

# *I am What I am*



Ballina Arts Centre  
Barrett St,  
Ballina, Co. Mayo  
5<sup>th</sup> June - 31<sup>st</sup> July 2021  
[ballinaartscentre.com](http://ballinaartscentre.com)

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What does it mean to be queer in Ireland in 2021? *I Am What I Am* is an inclusive celebration of the LGBTQ+ community and the arts. The title hails from the song finale in the 1983 Broadway musical *La Cage aux Folles* written and composed by queer writer Jerry Herman. The song was covered by Gloria Gaynor that same year and has been an empowerment anthem for the LGBTQ+ community ever since. Community is at the nexus of the programme as a point of arrival into the process of bringing together this exhibition. Here we have a wide variety of potent cultural exchanges; from Sara R. Phillips' educational talk on the Irish Trans Archive to Bassam Al- Sabah's video art piece *Dissolving Beyond The Worm Moon*. The curatorial process was to engage, understand and listen to the vast array of cultural practitioners and members of the community involved in the programme. It provided the opportunity to talk to them about their historical relationships with one another, the state and indeed their own relationship with art and to bring them all together with a sense of unity. To celebrate and enrich the lives of one another through the creative process of making and experiencing art. We stand at a curious intersection in Irish society where a lack of queer - inclusive education within our school and institutional systems, means that engagements and discourse around sexuality, identity and gender happen through different means and what encounter can be more visceral in understanding these topics than art. All events and the exhibition itself is free to the public and there is something for everyone. Mayo based artists and the local LGBTQ+ community (such as OutWest) are brought together with institutional bodies such as the National Museum of Ireland, emerging artists such as Cami and cultural figureheads such as Séan Kissane to intersect and reveal a complex tissue of what it means to be queer in Ireland in 2021. The value in the programme is that each piece of work, each engagement has its own unique point of view and all undercut the sense of agency there is to be had in real representation. I hope you find your encounter with beauty within the exhibition and that a lexicon of shared understanding, a risk and a trust can be found and overall a genuine human connection to unite us at our core. It is my profound honour and privilege to have curated *I Am What I Am* for the Mayo County Council Arts Service / Creative Ireland Cultural Diversity Curatorial Award and to design a stronghold in the form of resistance against adversity in an ever evolving / dissolving world.

## ***I Am What I Am* curator - Sinéad Keogh**

The exhibition runs from June 5th until July 31st 2021. A complementary programme of events will also take place. Full details of this programme will be available on [www.ballinartscentre.com](http://www.ballinartscentre.com).

Thank you to Breda Mayock, Edith Geraghty, Damien O' Connor, Laura Foye, Rosaleen Lally, Anne Ronayne, Katarzyna Kamieniecka, Colette O'Flaherty, Rosa Meehan, James Harte, Judith Finlay, GalleryX, Sara R. Phillips, Brenda Malone, Róisín Murphy and all of the artists and creative practitioners involved in the programme.

A special thank you to Katriona Gillespie from Mayo County Council Arts Service, Sean Walsh the Director of Ballina Arts Centre, and Austin Vaughan Creative Ireland Coordinator, Mayo County Council. Without your kindness, openness and support this exhibition would not have been possible and I am very grateful.

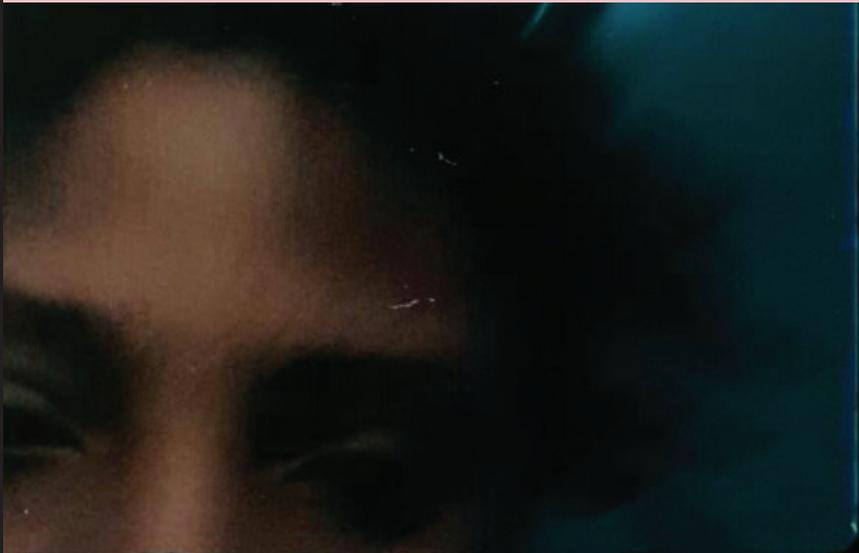


## Poster Commission

### Shota Kotake

I am very pleased to present this poster for *I Am What I Am* by the wonderful artist Shota Kotake. Born in Niigata, Japan, Kotake has been working and living in Dublin since 2004. He holds a BA in Fine Art from NCAD (2012). Inspired by Alphonse Mucha in style, this work has many fine symbolic details. The Mayo County colours are present in the work to show pride for Ballina. The Hydra, a fresh-water organism that reproduces by itself and defies any visible aging process (and a representation of queerness) emerges from the pillars flanking the main figure. The main figure boldly announces themselves in the middle of the work as the title of the exhibition programme beams overhead. I am very grateful to Shota Kotake for this act of allyship and we are selling copies of this poster in Ballina Arts Centre with all profits going to local LGBTQ+ organisation OutWest.

[shotakotake.com](http://shotakotake.com)



## Cross X Generation Commission

### Cami

The first part of our Cross X Generation Commission - *CHI*, a song commission by emerging rap artist Cami. A sound installation has been designed for this work, with *CHI* printed on vinyl for the audience to feel the full impact of this outstanding piece.

*"This song explores being inside out or "coming out". This bright yellow feeling burning a hole into me so many feelings to spend. If I ignore it i will lose my mind. If i don't ignore it i'll loose my roots not just the ppl the ceremonial rites, the land, my Nigerianess? Still \*Chi ya ekwe ("If a person agrees to a thing, his spirit agrees also") I agree.*

*Containing myself, carrying myself waiting for something to give, now I'm overwhelmed by an urgent sense of benevolent. To be inside out is to be a buttercup in the ocean a yellow speck in an unknwn blue vastness stretching to becomes part of the sky.*

*The waves won't always be this languid, It won't always feel like summer & the darkness is still scary, right now i'm sitting beside you telling you how " I never grasped the connectivity of stars, the dots don't connect for me....."*

Chi-Chi is the personal spirit of a person (ímmúọ) in Igbo culture

Cami is an Nigerian Irish lesbian rapper based in Dublin who has slowly and steadily crafted a comfortable and versatile style of rap through working on experimental/complex beats.

Instagram @cvmimusica  
Soundcloud @cvmimusica  
Twitter @chyzzyy



*Work in Progress* for a site-specific sculptural installation made for Ballina Arts Centre in response to curator Sinéad Keogh's *I Am What I Am*.

## Cross X Generation Commission

### Louise Walsh

The the second part of our Cross X Generation Commissions – *Fruit (and multiply)* by established visual artist Louise Walsh. A site responsive sculptural installation has been made in response to Ballina Arts Centre and the themes of the exhibition.

Born in Co Cork. Louise Walsh is a visual artist who lives on the Meath/Cavan border and lecturers at the National College of Art and Design, Dublin. Evolved through feminist and queer concerns, Walsh's site-specific sculptural interventions explore dynamics of self-determination and regeneration. Recent work includes 2019-2020, 'Hydra Inlaw,' Elliptical Affinities: Irish women artists and the politics of the body 1984 to the present. In Highlanes Gallery Drogheda and Limerick City Gallery of Art.

*To Fruit (and multiply)*

*'Fruit!' shouted after me in the streets of Belfast in the 1980s, meant to insult, to warn that I was recognised and it would get me in trouble. 'Well spotted!' I would call back, moving fast, knowing such tactics of resistance might indeed get me bate. Being spotted as a dyke, noticeably queer in this otherness was my calling, my identity, my pride.*

*I delighted in my active fruit-full-ness, and I was terrified.*

*Defying gender norms and the wanton wasting of our fertile bodies in unsanctified sexuality was deemed criminal and desolate. Not performing as a good breeder was judged to be a terrible waste of a perfectly functional reproductive system.*

Fruit /fru:t/ noun

The sweet fleshy or dry ripened ovary of a flowering plant, enclosing the seed or seeds, can be eaten as food.

In these many flowering versions of gender we continue to multiply, ovoided in parentheses, going forth beyond them/their brackets.

Us with our adult sexual organs, and us doing each other with consent, out beyond with all our pleasures and our ambiguous corporeality, our many marginal eXe's and Y's lining up for our organs within or without our bodies.

## John O'Brien

A special commission of - *Precious Rainbow*, a poem written for this exhibition by poet and ally John O'Brien has been prepared for this exhibition.

*"I always like and got on well with people as my job entailed*

*understanding others with no judgement towards them. A mantra that I still live by today. A very good friend of mine died in his early twenties as he didn't know how to ask for help and those he left behind are the ones who now have to suffer."*

John is a writer and poet based in Wicklow and a member of *The Greystones Scribblers* and *The Hardliners Writing Collective*.



*Esther in Porto Alegre, Brazil (2019).*  
Photographer: Egidio Pandoldo.

## Esther Raquel Minsky

A special commission by Esther Raquel Minsky / Oscar Esterson and Denis Kehoe - writer and performer. Esther has prepared a site specific performance commissioned work in response to Ballina Arts Centre's location beside a canal and rushing water.

*Water; always present in the life of Oscar, of Esther. Lakes, rivers, seas and oceans. Always crossing, always searching, forever trying to put it all together; like stitches in fabric, like time, like the stories we tell ourselves of who we might have been, of who we might still become.*

Instagram @estherraquelminsky



## Mayo Travellers Support Group (MTSG)

We are proud to present a special commission from the Mayo Travellers Support Group. Paper craft flowers - a traditional craft of the Traveller people have been made especially for this exhibition by Margaret Sweeny, Donna Muldoon, Lena Collins, Rosie Maughan and Winnie Maughan. The flowers are made in the colours of the pride flag and is a symbolic crossover between the Traveller peoples traditions and allyship with the LGBTQ+ community.

Additionally, a traditional Traveller pocket and a baby blanket have been made to represent the community.

Special thanks to Laura Foye for her support of this collaboration.

## Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA)



*I Am What I Am* is proud to partner with the Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA) on two tours for the local community who are wheelchair users. There will be a special online tour and a live tour followed by response workshop. Both tours are now fully booked with local service users. We are greatly looking forward to talking with the groups and learning about their perspectives and the outcomes in the response workshop. Special thanks to Rosaleen Lally for her support of this collaboration.

[iwa.ie](http://iwa.ie)

## National Council for the Blind (NCBI)



*I Am What I Am* is proud to partner with the National Council for the Blind of Ireland on a special tactile tour and response workshop. A tactile tour is a special tour designed for the community who have visual impairments or who are blind using non-visual sensory elements. *I Am What I Am* curator Sinéad Keogh has been working at the NCBI rehabilitation centre in Dublin as the Creative Coordinator for the past eight years and will be releasing a special audio tour online at [ballinaartscentre.com](http://ballinaartscentre.com). This tour will be in conjunction with the programmes live event creatives, lecturers and artists. We are also greatly looking forward to talking with the group, learning from them about their perspectives and the outcomes in the response workshop.

[ncbi.ie](http://ncbi.ie)

## OutWest



We are very proud to work with local LGBTQ+ organisation OutWest on several access routes to the exhibition and collaborations. There will be a poster in the entrance to the Ballina Arts Centre to inform the public about OutWest's new drop in centre space, designed especially for the exhibition. There will be a special tour for OutWest's members, friends and family. There will also be an event called Community Storytelling: Hope & Resilience x OutWest, whereby members of the public can share their stories on hope and resilience of their own lives and of LGBTQ+ friends and family. Additionally our poster for the exhibition designed by Shota Kotake, will have special edition limited prints for sale with all proceeds going to support OutWest's work. OutWest are also involved in the tour of the National Library of Ireland Film.

Special thanks to Anne Ronayne for her poster concept, Rosa Meehan for her suggestion of a sharing talk and Róisín Murphy from OutWest.

[outwest.ie](http://outwest.ie)

## National Museum of Ireland (NMI) - The LGBTI+ Living Archives Project



*I Am What I Am* is proud to partner with the National Museum of Ireland to document and share a documentary film on The LGBTI+ Living Archives Project which will be released on [ballinaartscentre.com](http://ballinaartscentre.com) on Monday June 14th. The LGBTI+ Living Archives Project is a collection of artifacts and materials from recent history of cultural significance which includes the dress Mayo born Panti Bliss wore for her *Noble Call* speech.

Special thanks to Judith Finlay, Rosa Meehan and Brenda Malone.

[museum.ie](http://museum.ie)

## National Library of Ireland Irish Queer Archive



*I Am What I Am* is very pleased to partner with the National Library of Ireland to present eleven educational posters documenting key moments in Ireland's queer history with images curated from The Irish Queer Archive. Each poster is in a colour from the new 2018 pride flag. Additionally, a special print of a promotional poster from the Gays Against The Amendment (GAA) 1983, has been kindly provided by the library and will be included in the exhibition space.

Special thanks to Katarzyna Kamieniecka, Colette O'Flaherty and James Harte.

[nli.ie](http://nli.ie)



## Queer Culture Ireland (QCI)

*I Am What I Am* is honoured to present a beautiful and moving collaboration in the presentation of one of the AIDS Memorial Quilts from QCI'S archives.

In December 2020, Winter Pride Dublin collaborated with Queer Culture Ireland to exhibit fifteen AIDS Memorial Quilts in an exhibition called *The Quilt: Echoes & Memory* at Filmbase in Temple Bar.

On the July 11th 1990, the first panel of the Irish AIDS Quilt was officially displayed at the Dublin AIDS Action Alliance office in Parnell Street. This panel was dedicated to Joe Carthy who had died from AIDS on January 17th of that year. During the 35th Cork Film Festival, the Irish AIDS Quilt featuring Joe Carthy's panel was displayed in October and on January 13th 1991, the *Irish AIDS Quilt Tour* was officially launched at the Mansion House in Dublin. The Irish AIDS Quilts travelled from Dublin to Cork, Limerick, Derry, Galway, before finishing up in Belfast between January 13th to February 12th 1991. There was fifteen quilts displayed in the tour to garner an awareness of the AIDS epidemic, the people who are affected by AIDS and to raise money for awareness campaigns. Each panel of the fifteen quilts has eight panels and each of those panels is dedicated to a loved one who has passed away from AIDS. Two of these panels were for Irish people and the others comprised of people from England and the USA. The names of each person was read at the opening and closing of each ceremony. We will be reading the names of the persons on the quilt we will exhibit with QCI at a special event.

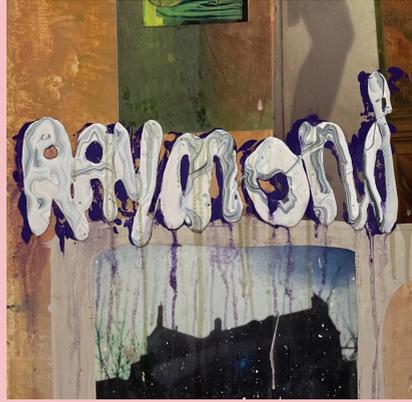
Facebook @QueerCultureIreland

## Austin Hearne

*Raymond* (2021), paint, ink-jet prints, yacht varnish on canvas.

Thwarted love letters in paint and paper to an arch homophobe, the oh so glamorous Cardinal. A purveyor of the finest satins, silks and robes. A joke figure in and out of the Vatican, a malignant being who provides untold opportunities for work making and laugh out louds.

[bishopaustinhearne.com](http://bishopaustinhearne.com)



## Bassam Al-Sabah

*Dissolving Beyond The Worm Moon* (2019) CGI Film

This film was produced in relation to war, unrealized childhood fantasies and representation within globalized media. The film imagines the traumatised body as a functioning time machine where gaps between timelines and anomalies cause the present-day body to disappear and is replaced by the body's memory of past trauma.

[bassamalsabah.com](http://bassamalsabah.com)

## Bernie Masterson

*Three Generations of Queers* (2021) Digital HD film  
Available on on [ballinaartscentre.com](http://ballinaartscentre.com)

This work investigates the complex nature of identity through three short documentaries told by Gray, Patricia and Ezra. The philosopher Michel Foucault describes this process as an ethics of the self: a praxis of becoming. This film work explores that process.

Instagram @bernie\_masterson



*Three Generations of Queers*



## Breda Burns

*Where Am I....* (2018) Digital HD film

*Where Am I...* a 3-minute video work. A performance piece in which I filmed myself with the style and energy I approach painting. It is a very personal piece with a layered depth of concept. As with much of my work it's underlining theme is identity and the human condition.

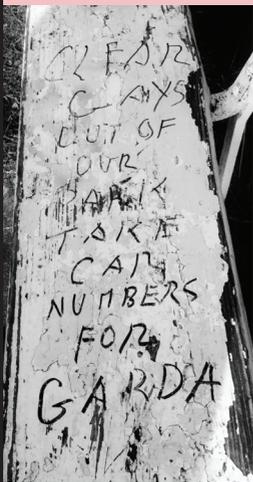
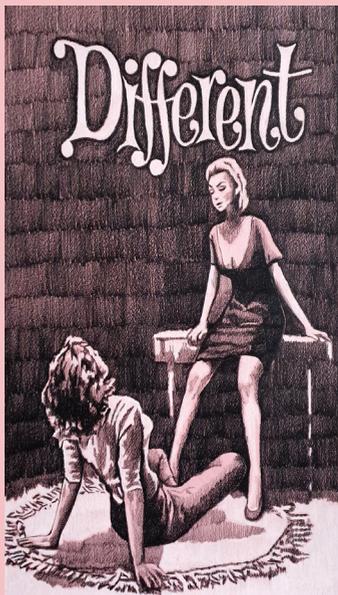
[bredaburns.com](http://bredaburns.com)

## Breda Lynch

*Different* (2020) colouring pencil on tinted paper

The drawing, *Different*, is part of a larger series of 30 similarly themed drawings from the Pulp Fiction series. The artist examines the representation of otherness by directly appropriating these queer identities as presented through the retro genre of lesbian under-the-counter fiction. Re-appropriating and re-claiming the low-brow writing and not so subtle innuendo within the found imagery, the artist takes the opportunity to 'detour' and present humorous subversion in the form of the drawings.

[bredalynch.wordpress.com](http://bredalynch.wordpress.com)



## Conor O' Grady

*Phoenix Park Palare (Bench 2)*(2015) photographic triptych

*Phoenix Park Palare* is a series of three grainy, gritty images of a park bench at Dublin's Phoenix Park, (an area synonymous with homophobic attacks) taken over a six-year period in conjunction with a socially engaged project. Each time the bench was photographed it was painted white by the OPW or vandalised with homophobic graffiti.

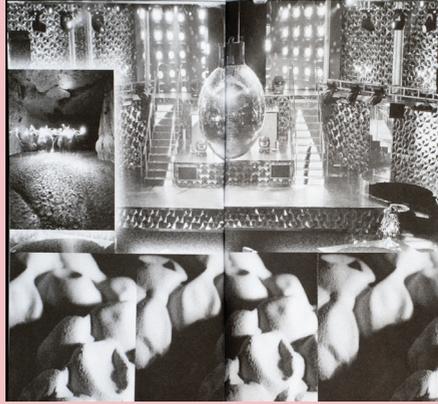
## Emma Wolf-Haugh

*Zines & other ephemera* (2013-2020) selection of zines and other printed matter from various projects

Emma Wolf-Haugh has been working with zines and other ephemera as an integral part of their work since 2010. These self published materials are generally free to take away from exhibitions and constitute Emma's continuing practice of 'Wild Archiving' sharing key components from long term research projects with diverse publics.

There is a limited edition of 100 copies of *Reading Troupe #13 - domestic decadence* available at the front desk of Ballina Arts Centre for the audience to take home.

[emmahaugh.com](http://emmahaugh.com)



## Garreth Carroll

*Primordial Image* (2021)  
alcohol marker, acrylic,  
granite on white paper  
board

*Primordial Image* is a reflection on sexuality and the self-conscious. The artist used the form to illustrate personal inflictions as a result of coming out. Crunched up with tension and posed, the artist allows the viewer to witness their inner turmoil as they 'grin and bear it'.

## Isabella Oberlander

Alienation, otherness and sweaty dancing.

*Glisten* is an inquiry into what is already felt but not yet visible. A performative exploration striving to excavate how experiences, reality and imagination of otherness manifest in the physical. Embracing provocations of the Xenofeminist manifesto, it offers an invitation to imagine a realm for multitude - a speculative future.

Instagram @oberlanderisabella





## Kevin Gaffney

*Expulsion* (2020) HD Video

Set in a fictional Queer State, *Expulsion* navigates through queer history, from the witchcraft trials and the inquisition, to current debates about the co-opting of queerness by capitalism. Featuring archival footage of Joan Jett Blakk, a drag queen who ran for president in the USA in 1992.

[kevin-gaffney.com](http://kevin-gaffney.com)

## Kieran Gallagher

*Fort 54.779356 - 8.346866* (2016)  
woven photographic paper

*Fort 54.779356 - 8.346866* is part of an ongoing series of paper sculptures which examine forts as a place of play and protection. This work investigates the phenomenon of forest bathing or Shinrin-Yoku. By exploring our connection with forests as a space to reflect and connect with nature under a canopy of trees.

Facebook @kierangallagherartist



## Luke Faulkner

*I'm Addicted To You, Don't You Know That You're Toxic* (2018)  
video Installation

*Toxic* is a video installation which explores the idea of masculinity in queer men attracted to men - how it can be something they are really drawn to in terms of gender expression / attraction but also how it can also be an oppressing and often damaging presence for them.

[puregrand.org](http://puregrand.org)

## Michael O'Boyle

*Kaleidoscope* (2021), *Thorax* (2018), *Hoba* (2020), *Imbolc* (2019), *Zuba* (2017), and *Chromax* (2019), oil on canvas

Microscopy and Scientific illustrations are the primary source for my work with the aim to make the non visible that surrounds us, visible. My 6 paintings are from an ongoing series called TRIBE that reference genetics, identity, sex, life cycles and environments in a colour conversation to create portraits of the invisible.

Instagram @elat5000



## Phelim Webb

*Evolution* (2020) lino print on paper

Evolution is an exploration of my masculinity as a Queer man. Coming out as queer has made me feel free like nature, growing everyday. I always feared letting my feminine side show, but now I have bloomed into a person that no longer fears my true self and I show it with pride.

Instagram @phelimwebbartist

## Pradeep Mahadeshwar

*Untitled* (2020) digital drawing

The life of an immigrant gay person of colour during the lockdown is full of anxiety. A loss of physical and emotional intimacy is devastating - this piece of work I created on a sleepless night during spring 2020, in the memory of a beautiful man once I admire.

Instagram @queermyths





## Roberta Murray

*Bog Cottage, Panel 1 (2021)* tufted wall hanging

Bog Cottage is a place of lore. A meeting space for rural queers, a mythological gathering that materialises on the most liminal nights. Bog cottage is a created space, born from necessity. These works serve as artifacts - textile pieces that catalogue the untold histories of queer intimacy in Ireland.

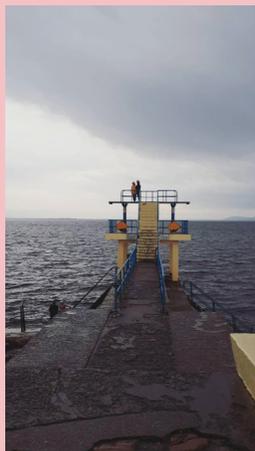
[bogcottage.com](http://bogcottage.com)

## Thomas Brawn

*Pensée (2021)* living flower and readymade installation

I loved watching my Mother transforming our family butcher shop with linen, flowers and statues for the annual Corpus Christi procession. Her actions revealed how conditions can be altered and people's perceptions changed. Juxtaposing the exotic and commonplace I too strive to create these 'other' spaces of change and reflection.

[tombrawn.com](http://tombrawn.com)



## William Keohane

William Keohane is a writer from Limerick, currently completing an MA in Creative Writing. As a transgender man, William's writing reflects on the concrete and abstract facets of gender transition, told through the metaphor of water. His collection *Saltwater* is based around seaside locations in Ireland.

Instagram @william.keohane

## Jenny Duffy

Online lecture on *Art and Activism: Louise Walsh*  
Saturday July 3rd from 2 - 3 pm

Louise Walsh's art is both personal and political. Her artworks engage with queer identities, and make strong statements. Looking at early explorations of female relationships, the evolving form of 'In-Laws, Out-Laws' and her new work, this talk will engage with Walsh as an artist and activist who continues to challenge audiences.

[thebookstheartandme.wordpress.com](http://thebookstheartandme.wordpress.com)



## Judith Finlay (NMI) (QCI)

Lecture on Judith's work at the National Museum's first LGBTI+ exhibition and Queer Culture Ireland  
Saturday July 3rd 12 - 1 pm

In 2019, Judith led the National Museums first LGBTI+ exhibition, *Rainbow Revolution* and co-founded Queer Culture Ireland (QCI) with Kate Drinane, a support network for anyone interested in Irish Queer Culture. In 2020 QCI launched *The Quilt: Echoes & Memories*, all forming part of her PhD exploring *The Healing Museum*.

Instagram Judith Finlay @womblelurve /  
Queer Culture Ireland @queercultureireland

QCI logo by Colm Molloy (2019)

## Sean Kissane (IMMA)

Sean Kissane's online lecture on *Queer Histories*  
Saturday June 19th 12pm - 1 pm

Seán Kissane is Curator of Exhibitions at the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA), Dublin. He describes his practice as 'curating the edges', producing deeply researched exhibitions focussed on the work of female and queer artists whose work has been critically neglected. These projects have included major touring exhibitions such as the retrospectives for Derek Jarman, Leonora Carrington, and Mary Swanzy. In 2016 he presented the critically acclaimed *Patrick Hennessy: De Profundis*, the first queer reading of Irish modernism. Seán will present a lecture entitled *Queer Histories*, that will examine how some Irish artists in the 20th century presented divergent images of sexuality that countered prevailing orthodoxies.



## Sara R. Phillips (TENI)

*Irish Trans Archive - The History of the Trans Community in Ireland 2016 to today*

Online Lecture Saturday 26th June  
12 - 2pm

Sara R Phillips is a Trans activist. Sara is the founder, researcher and archivist for the Irish Trans Archive. She is the Chair of Transgender Equality Network Ireland and the founder and curator of the annual Trans Arts and Performance festival *Trans-Fusion*. Sara is also a member of the National Women's Council Board.

[irishtransarchive.com](http://irishtransarchive.com)

## Origins Eile

*TONGUES*, talk

Thursday 29th of July 6 - 7.30pm

Online, TBC

Origins Eile is a Black Queer org with an emphasis on the safety and celebration of QTIBPOC.

OE is dedicated to creating space, visibility, support and moving the conversation from "representation" towards new impactful ecology's. *TONGUES* is the newest anthology of offerings for the community by the community. We will be discussing the importance of creating our own spaces, worlds and modes of working within "white" spaces whilst moving from a space of centering love and care. With the editors and creators of *TONGUES* Karen Miano and Maia Nunes.

[originseile.com](http://originseile.com)



## Panel discussion

As part of *I Am What I Am* there will be an informative and challenging panel discussion on arts, politics and intersectionality within Irish society. The panel will be chaired by curator Sinéad Keogh. The panelists are exhibiting artist and educator Louise Walsh, exhibiting artist and feminist Breda Lynch, Transgender activist and chair of TENI Sara. R. Phillips, LGBT Traveller activist Darren Collins, a member of OutWest (member TBD) and exhibiting artist Pradeep Mahadeshwar. The panel will be followed by a Q&A with the audience.

Please visit [ballinaartscentre.com](http://ballinaartscentre.com) for more information on tickets for these events.



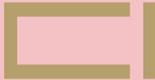
**Mayo Arts  
Service**



Comhairle Contae Mhaigh Eo  
Mayo County Council



Clár Éire Ildánach  
*Creative Ireland  
Programme*  
2017–2022



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Front image of Esther Raquel Minsky by Egidio Pandoldo