

IKEA
Butter Churn
for
Gneeveguilla

Gareth Kennedy

Hardu sett de nya möblerna!

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**IKEA
BUTTER CHURN
FOR
GNEEVGUILLA**

In July 2011 two wooden tables were purchased in IKEA, Dublin. These were then brought to the village of Gneeveguilla (pop. 500), County Kerry, where they were re-crafted into a butter churn and a firkin.

Celebrating the wealth of local lore surrounding butter and it's social, cultural and economic history, every inhabitant of Gneeveguilla (and visitors) was invited to come and spin the churn to help produce a massive pat of butter which was then packed into the firkin and paraded down the village. It was then brought to the local bog where it was ceremonially buried to become Bog Butter.

This invented tradition was filmed. The film presents a folk fiction which serves as a celebration of the continuity of people and place in spite of hard economic times. The film was premiered in Gneeveguilla in March 2012.



Crafting Folk Fiction

Sunniva O'Flynn

Gareth Kennedy's *IKEA Butter Churn for Gneeveguilla* is a compelling and joyful celebration of folk life tradition in Ireland. It intrigues, informs and rewards multiple avenues of enquiry.

Kennedy's project appropriates a mass-produced piece of modern furniture and re-fashions it as an artisanal piece of equipment. By doing so it revisits and re-creates a new folk tradition around the production and entombing of butter. It also produces a filmic record of the process which enshrines the community experience in perpetuity.

The project can usefully be considered alongside a body of related film material which has been made in Ireland and which documents and celebrates folkloric traditions.

Irish rural lives, particularly in the remote west and south of the country, have fascinated filmmakers since the advent of cinema in the late 19th century. The recording of these lives on film has resulted in a broad range of work by Irish and foreign filmmakers. Non-fiction

work includes early unedited actualities, newsreels, amateur record films and professional documentaries. Fiction films too include scenes of 'real' rural practices that may be captured as an incidental backdrop to a feature narrative.

Some of these films, made for theatrical exhibition, are familiar and embedded in international public consciousness. Think of Flaherty's *Man of Aran*, Ford's *Quiet Man*, Lean's *Ryan's Daughter*, and think too of the heated debates which continue around the authenticity of their representations of Irish rural life. Other works are less well known – ethnographic films made outside the broadcast arena, documentaries made for educational purposes and amateur community films created primarily for consumption by the people they represent. But these latter works, although more modest in their production values, are often the sole visual record of a people or place and are invaluable to the communities they document. They carry images of agricultural activity; primitive pre-modern lives; people isolated and unsullied by urban interventions. They may share a number of tropes emblematic



opposite: Girl churning from *The Seasons*, Dir. Dr John Benignus Lyons (1935)
far right: PJ Lowe and Martin Ashe of Gneeveguilla with cooper Ger Buckley of Middleton Whiskey; 2011

of honest rural endeavour — scenes of hay-making, seaweed gathering, school-children (often bare-footed) at work and at play, church-going and cattle driving. In the domestic sphere we often see chicken-feeding, bread-making, wool spinning and butter-churning. Images of butter churning appearing throughout these rural films immediately connote a busy homestead and a warm, nurturing women's realm (see *The Seasons* (1935)). Elsewhere, the business of churning butter is seen as an essential agricultural skill for which training must be provided in a formal educational environment (see Gael Linn's *Bantracht na Tuaithe* (1956) and *The March of Time: Ireland* (1945)).

Kennedy's project sits side-by-side with these works. It assimilates aspects of these filmic precedents, yet subverts as many filmic traditions as it appears to embrace. Constantly interrogating form

and function, Kennedy creates a dynamic and surprising new kind of ritual record.

Kennedy's *Butter Churn* film is made in IKEA in Ballymun, Dublin, in Shandon, Co Cork and in Gneeveguilla, a small village in East Kerry boasting a population of 500. The juxtapositions of urban and rural, of modern and traditional, are stark. The film documents the purchase, transportation and transformation of two IKEA tables from Dublin to Kerry; a research visit to The Butter Museum in Cork; the setting up of a carpentry workshop in an uninhabited modern house in Gneeveguilla; the deconstruction of the table, its reconstruction as butter churn and firkin; the invitation to villagers to turn up and churn up; and finally, the parading of the freshly-filled firkin through the village before it is inhumed in a nearby bog.



**THE IKEA
BUTTER CHURN
FOR
GNEEVGUILLA
AS
ETHNOGRAPHIC
RECORD...**

Ethnographic filmmakers set out to create detailed and in-depth records of everyday life and practice within a particular community. They immerse themselves in their adopted locale while attempting to maintain a level of detachment as they observe and record its activities, though their presence and the impact it makes on the people involved, may be perceptible in their films. Their work is often prompted by the imminent demise of a community or tradition and the impetus is to salvage images before they become extinct. The work may have the quality of an elegy.

An interesting example of such practice is anthropologist Paul Hockings' *The Village* made for the Ethnographic Unit of UCLA in 1967. Like Kennedy's *Butter Churn*, made in Gneeveguilla, *The Village* was also made in a small Kerry

village, Dunquin in this case, and, like Kennedy, Hockings clearly reveres the traditions he records. The film's introductory plate states, 'The village of Dunquin and the off-shore Blasket Islands were once a secluded preserve of traditional Irish life. Now the dole is displacing earnings from the land; commercial trawlers have destroyed the fishing; families are broken when the young people emigrate'. The film records the sights, sounds, and conversation of the village and interviews key inhabitants about their lives. The subjects are aware of the camera and their observations about the film crew are present within the film itself.

The Irish Village (1959) was made some years earlier in the small town of Crookhaven, Co Cork, by Jim Clark, a young British trainee director. Though not made by a social anthropologist, it has the quality of an ethnographic film, and provides a visual record of life in the village showing scenes of ordinary people going about their daily work and leisure. Fishermen catch lobsters for trade and farmers sell cattle. Men drink in the pub, women wash clothes, dogs sleep in doorways.



But the voiceover (which appears to be that of the director) tells us there is nothing special about the village 'except that it is dying'. It is a village with little to offer its young people, the majority of whom will emigrate, a village where there are far more deaths than there are births.

Kennedy's work shares much with these films. He too is an outsider who moves into and briefly immerses himself in a community and observes and records aspects of their lives. There is an underlying sense of economic hardship in the work, though more subtly alluded to than in the earlier ethnographic films. This tone can be detected in the location of the butter churn workshop in an

uninhabited but well-appointed and spacious house in a seemingly half occupied modern development on the outskirts of the village. But Kennedy's film is not infused with the doom-laden tone of the earlier works. He has not arrived to salvage pictures of a dying community, to capture tradition before it is too late.

Unlike the UCLA crew and Jim Clark, Kennedy does not appear and is not audible in his film, but his presence can be deduced by the presence in the village of two somewhat anomalous characters – a rather Bohemian-looking young woman (his friend) and a leather-clad biker with a fancy camera (his brother).

far left: Martin Ashe waxing the butter churn and firkin crafted from IKEA tables; Production still, 2011

below: Women at an agricultural college training in the churning of butter using end-over-end churns. Film still from the *March of Time: Ireland* (1945)



**THE IKEA
BUTTER CHURN
FOR
GNEEVGUILLA
AS
AMATEUR
COMMUNITY
FILM...**

Perhaps Kennedy's work has more in common with the amateur community film, an interesting strand of production which features throughout Irish film history. Films documenting communities at work and at play were made from the 1920s onwards by fellow residents who could afford the costly means of production. A significant body of work recording rural (and urban) lives was produced by parish priests in Ireland, men who occupied a privileged position in Irish society from where they could film their parishes. Many of these films are more valuable for being produced by a filmmaker whose gaze transcends familial boundaries and embraces a broader cast. Some, but not all, of the activities recorded are of a religious nature (communions, Corpus Christi processions and so on). Quite often the parish priest recorded fair days, schoolchildren's games, and agricultural activity. Father Jackie Moran (1913-86) was a prolific amateur documentarian of the various towns and villages in which he served. In *Our Town*, a colour and black and white silent film, he records the ritual of an annual children's parade in Daingean, Co Offaly.

left & far right: Marian procession from *Our Town: Daingean*; Dir. Fr Jackie Moran (c. 1958).
centre: Procession scene from *IKEA Butter Churn for Gneevguilla*; Super8 film still (2011)

The Seasons is a film made not by a priest but by a similarly elevated member of a rural community. Dr John Benignus Lyons was a dispensary doctor in the little village of Kilkelly in Co Mayo. In 1935 he produced *The Seasons*, a film which meticulously recorded the agricultural, educational and social calendar of this small village. The finished film, was rigorously edited, punctuated with explanatory inter-titles (in English and Irish), and included a broad sweep of the village community young and old, affluent and ordinary. There is great warmth in the capturing of young men at play in a handball alley, children gathering blackberries in sunny lanes and farmhouse scenes of butter-churning. The film represents winter and autumn scenes in black and white, reserving the more costly Kodachrome stocks for the colourful outdoor summer sequences. The record, now preserved in the IFI Irish Film Archive is the only photographic evidence of this small village at that time.

One can easily imagine that Dr Lyons, and indeed Fr Moran and other community recorders, shared Kennedy's sense of precious urgency about their practice. They probably owned the only cameras (certainly the only *moving image* cameras) in the village and so, with a heightened sense of civic duty borne of their respected position, they created, what were in all likelihood the only visual records of their neighbours' lives at that time. They appear to have had remarkable foresight in documenting traditions that would change.

In both *The Seasons* and *Our Town*, there is a sense of *authenticity* about the record. It is a sense often felt, consciously or unconsciously by viewers of amateur film. While we understand that there is a process of selection and editing of images by the film-maker, there is too an impression that the images are 'purer', subject to less manipulation than in more sophisticated, professional productions. The absence of a sound track suggests there are fewer imposed layers of meaning,

The sense of legitimacy of the record is also created by the filmmaker's membership (albeit at an elevated level) of the community he (for it is almost always a "he") records.

Kennedy is not part of the community he records but his work shares a sense of *bona fide* intent with Moran and Lyons. His aim is to record a folkloric ritual. He captures the action with his unobtrusive super 8 camera. The ritual he documents may be a new contrivance, but it draws directly on a long history of local domestic and agricultural practice. It draws too on folk memory, and in its new configuration, it may become part of future folk memory.



THE ANACHRONISM OF SUPER 8

What is most unsettling however in Kennedy's project is his use of super 8 film. Super 8 is an almost obsolete medium which was much-loved by amateur film makers, particularly in the 1960s and 70s, for its ease of use, its large frame (much bigger than its 8mm precursor) and its greater affordability than the earlier 16mm gauge. When projected, the film is blown up and its grain amplified to create an almost tactile texture absent from larger gauges. For modern audiences, super 8 immediately connotes home movies, intimacy, nostalgia, warmth, sunshine, holidays, happy days, and simpler times. Kennedy's use of the format is clever, and at first appears entirely appropriate for his recording of a folk ritual. But our expectations are subverted as we battle with the mixed message: on the one hand, the film format leads us to expect nostalgia and the past, the family and the domestic sphere; yet the images we see are of vast shopping emporia, white transit vans, unfinished housing estates, and leather-clad bikers. Alongside these are images of butter churns and country lanes and parades and a little band of Kerry village folk marching through the village following not Puck but a barrel of butter. We are constantly surprised by the messages conveyed through this anachronistic format and these chronologically-displaced images.

below: Bog butter burial; *IKEA Butter Churn for Gneeveguilla*; Production stills; 2011



FOLK FACT / FOLK FICTION...

IKEA Butter Churn for Gneeveguilla is, first and foremost, a work by a visual artist, a work which reflects his point of view and which manifests a conceit born in his imagination. Kennedy has audaciously created a new ritual. It is a work that pays homage to a revered but no longer practiced folk tradition; which attempts to create new tradition, and which attempts to leave a legacy of the project – both by burying the butter in the bog for future folk archaeologists and by capturing the performance on film.

He has invited the people of Gneevenaguilla to join this ritual; *directed* their churning of butter, *choreographed* their parading of the firkin through the town and *orchestrated* its burial in a rain-sodden bog.

So is it all fake? Earlier film-makers (home-movie makers and community film-makers) were also guilty of narrativising their “documentary” material: directing their subjects; insisting on the participation of family and friends; creating scenarios to stimulate action; demanding that all smile for the camera. There are levels of coercion and manipulation of truths in even the most authentic of “real-life” amateur films.

Kennedy's ‘cast’ are all, clearly, willing participants in the creation of his folk folly. They are there, a small raggle-taggle group, in response to an open invitation to be part of an art work, a folk fiction. There is a palpable sense of curiosity and playfulness in their participation. They are not paid but are rewarded by their part-ownership of the project and their permanent connection as evidenced by their appearance in the film.

LEGACIES...

One hopes aspects of the project will survive within the community of Gneeveguilla. The ritual of the churning of the butter will mature in the bog – remembered or forgotten until found in ten or a thousand years. The film will be screened now and may occasionally reappear to be re-presented to the community – the soundtrack provided by local musicians, or simply by locals filling the silence with the chatter of recognition and reminiscence. The film will retain meaning thanks to the strength of local memory and to the explicatory inter-titles which will remind future audiences who and what is appearing on screen.

The film will have resonance for audiences further afield, outside the immediate locale, who will recognise the archetypal quality of the ordinary Irish village and will be engaged and perhaps enchanted by the conceit of this devised folk ritual and the anachronisms inherent in its manifestation and its recording.

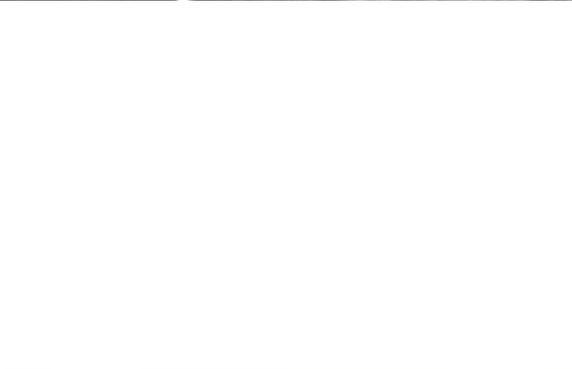
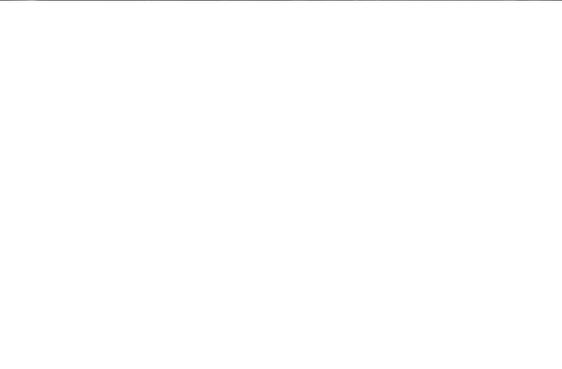
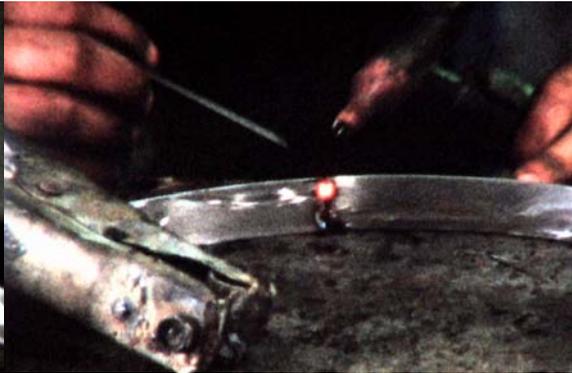
Following pages: *IKEA Butter Churn for Gneeveguilla*; Film stills; Super 8 transferred to HD digital; 32'13"; (2011)

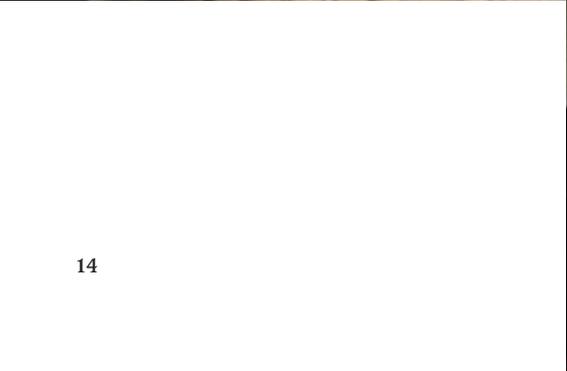
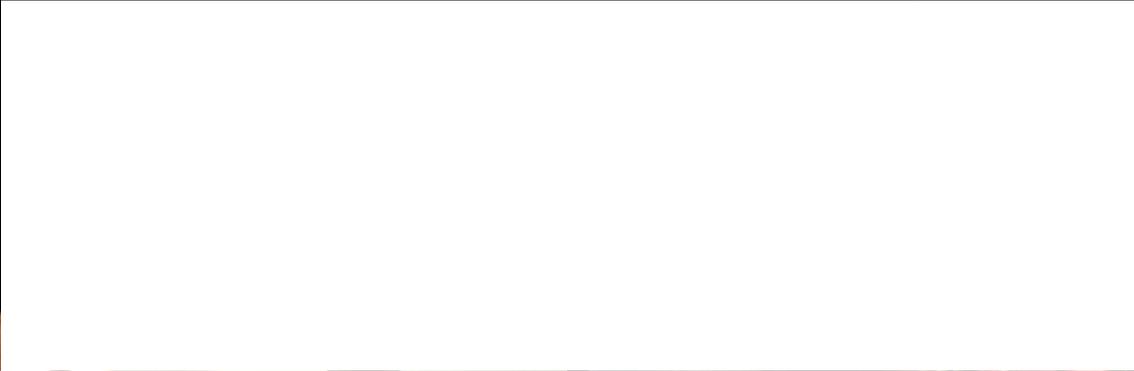
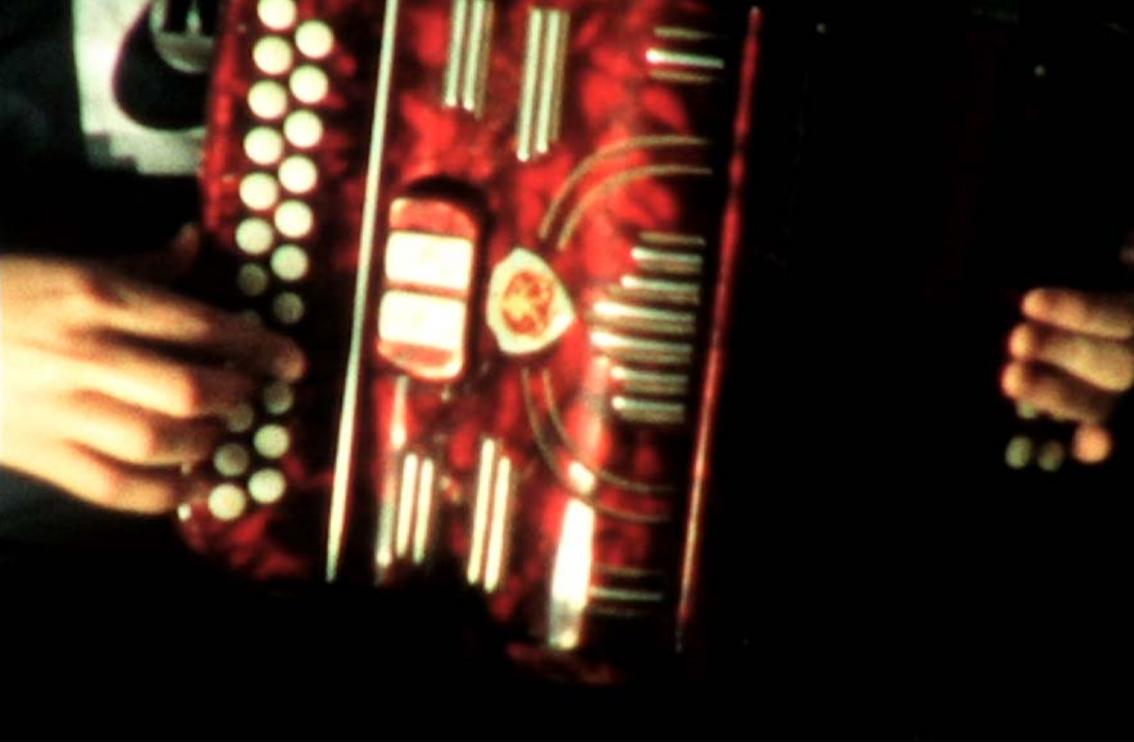
Prologue: The Village



Chapter 1: Shopping







Chapter 4: The Procession



Chapter 5: The Burial





IKEA as Folk Museum

Pauline Garvey

There is a small museum located in the town of Älmhult in southern Sweden that is something out of the ordinary. Here is a gleaming white concrete building with blue gables that is the IKEA corporate culture centre called *Tillsammans* ('Together'). There is nothing from the exterior that hints that this is a museum, dedicated to a potted history of post-war Swedish domestic interiors, complete with reconstructed living rooms kitted out with typical furniture of the time. The exhibits follow a predictable route: one passes a series of tableaux typifying each decade, starting in the 1950s and eventually arriving at the present moment. The exhibits are accompanied with descriptive labels and are cordoned-off with heavy ropes. The 1950s room, for example, is organised in a formal style with an ornate varnished sideboard and overhanging crystal chandelier. Porcelain cups stand on a matching coffee table which is decorated with an embroidered cloth. This old-world feel of the 1950s contrasts starkly with the 1960s exhibit, with its sleek and simple coffee and dining tables, constructed in birch or pine, the style that was later to take Europe by storm. The 1960s exhibit

is testament to the expanding and transformational currency of the ultramodern, *exklusiv och slitstark helt i den nya tidens anda* ('exclusive and durable totally in the spirit of the times').¹ The museum visitor reads how this was the time of rebellion, when young householders eschewed tradition. It was also the time that IKEA developed simple and brightly-coloured ranges that are now recognized as typical for the retailer. The FEMBO storage series, denim covers, rice lamps, removable covers and long-wearing, 'elastic' synthetic fibres all emerged as a response to the relaxation of the formal aesthetic.² Snaking through this exhibition, one could interpret the trajectory as a movement from tradition to modern, from old-world concerns to contemporary democratic design. But such a reading would be mistaken. Not all the ranges comply with the modernist label and reproductions of 17th century pieces described as Swedish Gustavian style (found in rural gentry homes) sit amongst the modern sleek series.

This museum would be an unremarkable except that it is part of the IKEA corporation, available for the training of staff and select visitors during pre-arranged times. It is a museum of IKEA as much as a history of Swedish domesticity – the corporation is often projected through in-store literature as the natural culmination of Swedish post-war domestic history. What is striking about this museum is how closely it follows the standard museological format in which the visitor is progressively – and passively –

opposite: *IKEA Butter Churn for Gneeveguilla*;
Production still of churn and related utensils;
(2011)

educated as one moves through space, and through a series of visual stimuli and printed labels. It is striking because just yards away IKEA in-store showrooms play on a similar series of museological themes, but do so in a way that deliberately brings together standard exhibition and commercial practices. IKEA stores typify a kind of exhibition centre that merge housing exhibits into a high performing commercial enterprise. Whereas the *Tilsammans* museum follows a conventional format, standard IKEA showrooms are taking this format and overturning it.

One commonly overlooked quality to IKEA showrooms is their exhibitionary quality, their museological tone.³ IKEA

emerged in mid-20th century Sweden, when housing exhibitions were common and didactic in purpose. They aimed to interrogate how best to organise, furnish and occupy homes, and were widely popular. IKEA stores represent another version of this popular phenomenon of housing theatre, but subsume the role of the exhibition into a strictly commercial setting. The fact that store tableaux are commercial does not make them any less viable as exhibition centres, where householders go to peruse, ponder and contemplate current projects and future trends. Like it or not, the unassailable lines demarcating museums and commercial spaces, even within museums, are rapidly being crossed.



left: Martin Ashe testing the IKEA butter churn with Béan An Ti Mary McCarthy, at Muckross Traditional Farms, Killarney.
right: IKEA store at Kungas Kurva, Stockholm, Sweden. IKEA's third store which opened in 1965 was inspired by New York's Guggenheim Museum.

One arrives into IKEA stores to be greeted by living rooms and bedrooms, kitchens and workspaces kitted out as if there were real lived spaces. We see posters of couples and families welcoming us to their homes. Indeed, the human infusion is added through the common vision of shoppers lying on beds, sitting at kitchen tables, or lounging on sofas. We encounter a betwixt-and-between sensation: we are not in domestic spaces, despite the children's paintings hanging on fridges or tea cups on tables, but we feel we are not in a standard commercial centre either. These showrooms provide staging posts to try out a domestic scene before investing in it financially or emotionally. It is this construction of the homelike scene that has been described as housing theatre, which is one of the compelling features that IKEA distinguishes itself from other competing stores. As far as one Swedish IKEA manager knows, this has been the layout as long as IKEA has been established in Stockholm and it is the blueprint for all the stores worldwide. In such situations the visitor feels neither inside a real home nor completely

outside it either. Little wonder then that the blueprints for the flagship store in Stockholm were based on the Guggenheim museum in New York.

This example shows that IKEA as the world's largest furniture retailer cannot be boiled down to neat descriptive idioms. But contrasts and contradictions are not exceptional to contemporary experiences of global phenomena. IKEA is often nominated as an icon of globalization and homogeneity, but not to be neglected is the creative potential of its merchandise when in the hands of householders. Individuals are subjected to a bewildering proliferation of goods on a daily basis but at the same time it is through these goods that we manifest the quality of uniqueness: a family home, a personal style, a singular relationship with friends and family. Anthropological research clearly shows that although the retailer's potential for homogeneity may loom large, individuals are creative in managing that potential in balancing their requirements for thrift with their own individualizing measures to 'singularise' what is otherwise deemed ubiquitous.⁴ This process

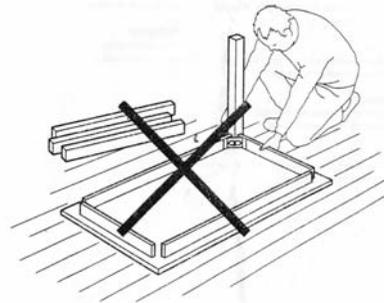
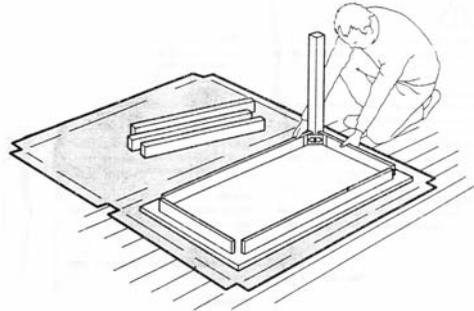


is not necessarily straightforward, and often characterized by conflict. Even those householders who furnished rooms completely in IKEA merchandise saw their homes as unique, because merchandise alone does not constitute a home.

Moreover the local is no longer wholly distinct from global, if it ever was. On the contrary it is though the latter, through 'worldly things' that the local is established.⁵ No where is this more apparent than in global retailers such as IKEA that represent global homogenous goods on the one hand and the singular domestic utensils on the other. In the Dublin store, as in each IKEA showroom worldwide, one finds a mix of styles that speak to the local demographic as well as showcase the range as dictated by international service offices. Despite the global character of the world's largest retailer, each IKEA showroom brings together a heady mix of global and local.

It is against this background that the use of IKEA goods for craft purposes seems ironically apt. Too often the term 'craft' designates the pre-industrial or non-modern 'local' as opposed to the contemporary moment. Craft often implies the pre-industrial and therefore is conceptually banished to the non-modern, peasant lifeways. It can signify loss, the loss of human skill in the face of

industrialization, but viewing craft only as nostalgia is to diminish its potential.⁶ From this perspective craft opposes everything that IKEA merchandise implies. IKEA purports to cater for modern life. It is ideally suited for small space living such as apartments and urban living that lack the roominess of rural locations. Range Strategist in IKEA, Lea Kumpulainen, describes IKEA wares as modernist, referring to post-war design trends in which clean lines, a bare minimal aesthetic and modern styles gained international acclaim. Scandinavian versions of this stripped-down aesthetic are often compared to IKEA design. But what is missing in this description is that the IKEA style derives from Swedish domestic



craft and home industry as much as from modernist international aesthetic. Key moments in the Swedish launch of modern architecture, design and interior planning in the early 20th century were also milestones in the launch of another craft aesthetic that tends to be written out of historical documentaries. When modernist and functionalist styles were launched in Stockholm, they did so alongside the established homecraft that was exhibited in often the same spaces as the modern aesthetic. Homecraft style blended with functionalist design resulted in a '... Swedish *mélange* in furniture, textiles, and glass wares that was to become the essential ingredient in the globally promoted IKEA style'.⁷ Occasionally this homecraft comes under direct focus in IKEA design strategies: wandering through the *Tilsammans* museum one can read that the launch of the Stockholm range in the 1980s was based on the 'quintessentially Swedish' tradition of simplicity with roots in the Swedish turn-of-the-century-style.

Craft as a phenomenon forms a neglected undercurrent to mainstream cultural practice. Craft has the potential to make, construct, create, and execute skill, which happens on a daily basis, but is rarely spectacular. Furthermore as material culture, craft objects constitute and hardwire social relationships. Things

lend solid form to a nexus of activities and series of plans: individual action congeals into something solid and collective. Gareth Kennedy's construction of the *IKEA Butter Churn for Gneeveguilla* highlights this potential. Out of the most ordinary and potentially homogenous of things comes the most exceptional of goods. Simultaneously the butter churn and firkin highlights the convergence between these seemingly oppositional objects. Kerry butter is also a global product. In the past it brought together village expertise and catapulted it onto the world stage in vast quantities. Kerry butter also defies neat distinctions between craft, mass production, regional skill and global distribution.

Kennedy's project thus recasts simple dichotomies, evoking both butter and churn as simultaneously past and present, local and global, individual and collective. Such goods form the groundwork for fresh interpretations of our lives right now. Finally craft can be seen as the materialisation of human effort, skill or imagination in any guise. Every time we assemble furniture or organise our home we are developing skills. Craft is required in assembling flat-pack, but precisely what is crafted from such material remains unscripted. One can construct a butter churn or a kitchen.

1. 1957 IKEA catalogue quoted in Eva Atle Bjarnestam, 2009 *IKEA: design och identitet*, Bokförlaget Arena, Sweden, p.31

2. *ibid*, p.30

3. A notable exception is Ursula Lindqvist, 2009, 'The Cultural Archive of the IKEA Store,' *Space and Culture*, 12: 43, Sage, pp. 43-62

4. Igor Kopytoff, 1986 'The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process', in A. Appadurai (ed) *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

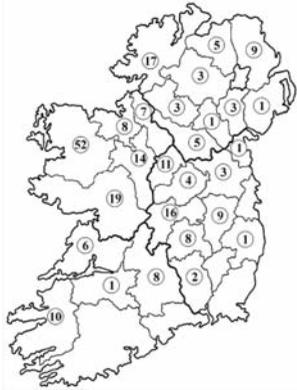
5. See Robert Foster, 2008 *Coca-Globalization: Following Soft Drinks from New York to New Guinea*, Palgrave/ St. Martin's Press, New York.

6. See Daniel Miller, 2011, 'The Power of Making', in *The Power of Making*, V&A, London.

7. Barbo Klein, 2000 'The moral content of tradition: homecraft, ethnology, and Swedish life in the twentieth century', in *Western Folklore*, vol. 59, no. 2. See p.183 of pp. 171-195.

Lore, Luck and the Economy of Butter

Peter Foynes



Number of bog butter finds in Ireland by county (1997)

Butter, butter making and dairy culture have been part of Irish society since time immemorial. Almost half the domestic animals that have been discovered in archaeological sites in Ireland from before the year 1100 are from cattle. The standard study on early Irish farming lists some thirty variations in Old Irish on the word “bó”, a cow. The roots of this unique relationship lie in the Irish climate, especially that of south and south-west Ireland. The Gulf Stream, running along the west coast of the island, makes for mild winters and soft summers and a grass growing season whose length is without parallel in the northern hemisphere. The cleric, Gerald of Wales, who visited Ireland in the twelfth century, wrote *“This is the most temperate of all countries... You will seldom see snow here, and then it lasts for only a short time... The grass is green in the fields in winter, just the same as in summer... The country enjoys the freshness and the mildness of spring almost all the year round.”*

George Berkeley, the philosopher and eighteenth century bishop of Cloyne wrote, this is the land where “the daisy never dies.”

Cows and dairying is a natural development of this grass culture. Within the dairy world, butter is the king, for, unlike milk, butter has the life enhancing property of keeping over a long period. Butter’s status is reflected in early Irish law, which specifies that a visiting lord, but only a visiting lord, must be given butter every day; butter can be added to

the porridge of high born children, but not to that of the children of commoners.

Travellers to Ireland invariably saw the Irish taste for butter as a distinct cultural identifier. One Englishman, writing in the early 1600s referred to the taste of the Irish for “whole lumps of filthy butter.” John Dunton, writing in 1698, describes how his hostess set to churning butter with her arms. “surely the heate which this labour put the good wife in must unavoidably have made some of the essence of arm pitts tricle down her arm into the churn..”

Not all colonisers saw Irish butter as an object of curiosity or horror. Many saw a business opportunity. Emerging markets in the Americas for European food combined with the introduction of new production and preservation methods to create a new economy. In this economy butter was no longer an item of direct consumption or gift exchange, but a commodity exchanged for money.

The city of Cork emerged in the course of the eighteenth century as the centre of the Atlantic butter trade and in the nineteenth century, the centre of the Irish butter trade. Its home was the Cork Butter Exchange, located in the Shandon area of the city.

The scale of the butter trade carried on from the Cork Butter Exchange still has the power to impress. In 1835 one third of all Irish butter exports, 9,000 tons, came from the Butter Exchange. By the 1870s the Exchange was exporting some 12,000 tons of butter, packed into more than 400,000 firkins.

An oblique sense of the scale of the trade can be seen in a letter the coopers wrote to the butter merchants in 1879. *“The stock of empty firkins required at the commencement of the season is generally from 60 to 70 thousands and the annual make passing through the crane about 210 or 220 thousand large casks and if the smaller firkins and kegs be adopted, which is very likely, there ought to be an increase of from 40 to 50 thousands.”*

At one time or another Cork branded butter was sold in North America, the West Indies, Brazil, Australia, New Zealand, Portugal and its colonies, France, the Netherlands, Germany and, of course, Britain. Cork butter was the first global food brand.

The Butter Exchange served a farming community of 70–80,000 thousand farmers, primarily in counties Cork, Limerick and Kerry. The trade cast its web widely. An extensive road network, the Butter Roads, linked hitherto remote areas to the hub in Cork City. Cash advances from butter dealers underpinned the rural economy. In 1880 one butter broker, Dominic Cronin, estimated that the trade had advanced £32,000 to farmers, roughly €3 million in today’s money.

Changing market conditions ended the reign of the Butter Exchange but Irish butter and dairying continues to thrive in the contemporary world, giving us some of the country’s largest enterprises and the one global Irish food brand, Kerrygold.

The reach of butter into Irish society and culture extends beyond the purely economic and culinary into more mystical areas.

An early Irish charm against the ill effects of a thorn, invokes Goibniu, the blacksmith to the Tuatha De Danann, (the mythical pre-Christian inhabitants of Ireland), states the charm must be "laid in butter...and [the butter] smeared all around the thorn..." In the west of Ireland lumps of butter were thrown into springs and lakes after which the cattle were then driven through the water to restore them to health. A county Galway story of the Cailleach Beare, the wise woman healer of Irish mythology, tells how a man is saved from certain death by, on the instruction of the Cailleach, asking his wife, to fetch two crocks of butter into which he places the soles of his feet in overnight. The butter then seeps into his skin and restores him to health.

The idea of the benevolent nurturing woman associated with butter is repeated in a Christian context in a Life of Saint Brigit, patroness of the island of Ireland, who is often represented with a cow and a large bowl. The Life tells of how the saint was pressed by the wife of a wizard to fill the wizard's hampers with butter when no butter was ready. Brigit was able to miraculously fill the hamper through the favour of the Lord "for God did not wish to deprive her of honour."

The benevolence of butter is also apparent in its use to propitiate the unseen forces, forces which were not always well disposed to human kind.

In County Antrim butter was among the foodstuffs offered to a "magical stone". The memory survived into the mid-twentieth century of butter being left by the graveside after a funeral. The origins of the practice of burying butter in bogs are not fully understood, but some believe that, at the very least, the practice had magical associations to placate the gods. Others suggest that it formed part of the mystical marriage of the king to the earth goddess. In this story the butter is a high value gift to the bride and takes its place among other high status goods associated with kingly inauguration. That many of the butter finds, such as the Iron Age finds at Graffa, Inchimacteige and Annaghbeg in County Kerry, were on boundaries supports the suggestion that bog butter has some connection with the ascent of a king to rule over a territory. This does not preclude other, more mundane, explanations for the phenomenon of bog butter, such as simple preservation or security from theft.

In more recent times, when the rich mystical associations of butter were less apparent, the value of butter was well understood in rural Ireland. It was, for many farmers' wives, the sole access to an income independent of her husband. The failure of a churn of cream to "break" was a serious matter. A vast body of lore survives dedicated to protecting the household's capacity to perform the mysterious act of turning the white liquid, cream, into the golden semi-solid, butter.

opposite: Butter casks from the National Museum of Ireland with dates of discovery. From top left running clockwise: Corragarrow, Longford, 1984; Tawnymucklagh, Sligo, 1986; Bellanagare, Roscommon, 1961; Enaghan, Offaly, 1960.



The household's capacity to churn butter was intimately connected with its "butter luck". As one butter maker put it, "Butter making is a chancy business..." and butter luck was needed to maximise the likelihood of a positive outcome. The butter luck had to be protected against baleful forces that might wish to steal it. Sometimes it was the fairies that were the perceived danger, but, more often than not, the threat came from the neighbour. In the lore of butter making, the neighbour was a source of threat and an object of suspicion. May Day, when, by tradition, the cows went on to common pasture, was the most dangerous time. Taking dew from the grass, water from the well, milk from the cows or fire from the house were all devices by which the butter luck could be stolen. Protective measures ranged from the esoteric, such as bleeding the cattle and then burning the blood, to the more direct method favoured by one Kerry farmer, recorded in 1947, which was to shoot anyone he saw on his land on May Day.

The process of churning itself had to be protected beyond May Day. The presence of salt, a horseshoe, a burning ember of coal or turf, the left hand of a dead man or a churn made from mountain ash were all ways to prevent malevolent interference with the churning. An unexpected visitor to the churning was a

matter of particular suspicion, perhaps not unreasonably as the churning time was not a normal time for visitors. The visitor would expect, and be expected to, take a brief hand in the process. This enforced participation reduced the possibility of the visitor stealing the butter luck. To be denied the opportunity of participation was a gross transgression of social norms; to refuse was proof positive of ill intent.

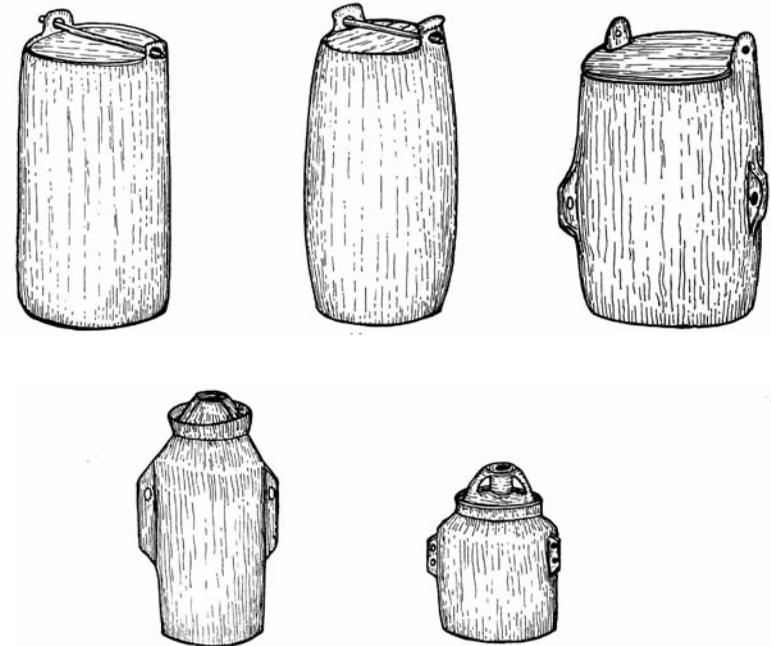
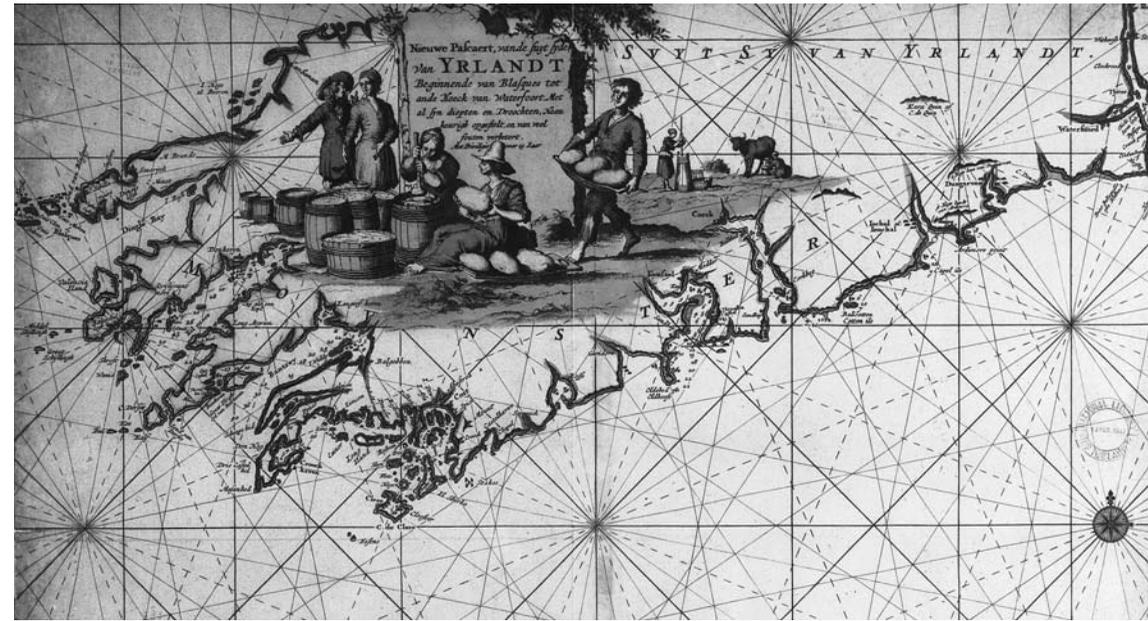
To modern eyes, these traditions may seem a quaint relic of a less enlightened age. But they articulate a fundamental fact, which societies forget, or ignore, at their peril. Food is important.



this page: Motif from J.P. Sheldon's *Dairy Farming*, early 20th century

opposite above: Cartouche from Van Keulenbeoch's navigation chart of c.1708 illustrating butter making in Munster

below: Typology of bog butter casks.



Gareth Kennedy

Kennedy's work addresses concerns regarding economies of being and of scale as well as orientation within the liquidity of contemporary experience. It attempts to localise and define in public contexts macro-economic and/or environmental concerns and anxieties. Throughout 2010-2011 he has been developing an ethnographical approach as an operational aesthetic within specific locales to generate 'folk fictions'. These works draw on the particular social, cultural and economic history of a people and a place to craft work that is a meaningful composite of these histories. This work is then enacted locally by and for that place to generate contemporary significance.

Kennedy has produced and shown work both nationally and internationally. His practice to date includes public art work, educational projects, exhibitions, residencies and collaborations. In 2009, he co-represented Ireland at the 53rd Venice Biennale.

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Pauline Garvey

Pauline Garvey is a lecturer in anthropology in the National University of Ireland Maynooth. Her theoretical interests are wide, but her research centres on material culture in contemporary settings. She conducted doctoral research on Norwegian homes and graduated from University College London with a PhD in Anthropology in 2002. More recently, her research has expanded to include an investigation of material heritage in Irish museums and design in a pan-European setting. She is currently writing up ethnographic research on IKEA consumption in Dublin and Stockholm. Forthcoming publications in 2012 include *Exhibit Ireland: Ethnographic Collections in Irish Museums*, co-edited with Seamas O'Siochian and Adam Drazin, Wordwell press.

Sunniva O'Flynn

Sunniva O'Flynn trained in the National Film and TV Archive in London and worked in the IFI Irish Film Archives for many years before moving to the position of IFI curator in 2008. As IFI Curator she is responsible for programming both archival material and new Irish film for audiences in the Irish Film Institute and further afield. Recent curatorial projects include *This Other Eden: Ireland and Film* at the National Gallery of Art in Washington; the co-curation with Gabriel Byrne of *Revisiting the Quiet Man: Ireland on Film* at Museum of Modern Art New York; and a series of programmes bringing archival films back to the Irish communities from whence they came, often with newly devised scores.

Peter Foynes

Peter Foynes has been the Director of the Cork Butter Museum since 2001. He is a history graduate of University College, Cork.

The Cork Butter Museum was established in 1997 to memorialise Ireland's dairy tradition and to offer visitors and natives alike an entrance to an understanding of this supremely rich heritage. With a history that extends back thousands of years, butter culture engages with the social, business and economic history of this island as well as its rich folklore. A particular focus is the nineteenth century Cork Butter Exchange, which created the world's first global food brand, Cork Butter. Text, image and artefact combine in the Cork Butter Museum to create an experience unique to this place.

Production credits/acknowledgements

Carpenter: Martin Ashe
Firkin maker: PJ Lowe
Metal Worker: Jason Kearns

Béan an Tí: Eileen Fleming
Seán Nós singers: Christie Cronin & Paddy Doyle
Accordian player: Micheal Dillane
Toyota Dyna driver: Timmy Brosnan
Bog Diggers: Tom Hogan & Timothy Daly
Museum Director: Peter Foynes

People in procession:

Eileen Fleming, Oliver Fleming, Martin Ashe, Martin Murphy, Ted O'Connor, Terence O'Connor, Karl Kennedy, Aeneas Seán O'Leary, Óisín O'Leary, Jack O'Leary, Martina O'Connor, Ambrose Donnelly, Charlie Cronin, Tim Looney, Emma Houlihan

Super 8 Camera: Gareth Kennedy & Sarah Browne
Stills photography: Sarah Browne, Karl Kennedy & Gareth Kennedy
Event Co-ordinator: Emma Houlihan

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Film score and musicians

Prologue: The Village
Polka: The Gneeveguilla Polka

Chapter 1:
Shopping
Polkas: Din Tarrant's, The Knocknaboul Polka

The Museum
Slow Air: Sweet Kingwilliamstown

Chapter 2:
The Workshop
Hornpipes: The Stack of Barley, Cronin's
Jigs: The Munster Jig, The Humours of Lisheen

Bog Dig
Slow Air: Turas go Tír na nÓg

Chapter 3: The Churning
Slides: Star Above the Garter, The Lisheen Slide
Solo (Michael Dillane)
Jigs: The Lark in the Morning, Munster Buttermilk

Chapter 4: The Procession
Polkas: The Siege of Ennis, The Rose Tree

Chapter 5: The Burial
Slow Air: Táimse im Choladh

Musicians
Flute & Tin Whistle – Joe O'Sullivan
Banjo – Ciarán O'Sullivan
Concertina – Niamh Dalton
Octave Mandolin & Mandolin – Damien Dalton
Accordion – Michael Dillane

Recorded by: Damien Dalton in Gneeveguilla,
Co. Kerry
Music Arrangements by: Joe O'Sullivan & Damien Dalton

Colophon

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Cover: IKEA at Kungas Kurva, Stockholm, Sweden; 1970s.

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