



the soft fall of land

Curated by
Ciara Hickey

Commissioned by
Black Church Print Studio

Artists:

Bassam Issa Al-Sabah

Sighle Bhreathnach-Cashell

Chloe Brennan

Aisling Conroy

Grace Ryan

Soft Fiction Projects

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September 5 - 27, 2025


**The Library Project
4 Temple Bar, Dublin 2**

**Curated by Ciara Hickey
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Artists:

**Bassam Issa Al-Sabah
Sighle Bhreathnach-Cashell
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Opening Hours: Tuesday - Friday 11am-6pm; Saturday 12-6pm

The background of the entire page is a vibrant green with large, irregular, white organic shapes that resemble water droplets or abstract landforms. These shapes are scattered across the page, creating a dynamic and textured visual field.

This exhibition brings together new work by Bassam Issa Al-Sabah, Sighle Bhreathnach-Cashell, Chloe Brenan, Aisling Conroy, Grace Ryan and Soft Fiction Projects.

It considers the idea of Utopia and the pursuit of this imagined, impossible state from a range of perspectives. The artworks relate in different ways to the evolution of technology, the environment and society, acknowledging the flawed but inevitable human drive for progress. The works in the exhibition oscillate between escapism and activism, fantasy and instruction for creating an alternative, better world. **Bassam Issa al-Sabah and Sighle Bhreathnach-Cashell** have each made a new series of prints directing us

into dense, imagined worlds. Their work is created from a personal lexicon of symbols drawn from the artists' own histories and critical responses to the humanitarian, social and ecological issues confronting our contemporary life.

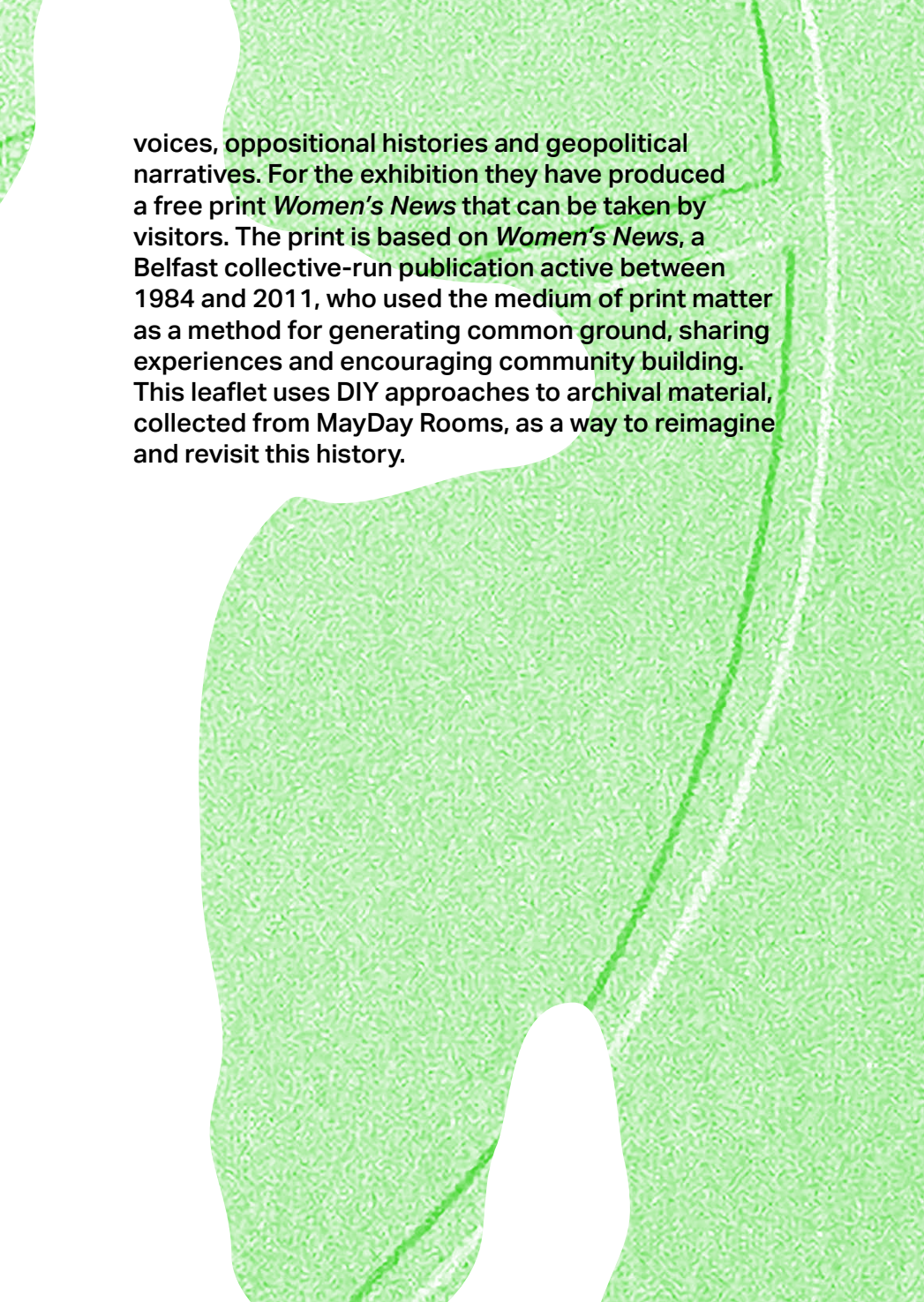
Al-Sabah's monochromatic prints, made during his Process Residency at Black Church Studios, evoke imagery from his moving image works and installations. Seductive, arcadian landscapes invite the viewer into speculative digital worlds in which dystopian and utopian scenarios intersect. Bhreathnach-Cashell, known for her immersive installations and activist work has created a new series of aquatint etchings and blind embossed prints under the title, '*Ulster Cycles*'. The work translates years of the artist's unseen drawings and depicts mimetic figures using Celtic, biological and architectural imagery, conjuring contemporary fables and cautionary tales. The triptych she has made for this exhibition refer specifically to the history of print and technology, and their relationship to cycles of power.

For Grace Ryan and Chloe Brenan, two studio holders at Black Church Print Studio, the invitation to think about Utopia and progress led them to a close examination of the natural world. Ryan has made a sculptural work '*Hothouse*' based on Ikebana, the ancient Japanese art of flower arrangement rooted in balance, asymmetry, and the aspiration for harmony between humans and nature. For this exhibition Ryan has produced a custom made frame of steel, wood and opaque glass to encase a digital collage print of an idealised ikebana form.

Chloe Brennan's starting point for her current work '*Inversions*' is found within the microcosm of an orchard in Carlow, adjacent to her family home. Originally created as a colonial project to order and control the land, the orchard is now overgrown, the traces of colonial past are muted by the unabatted growth of weeds and shrubs over decades. Brennan's work frequently exists at the margins of a subject. She has used Super 8 photography to document the process of observing the orchard and acknowledging the small changes in colour, scent, and diversity of plant life as dictated by time, climate and chance. Brennan's work in the gallery represent the first and last frames of a roll of film on which she photographed the orchard, the edges of which are singed, capturing the moment that an image is simultaneously created and extinguished.

Black Church Print Studio holder Aisling Conroy continues her exploration of sound and cymatics, the study of vibrational phenomena. This new work (*FREQUENCY 1-40*) comprises a grid of 40 monoprints representing the 40 Chladni plates, a methodology developed by Ernst Chladni in 1787 as a visual manifestation of sound vibrations, looking at the patterns produced by sounds on flat plates made by a bow. The work offers an invitation to think about the invisible forces that shape our reality and consider the possibilities of new languages and systems for understanding and grappling with the unknown.

Soft Fiction Projects (Alessia Cargnelli and Emily McFarland) are an initiative that produce printed and digital matter to explore archives of underrepresented



voices, oppositional histories and geopolitical narratives. For the exhibition they have produced a free print *Women's News* that can be taken by visitors. The print is based on *Women's News*, a Belfast collective-run publication active between 1984 and 2011, who used the medium of print matter as a method for generating common ground, sharing experiences and encouraging community building. This leaflet uses DIY approaches to archival material, collected from MayDay Rooms, as a way to reimagine and revisit this history.

BIOGRAPHIES

Bassam Issa Al-Sabah

Bassam Issa Al-Sabah is a visual artist working with digital animation, painting, sculpture and textiles. Often building installations that interrogate the intersection of fantasy and trauma, employing speculative worlds as a lens through which to explore the mechanisms of memory and identity formation. Frequently drawing on the visual lexicon of video games, anime, and popular culture, constructing alternative realities that function as both a means of escape and critical commentary.

Bassam Issa Al-Sabah works across digital animation, painting, sculpture, and textiles. His work has been shown in solo exhibitions at FACT (2025) Transmediale (2024) The DHG (2022-24) Solstice Arts Centre (2019), the LAB (2018) and with the Glucksman as an offsite installation (2021). Group exhibitions include Golden Thread Gallery (2020), the Dock (2021), Queer Embodiment and Social Fabric at IMMA (2021-2022) and Futures at the RHA (2018). His work has also been shown internationally, including solo exhibitions at Gasworks (London, 2021) and the De La Warr Pavillion (UK, 2022), and group exhibitions and screenings at Transmediale (Berlin, 2021), EX-IS (South Korea, 2021), Jeu de Paume (Paris, 2021) and the Barbican (London, 2022).

Sighle Bhreathnach-Cashell

Sighle Bhreathnach-Cashell is a multi-media artist based in Belfast. Using print, installation and film, her work explores how our environment (physical/social/fictional) affects our behaviour and sense of identity.

Sighle studied Environmental Art at the Glasgow School of Art and completed her MFA at the Piet Zwart Institute in Rotterdam. She is a member of the Belfast Print Workshop. She often works collaboratively and has organised and created works for immersive, site specific events like 'PROCEDURE' (RUC Station, Belfast) and 'GAMES NIGHT!' (Glue Factory, Glasgow). Sighle has previously been a co-director of organisations Household, Platform Arts and residence. In 2023 she initiated 'LENA' a series of workshops and artist residencies in a cottage in County Down.

She is part of the artist duo DUNCAN (Richard Martin, Glasgow) and a member of the Array Collective (Turner Prize, 2021). The Array Collective were recently commissioned to make new work for 'Self-Determination: A Global Perspective' at IMMA and their upcoming shows include De Appel, Amsterdam and the Irish Arts Centre, New York. Their work is in the collections of National Museums NI, Arts Council Ireland, Arts Council Northern Ireland and IMMA.

Chloe Brennan

Through a combination of moving image, photography, sound, publication and text, Chloe Brennan's practice explores the porosity of the body and its indivisibility from its environment. She is interested in how forces are registered and measured - both experientially and materially - in human and non-human bodies, exploring the possibilities of alternative and expanded modes of sense making and attunement. Informed by feminist and new materialist epistemologies, works often involve close and careful examinations of the poetic haptics of daily life and processes on the edge of perception that call into question boundaries between bodies, environments, intimate spaces and wider structures of power.

Selected exhibitions include Solstice Art Centre, Navan; VISUAL Centre for Contemporary Art, Carlow; The Douglas Hyde Gallery (online screening series), Dublin; The Library Project, Dublin; Periphery Space, Wexford; Galway Arts Centre; Catalyst Arts, Belfast; The Estonian Museum of Applied Arts and Design, Tallinn; as well as in print at Dublin Art Book Fair; Tokyo Art Book Fair, Japan; and I Never Read Art Book Fair, Basel.

Selected projects include an artist residency at Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris (2023); *Welcome to the Neighbourhood*, Askeaton Contemporary Arts, Limerick (2022); and *Landscape, Ecology and Environment* Research Residency (LEER), Leitrim Sculpture Centre (2022).

Aisling Conroy

Aisling Conroy is a multidisciplinary artist using painting, print, sound and experimental film. She graduated from The National College of Art and Design with a BA Hons degree in Fine Art Print, 2009; and a Master of Fine Art postgraduate degree, 2011. She has worked in the National Irish Visual Arts Library (NIVAL) at NCAD, on numerous archival, digitisation, research projects (2012-2017), and in the audio-visual sector on TV and film productions since 2017. Conroy has been the recipient of Arts Council Funding, Laois Arts Funding, a Creative Ireland Bursary and the Centre Culturel Irlandais Bursary.

Conroy's practice intertwines several aspects of metaphysics and the healing arts by incorporating meditative and sound healing modalities to deepen the conceptual and sensory dimensions of her work, while also engaging with the experiential intersections of art and healing. These practices extend beyond the studio into workshops and events, creating participatory spaces that explore introspection, health and wellness, embodiment, and expanded states of consciousness.

Conroy's work is represented in collections such as the The Press Up Group, Dublin; The Office of Public Works, State Collection; Laois County Council; Axa Insurance; Irish Independent; International Centre for Contemporary Printmaking, US; The National Council of Bioethics; and private collections around Ireland, Spain, UK, the U.S and India.

Grace Ryan

Grace Ryan is a multidisciplinary artist based in Dublin. She graduated with a degree in Fine Art Print from the National College of Art and Design in 2023. Since graduating, she received the Agility Award 2024, the Black Church Print Studio Graduate Award and now resides there as a full-time member. Ryan has participated in numerous exhibitions, including the RDS Visual Arts Awards at IMMA and Unlimiting the Edition at The Library Project. She has also undertaken international internships and residency programs at PADA Studios in Lisbon and Quint in Vienna. Her work is held in the private collections of the Office of Public Works and Business to Arts.

Ryan's practice explores historically gendered materials and their entanglement with female subjectivity, symbolism, and mythology. She utilises the hybrid as a vessel for transgression, her work recontextualizes the fetishization of unrealistic ideals, through processes of mutation and transformation.

Soft Fiction Projects

Soft Fiction Projects is an initiative run by artists Alessia Cargnelli and Emily McFarland. They are based at PS2 in Belfast, dedicated to producing digital and printed matter on film and artist moving image culture. The printed project acts as a forum for presenting new collaborations, artworks, research and writing from invited artists and contributors. Revisiting recent history in moving image practices, Soft Fiction Projects research focus is an exploration of underrepresented voices, oppositional histories, geopolitical narratives underpinned by intersectional feminist perspectives which challenge and reframe dominant hegemonic power structures.

Recent projects include; *All My Dreams Have Come True* [with Edy Fung], screening at Marabouparken, with films from FilmForm, Stockholm, 2025; *Long time we've been working / Tamall fada atá muid ag obair*, Belfast Feminist Film School x Project Arts Centre, Dublin, 2023; *Gintlíocht*, Ulster Folk Museum, Belfast, 2023; *UPHOLD* New Commission, Belfast, 2021; *TULCA*, Galway, 2020; *Working Document*, Catalyst Arts, Belfast, 2020; *MAKING SPACE*, Guest Projects, London, 2019; *SHOP*, PS2, Belfast, 2019; *KNOWLEDGE IS MADE HERE*, curated by Sara Graevu and Andrea Francke, Derry, 2019; *URGENCIES*, CCA, Derry, 2019.

Ciara Hickey

Ciara Hickey is a Curator based in Belfast. She is Co-Director of *Household*, an arts organisation that supports the production of high quality art that connects people and place. Recent projects include *Red Sky at Night*, a night time festival of international commissions across the city of Belfast and UPHOLD, commissioning platform for selling contemporary art.

Ciara was curator of the Freelands Artist Programme through PS2 and co-curated the exhibition *mother tongue* with Alissa Kleist at the MAC Belfast in 2024. She was previously curator of Belfast Exposed Photography where she worked on new commissions with artists including Bertien van Manen, Martin Parr, Michael Hanna and Jan McCullough and also initiated Belfast Exposed Futures, a programme for early career artists.

From 2008-2010 Ciara co-organised the art Space Delawab in her home, and has continued to pursue an interest in the domestic space as a site for contemporary art including the exhibition *House Taken Over* in 2019 (with Nora Hickey M'Sichili). She recently received a curatorial research grant from Paul Mellon to explore art production in the domestic space in Belfast 1968 – present day.

Limited edition zine printed on the occasion of the exhibition **the soft fall of land** curated by Ciara Hickey, commissioned and presented by Black Church Print Studio and hosted by the Library Project.

Design Tomasz Knapik
Paper Munken Smooth
Risograph printed

Image Captions:

Bassam Issa Al-Sabah,
'Horse Riding', CGI preparatory image for printing, 2025.

Sighle Bhreathnach-Cashell,
'Luddite : Ulster Cycles', Blind Deboss on Fabriano Rosaspina paper, Edition of 5, 2025.

'Reap : Ulster Cycles', Blind Deboss on Fabriano Rosaspina paper, Edition of 5, 2025.

Further Information:

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