

Artist's Statement

I believe it is a combination of artistic practice, scientific research, and collective action that is necessary to address and ameliorate the ways in which human beings are actively and radically altering life on Earth. At the centre of my practice, and of this Soil Project residency, is the continued investigation of the ways in which artistic and collaborative practice methodologies can help to support biodiversity. My current research is centred on the biota, namely earthworms and mycelium that are essential to the formation, maintenance and restoration of high quality, indispensable soils in Ireland.

The first body of work being developed as part of this residency is an investigation of the multiple soil compositions and soil food webs found throughout Kilkenny's locality. Soil is a non-renewable resource, meaning that any loss or severe degradation is not recoverable within a human lifespan. My research into the role that soils play in maintaining and supporting a sustainable environment will be informed by conversations with scientists and permaculture experts and as such will consider how other lifeforms, such as earthworms and nematodes, influence and sustain soil vitality. The quick time-lapse video shows several species of earthworms within an Evans' box or 2D glass fronted terrarium, as they burrow through multiple layers of soil, leaf litter, gorse and heather flowers, manure, wild garlic and decaying beech wood. While the video prioritizes the often unseen labour of earthworms in terms of decomposition, nutrient cycling and humus formation, it also seeks to highlight soil as a beautifully complex, finite resource .

The second body of work being developed is an investigation of mycological topics such as fungal biology, patterns of fungal ecology, an account of fungi in human history, the soil food web, mushroom hunting and culinary practices. I am deeply interested in mycelium, as a living sculptural material, and its potential to act as a metaphorical and functional source of connectivity, translation and remediation. Inherently, working with mycelium allows me to cultivate a symbiotic relationship with the natural world as a means for creating art, working closely with natural phenomena, biological systems and utilizing sustainable materials that have mycoremediation potential.

Both proposed bodies of work for this residency will lay the foundations for an intergenerational, community based workshop that will investigate mycorrhizal fungi and earthworm species as a potent sources for engendering a deeper awareness of the ways in which we are interconnected, so that we may value our entanglements with surrounding biota and elemental processes, and live within our essential social and planetary boundaries.

Eileen Hutton