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**WELTERNÄHRUNG**

**Die Samenbank Gottes**

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The name of the artist from Texas tells of an old drama that has a lot to do with her work today. Dornith Doherty, that sounds Irish. Their ancestors emigrated like millions of others westwards, after a mushroom spoiled the potato harvest in Europe in the middle of the 19th century. The following famines hit Ireland most heavily. About twelve percent of the population died. The fact that a part of the Irish peasants, often under the pressure of the English gentlemen, cultivated only one type of potatoes, exacerbated the situation. The diversity of nature and agriculture would have reduced the catastrophe. Today, we know that the wealth of seeds is our opportunity to provide sufficient food to the growing world population even under severe conditions due to climate change, Environmental destruction and bioterrorism. That is why more than 1400 seed banks around the world keep the seeds of innumerable useful and wild plants, some in cardboard boxes, others in liquid nitrogen.

Doherty, a professor at the College of Visual Arts and Design at the University of North Texas, discovered the topic when the Svalbard Global Seed Vault started its work, the world-wide seed vault on Norway's island group Spitzbergen in the North Atlantic. The photographer began her "Project Eden". Meanwhile she has taken pictures in more than 20 institutes. Some photos are rather documentary, others are alienated, for example by collages of plants and seeds.

Art and science complement each other in their project. If you like the aesthetics of the pictures printed here, you might like Doherty's illustrated book published by Schilt Publishing. With the motto "Limits to Growth" (between June 22 and July 16), Fotofestival Dortmund is also showing works by Doherty.

The photographer, however, is not tired of pointing to the explosiveness of her motifs. At any time, a disease could break through important food plants. Current example: Starting from Central America, a mushroom threatens the prevailing Bananensorte Cavendish. Climate change threatens harvests in many places.

Environmental conditions have already played a role in Irish potato rot. It can partly be traced back to the eruption of the Indonesian volcano Tambora in 1816. The summer was still over, rainy weather created good conditions for the mushroom.

Last but not least, security experts are concerned with the novel bioterrorism. Summoning ailing pathogens could be more difficult and less efficient for assassins than destroying the food base of hundreds of thousands of people through a cleverly placed microorganism.

Because of such terror scenarios, millions of investments are necessary, Doherty urges. It needs more safes like in Spitzbergen. At minus 18 degrees Celsius, well over 1000 kilometers from the North Pole, there are among others 70 000 rice and 15 000 bean varieties. The funding was provided by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, UNO organizations and the EU. Asylum was offered by the Tresor some samples from Aleppo destroyed by the civil war - until the Syrian researchers found a new location in Beirut.

Doherty was allowed to enter the gallery with her camera on one of the three days of the year when new samples were accepted. In one room, she photographed a dozen straight-ahead crates from the USA. From Germany's plant nursery center in Gatersleben (Saxony-Anhalt), some 42,000 varieties are likely to originate in Spitzbergen. Doherty also saw a delivery from the Central African Uganda, no more than a parallelepipedal container with perhaps 40 centimeters of edge length. "I could hardly believe that so little came from one of the countries with the world's highest biodiversity."

The Tresor in Spitzbergen is a pure camp, in the coming years it is to become a kind of global Ark Noah. In many other seed banks is also researched. The USA and China are also trying to outdo each other in this respect. Germany is working with the methods of biotechnology on improved, more productive breeds.

The fact that there are seed banks at all, the artist Doherty agrees pessimistically and optimistically. They exist to save humanity from famines in the future. However, they also reveal the enormous diversity of natural resources that we, according to experts, know only to a fraction.

The world-wide network of seed banks is the modern Noah's ark of crops

*"I am impressed by the ability of these tiny plantlets and seeds - some of them hardly larger than sand grains - to produce so much life." Dornith Doherty*