

Eat your Heart out

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*Exhibition curated by dlr
Writer in Residence 2018-19*

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Photography by

BRÍD O'DONOVAN

Brid's portfolio covers food, travel, portraiture and lifestyle. Her modern, and understated style incorporates studio, documentary and natural light photo shoots.



Eat Your Heart Out is an exhibition about food and memory. Contributors were invited to write about a recipe or dish that meant a great deal to them, or to describe a special food memory and explore why it is significant. Congratulations and thanks to all the contributors: **Caroline Bracken, Patricia Doran, Sally Dunne, Angela Finn, Jackie Fitzgerald, Sarah Maria Griffin, Clare Hall, Michelle McElroy, Mairéad McGrath, Cormac O'Connor, Maggie O'Dwyer, Marie G. O'Dwyer, Adrienne Quinn, Hester Scott and Michelle Walsh.**



Eat your Heart out

Adrienne
Quinn

SALMON

The salmon was as big as me. I knew because Daddy had hooked his hand in its gills and hung it up beside me in my kilt and the yellow aran jumper. Uncle Brendan had taken the photograph. She was furious with Daddy because the child's hair hadn't been brushed and she looked like a tinker and just look at her socks falling down.

She put on her nylon house coat to protect her good clothes and lifted me up to sit on the damp wooden draining board beside the deep cream sink. She took an enormous knife and sliced it on the stone step back and forth until it gleamed and was as sharp as could be ready for battle.

She wrestled the salmon into the sink, it could only fit in by curling it slightly. Then took the knife and inserted into the tiny hole above the salmon's tail. The fish ripped open with one swoop upwards along its body. And she shoved her fist into the opening pulling out its innards. Bloody strings clung to her fingers and blood got under her finger nails. She waved a sliver of meat at me. Roe on toast for lunch. Those little dots are baby salmon eggs that would have been laid to make more salmon.

She lifted the flaps on either side of the salmon's head to show me the fanlights of its gills. That's how fish breathe. Its leathery pearl eye stared at me as she took my finger and ran it over the pointed teeth in its mouth. Then she showed me the interior. Nice and clean now she said as she removed all vestiges of bloody string. Then a brisk scrubbing of hands and knife under the freezing cold brass tap.

She scraped the knife up and down the salmon's skin and tiny scales flaked into the sink. One stuck on the tip of her extended finger. If we had a magnifying glass we could tell how old they are by counting these little dots, one for each year of the salmon's life. Like the rings inside a tree trunk.

Then the long copper fish kettle. Then laid out, in a fluid curve and its mouth slightly open, on a plank covered in tinfoil.

For ages I helped overlap discs of cucumber all over the fish. The eye was replaced by a horizontal slice of pimento stuffed olive. Red centre encircled by green. And curling waves of piped mayonnaise lapped its sides.

Little triangular slashes were cut around the middle of tomatoes, so that when separated the rim of each half was crenelated. Gherkins were stamped into shamrocks. The yolks of eggs were disembowelled and mushed up with mayonnaise and piped back in whorls dusted with paprika.

A caricature of a fish. This need for a contrived perfection, an enhanced version of reality. This never good enough but could be made more perfect world

view. The vast amounts of gratuitous labour. A never to be achieved dream of perfection.

Years later, unpacking a crate of china from my car, I took out a tiny porcelain jug, edged in gilt, decorated with tiny rosebuds. Its spout and handle were broken. Shattered dreams of daintiness. Of perfection. The jug spoke to me of the zeitgeist that divided the good and the not good. The not Good? Well that must mean the Bad.

The 'good' china was only used for visitors who only sat in the 'good' room which was kept for that purpose. Eternally tidy and entirely perfect and tasteful. Dainty sandwiches of white bread with the crusts cut off and sitting on paper doilies on gilt-edged plates. Not at all the home made morally fibrous brown bread eaten daily, compulsory crusts and all which was the actual fare of the family. And 'good clothes' kept for Sunday. And presents of chocolate too good to eat but should be saved for some unknown occasion worthy of their consumption (deferred gratification ruled).

And carefully composed photographic slides, constructed fictions of the Happy Family we really were not. And Adoption (you need children for the Happy Housewife and the Happy Family). And hair curlers imposed every night and stiff girdles encasing all female bodies over the age of 11. And conical bras. And I could go on enumerating the fictions. Good towels, to rooms, to clothes, to soap. As opposed to ?

All a vision of loveliness. The dream must go on at all costs. And the costs were very high.

Good and Bad imply a moral dimension, the scales of the Last Judgement, the angel on one shoulder the devil on the other. The damned and the saved. You must choose.

Now I look at the acres of china tea sets, the rose buds and the broken spouted jugs. So much I couldn't give up. That I was loyal to in heart if not in mind. I am oppressed by their looming stacked presence (tho' no longer lost in their forest). They tower over me imprisoning me in their dreams of perfection their fictions of loveliness. No more than I would wear a girdle, I don't use them. I have a notion my daughters might like to have them divided between them. Maybe to keep them as a warning to themselves, a trap they must avoid.

Maybe I should smash these tea sets and construct a mosaic path from their shards that will lead me out of the garden and stretch ahead, down which I will skip and not look back....

When I think of my childhood I think of sitting among the huge blowsy cabbage roses their branches writhing with hooked thorns that bloomed on Maura's bedroom carpet. I sit in the middle of this forest with a polythene bag filled with every glove Maura has ever owned. I push my tiny fingers into each glove and pull the leather up my hands which I stretch above my head to admire.

Maura sits at the dressing table, her face reflected to infinity in its tripartite mirror. She backcombs her hair with vicious determination until it spikes out vertically from her skull. Then she smooths it into a helmet and sprays it long and hard until our eyes sting and we can barely breathe.

She slashes on lipstick, and clamps her mouth shut on an old used envelope, a pile of which she keeps handy for the purpose.

And years later I receive her hard clearly defined (the gills of fish) kisses. Envelopes from the past. And rip them up.



Eat your Heart out

Angela
Finn

RECIPE FOR SURVIVAL

make banana bread
in your half-built kitchen
melt butter -
to the gold
of childhood summers

remember -
Beaumont in the 70s
the Keogh sisters
twirling buttercups
yellow petals

mirrored under pale chinskin.

weigh sugar –
a shade of beach sand -
raw cane from Mauritius
island where you honeymooned
ate skewered pineapple
drank vanilla tea
sipped sugarcane rum
at night in the straw hotel –
watching geckos
dart behind dodo etchings
and waking
in the morning
to an unending sentence
brown ants on white stucco
crawling
towards the basket
spoilng
infesting
the half eaten fruit

take two cool eggs
from the pale green carton,
lay them
next to the mixing bowl
daliesque ovals
reflected in stainless steel
mother hen –
note that one is speckled,
the other

an angel, a tiny white feather
stuck to its shell
lost soft down shivering
under your nose-breath,
and while the oven warms
add flour -
baby powder white
peel the freckled skins
from the trinity of bananas
no one would eat

acetone smell
takes you back
your fourteen summers
addicted
to banana milkshake
your first job
sucking on a straw

in the fluorescence
of the 16a bus
your mother
waiting at the terminus
to walk you
home to the embrace
of her Bird's custard
lemon kitchen

and though the recipe
doesn't ask -
add raspberries
for tartness

like a painter -
meld red tincture
into chick-yellow mix
and add a slab
of white chocolate
smashed



Eat your Heart out

Caroline
Bracken

SIGN

A handwritten sign hangs on a gate
outside a cottage on Waterfall Road:

Duck Eggs For Sale.

It has always been there, an unanswered invitation.

If I ever responded to that call

I would hollow out one duck egg

and create a pysanka

like a Ukranian woman.

I would dye and decorate it at night

in secret, my daughter the sole witness

my life inscribed in beeswax

preserved on shell.

For now, it is enough to know that the duck eggs
are there waiting like love should the mood take me.

Enough to picture them, palest of pale blue

in a wicker basket, laid on a bed of yellow straw.





*Eat your
Heart out*

Claire
Hall

GRANNY'S APPLE TART, WITH (C)LOVE.

Powdery white flour and a pinch of salt are sifted from a height into a ceramic bowl the colour of toast.

Butter cubes are gently rubbed and worked into the flour with cold fingers, then drops of icy water from the brass tap added and mixed with a cold knife blade until it comes together into a ball.

Cut in two, one hemisphere is placed on the floured marble table and rolled gently with the wooden rolling pin, to and fro, to make a large thin circle. It's then wrapped around the rolling pin and lifted onto the buttered enamel plate.

The other half is rolled out and left on the marble surface while the apples are prepared.

Three large shiny green ones chosen from the larder shelf, are peeled with a sharp steel knife, quartered and cored, then sliced thinly onto the pastry base. A heaped tablespoon of sugar is sprinkled and a clove added for each apple.

A fingertip gently washes the lower edge of the pastry with some cold water to ensure a seal. Then the lid is wrapped around the rolling pin and hoisted into position.

The plate is spun with one hand while the sharp knife shaves off the extra pastry, and the neat edge pinched to form a sealed scalloped edge.

A small pastry brush sweeps the tart with beaten egg and a teaspoon of sugar is sifted over the top.

The knife makes two small stabs in the centre of the lid, and it is placed in the hot oven. 25-30 minutes at 190 degrees will soften the apple and crisp the pastry.

Enjoy a slice with a dollop of fresh whipped cream.

Beware of the clove.





Eat your Heart out

Cormac
O'Connor

CHIPS

My mum was thinking about the potential wind exposure, the distance from the sea, the sand quality, potential impact of incoming tide, stone quantity, stone quality, stone size, stone sharpness, noise of neighbours, noise of potential future neighbours.

I was thinking we'd been walking for about fifteen minutes, the cool box was getting heavy and we'd passed at least eleven perfect places.

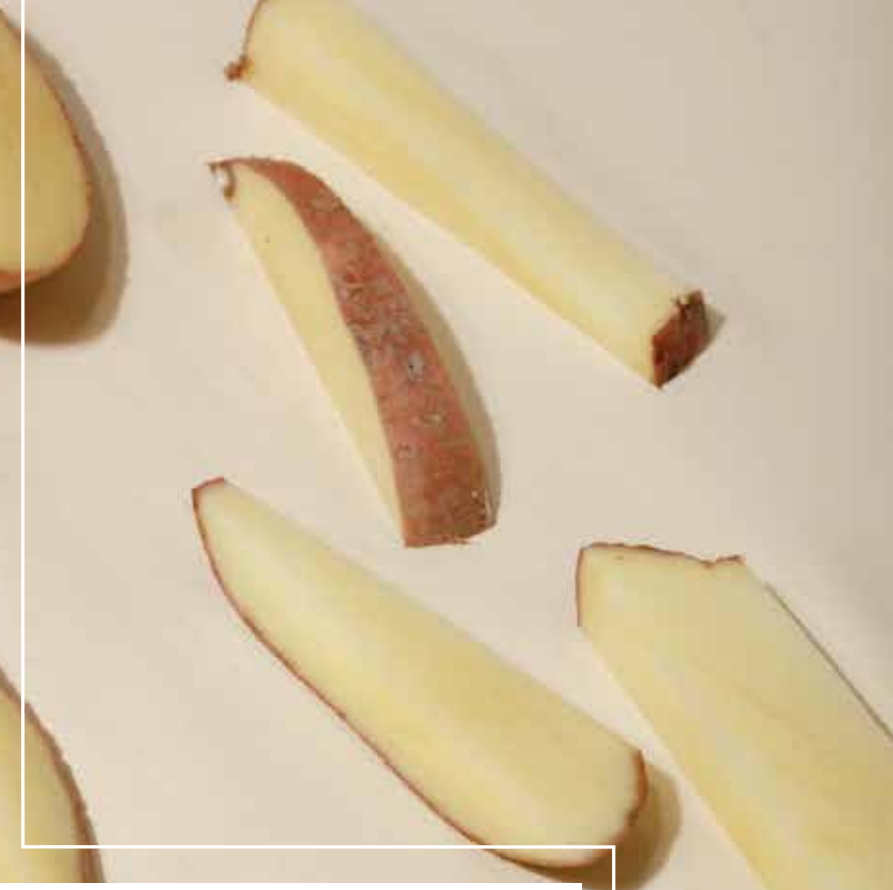
I'd spend a few hours running up the sand dunes and running in and out of the water. Thinking about how cold it was or how fast I could run down the dunes without falling. There'd always be food I didn't know I liked yet, like mayonnaise, ham and cucumber. So I would just eat crisps and peanut butter sandwiches and wait for the chocolate. I'd eat and think about what I would do next, looking up at the sand dunes and seeing if there was anything I hadn't jumped off yet.

Once I found 50p in the sand, the most likely source was my dad's pocket, as I found it pretty near my dad's pocket.

The last person to get bored and want to go home would always be my mum, thinking any time not spent outside was wasteful. Even in the height of the summer, I'd be chilly by the time we left.

The car park would be emptying or empty by the time we got back, and there was no queue at the chipper van. We'd never get anything from the chipper van, I think that made it smell even better. I went up and asked the lady if she 'had anything for 50p?' not thinking about the embarrassment of potential rejection, not thinking of what she'd think of me for asking. 'I can give you a few chips, love and you can keep that'. She gave me a proper portion and even gave a little sachet of ketchup, but there was no way I could sully these chips with ketchup. Some were crispy and soggy, others just crispy, each made me feel a little less cold. I watched the chipper van women load up the jeep, smiling at me as she put a crate of coke cans in the boot. I'd nearly finished my meal by the time my mum got back to the car, I'd always run ahead through the sand dunes. But there was no guilt for not sharing, and no shame for eating chips, no knowledge of the calories in the large portion of chips, no knowledge of calories.

On Thursdays my mum would work late, my dad would wait and eat dinner with her, which meant he could be a little more adventurous in what he cooked. My sister and later my brothers would have chips and something else. My dad would use the deep fat fryer so you could almost smell Thursday. Rachel English would be grilling the Minister of whatever or talking to an Irish Times journalist about the Moriarty tribunal or whatever disaster happened to be happening. The radio would stay on, on a Thursday.



I could listen to Five Seven Live, it was a distraction from the worries of undone homework, or feeling fat, or being bullied. Mixed with the smell of chips was the smell of the adventurous meal my dad was cooking, fried aubergine has a distinctive smell.

Crinkle cut chips are not too good for ketchup in fact depending on the length of the chip, another tap on the glass bottom of the bottle may be required after just one. The ridges serve as a perfect teeth marker. If you don't want to think about other things you can think a lot about the chip-eating process, not feeling anything other than the soggy crispiness of the chip, a paradox made possible by a coating of ketchup. For just a few minutes it's perfection. The worries of later can stay there.

We had tried two or three places already, my dad had asked the waiters 'Bonjour, blah blah blah frite?' and they had mostly just 'non' and after a few more 'blahs' were exchanged, we had moved on. In this place there was a definite 'non' but far too many 'blahs' were exchanged for a simple explanation as to the lack of chips and we had sat down. There were no booster seats or anything so the table was about shoulder height. My dad translated the menu and ordered. After taking the order, the waiter had left the restaurant. My dad explained that they did not have chips but they had offered to go and buy some from the takeaway kiosk on the pier. These chips were served in a bowl AND in a cone. There is a mustardiness to French mayonnaise that makes it one of the world's best chip-friendly dips.

You have to think about chopping up a potato for chips. Are they too thick? Not thick enough? If they are too thick you risk undercooking, if they are too thin par boiling can almost cook them. You need to watch them boil, to ensure they don't cook. You need to concentrate on this or you end up putting mashed potato on the oven tray. Once you have them in the oven, you can start to think about prepping your steaks, don't let your mind wander too far though or you risk over-cooking your chips. Whilst you eat your chips, make sure to concentrate on each one, the wonder of chips is that your mind doesn't need to be anywhere else other than on the chip in your hand.



*Eat your
Heart out*

Hester
Scott

PIE CHART

Our mother's tea tables were a source of wonder and exclamations. Simnel cake, yeast buns and profiteroles were no bother to her, but slinging a chop into a pan for her family was simply too boring to waste much of her attention.

Even less bother than a rasher was the solution of the Denny meat pie. This came in a low blue tin, with an illustration of the delight inside. With a large plate of boiled potatoes it made dinner for a farming family of five. I can see clearly now how it was divided between us, in fact, like a pie chart. Our father had a wedge from eight o'clock to one o'clock, one to four o'clock was for my mother, and we three children had tiny triangles cut from the remainder, scrupulously observing seniority, so that the youngest got little more than a few flakes of pastry and a brown puddle.

The pie even came with us on our camping trips up the Shannon, with the army bell tent that took two people to carry. A large sack of potatoes was heaved into the boat, along with a Primus stove, sleeping bags and saucepans. Somehow the pie was semi-cooked –although the pastry was a challenge which our mother dealt with by holding the tin, with lid still on, rotating it over the flame of the Primus. Our father added the culinary advice that it would be a good idea to puncture the tin to avoid an explosion.

A reminder of those times is the multitude of rusty pie tins lying around the farm today. They serve as dogs' water bowls, and food dishes for tiny chicks. They hold nuts and screws in the workshop and pots of geraniums on the windowsills.



*Eat your
Heart out*

Mairéad
McGrath

FATHER KNOWS BEST

I was about eight. My Mother, who was never sick – or if she was she kept going – had taken to her bed for the weekend. My Father, who couldn't boil an egg but oozed confidence was in charge of preparing the dinner. He was boiling potatoes. That was the entire meal. Potatoes! Nothing else. (He had obviously skipped a century and we were living just before the Famine.)

An hour into the procedure my Father, rattled, roared at me.

'Mairead. Tell your Mother to get a full new set of pots and pans on Monday. These don't work.'

I knew that wasn't true. My Mother used them every day and she made lovely meals.

Time passed... The penetrating voice came again.

'Ask your Mother how long it takes potatoes to boil.'

I went upstairs. My Mother was sitting up in bed reading and smoking a cigarette. She didn't look sick to me.

'He wants to know how long it takes for potatoes to boil' I asked.

'About twenty minutes' was the reply.

Seeing my eyes pop and my jaw drop, she asked

'How long has he had them on?'

'About an hour and a half.'

She started to giggle. I joined in. Stuffing the tea towel from my hand into my mouth so my Father wouldn't hear me, I decided to thoroughly spill the beans.

'He's bent over the gas stove with his fists up like a boxer, fighting and growling at it.' I gave a demonstration.

When we recovered she looked at me shrewdly.

'What's he done wrong?'

'He hasn't put the lid on the pot. They're never going to cook.' We were off laughing again.

They never did. I was sent out to get chips from the chipper.

Nothing daunted, next day he made a pot of rice. Enough to last an army for a week. My school friend was astonished when she called to the house that evening and my Father opened the door to her.

'Hello Frances. Come on in' he said delightedly perceiving another victim. 'Would you like some rice?'

'No thank you Mr McGrath' she said. Wise woman.

We never did get to the end of it.

Thankfully when Monday morning came, my Mother decided she was better.



Eat your Heart out

Marie G.
O'Dwyer

ONIONS AND SNOOKER

Food is a conduit of much more than essential nourishment. Complex human relationships express themselves in and through the delicious delights of hot buttered scones, mugs of sweetened tea, blazing plum puddings, crumbly apple pies and the Sunday roast. It is no surprise then that biting into a white bread, salad cream and onion sandwich, I taste my memories. I recall the careful upending of the Chef bottle of salad cream. The tap of its base with one hand and then plop, tap and then plop, onto the two waiting slices of bread. The slip and slide of the flat blade of the knife smoothing its tart creamy essence to the crusty edges. The eye-watering slicing of the just peeled onion and the benediction of the bread with onion rings of various widths. The placing of the second slice on top and the hand squashing it down, sealing it together. The careful trimming away of the hardened edges and drawing a diagonal line with the sharp edge of the knife. The two triangles cut again to make four and then placed on his Denby china side-plate. The making of black tea with milk, strong enough for a mouse to trot on, and then the carrying of mug and plate into the sitting room to my grandfather watching the telly. I see him clearly, sitting in his armchair, smiling at my offering and handing me back one of the sandwiches as we sit together and watch Hurricane Higgins pot the black.





Eat your Heart out

Michelle
Walsh

TAGINE

There's so much colour here. Vibrancy pulsates in the air. It's in the smells, the souks, the voices of the hawkers and the buyers. Rows and rows of crates filled with vegetables, herbs, nuts, fish, meat, spices, greens, blues, reds, it looks like the earth has been dug up and exposed, roots and all.

Ingredients are bought with intent, they are handled, assessed and haggled over. Food is prepared slowly and simply by hand. Vegetables are washed, cut, sliced and diced. Fish is skinned and boned, meat dissected, every part is used. Meals are cooked slowly, letting the cooking vessel work its magic.

To get the flavours right, you need the right mix of spices. Cumin, coriander, cayenne, turmeric and paprika. Mud brown, forest green, burnt orange, bright yellow and blood red - a roll call of colour. These tiny pyramids of flavour look like magic dust waiting to be sprinkled over a cauldron. Your basic ingredients are onion and garlic, root vegetables many and varied, and meat or fish. The dish is assembled, cooked and eaten in layers.

You start with a base of onion, garlic and spices. You place the meat at the centre, like a diamond to be excavated. You surround it with vegetables, largest on the inside, smallest on the outside. You splash a small amount of water over everything. You pop the lid on top of the round base and walk away. Time and the conical, pyramid shaped pot will do the rest.

When you return, you will find an invisible alchemy has taken place in your absence. The small amount of water you added will be infused with spice. It is no longer water. It is sauce. The vegetables are soft and buttery, even though there is no butter involved. The succulent meat simmers at the core. A perfect but gentle storm has taken place, steam and heat and time colliding to extract rich, deep flavours from the ingredients, transforming their taste and texture from simple to sublime.

The dish is revealed by whipping off the lid, in the manner of a magician. Fragrant steam fills the room and the vegetables gleam at you. Their rainbow colours shine.

Bread is a utensil here. To eat, you begin at the outside and work your way in towards the meaty treasure at the centre, scooping the vegetables with your hands or with bread. The vegetables taste sweet and the bread quickly becomes deliciously soggy. When you finally reach the meat, it yields to your touch, peeling away from the bone, softened by the slow cooking and the steam.

It's deeply satisfying to earn the reward of the centre, so unlike western food, where you immediately see everything you are going to eat laid out on a plate. Like everything else in this

country, food is shrouded in mystery. And steam. It rises from the ground in the desert heat. It clouds the air in the hammam to cleanse the skin. It rises in the tagine to cook the food. It spirals from earthenware teapots brewing mint tea to cleanse the palate after eating.

Time moves slowly in this place of tradition and custom, of minarets and muezzins. The call to prayer five times a day reminds you of your natural circadian rhythm, a time to wake, to eat, to rest, to work, to sleep. It makes you stop for a moment and reflect on what you have to be grateful for and you remember that feeling of gratitude when you sit down to eat.

When you eat, you eat with others. In the same way that food is cooked with other ingredients, it is consumed with other people. Nothing exists in isolation. Community and family are at the heart of every activity. Food is eaten directly from the dish in the centre of a low table. Hands criss-cross in the air, reaching for the breadbasket or the plumpest vegetable. There is endless chatter about events of the day in a mix of languages - French, Arabic and English. There's no television, no devices, no tools of any kind. Just time. Time to eat, time to talk, time to digest not only the food but the news of the day, and time to rest after a meal.

In this hot, dusty, noisy country where life moves at a gentle pace and language sounds like a song; food is eaten with more care and consideration than anywhere I've ever been in the world. I ate tagines at roadside rest-stops, sampled couscous, pastilla and delicious sweet delicacies in people's homes. I tried harira and bissara, traditional, hearty soups sold by street sellers, deep in the medina. I drank avocado juice, mint tea and café crème in seaside cafes. No matter where or what I ate, I ate slowly. The way food is treated here, with care and respect, and where nothing goes to waste, is a valuable lesson in how to treat every other aspect of your life.





*Eat your
Heart out*

Sarah Maria
Griffin

BALSAMIC VINEGAR/ MOZZARELLA

It's not that I don't like cake. I do: I like everything about cake, actually. Especially white, cloudy, vanilla edged queen-cake like you get on your birthday. It is, however, that I don't really like birthdays. The year I'm trying to tell you about was in the middle of our lives in San Francisco, what we've come to call the Good Year. Christina was living with us, and her Damon had just followed her across the world to be with her and it felt, at that time, like though the city was grating on us, we might be able to make it after all. It felt like even though we had no money and bad jobs that we might just survive the crush of the place, given that we laughed so much.

January in San Francisco that year was not particularly unlike February, or I'd stretch to even say May, or June. Warm. 19-degrees-ish. Blue skies, occasional fog. Time never seemed to move there. I was turning twenty-seven, and was just beginning to learn that food could do more than hush a craving or satisfy a basic need. I didn't want cake for my birthday – or anything, at all. I let them slip by every year - this year, for example, I lay food poisoned on the sofa from a malign takeaway, as though my body was purging whatever thirty had done to me, strangely grateful for the excuse to lie still and be unseen.

Look, I was just twenty-seven and Christina and Damon came to the door and had something small and white on a plate with a lit candle in it, and a box of tiny black bottles – a ball of mozzarella, accompanied by a tiny selection of balsamic glazes. I laughed so hard and was so full of delight when they came, that their faces and roar of 'Happy Birthday!' in that doorway on Dolores Street is still a vignette that flashes through me like a burst of confetti, like better than any cake ever has been. I stood in the kitchen and ate the cheese in thick, round discs, doused in the surprise of the vinegar and it was opulent. The smoke from the little supermarket sugar-looking candles, the soft nothing of the mozzarella, the sharp something of the vinegar. I put it on everything, now. Splatter golden chips black with it. Drizzle molasses thick glaze on towers of brie, nectarine, biscuit. This un-poison, this better-than-any-cake, this liquid photograph of a good time, a great time.



GLUG SOUP

Glug soup,
that's what he calls it.
I'm presuming he's saying it's tasteless,
undrinkable, not for him.
To me it's wholesome, comforting, rich with
greens and warmth and nourishment.
It fills my centre, heats my toes.
Leeks, particularly the green tops, potatoes, stock,
garlic, nutmeg, milk.
I've stood there, peeling and chopping and tasting,
using my writing time to make this soup,
dreaming of, rather than writing, the poem that's
going round my head.
But I've chosen to do this
ritual at the stove and
serve its unassuming goodness with a dash of
soy sauce over sliced spring onions. (His loss.)
I sit over the bowl, fragrant steam blurring my vision.
The spoon handle is cool, its curved saucer
dips and draws across the dense surface,
collecting scallion straws, darkened by the soy's deep
colour and salty depths

that speak to me of inky sketches on parchment scrolls –
industrious folk at work on the land,
conical straw hats making pale patterns against
jagged mountains, thunderous skies.
I trip back to Dingle's Annascaul and
cold February lunch breaks, after a morning's shiatsu study,
eager for soup and bread,
anticipating the aroma in the kitchen.
I walk through to the glass covered dining room, trestle tables,
seaweed drying on washing lines -
to eat in companionable silence, eyes on the stretch of faraway peninsulas.
I discover the art of cutting carrots to maintain their yin and their yang,
and learn how chlorophyll-rich greens build the blood,
how aromatic leeks benefit the Lung energy,
how making food from scratch is soul food -
intention and thought elemental to the mix.
Feeling grounded and real, nourished and whole
in the place where sea, rock and sky
link heaven to earth
over a bowl of leek and potato
glug soup.



BEEF WELLINGTON

Some dishes are touchstones in my life. Signature dishes like Beef Stroganoff, which was the first meal I cooked for my husband, was one of the reasons he married me, he says. Or Spaghetti Bolognese, my son's favourite, which I simmer for at least three hours and has milk and nutmeg as secret ingredients. Or my deeply comforting Fish Pie, which is sure to cheer my daughter up, when she's feeling under the weather. These aren't quick and easy meals. They are dishes that take time to prepare, with carefully chosen ingredients, and when cooked to perfection, feel like I'm wrapping them in a big bear hug, that doesn't let go.

The first time I ate Beef Wellington was on a warm September day, in an old country house, at my sister's wedding. Emotions ran high in the run up to her special day, as my parents desperately rushed her up the aisle, before her expanding waistline could give her away. I was sixteen and on the cusp of life, yearning to escape the hypocritical, small-minded border hometown, with its claustrophobic, old grey walls, forever closing in.

The wedding feast began with an unspectacular prawn cocktail. As the dishes were cleared away, a hush came over the room, as the waiters marched triumphantly, in single file, their silver trays aloft, laden with the parcels of gold encrusted beef. They returned minutes later, with armfuls of the steaming thick slices on gleaming white dinner plates. My knife glided through the pink, tender beef, like butter, through the rich, decadent mushroom and paté layer, and into the succulent golden-brown puff pastry, coated in a rich, red wine sauce.

That beef could taste so sublime shocked me. Roast beef was my least favourite Sunday dinner, my mother's rib roast was usually surrounded by a repellent, yellow, jelly-like layer of fat. My parents, devout Catholics, went to 10am mass in the parish church and my sisters and I would carry out the weekly charade of going to the 12 noon one, but in the nearby coffee shop or pub instead. By the time we got home, the kitchen would resemble a steaming, frenzied battleground of bubbling pots of potatoes, cabbage, carrots or turnips, with my mother barking out orders to strain this, mash that, stir the gravy and lay the table, which was pulled out from the wall, to the centre of the dining room, for this special meal, which we would all eat together.

Many years later, while trying to decide what to cook for my husband and kids for a special millennium New Year's Day meal, I flick through the glossy supermarket brochure, recently pushed through the letterbox, and pause when I see that beef fillet is on a special Y2K offer with 33% off the regular price. Memories of the wedding feast come flooding back. Leafing through my mother's old, dogeared Good Housekeeping cookery book, I find the recipe I'm looking for and start the meticulous shopping list and workplan for this special meal. While I know the recipe is ambitious, I am not intimidated by



the challenge and approach the task with careful preparation and confidence.

I inherited my ability to cook from my mother, who taught me, at an early age, how to fillet and skin plaice on the bone, shell and de-vein prawns for scampi, and many other culinary skills. However, I was terrified of sabotaging this expensive rare treat and laboured over every detail, taking care not to overcook the beef or undercook the pastry. I made sure the beef was at room temperature so it wouldn't tense up in the heat of the oven, I seared it, roasted it for forty minutes and let it go cold. I mixed and spread the chopped mushrooms and paté paste and enveloped it in the buttery puff pastry. Finally, I gave it time to rest in the warm kitchen to let it settle and breathe.

As our knives slide through the velvety, flushed beef, I hear their sighs of delight with each tasty morsel. I sit back and relax, hoping that this traditionally decadent dish, made with love, will become one of their food memories. From that moment, Beef Wellington became one of our firm favourites, and joined classics like Chicken Satay and Pork Somerset, dishes that help us create a special space to eat, talk, bicker, laugh and grow close together.



*Eat your
Heart out*

Maggie
O'Dwyer

CHERRIES

When I first met you, you said there was something missing. Perhaps it was salt or sugar - I could only guess. So I fed you sweet tart cherries that floated in a bowl of ice, their skin smooth, snapping in our mouths.

Winter, Rue Rousselet, Paris.

Lonely for the mountains and the bright yellow blaze of gorse, the pattern of fields and the boundary lines of hawthorn, I fed you lamb chops studded with garlic and rosemary, steaming bowls of ratatouille, the courgettes salted and pressed, plump tomatoes, heated to burst their flesh. I wanted to remind you of that Summer, the light of Nice that I could have swallowed, that blue plate of skinned, glistening red peppers, the warm shadowed ochre walls.

Spring, Rue Mouffetard.

I mumbled my French in the market, learned how to say, 'Chicken, cut in four and five carrots, if you please'. I can't remember what I did with them but I remember you photographing me as I held a green apple in the tiny top floor apartment, the voice of Maria Callas rising into a square blue sky as I ironed. The passionate fights of the Brazilian couple below - the sound of their furniture thrown into the trapped light of the courtyard.

Summer, Rue Raymond Losserand.

You said there was nothing missing. I fed you slivers of lemon sole, wrapped and fried in butter, with snow peas and small wet potatoes that made me long for home - the burst flesh and flowery centres of Kerr's pinks and the salty melt of Kerrygold.

*Eat your
Heart out*

Michelle
McElroy

POUTINE



It was December, my first Saturday in Toronto. I was starving. I was craving a chicken fillet roll. Crunchy French baguette with a hot and spicy chicken fillet which melts the butter, mayo and cheese. Disappointingly, there was nothing close to it on the menu. I sat alone in Shoeless Joe's Bar downtown, hoping I wasn't in the wrong one on 86km long Yonge Street. Navigating the subway and bus routes to get here had been a nightmare. I had no phone data being fresh off the boat, no Google maps. I ripped a map from the hook as I got off the Green Line subway. I tried to match the picture on the station wall to the unfolded map in my hand but it was like looking at Lake Ontario compared to a puddle. So I resorted to asking passers-by for help.

Everything was different. The sights, smells, sounds and tastes. Huge crowds of people moved swiftly with purpose but none would meet my eye. I would think I recognised a familiar face across the road and would have to restrain myself from smiling and waving. The smell of 'The Six' was a mixture of dust, fumes from the TTC and weed. Everything sounded like it was on a higher octave than normal with 20 different languages being spoken all at once.

The temperature was minus 20 the real feel was minus 40, so cold my eyelashes froze. The first time it happened I sent a photo of myself to my mate Katie back in Ireland. *My God your lashes will break off, come home now* - came the swift response. My Canadian work colleagues were pleasant enough although some of them were in arranged marriages which they thought was completely normal. The surprise was, none of them had a clue what a spice bag was. I explained to them that it was crispy shredded chilli chicken in a brown paper bag with fresh cut chips and onions. But it was like trying to describe the sea to someone who had only ever lived in a desert.

My Dunnes Stores jacket and Penneys hat were nowhere near as capable of withstanding the cold as the goose down-filled coats and Blundstone boots worn by the locals. It was lunchtime, which meant it was 5pm at home. My younger brothers would be on their way home from football practice, stopping for chicken fillet rolls in the local Centra. I watched the door of Shoeless Joe's like a mother waiting for a missing child.

The door opened and a whirlwind of girls blew in wearing matching frozen eyelashes. *Sorry we're late hun. How's ting's girl? Your hoops are massive babe!* Their still thick Irish accents drowned out the soft Canadian chatter around me. Relief. It was more than relief. It was like hearing a song I hadn't heard in a long time that I knew all the words to. It was the Bray to Greystones cliff walk, Teddy's ice cream on Dún Laoghaire Pier and a music session in The Harbour Bar.

The waitress shimmied over to take the order. Aoife who had been in Toronto longest took charge and called for *Four beers and four poutines*. Poo what? Poutine? *Trust me you'll love it*. Out the waitress came with four hefty bowls, steam rising off them. A dish with skinny french fries loaded with melted white cheddar cheese curds smothered in thick brown gravy. Pure comfort food. I later learned that poutine means 'mess' in Quebec. I didn't realise at that moment that poutine would become my own, alongside the chicken fillet roll and spice bag.

BREAD BUTTER MILK

Give us this day our daily bread in the land of milk and honey where you may find a bread and butter job through the milk of human kindness.....

Nothing is really ordinary but you don't know that, until it is gone but for the memory. In those days the milkman came to every house and the breadman came to most with his yellow and white van. We had home-made soda breads, white and brown, in the same way as hand-knitted jumpers. We liked the shop bought stuff though and we supported the breadman with a twice weekly order.

When my father was a boy he knew a young and kindly Christian Brother, or so his story went. The young man left the order to pursue a different life; at that time a shameful failure. Wearing both education and disgrace he had great difficulty in finding a job. The bakery employed him as a breadman in spite of this. He married, had a family and lived happy ever after, my father said. Therefore our house had to support the bakery and their breadmen, because you just never know. Besides, our father enjoyed batch loaves and Vienna rolls.

You must understand this was in the days when grease-proof wrappers were not discarded but saved for lunches to place in school-bags and large pockets in the men's overcoats. Milk came in glass bottles which were returned daily. These were the habits of ordinary people.

I doubt our breadman had been a Christian Brother but he could lift the giant wooden tray to carry it with ease into the local shop. His coat, the colour of crust saved his clothes from the powdery flour. Even outdoors, that freshly baked aroma tempted the senses. On a special tray sat the unwrapped and most delicious of all, the Vienna rolls.

There's no use crying over spilt milk but she doesn't know what side her bread is buttered.....

Bread and butter: the most ordinary things to have and eat. The sliced pans and the batch loaves were buttered with yellow gold bringing the fields into city kitchens, or at least that is what I tasted. Some people had bread with margarine on weekdays and butter was for Sundays and visitors. This discovery revealed small distinctions between households.

Milk: I thought every child drank creamy Jersey milk in their green capped bottles. The tea brewed in metal-bellied teapots balanced precariously on the side of gas rings, jaunty and lopsided. Waiting, we sat at the kitchen table. For the children tea was always milked and sugared in mugs with rabbits chasing each other round and round the rim. The prevalence of milk over tea and margarine over butter were among those differences ordained by a list of variables. We were a small family and that afforded some privileges.

The cream of the milk floats to the top but she wants her bread buttered both sides and she'll have jam on it too....

Childhood evaporated. The time came to swap one life and in my opinion try on a real grown-up life at last. Ordinary young women from ordinary streets did not leave their homes until marriage or at least with an excuse to go nursing in England. Country *girls* living in flatland were pitied for some reason I never quite fathomed.

Typical I said at the time, when a story from childhood resurfaced to illustrate my unusual characteristics. At Christmas when I was very young, I ate buttered bread with dark fruity jam instead of Christmas dinner; though my mother was a fine cook. That family tale was recounted for years, until it was forgotten. Then I announced my plan, whereupon it was revived. You see, they did not remember the bread was Vienna roll smothered with creamy salt-flavoured butter; crusty on the outside, soft and white in the middle, two slices with jam and two slices without. Even the crunchy heel was tasty and delicious.

For all that, everyone becomes accustomed to change and new ways become the norm. Nevertheless it is extraordinary that in the broad canvas of life, a safe haven for your bread, butter and milk may mean the difference between victory and defeat.

Call it the staff of life but bread always lands buttered side down, though half a loaf is better than none and why buy a cow if you can get milk for free with a glass and a half in every bar.



(Paraphrases: Compiled from The Lord's Prayer, the Book of Exodus, Macbeth by William Shakespeare, idioms, old sayings and an old Cadbury's advertisement.)



SARAH MARIA GRIFFIN

dlr Writer in Residence 2018-19

The first time I walked into the library by the ocean, I walked through a grove of lavender. Right there, by the Irish Design Gallery, alive with bees, the occasional blood-red ladybird. The relief of securing a residency was palpable: I was just out of an injury, beginning to walk in the world again. I had books to write, and now, a roof over my head, a roaring ocean beside me, and these fresh purple flowers growing outside. This great building, this stone and glass ship full of books in front of the pier was a home to me for twelve months. I wrote a novella, the living guts of a novel, an essay I hadn't been able to write before, a weekly column and five full diaries in that space. I sat with students every week and I asked them to tell me about their lives with food. I took selfies in the lift. I sat, some nights until two in the morning looking out over the dark hush of the ocean and the amber of the streetlamps counting down the words until my daily deadlines were passed. I am sure the night security thought I was a ghost, moving through the silence, footfall eaten by the carpet, my motion waking up the lighting sensors and illuminating these corridors of books and the tall windows, for anybody who happened to be looking towards the sea at night. I was there.

To quantify the work I did there in a list is one thing: I taught both inside the library and in other libraries, I gave lectures and moderated panels, I interviewed stunning writers and went on the radio – more importantly, this work was facilitated by the certainty and reliability my residency gave me, and the confidence that I was somehow able to grow from the architecture of the role. By the librarians who said hello, warmly, every day and never for a second made me feel an interloper – who were immediately welcoming and kind. For companionable silence in shared spaces. For just existing in a place where you are supposed to be after years of coffee shop typing, or squeezing in at desks where it didn't matter if I showed or not. For a sense of belonging. There is no way to feel like an imposter anywhere else in the world when in residence in a building like dlr LexIcon in Dún Laoghaire. Where the lights go on when you walk at night. Where the ocean changes from bright blue to grey to sometimes black to white with foam throughout the year until somehow, it is summer again, and the lavender is back in bloom and I am packing up my desk, leaving room for whoever comes next. How uncommon in this life to have benefited from something so totally, and to be leaving feeling full, and good, and maybe braver than the I was when I first stepped through the sleepy veil of lavender. Braver than letting myself out in the dead of night, listening to the wind screech through the ships like a haunting in the bay. Like maybe now I can call myself something like a writer and mean it. Like maybe when I sit down to work, no matter where I make that work now, I'll still be able to feel those lights coming on around me.