless change is implemented.

I have worked with bulls myself, and I admire them. They are impressive at their job. My art student impression is one of a bull who makes things work: here, for emphasis, I include the impossible: YYY genetics.

I would hope for a future securing a natural enough mix of herd systems on farms, to ensure contented lifestyle; and, also, with habitat space for all the breeds, who have proven themselves as far as 2022.

Well-managed farms, with present-day advances, and given sufficient popular, economic, and departmental support, could aspire to this.



In the Picture: Co-existence

A selfie, with Doon just the job, the Charolais bull in Maria McKinney's stunning photograph. I was particularly drawn to the work by Maria McKinney, in the Meat and Potatoes exhibition. I liked the coloured, woven sculptures, with their design and technical ingenuity, and I liked the photographs involving bulls. I am also a fan of bulls. I am really glad I have seen her wonderful work!

The number of extant species of animals and plants has diminished rapidly in the past century. We have lost much, of value to us all. Securing what we presently have relies on our day-to-day choices. ***Support variety. Support local. Avoid selecting your food from mass production, where possible. Open your eyes; and make informed choices. Our descendants deserve the preservation of our precious species and varieties. Sustainability of what we have requires effort, as we aspire towards the inclusion of all: quality food supply for all the world human population, and co-existence with invaluable fauna and flora.***

Behind the scenes...



Marie Bryan, *Going Nowhere*, 2021

My QQI Level 5 painting, for Cork College of FET, Douglas Street Campus. My brief was to research an environment well-known to myself, and to design a painting. I chose my farmyard, last November, and I painted a triptych with acrylics, including a diagonal-line features, and recurring bars. The magnificent bulls patiently passed the wintertime together in a shed, before attaining freedom, with enthusiasm, when field ground conditions and grass growth were good enough again, in April. Knowing each other well, and with an established pecking order, there were no fights, though I did notice a frustration towards the end of the winter season, where I saw the bigger animals physically dominating the others with the occasional shove, and also some hogging of access to the best silage.