



## Holdings

Cliona Harmey, Maria McKinney, Rachel Doolin with  
Anne Marie Deacy, Seoidín O'Sullivan, Martina O'Brien

6 May - 17 June

Third Floor Gallery

The lands at Dowth currently held by Devenish are significant and unique. Set within the Brú na Bóinne UNESCO World Heritage Site, the holding consists of 552 acres, including the Victorian Netterville Manor and Georgian dwelling, Dowth Hall. It features Neolithic monuments built over a period of 4,000-6,000 years ago by Ireland's first farming communities. In 2017, the remains of a 5000-year-old passage tomb, was discovered under Dowth Hall. There are over 40ha of woodland with a variety of woodland habitats, while 54 different birds and nine species of bat have been recorded on the lands. Throughout the last two years, and with thanks to the support of Devenish1, Solstice has provided public and artistic knowledge based opportunities to determine, examine and navigate issues of global food production, archaeology, social epistemologies, and colonialism, over 6000 years of occupation. It seemed imperative that we undertake a multifaceted inquiry, and be responsive to the current utility as an agricultural research facility. Inhibited initially by Covid 19, participating artists travelled intermittently to survey the site, meeting with Devenish staff and site archaeologist, Cliona Ní Lionáin. The term 'Holdings' is a word that epitomises the complexity of Ireland's land use, referring to both tenure and human dominion, but also the haptic touch, embodied labour, and connection to the land.

## ARTISTS

### Maria McKinney

Maria McKinney's practice speculates on the wider societal implications brought about by developments in agriculture and genetic research. McKinney traverses both traditional belief and cutting edge agri-tech in Drumgold holly embryo transfer (2020), citing the suspension of holly within cattle sheds to ward off ringworm with genomic form, intricately hand woven from artificial insemination straws. Cairn mycorrhiza root blanket references the highly sophisticated communicative and shared roots systems between plant roots and fungi. The artist's splayed form is contoured in hand sewn glass beads and 3D printed biopolymer mushrooms. In photo of same, she lies hybridised with the earth. Arriving with neolithic settlers c. 5,000 years ago, horns of the near extinct Old Irish Goat, hang at the neck of woman's coat adorned in SNP array chips in Goatherd. These reclaimed SNP chips are used to detect

polymorphisms in a population, a DNA testing method used to ascertain the Old Irish Goat as a unique species. A third of all food produced in the world is wasted. McKinney's protest chant 'Need, Feed, Greed' text of animal feed pellets set in gouache punk pink, is a protest call to arms. A third of all food produced globally is wasted through pestilence, climate change, political volatility, and commercial market interests. Our greedy consumer habits exploited by retail market infrastructure make certain that our own households are the world's largest food waste contributor.

### Cliona Harmey

Cliona Harmey examines the future past of solar significance of the site through experiment in light reactive substances. Harmey's practice looks to both historical and contemporary technologies, both trialling DIY tech and 19th century anthotypes, in which images, derived from photosensitive plant material develop in sunlight. Plant material here is from the multispecies

grass swards of Devenish research used in the study of animal gut health, carbon sequestering, and biodiversity. *The Instant and its Shadow*, by Jean-Christophe Bailly sits with other research material on Harmey's Process Table. Bailly examines the term "hand of nature" by calotype process creator, William Henry Fox Talbot (1800-1877) concerning photograms; "the mystery of an impression or an impregnation without contact: this is the photographic miracle. Light is settled within time like a pure immanence, it is an infinite action without object, a continuous expenditure, a perpetual variability; the photographic is what places a witness within that immanence, collecting the trace of that infinite action"<sup>2</sup>. An invisible stream of photons will continually shift Harmey's Quadrat I and II throughout the exhibition. As the volatile nature of anthotypes is illustrative of the fragility of our ecosystem, in Beam, Harmey signals climate emergency via a common survival SOS mirror onto the steps of Dowth Hall. An invisible stream of photons will continually shift Harmey's Quadrat I and II throughout the exhibition. As the volatile nature of anthotypes is illustrative of the fragility of our ecosystem, in Beam, Harmey signals climate emergency via a common survival SOS mirror onto the steps of Dowth Hall.

### **Seoidín O'Sullivan**

Seoidín O'Sullivan's fieldwork explores soil ecology, and research methodologies undertaken at the lands of Dowth. Particularly O'Sullivan spent time with PhD students Omotola Odetayo and Jane Shackleton who, amongst other research, monitor soil and grass content to guide nutrient management. O'Sullivan correlates the quadrat, a key grass measurement device, to the

ancient devices of sator, (or rotas) rebus and mathematical magic square, in a complex layering; from the greenhouse tiled floor, farm tool, and ancient patterning at Neolithic stone at Dowth. The ancient (1st century) sator acrostic word square is particularly appropriate if read (from Latin) as a palindromic agricultural care system:

R O T A S to rotate  
O P E R A to aid, work  
T E N E T to hold  
A R E P O meaning unknown  
S A T O R to sow

O'Sullivan's practice is that of collective, activism and commoning. A sandbag circle invites visitors to the exhibition to sit and exchange, chiming with the use of sandbags in both archaeological and now frequently occurring flood fortifications.

### **Martina O'Brien**

Martina O'Brien queries our failing hubristic control of nature and the duality of natural and technological networks in Throughout Outlier's Stage, Mammalian Eye. Animal and earth are bound by a multitude of natural and interweaving biological, migratory, climate and planetary systems, surveyed and quantified by manmade technological and methodical systems, commanding knowledge for a multitude of applications. O'Brien acts as citizen scientist, manually and systematically collecting feral night-time footage on the lands, harvested from animal tracking cameras distributed throughout the property. Footage is shot with night vision and infrared technology, initially developed for military purposes. Whilst O'Brien interventions are time consuming and low tech, O'Brien alludes to sci-fi author Kim Stanley Robinson's

fictional technology – the "Internet of animals" – that allow animals to communicate with humans and other animals via a network of sensors and devices. The footage is intermingled with “how to” found internet footage of taxidermy, querying humankind's detachment from, and dominion over the natural world.

### Rachel Doolin | Anne Marie Deacy

Rachel Doolin, with Anne Marie Deacy, speak to the ancient soundings and the use of white quartz stones known as ‘Clocha Geala’ at neolithic burial sites, not local to the area. Quartz is also a ‘triboluminescent’ material, which when rubbed together sparks and creates a luminous glow. Quartz is also piezoelectric (an electrical converter of mechanical stress) utilised in a variety of technological systems, particularly in sound and time instrumentation. Oscillithic's birch ply table physically vibrates with sounds of Dowth, stone and surrounds. Upon the rippling grain lies photographic research and chunks of quartz that glisten under the gallery lighting. Quartz as neolithic site signifier, ritual tool, and ancient instrument (quartz filled rattles) criss-crosses millennia in the tiny quartz crystal oscillator of Oscillithic II, in which captured soundings trail up through animal (deer antler) antennae to shortwave radio transmission.

Belinda Quirke, May 2023.

1. With particular thanks to Helen Stanton, Manager of Public Engagement, Outreach and Education, Owen Brennan and Alice Stanton, Omotola Odetayo, Jane Shackleton, Cliona Ní Lionáin.

2. Bailly, Jean-Christophe, *The Instant and Its Shadow*, trans. by Martin, Samuel E., Fordham University Press, New York, 2020

Front cover: 'Multi-species Quadrat study' © Seoidín O'Sullivan, 2022. Observation of small plots PhD study by scientist Jane Shackleton on Devenish's research farm at Dowth.

### Solstice Arts Centre

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### Gallery Opening Times

Tues - Sat: 11am - 4pm  
Socials: @solsticearts  
[www.solsticeartscentre.ie](http://www.solsticeartscentre.ie)

