



Little **HUNGER**

By Shanna May Breen

Thanks

To my history teacher Ms. Morkan for teaching me all about history and its wonders. To my Sylvanian family hedgehogs for creating a whole new dimension. To my family who have helped me glue, stick and carve this project into something that forms a middle, end and beginning. To the inspiring company "Hotel Modern" for welcoming me into their miniature worlds and allowing me to eat, laugh and play with them. The people of Inis Mor who lie deep within the composition of this project, for welcoming me into their lives and village. Sophie Connon and Catriona Rigney both great friends since I was a young ballerina, thanks for writing about and videoing the project, a leap in all our lives were noted. To my grandmother Maud Hoare for helping me to knit the costumes for each of the miniature people. Mary Lohan one of the most influential Irish artists of the 21st Century for staying with me and for emailing me wise words on the Irish landscape. To Dartington College of Arts incorporating Falmouth University for being snap, crackle and pop!

Lastly, I would like to dedicate this book to the lives lost during the Great Irish Famine of 1845 and to my grandmother Patricia Breen who came to the end of her journey at the beginning of my three month adventure, thank you.

"To celebrate it is to remember it." (Bogart, 2001)

Shaping Interests

“Theatre is about memory; it is an act of memory and description. There are plays and people and moments of history to revisit. Our cultural treasure trove is full to bursting. And the journeys will change us, make us better, bigger and more connected. We enjoy a rich, diverse and unique history and to celebrate it is to remember it. To remember it is to use it. To use it is to be true to who we are.” (Bogart, 2001)

The Great Irish Famine or ‘Gorta Mor’ took place in Ireland between 1846-1851. The failure of the potato crop meant that over 1million of the population died of starvation and disease. It was the worst natural disaster in Irish history.

It is within these facts that a mass of forgotten narratives, stories and moments lie, I wanted to uncover or re visit these through my micro performances.

In my previous practice I would always look to history as a stimulus in which to research and create from, as Anne Bogart said “to celebrate it is to remember it” (Bogart, 2001).I like the idea of remembering the almost forgotten. I chose to remember the lost narratives of the Famine and to do what I could to allow them to breath in the Irish context of 2010 through my project. To give them space and wait and see what would occur.

Another influence for my project I wanted to explore was something I discovered in the first year of my degree - “micro performative environments” all my previous years of playing with dolls houses Sylvanians and microscopes had now found a major place within my artistic practice. I have always been fascinated with the idea of seeing the world through a smaller perspective.

“What a curious feeling!” said Alice. “I must be shutting up like a telescope!” And so it was indeed: she was now only ten inches high, and her face brightened up at the thought that she was now the right size for going through the little door into that lovely garden.” (Carroll, 1999)

As a child I was curious about “shutting up like a telescope” and now I am even more interested in the sea of undergrowth belonging to the miniature. I wanted to take this “love of tiny things” and place them “in contexts” as an adult and artist.

“I myself remain overpoweringly preoccupied by distortions in scale: when I was a child, I spoke like a child, and I have a love of tiny things - like a child. When I came to be an adult I acquired still more tiny things, and placed them in contexts that best enabled them to make the world intelligible.” (Self, 2008)



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Steps In The Right Direction

I am not an organized person, I work in chaos. Therefore at the very beginning of my project I knew I had to give myself a very strong structure and rigid timeline within which to work. I divided the project up into three sections method, research and practice.



Step One – Method

How do I create and explore miniature environments?





"Kamp" a production by Hotel Modern.

Answer: Hotel Modern.

Hotel Modern are a three member Dutch company who create miniature performative universes by making small scale models out of clay and cardboard while exploring the macro themes of human disasters. In their show "Kamp" they took 5000 acres of the original Auschwitz Nazi camp and shrunk it down to a scale model of 36 cm high and 33 meters wide. The model was home to 3000, 8 cm high models each one representing an existing prisoner; the show unveiled the daily lives of the prisoners through a 1 hour performance.

"Scale environments are of central importance in the universe: they provide an opportunity to see the world, literally from a macro perspective."
(<http://www.hotelmodern.nl>)

It was in my first year of study in Dartington that I stumbled across the company's website. I was immediately mesmerized by their use of the miniature and began to research their work. Through my degree I decided to look at micro performative environments in essays, performances and projects.

I worked with Hotel Modern in Rotterdam, Holland for two weeks at the beginning of October.

Research and Narratives

The first question Pauline Kalker, one of the founding members, asked me was:

“What are your famine stories?”
(Kalker, 2010) I had none.

My expectations for Hotel Modern was that I would observe them working and creating. In my timeline, the research for the famine narratives was to come after my time with Hotel Modern. Suddenly the cart was before the horse. So for the first of many times in my project I found myself having to reshape my ever changing plans. I brought a number of books with me and I began to look at the famine stories within them, to begin to create from. It was in a discussion with Herman Helle a member of Hotel Modern that I realised there are two sides to telling a historical narrative.

“When you tell a story of history you have to realise you can tell it in two ways. Will I tell you the historical event as a whole, the Great War, or shall I tell you the stories of a person, one soldier?” (Helle, 2010)

Hmmm...

I realised I wanted to represent the individual traces and the individual lives of the famine victims and what they say about humanity rather than telling the great Irish Famine as whole story. This was a huge turning point within my enquiry.

Hotel Modern set me daily tasks.

Tell me about the Irish Famine in 5 minutes?
Make a character and tell their story using models.
Invite us into your context, allow us to understand the famine through your perspective.
From these tasks the research and narratives began to grown into one coherent yet fragmentary tapestry.



The Famine in Ireland - Peasants at the gate of a workhouse.



Model Making

“Find out how you would make something, start with a piece of wire and end up with a figure. The figure and character you create will devise a story of its own through your imagination or research. This person can be placed in any piece of history or landscape and move.” (Helle, 2010)

Excerpt from project Blog 16/10/10:

I had the incredible opportunity of working alone in Hotel Moderns Studio and workshop today. Do you know when you are a child and you wish to be locked into a toy shop over night? I had the Shanna equivalent of that. I was locked into a Rotterdam maze, alone, with the most wonderful toys, tea and glue guns. I started by creating a model on the top of a table in the studio, with many cottages made out of sponge. I began to work with scale, lighting, live footage and sound in the environment. I started to place some of the stories I researched into the model, creating little humans as I needed them. Jumping in and out of life-size and miniature, live and recorded, in preparation for my showing on Monday evening.

While in a model making session with Pauline Kalker of Hotel Modern, I decided I wanted to make my models limbs out of potato. “the figure you create will devise a story”, I wanted to create models that would interact or connect with the history I was exploring. The miniature characters decayed over the space of a week, darkening around the face and mouths, rotting away with the stories.

Picture Boarding

Hotel Modern showed me a method they use in the beginning stages of devising called picture boarding. It allowed me to take large bulks of text and reduce it to a visual story. Each sketch was quick and allowed space for ideas and moments, devising on paper.





Hotel Modern devising within a model.

Environment

It has become clear to me how important landscape is in Hotel Moderns work. They aim to create the whole picture rather than one element. For example in "Great War" they have scenes in trenches, bunkers, submarines etc. To devise these scenes in the first place they have to create the micro models and then begin to play within that space. It is important for them that the landscapes in their work tell a story. In Hotel Modern's production "Great War" the scenery of northern France:

"Was not just the backdrop for the enactment of human dramas; the landscape itself was poisoned and wounded." (<http://www.hotelmodern.nl>)

Performance

An air stewardess called Mary announces an in flight documentary about the Great Irish Famine of 1845. An aeroplane flies from Rotterdam to Galway. The movie begins and the life of a mother begins to be told in fragments on a desk in a studio near the docks. She buries a child. She coughs in the dark. She watches her husband drown in the waves.

“How are you going to present your future stories?

Who will you present them to?

Will you have a sound scope?

Keep in mind the context you and your moments are in and how it effects what you are doing, acting and saying.

Always keep in mind the finished result when devising, creating and making.

Create from a location that holds hands with Your story.”

(Kalker, 2010)



Images from my final performance with Hotel Modern.

Business and Networking

I was pleasantly surprised by Hotel Modern's business structure and how they go about accessing government funding, promoting each show, their website, tour management, their business and artistic practice were equally balanced, I now realise that a strong business structure is one of the major foundations of a successful theatre company.

Through seeing how Hotel Modern promote and tour around the world, I decided I wanted to attempt to create a micro tour at the end of my three months enquiry. I wanted to allow myself the opportunity to organise venues, contact museums, create awareness of my project around Ireland, devise a tour timetable and travel with my micro moments.

Close attention

“The moment one gives close attention to anything, even a blade of grass, it becomes a mysterious, awesome, indescribably magnified world in itself. Almost an ‘unrecognisable’ world.” (Miller, 2002)

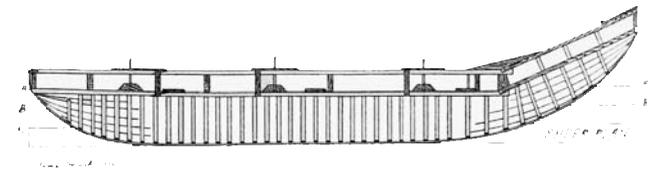
I have given the miniature and Hotel Modern my ‘closest attention’. I have speculated how they created shows and now I have an understanding of how they do it. They play and devise in little worlds, I played and devised in little worlds and afterwards I would cycle home. The time with them allowed me to question not only what they create but what I create also. I understood I needed to relate to the landscape I wanted to make, to create from the people and its environment. I learnt how to bend wire and make models, puppets that can tell macro narratives, such as World War One. I saw how they packed each model into its own individual match box and then put that box into a larger box and so on until they had a set on wheels that could travel the world in an aeroplane. I looked at a business which is respected by the Dutch and audiences around the world. It was definitely a “mysterious, awesome and indescribably magnified world in itself”.

I was set for the next step into the project.



Step Two – Research

I worked on the Aran Islands off the coast of Galway for on the month of November, looking at time, weather and landscape.



From Hotel Modern I learnt that landscape plays a pivotal role within micro environments. As Pauline Kalker said:

“We would immerse ourselves in the environment or context that we wanted to create. For WWI we went to the trenches and mass burials in France. From this we created our landscapes and begin to devise stories.” (Kalker, 2010)

Originally my decision to go to the Aran Islands was inspired by the poet W.B. Yeats:

“Go to the Aran Islands. Live there as one of the people themselves; express a life that has never found expression.” (Yeats, 2008)

I had chosen the Aran Islands to research the famine, but after my work with Hotel Modern the role of the Island had changed. It would now become a place in which I could immerse myself in and surround my project with an environment closest to the Irish Famine times.

The Aran Islands are the most westerly point of Europe, next stop America! Inis Mor is the largest of the three islands. And it has one shop, three pubs, hundreds of tiny green fields, miles of stone walls and the people still speak the Irish language as their first language. Its isolation has meant that it's landscape is closest to Ireland of the 1800s.

As part of my original CEP plan I had chosen to work on Inis Mor to look at:

- Historical research
- Local narratives
- Show case micro moments

When I placed myself in the Island location with the local people, my original concept of what I would be working on within the Island changed and developed into something different.

Time, weather and **landscape** became core to living on the island.



A picture of Inis Mor.



A good day's weather on the Aran Islands

Weather

Getting around the Island to explore and work was difficult from day one.
Stormy Wet Windy Wild Wet Wet Windy Wild Wet Windy

I decided on day three that I would just have to face it. I remember in first year, my site specific tutor saying "It will rain, buy a rain mac and go with it". I quickly put on my rain mac and began to play.

What must it have been like for the people of the Famine to live in these harsh conditions?

The constant struggle with elements.

The weather was something I wanted to explore and represent in my micro moments.

How could I represent weather in my Micro performances?

Tiny specs of snow fall onto a man dying under a tree, eventually his whole body becomes a heap under a sheet of white, he dies.

Time

Pace and time became warped on the Island, especially coming from the busy city of Rotterdam. Life is a lot slower on the Island; there is no reason to go fast. This allowed me to place myself back in time, a slowly ticking portal.

Tiny twisting country roads leading to nowhere, with nobody to meet.

Time, "The system of those sequential relations that any event has to any other, as past, present, or future; indefinite and continuous duration regarded as that in which events succeed one another." (Soanes and Stevenson, 2005).

Somehow my time on the island seemed closer to the "event" of the famine than time anywhere else in the world, 'indefinite and continuous duration' warped by the context of the people and the landscape.

How could I play with time in my Micro performances?

A moment of miniature in the corner of an alley, a trace of a life seen by a stranger, slowing down time for a second, magnifying a life and then leaving.





Landscape of Inis Mor.

Landscape

Harsh, rugged, green, beautiful, stone walls, rain, boats, sea, waves, cottages, wind, storm, cliffs, sand, sheep, donkeys, ruins, seals, thatched roofs, lanes, seasons, hills, chickens, tourists, language.

By choosing to place myself in the context of Inis Mor and the islanders I had taken myself out of my comfort zone. The unfamiliar made me listen and hear better.

“Creation is not making something happen, its actually listening to what is already happening.” (Bogart, 2007)

Working in this wild, isolated location made my practice more immediate and vital. It surprised me.

Even though the island was strange to me the connection I felt to the people and the environment was strangely familiar.

“Because I am human I am connecting to other humans, to my past, my ancestors, to the land. It is part of my life. I have a thread connecting me to that-that for me, is the important thing.” (Bonanno, 2010)

How could I represent landscape in my micro performances?

A barren tree growing out of the soil, surrounded by a mother and father burying their first born child in the snow.

People and Storytelling

“The task is to look beyond the obvious.” (Bogart, 2002)

I met a lot of the islanders and they told me of their experiences of the Island and old stories or Seanchai that have been passed down through generations.

They spoke, I listened.

Everybody I spoke to on the Island asked ‘why are you not on the mainland, where the majority of the people died due to famine?’ I would explain that I was looking ‘beyond the obvious’ into a way of life unique to the Islands.

Although the stories did not take place in the period of history I was exploring, the way they were told, composed and expressed became essential to the composing of my final micro performances.

Blog

My documentation gave my days structure. My blog allowed me to document pieces of text, footage, photos and ideas. This discipline of continually logging and updating helped to keep me motivated. Through my blog my fellow students, family, friends and local/international artists were able to see what I was doing and respond. We interacted from afar.

Catriona Rigney Journalism student wrote in an interview with me on my project:

“Has her project garnered much of a response so far? She has had hugely positive reactions and comments on her blog, something which surprised her. ‘My blog is all about my work, I’m recording the whole process of my project and I actually have a lot of followers on it, which is something that I didn’t expect at all.’ Interacting with people who are interested and inspired by her work is one of the best feelings ever, she says. She explains she emailed her blog link to the county Offaly Arts council and from that people began to read her blog, including local and national artists.” (Rigney, 2010)



A fisherman looks out to see on Kilronan pier.

The world would not have it.

“There is vitality, a life- force, a quickening that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and be lost. The world will not have it.” (Bogart, 2001)

Working alone on the Island meant that I had to trust my instincts and intuition, visceral.

It was only me, and everything I saw and heard was channelled through me. Placing myself in the context of island life allowed me listen to and see a way of life that I only heard of before my visit. Now I had experienced it and would allow my experience breathe in the stories of my research.

Wet windy and wild.

A slowly ticking portal.

Harsh, rugged and green.

Filtering the context of the island became the heart of the work.

I was now set for the next step.

Step Three - Practice

I created a micro performative environment and travelled around on a bus for a week, performing local famine stories in north, south, east and west Ireland.



Hotel Modern had raised the question at the start of my apprentice with them, what do I want to create at the end of my enquiry?

A short film, performance, documentary, writing or workshop?

I decided I wanted to create a short performance that I could tour around Ireland and show to an unarranged audience in various locations. This micro tour was inspired by Hotel Modern's world tours. I wanted to arrange and organize places to show my work and be seen.

Sophie Cannon a theatre practitioner from Cork travelled with me around Ireland by bus to the four locations. Sophie filmed the micro performances and photographed each location. Bad weather followed us with ice, cold and snow. It was some of the worst recorded weather in Irish history. The Aran Islands and its wild weather trailed us.

The Box

I had to create an environment or landscape that I could play within. I did not want to create a script, I wanted to visually see how the stories unfolded.

How was I going to travel to each location and create a space in which I could contain and stage the stories?

Could I tell them in a planned location like a certain bench?

I stumbled across an artist called Katrin Sigurdardottir who creates small wooden boxes that fold out unveiling micro landscapes, which she calls "landscapes to go".

Through using a fold out box environment I could use the same sense of a portal in my work as the Aran Islands had given me. A fold out stage that leaks onto the street and the story can begin, end and I can walk away with the environment.

A trace of something for a slight moment, stopping time or slowing it down, in a world unique to the famine. Controlling the environment!

I designed a seven sided box and collaborated with Roger McArthur a local joiner in my home town to make it. He mentioned that it was the second strangest object he ever made, I asked him what the first was and he would not tell, with a smile.



Tiny **HUNGER** in Cork City

When the box was completed I began to play within the fold out sides with my potato models, time, landscape and weather.

For summer the box was full of soil, for winter snow, for autumn leaves and for spring it lay blank.

The box travelled around the country for twenty hours with suitcases and bags, in the belly of nine different buses.

On its travels it accumulated interest.

“Is that a magic box?” – an elderly man in Galway bus station.

“Do you have some sort of bomb in there?” bus driver asks with a smile.

“Are you the Ghostbusters?” a man in a lift.

“That is an interesting looking object.” a lady on the street in Cork city.

“Is Bosco in there?” a hostel owner in Donegal making reference to an Irish puppet.

“Look mum, look mum, look mum” a child looking at the box unfolding
“I see” a mum talking to her child.



The Crawford Art Gallery in Cork

Micro Tour.

What if I travelled to four parts of Ireland north south east and west with four narratives, each one a famine story from the locality?

I spent a week organising with the different venues in which I wanted to perform.

Emails project details more emails blog details emails. Arranged.

Locations:

North, Famine graveyard and The Abbey Hotel, Donegal town.

South, Crawford Art Gallery and The Corn bridge, Cork city.

East, National Museum of Ireland and The Halfpenny bridge, Dublin city.

West, Galway Market and Eyre Square, Galway city.



Shop front in Donegal

Stories

"Lost stories, memories almost disappeared. Voices faint but still there in the fabric of the landscape." (Lohan, 2010)

Mary Lohan a Visual Artist and a member of Aosadana, response to the stories I was researching on the Aran Islands.

A mother and father bury their only child in the soil of their potato patch.

The famished were given a shot of whiskey, to stop their hearts, and then cleared off in a series of carts.

Man dies in the snow.

"Send us food or send us coffins." The first cry for help.

Storytelling.

I retold the stories in their original context.

A mother buries her new born baby in a Donegal graveyard. It was a local story so the people that died could have been buried below the box and earth. At times I felt like I was creating a gap for the people of the stories to be in, a trace of a life, a type of memorial.

Sometimes we told the stories and something unexpected happened, burying the child in the hotel lift and a recorded voice stating "lift going down".

To be a guest and to feel welcome in each location was very important to the story telling. It allows a welcoming for the narrative fragment, the moment that belongs in that town / place / history.

Allow myself to be and feel each place before I began roaming again.

Soundscaping happened naturally within the different locations.



Feeling at home

Drunken shouts in the distance. Car alarms. Laughter. Police sirens. Coughing. Cars. Stillness. Quiet. People talking. Wind.

The noises contrasted the stillness of the moments and narratives, allowing the traces to breathe in the twenty first century. The harsh noise of the city made the stories feel delicate and vulnerable.

Audiences

Who was I performing for?

Who were the models performing for?

The audiences were unarranged, the passing public.

Looking for an audience. Not looking for an audience.

In a hotel in Donegal town the staff and guests became our audience. I had purposely performed in the lift to create an intimate performance space.

A man stands waiting. He glances down with a smile watching until the box closes. He replies "What was that?" I hand him a postcard with the story and my blog details. The lift opens and I walk away.

People in cars driving by. Pedestrians and shoppers.

Audiences found us. We discovered audiences.

Their noise, movement and text became part of the narratives.

Taking care of the audience. Placing the audience in the wider context of the project.

For each location I made up little postcards with the text of the famine story on the front. Each card also had my blog details on it to allow the audience to see how the project was composed. The performance would reveal the postcards and the postcards would reveal my blog, each a trace or clue to follow. The postcards allowed me to interact with the audience but in a way that was arranged. A question was responded to with a smile and a postcard, keeping the energy of the anonymity alive.

The time and pace of each location meant people related to what they saw differently. In Galway city they would walk straight past without a look in comparison to Donegal town, a much smaller rural place, they were very intrigued and would wait and ask questions at the end.

What happened if nobody was watching, just me and the box unfolding, who was I storytelling for?

This is a question I still have not fully answered. Was it enough that the act took place, a memorial for the dead? If it was not seen by a live audience, I would document what happened, my writing would then have a reader, a spectator.

Me in place and place in me

It was the end of my tour around Ireland I felt the third step “practice” was extremely different. The first two stages in Rotterdam and on the Island were me as an artist taking in all that was around me, absorbing method and landscape.

I made my box, I had contained the landscape. I travelled around the perimeter of Ireland telling the stories through the potato models, each little character rotting away, as I reached the end. I had an audience in museums, art galleries and streets. I had listened and seen, and now I was been watched and heard.

“I had my existence. I was there.

Me in place and place in me.”

(Heaney, 2010)

This was the last step.



Conclusion



Conclusion

By simply listening to the past I was given fragments of stories from the Irish famine. By establishing links with my Irish history and placing myself, in what has been before, I revealed almost forgotten moments of lives.

By opening up a dialogue with Hotel Modern and by their generosity of sharing ideas, crafts and experiences with me I learnt a lot of new skills. My time with them made me question why I was so fascinated with miniature. I realised it was my way of dealing with the enormity of the world. I was managing a macro world by making it micro, in a way that it never lost its bigness, it only shrunk in scale. The small scale perspective made me peer even closer, leaning towards it until I bumped my nose, the work in my view had gained through the reduction of scale.

By placing myself on Inis Mor with the islanders I began to respond to the context. I got wet, slowed down and heard incredible stories told in a very unique way. I became a filter and my practice was shaped by my experiences and the influences of time, weather and landscape. The context suggested what I could do and where I could go with my work. By following my instincts I made choices which gave my work a framework and provided expression. A way of telling and retelling my tiny fragments of narratives.

By taking the stories out and around Ireland and into the community – the narratives took on a new dynamic. It was exciting to show and to see what happened. The connections between myself, the stories and the audience made

me realise that I had created a sort of memorial, a container for four stories, four lives to be remembered again. The role of the audience was difficult to determine or understand, after all I had no audiences on the Island, I jumped from me and model, to me, and what felt like the world. I had devised the stories to create a short glimpse into a moment, magnifying an anonymous story, magnifying humanity. It struck me at a later stage maybe this was too brief, had the audience gained anything from glancing and been handed a postcard? How could I develop the role of my audience in this kind of situation in my future work?

For the first time I realised I had my own practice and it was something I had been developing my whole life. This enquiry allowed me to explore my previous influences of history and miniature. Time was something that intrigued me in each one of my three steps and is something I would love to look at again.

I discovered other artists that investigated the macro world through micro worlds: Hotel Modern, Slinkachu, Will Self and Katrin Sigudadottir, to name a few. They are all artists that I will bring with me into my future work.

The project was a struggle and I found it difficult to manage and work. Getting from A to B, budgeting, blogging, model making, organising and devising, became a constant juggling act. The structure and timeline I had established at the very beginning helped and I realised the importance of

pre project planning. Good planning allows you more time for your work. I did not like working alone and enjoyed working with others. I relished the collaborations and dialogues with my blog readers, other artists and the small group of fellow students that I kept in contact with throughout. This project allowed me to take my interests, develop them and mould them into a travelling 'theatre to go' that I could show people and they might be interested in it.

I can take this adventure with me outside of this room, outside of this box, and into my future work.

It became clearer to me as to what miniature is. 'The paintings of the Sistine Chapel are a small-scale model in spite of their imposing dimensions, since the theme they depict is the End of Time.' (Self, 2008)

In my future work I would like to play with the idea of me being the miniature, distorting scale.

What a curious perspective that would be to view the world ?

Images







An article by Catriona Rigney a third year journalism student from Dublin City University for the university magazine.

LIVING on the Aran Islands and performing in settings as different as Dublin's National museum to a famine graveyard in Donegal, life is one big story for performing arts student Shanna May Breen.

Travelling around the country performing her latest project "Little Hunger" inspired by the Irish Famine, theatre artist Shanna May Breen has a busy few weeks ahead. Next summer she will graduate with a theatre degree from University College Falmouth incorporating Dartington College of Arts in England.

Having spent months preparing and creating the piece, she says it is both exciting and scary to finally be showing it to an audience around Ireland.

She will perform the four short moments, which tell true stories from the potato famine, in many different places around the country, from the art museums in both Dublin and Galway to the Crawford art gallery to a forgotten famine graveyard in Donegal. Although there will likely be passing audiences to watch her performances in the bigger locations, she suspects that in some of the quieter settings, it may only be her and her video camera.

Inspired by both the famine and the children's story Alice in Wonderland, she created her project to look at the famine through a miniature world. "Like Alice in the Alice in Wonderland story, I wanted to shut up like a telescope and examine the famine through a microscope" she explains "magnifying the forgotten narratives in 2010 Ireland".

Did she always know that she would study drama? “I didn’t always know that I would study drama, but drama always knew that it would study me” she says with a smile. She goes on to explain that “some people are good at lots of things and then other people are intensely suited to just one thing and I am one of those people who was always just really artistic.” Her mother also studied theatre and now directs and produces plays, so she constantly has drama and theatre revolving around her.

In preparation for her performance and to further explore the famine, Shanna spent a month living on Inis Mór, the largest of the Aran Islands. She could not help but fall in love with the island, but she did so in a twisted and haunted way. This, she says, is because she was there to explore forgotten stories of the famine, ones that were filled with sadness and death.

She admits that at times life on Inis Mór became quite hard and lonely. Did this make her question or doubt her project? Definitely, she says. “There were times when I asked myself what am I doing here? But I realised that if there’s one place in Ireland that hold hands with the famine then it’s the beautiful Aran Islands.” On her last day on Inis Mór she realised just how much she had grown to love it and how much she was going to miss it.

She also spent time living abroad in Rotterdam, Holland in order to learn more about the theatre trade, she worked for a while with a well known theatre company called Hotel Modern. She explains that she was well suited to the company as like her project on the famine, they focus on the theme of human tragedy in history through miniature worlds. She compares her time working with them as another dream come true, as out of any theatre

company; they are the ones that have inspired her most during her time studying Theatre.

She describes her experience in Rotterdam as “crazy and mind-blowing, meeting tour managers, models, assistants, lighting crew and technical teams, I felt like I was behind the scenes of a Michael Flatley tour!” Did she learn any valuable tricks of the trade during her time with them? “I think the one thing that I really picked up on while working with them was how successful you can become in the world of theatre, it’s a business at the end of the day” she says.

Has her project garnered much of a response so far? She has had hugely positive reactions and comments on her blog, something which surprised her. “My blog is all about my work, I’m recording the whole process of my project and I actually have a lot of followers on it, which is something that I didn’t expect at all.” Interacting with people who are interested and inspired by her work is one of the best feelings ever, she says. She explains she emailed her blog link to the county Offaly Arts council and from that people began to read her blog, including local and national artist.

She is unsure of her next step after this project, graduating from college gives her the feeling that she’s at a crossroads in her life. A move to London to further her theatre studies is a big possibility and she says that her true interests at the moment lie with puppetry, acting and directing.

Shanna’s blog can be found at <http://inisbeag.wordpress.com/>

(Rigney, 2010)

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