

POTATO LASER USER MANUAL



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Photo Alexa Phillips

The *Outside* Exhibition at Crossbones Cemetery

Potato Laser was a site specific work created for *Outside* and was part of a collection of sculptures, writings and performances held at Crossbones Cemetery. The site is located near London Bridge and is the resting place of 15,000 prostitutes and paupers from the Medieval period until the mid 1800's. The site hosts visitors with a lush garden, provides shaded areas with seating, and is maintained by volunteers. The site utilizes the arts as a way to improve awareness of the history of Crossbones and its importance to the contemporary sex worker community. Informed by field research, discussions, and through writings and publications, *Outside* presented contemporary issues around sex work to the public in a setting that was uniquely positioned as a memorial for prostitutes and social outcasts.

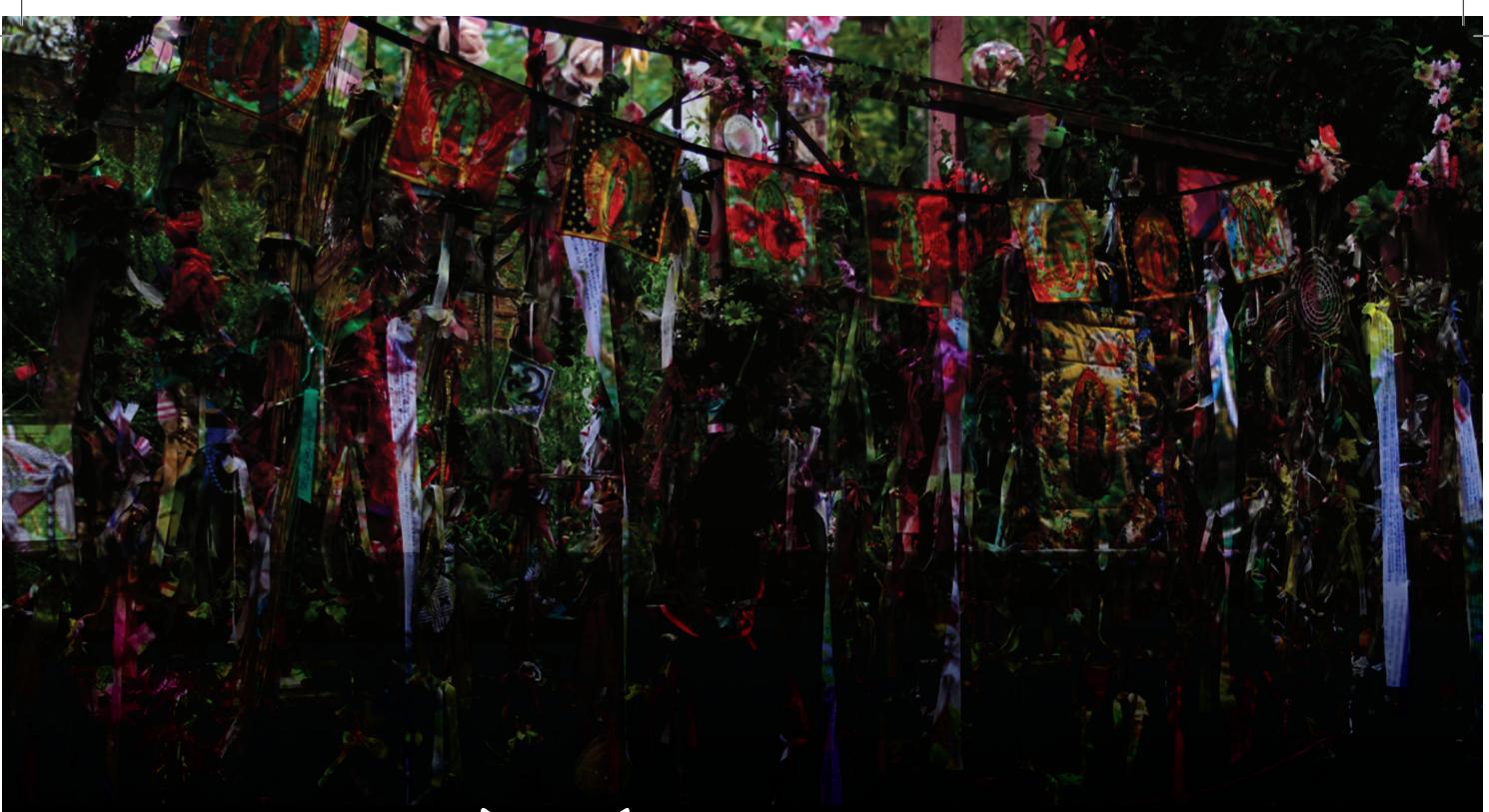
The grounds of the Crossbones Cemetery features a garden of flowers, ferns, walking paths, and ponds. The fence is decorated with personal items and ribbons left behind by visitors as offerings to the deceased. The entrance to the garden includes a shelter which is constructed of rough-cut timber with poetry carved in relief on the beams. Next to the shed where volunteers have their tea or coffee, a sculpture of the Bishop of Winchester spits when it rains. This detail is rooted in the history of Crossbones as he was responsible for providing licenses to prostitutes who came to be known as the Winchester Geese. This history is a striking example of Christian hypocrisy and this fact becomes more problematic considering that these women did not receive Christian burial rights despite paying money to the Bishop for their licenses.

Life as a prostitute or pauper during the time where the cemetery was being utilized was undoubtedly short, difficult and painful. Some of the recovered skeletons show that the median age for women during the time of death was around their mid to late teens. One such person died of advanced syphilis which was likely contracted during her adolescence. This is a fact which is both unsettling and a truth which would have been lost if it were not for historic interest in the site. The mass grave at Crossbones was lost to obscurity until the mid 90s where skeletons were discovered during the construction of the Jubilee line. The threat of being erased is once again reflected in the current issue of not being able to secure a long term lease from Transport For London.

Through utilization of a laser I wanted to draw a line between the unequal distributions of security and power that I see between Crossbones and the Shard. The site must be preserved for no other reason than to maintain the only memorial dedicated to deceased prostitutes. The sex worker that I had a conversation with said that she wished to be buried at Crossbones and I felt that this was a wish worth protecting. *Potato Laser* provides a form of green political resistance against the unchecked development that the Shard represents. My objective was to instigate a conversation around the unfair distribution of security, power, and privilege by staging a laser attack on the Shard from a stronghold for London's social outcasts and sex workers.

With the potato being a metaphor for a body below the surface of the soil, gardening became the foundation for establishing a living source of electrical current. This came from the idea that the Crossbones dead were the source of the site's power and importance. With the electricity created from the combined elements, I used a laser pointer to draw a line from Crossbones toward the Shard. With this line, the most secure building was under attack from a position within one of the most vulnerable sites in London. This is obviously a reversal of the threat that developers usually pose to Crossbones and other sites around the city.

I created *Potato Laser* to give agency to non-human actors. The light is a translation of electrical energy and an expression emitted by something commonly thought of as being docile. Even though this sculpture has the look of a school science project, the work involves a transference in power from one place to another which represents a redistribution of power socially. I invite the public to complete the connection by pressing the button which activates the laser. Before firing the laser, think of what other targets there are for green resistance. Choose your target, take aim and fire.



OUTSIDE

Exhibition & publication launch at Crossbones Garden

Crossbones Garden marks the site in south London where 15,000 people were buried between the 12th century and 1857. Many of them were sex workers, who were denied consecrated burial despite sex work being licensed by the Bishop of Winchester. Outside connects the Crossbones' history to issues facing contemporary sex worker communities. Six newly commissioned sculptures will be installed throughout the garden, each produced by an artist in response to a one-hour conversation with a sex worker.

Avril Corroon, Richard Ensor, Kate Howard, Alexa Phillips, Aron Rossman-Kiss, Joseph Steele, Dr. Laura Agustín, Manon Aquilina, KLW, Laura Ní Fhláibhín, Cora, John Muse, Linda Stupart and Aubree Penney.

Opening Event (with publication launch)

23rd May from 4:30-6:45pm, immediately followed by Crossbones' monthly vigil for the outcast dead.

Performance by Linda Stupart

28th May at 2pm

Open 12-5pm 24th May-28th May & 30th May-2nd June

Crossbones Garden
Union Street, London SE1 1SD



A path toward political resistance

In 2018 I staged an attack on the Shard with a laser weapon which was powered by potatoes. Members of the nightshade family are normally less effective than conventional power sources but powerful enough to permanently tarnish the perfect luster of London's monolith to the one percent. The newspapers did not report the Shard's defeat against a weapon with such a benign power source but the evidence can be found in the small etching on the window of a £50m penthouse apartment located towards the apex of the building. Still on the market since its construction, the blemish would certainly make this apartment slightly more difficult to sell but would be considered minor enough not to warrant a replacement of the glass. At less than 2mm, the etching looks like a flaw in the production of the window overlooked by the manufacturer's quality control. This etch in the surface may even be viewed as a slightly annoying spot that the cleaners have overlooked. If it were discovered that I was responsible for the damage, they might threaten to take me to court if I did not pay for the repairs. If pursued, I would decline to do anything about the defect and deny that a potato powered laser could ever pose a threat to the Shard in all its phallic intensity.

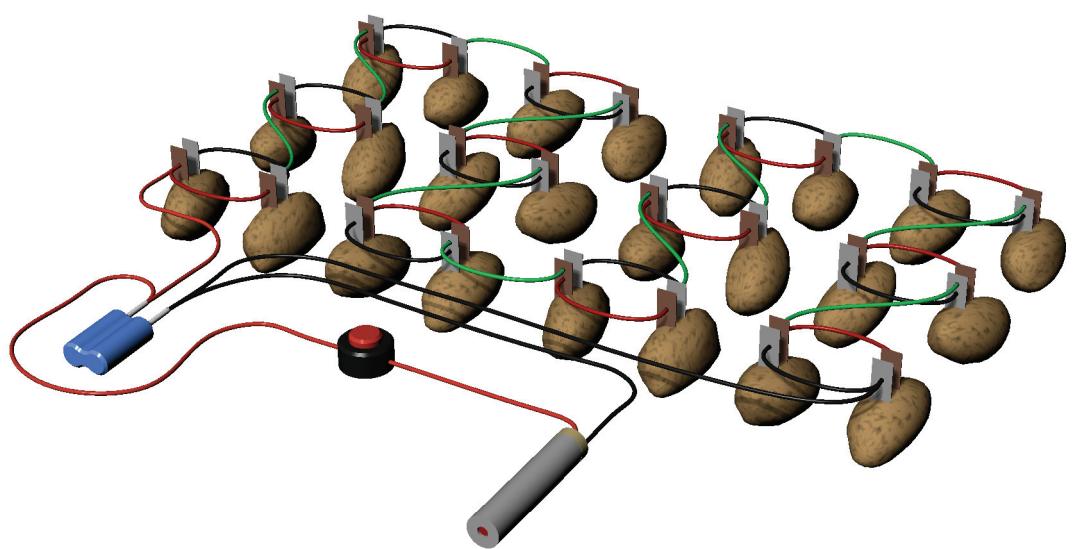
I would be labeled a terrorist, thrown in prison for a life sentence, or at the very least be deported and never allowed back into the United Kingdom if it weren't for the vulnerability of their pride. Who would admit to being defeated by the American Bond-villain-wannabe who weaponized the unstoppable power of potato electricity? I'll admit that I can understand why some may think of the potato as being harmless considering all the creative ways it can be prepared as food. Although the thickened portions of the rhizomes and stems of the plant is edible, the upper portions have been known to produce a deadly poison. This fact of the potato's biology shows its potential as a weapon for green resistance even without the need for it to produce electricity. Surely a mastermind capable of bringing the Shard to its knees and simultaneously preventing the possibility of encroachment by developers on the Crossbones site could not possibly lose the court case made against him. To their embarrassment they have been beaten by a small potato patch in a memorial garden tended to by pensioners and art students seeking their participation awards.

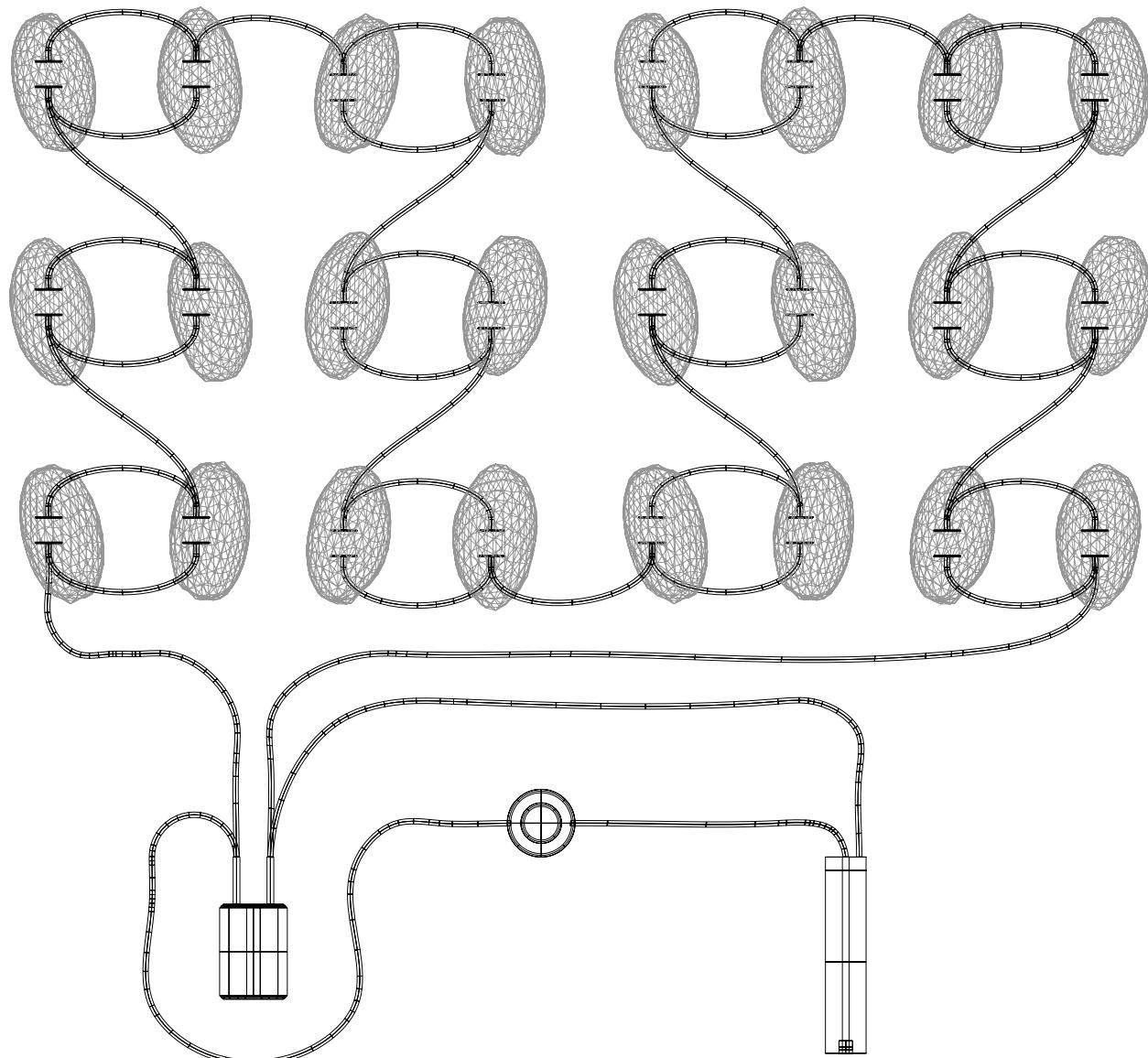
What you see exhibited is the initial prototype for the technology which I developed in the United Kingdom and was able to smuggle back to the United States. This was not without complications but was certainly easier than transporting the actual laser weapon on the plane. The final version which I used to attack the Shard during the *Outside* exhibition at Crossbones Cemetery was only fired once and was later buried in a secret location in London. The mission was to only etch a single point on the surface of the Shard to agitate, annoy, and slightly inconvenience the owners of the apartment rather than to establish a sustained assault on the same target.

I realized that this technology could provide political resistance elsewhere so I preserved the plans and the prototype so that they could be deployed in future exhibitions. After some explanation, the Transportation Safety Administration allowed me to keep the prototype in my checked luggage because they mistook it as a designer grill. I now imagine that they must have thought that laser seared bell peppers must be a favorite amongst hipster tailgaters.

This sweeping victory has given the resistance a stronger foothold and provides an avenue for future activism. As my prototype and schematics demonstrate, the technology can provide a green power source for everything from a smoke detector to a high powered laser weapon. Experiments with recharging conventional batteries are underway and can eventually be used in other tools for political resistance. The technology presented is scalable with the voltage and current increasing with every additional potato. Take a look at the schematic for yourself but do not take its simplicity as a limitation of its possibility as a tool for resistance. Take aim and fire!

Schematics





Capacitor

Momentary Switch

Laser

