

BUTLER ■ GALLERY

A MOST FAVOURABLE SOIL

A curatorial project by the Salvage Collective

9 November, 2019 - 1 March, 2020



Gallery 1

This room introduces forms of grafting and joining that serve as the metaphorical glue for this exhibition. Literal references to the grafting process are seen in Katie Ridley Murphy's hand-carved porcelain trees (cover image) and Seoidín O'Sullivan's photographs. A different kind of interdependence occurs in Charlotte Wheeler Cuffe's watercolour of an orchid using a tree limb as a support for its existence. The footprints of the buildings that have occupied the site of the new Butler Gallery suggest a similar pattern of reuse, reconstitution, and integration.

St. John's Priory

One of the first buildings to occupy the new Butler Gallery site was St. John's Priory. In 1211, William Marshall granted land to build the Augustinian Priory of St. John the Evangelist. Mass was held for the first time in 1220. During Henry the VIII's Dissolution of the Monasteries (1540), St. John's was granted to Kilkenny's City Corporation. Capuchins and Jesuits occupied the property at different points, but both were eventually expelled. By 1780, much of the property was in ruins and the nave of the main chapel, two towers, and several other buildings were razed. In 1817, the Church of Ireland reconsecrated the Lady Chapel and it remains in use today on John Street.

Foot Barracks

Dates vary as to the construction of the Foot Barracks at St. John's, but historians estimate that they were built in the late-seventeenth or early-eighteenth century. The barracks were described by Major Wilmot in his report for the *Journals of the*

House of Commons of the Kingdom of Ireland, Volume 8
(published 1761) as follows:

“Major Wilmot’s company possessed six rooms, each room eighteen feet square and nine feet high; roofs, walls, partitions, ceilings, and floors much shattered; also the bedsteads, bedding, and other barrack utensils out of repair; Centinels [*sic*] rooms containing 8 men each.

One of the officer’s rooms, the wall good, but the partition not built up; the roof open and not cieled [*sic*].

Captain Bradshaw’s company possessed five roomsCaptain Nesbit’s company possessed six rooms... Captain Rankin’s company possessed five rooms... and Captain Blake’s company possessed six rooms [all of which were reported to be in the same poor condition].” January 9, 1752

In a *History of the 57th Regiment*, a 1757 occupant of the foot barracks in Kilkenny described his quarters as being “partially enclosed by the massive ruined walls of the ancient abbey of St. John.” In later visits to Kilkenny, the Foot Barracks were no longer in use and the regiment occupied newly constructed barracks (likely the Stephens Barracks, which were completed between 1800 and 1803).

The Evans’ Home

Designed by William Robertson and funded by Joseph Evans, an almshouse established for "decayed servants was built

between 1815 and 1820. It followed a symmetrical plan with a wing on each end that housed male and female residents. The almshouse was constructed using fabric salvaged from the nave of St. John's Priory and the Foot Barracks.

Gallery 2

Women and men lived in separate wings of the Evans' Home connected by common rooms. The artwork in galleries 2 and 3 hearken to the lives of the male and female residents and the worlds they created in small, one-room apartments. The objects in gallery 2 (in addition to other work in the exhibition) are on loan from the Irish Museum of Modern Art. Works by Nevill Johnson, Micky Donnelly, and Varujan Baghosian act as visual clues that reference the complex processes of aging and cognition, and community-as-assemblage in the home. Documentary photographs by Selvage Collective members of what remained of residents' rooms and the space formerly used by the Carnegie library serve as mnemonic devices for (even portals to) these worlds.

Gallery 3

Gallery 3 unsettles familiar notions of femininity and domesticity with Daphne Wright's *I know what it is like* (2012) and Jack Pierson's *Untitled* (2008). These works are intended to recognize the challenges of residents who could not turn to family for support in later years and who lived in an isolated,

even marginalized, space. The artwork reminds us of our discomfort with and devaluation of disintegration. And yet, the residents built lives, side-by-side, in a home that provided resources, warmth, and neighborly presence; they re-constituted family.

Gallery 4



1750's map of Kilkenny by John Hogan, 1860 - 61

Orchards

According to John Bradley, who wrote the Kilkenny section of the *Irish Historic Towns Atlas* (Royal Irish Academy, 2000), the most prominent orchards in the area for many years were the Earl of Ormond's Great Orchard south of the castle, and Prior's Orchard, maintained by St. John's Priory. Among the fruits that

flourished in Prior's Orchard was the dessert pear, Bon Chretien.

John Robertson, who was a close relation to the Evans' Home architect William Robertson, owned a hothouse and nursery business in Kilkenny in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Among other accomplishments, Robertson is credited with producing the Kerry Pippin apple, which he introduced in Kilkenny in 1802. The Kerry Pippin is a small dessert apple with firm flesh, and is crisp and juicy.

The following quote from the *Statistical Survey of the County of Kilkenny in the Years 1800 & 1801*, compiled by William Tighe and published in 1802 by the Dublin Society, is the source of historical information about orchards and the inspiration for the exhibition's title. Tighe writes:

“Mr. Robertson's [nursery] consists of about fifteen acres, rented at from 4 guineas to 10 pounds per acre; he transplants [thousands of] trees, and some hundred thousand seedlings annually; the demand for the latter is increasing. Scotch fir and beech are most in request, lately larch.

Mr. Robertson has practiced the planting with success, and he communicated the following hints: “The situation which seems to suit orchards best, is on the banks of rivers and vallies well sheltered from the NW with south eastern exposure; **the most favourable soil**, a strong loam, with a dry clayey bottom, though they will answer well on any, between the extremes of thin gravel, or wet spewey bog, if it has sufficient depth, which

should be about 18 inches; or if the ground be gravelly, 12 may do, over a clayey bottom: the best preparation is manuring with potatoes, while a load or two of rich compost, of dung and earth, for each tree should be thrown together some months before, to plant them in.

Apples...most in esteem for cider here are the redstreak, moss apple, burlington crab, French pippin, and Gibbons russet; ...plant apples alternately with pears.”

The work in this gallery celebrates the beauty and diversity of plants and landscapes that have, through human intervention, found success in newly combined forms.

The research for this exhibition began in 2018 during a residency in Kilkenny. Selvage Collective is extremely thankful to everyone who welcomed us and have graciously offered their valuable time and expertise along the way.

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Cover image:

Katie Ridley Murphy, from Grafted apple tree series. Porcelain, 2019.
Image courtesy of the artist.

With thanks to:



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