

Artist Biographies

Bassam Al-Sabah studied Visual Art Practice at IADT, Dún Laoghaire. In 2018 he was awarded the Temple Bar Gallery & Studios Graduate Residency and currently holds a studio there. Al-Sabah was awarded the RHA Graduate Studio Award 2016 and received an AFAC Visual Arts Grant, 2018. Solo exhibitions of his work have been held at Eight Gallery (2017) and Dublin City Council The LAB (2018). His work has also recently been exhibited at Tulca 18, Galway and Pallas Projects, Dublin.

Geta Brătescu (1926-2018) studied at the Fine Arts Academy in Bucharest and has been a central figure of Romanian contemporary art since the 1960s. In 2017 she represented Romania at the Venice Biennale. Recent solo exhibitions of her work took place at Hamburger Kunsthalle (2016) and Tate Liverpool (2015). Brătescu's works are in collections all over the world including in MoMA, New York; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Tate Modern, London; Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw and The National Museum of Contemporary Art, Bucharest.

Nalini Malani trained at the Sir Jamshedjee Jeejeebhoy School of Art, Bombay. Malani has exhibited internationally since the 1980s and is widely considered a pioneer of video art in India. A solo exhibition of her work was presented at IMMA in 2007. A two-part retrospective exhibition took place recently at the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (2018) and at the Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Turin (2018-2019). Malani's work is represented in numerous collections worldwide including the Asia Society Museum, New York; MoMA, New York and National Gallery of Modern Art Mumbai. She lives and works in India and Europe.

Dennis Oppenheim (1938-2011) studied at the California College of Arts and Crafts and Stanford University, California before moving to New York. He was instrumental in the Performance Art and early Land Art movements in the USA. His work has been exhibited widely including at the Whitney Museum, New York, the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. He had a major solo exhibition at IMMA in 2001. Oppenheim's works are held in the collections of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., MoMA, New York, and Tate Modern, London, among others.

Mary Farl Powers (1948-1992) was born in Minnesota and moved to Dublin in 1951. She studied at the Dún Laoghaire School of Art and the National College of Art and Design, Dublin. She was Director of the Graphic Studio, Dublin for many years and was instrumental in establishing the Graphic Studio Gallery in 1983. Her work was exhibited widely in solo shows in Ireland and in group shows in China, Europe, India, Mexico and the USA. Powers's work is represented in a number of public collections including the OPW, Arts Council Ireland and Arts Council England. She was a founding member of Aosdána.

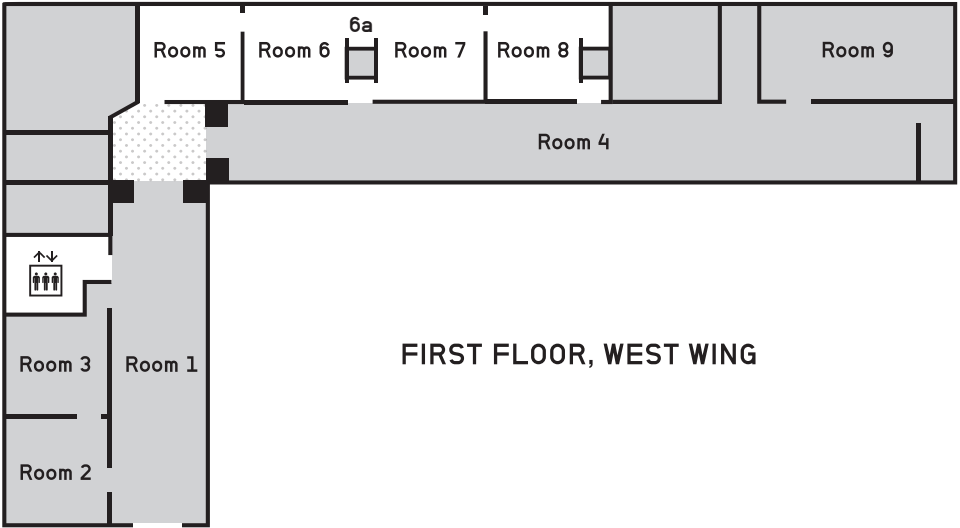
Betsabeé Romero studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris and the National Autonomous University of Mexico. She lives and works in Mexico City. Romero has received many international awards, including First Prize at the Cairo Biennial in 2006, and her work has been exhibited worldwide at institutions such as the Museo Nacional de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid and the Museo del Barrio in New York. Her work is represented in the Daros Collection, Switzerland, LACMA Los Angeles and the Museum of Modern Art, Houston among others.

For more information on the artists and a full listing of IMMA talks and events programmed in association with this exhibition, please see the IMMA website www.imma.ie

IMMA wishes to thank the artists: Bassam Al-Sabah, Nalini Malani, Betsabeé Romero and the following artists' estates: Geta Brătescu, Dennis Oppenheim and Mary Farl Powers. We would like to thank Carlos Baca, Assistant to Betsabeé Romero. We are grateful to Sylvia Bandi, Maria Brassel and Soraya Rodriguez of Hauser & Wirth, Zürich and London. We would also like to thank our invaluable IMMA Members and Patrons.

The exhibition is co-curated by Claire Walsh, Assistant Curator: Collections, Care and Access, Johanne Mullan, Collections Programmer and Christina Kennedy, Senior Curator: Head of Collections.

Have a question about an artwork? Want to know more? Ask a member of our Visitor Engagement Team, easily identifiable through their blue lanyards.



**ÁRAS NUA-EALAÍNE
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MODERN ART

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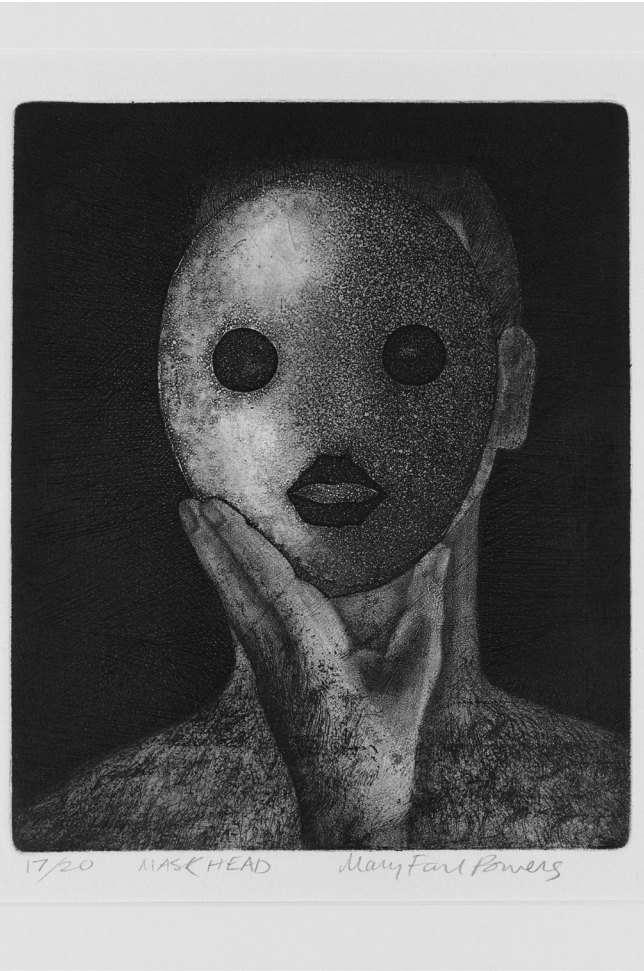
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IMMA
MAIN GALLERIES, WEST WING
15 FEBRUARY – 29 SEPTEMBER 2019

IMMA Collection:
A Fiction Close to Reality



A Fiction Close to Reality is a group exhibition from the IMMA Collection that was developed in response to themes within the adjoining display of Janet Mullarney's work. In both exhibitions, the artists explore inner worlds and inherited narratives. Looking at how the past inhabits the present through memory, the subconscious and the stories and traditions passed down to us from generation to generation. Featured artists include Bassam Al-Sabah, Geta Brătescu, Nalini Malani, Dennis Oppenheim, Mary Farl Powers and Betsabeé Romero.

A dialogue between materialisation and erasure emerges: from the traditional Mexican patterns appearing as shadows reflected on the wall in Betsabeé Romero's work *Amarillo al Cubo*, to the continually emerging and dissolving figures of Nalini Malani's video *Stains*. A display of prints and sculptures by Mary Farl Powers demonstrates her interest in lifecycles and decay, while Bassam Al-Sabah's work explores the unreliability of memory as the result of trauma and exile.

The film and video works of Geta Brătescu and Nalini Malani on display here engage with the expression of our inner worlds; that of memory, the subconscious, the primal, and the unknowable 'other' that exists within ourselves. Brătescu's film *Linia*, which shows the artist drawing in her studio, demonstrates the way that real, physical space merges with inner, intimate space and becomes public as an artwork.

The title, *A Fiction Close to Reality*, hints at the connection between imagination and the everyday. It also connects this exhibition to Janet Mullarney's in the adjoining room as it is taken from a description of her work in a review by Clíodhna Shaffrey, Director, Temple Bar Gallery & Studios; "If Mullarney's sculptures are conceived within a fiction - it is a fiction close to reality, and her artworks might address the viewer like self-analysis."

Room 5 - Nalini Malani

Nalini Malani's formative years were marked by the sense of loss and nostalgia related to her family's exile from Karachi to Calcutta during the brutal partition of British India into India and Pakistan in 1947. As such, memory and identity, both personal and collective, play an important role in her art practice. She writes that, "Memory is what you are, past is in the present and in the future. Memory means the collective memory." Through her work Malani interrogates the power of historical narratives and mythology, looking at how ancient cycles of violence and oppression, especially on the female figure, continue into the present.

In the video animation *Stains*, Malani used watercolour paint to create forms that appear and disappear in washes of water and pigment like fragments of memories that float in and out of our minds. As the artist describes it, these animated figures, "act ambiguously toward each other: loving, hating, killing each other."

A proposal for a different installation of this work suggests that the video be projected onto the surface of a large latex breast filled with milk and suspended from the ceiling in the centre of the room, although this version has never been realised. In this scenario the milk would appear to wash away the blood-coloured 'stains' of the video pointing to a central interest within Nalini's practice; the role of women in society both as nourishers and as absorbers (but also perpetrators) of violence.

Room 6 - Mary Farl Powers

In comparison to the visceral, bubbling imagery of Nalini Malani's video in the adjoining room, Mary Farl Powers' prints and sculptures have a more restrained appearance. Powers was horrified by the uncontainable natural world with its nebulous forms and teeming innards, and sought to create order over it in her work. "Among the things she dreaded", her sister

Katherine A. Powers lists in a catalogue text written for Powers's posthumous solo exhibition at IMMA in 1995, were "worms, caterpillars, eggs, electricity, gas explosions, tornadoes, food-caulked forks, rabies and doctors." But it was her perverse attraction to the things that frightened her that drove Powers to explore them so vividly in her work. According to her sister, "She wanted to take the snail by the horns, to slip a hand into the perilous, primeval ooze."

Born in Minnesota in 1948, Powers made Dublin her home in the 1970s and became known here for her ground-breaking printmaking techniques and innovative approach to subject matter. She was Director of the Graphic Studio in Dublin for many years and was revered for her extraordinary technical skills and experiments with the medium of printmaking. Memories of the vast prairies of her childhood, of extreme heat in the summer and the opposite in the winter, as well as regular invasions of insects, instilled a feeling of human vulnerability and exposure to uncontrollable external forces. This no doubt influenced her precise and commanding approach to her subjects, which included landscapes, torsos, ribbons, moths and beans among other things. Powers was not uncritical of systems of control however. She rebelled against the restrictive rules of Catholicism and the oppressive female domestic roles she was expected to inhabit.

A change in her work came in the 1980s when she was discovering the secret order in nature itself, its underlying symmetry and patterns, and allowing elements of chance to come into her processes. There is often a dialogue in her works between light and dark and between appearance and erasure in a physical sense. Her forms often seem to both materialise and disappear at the same time.

Room 6A - Geta Brătescu

This work demonstrates pioneering Romanian artist Geta Brătescu's lifelong commitment to documenting her process in the studio. Brătescu calls her worktable a "field of action" and for her the studio is a space of play and performance where fiction and reality intermingle.

The film reveals a cropped section of the artist's body with the camera focused on the table in front of her. With a thick black marker we see her drawing images that rise to the surface of her consciousness. She reacts to what appears on the sheets of paper in front of her with a mixture of disdain and amusement, "Let's see what crosses my mind...I don't know what came out...I must tear it apart."

For Brătescu, memory is fluid and manifests at a point somewhere between recollection and the creative act. Hands are a recurring feature in her work. They act as tools of the mind, tracing lines that reveal our inner thoughts.

Room 7 - Betsabeé Romero

Betsabeé Romero draws on elements of popular culture and the rich traditions of Mexican art in her homeland. Her work is concerned with themes of memory, identity and human migration. For Romero, culture is always in transit and she explores the identity and traditions that Mexican immigrants carry with them in their journeys to the United States, often using the car and car parts as symbolic of this movement. While these journeys inform her work directly, she is interested in broader ideas around migration related to the human condition. She has written that, "All of us are migrants between life and death. It is a migration that is inevitable and real".

The photograph on display in this room shows *Ayate Car*, a 1955 Ford Crown Victoria covered with floral painted fabric and filled with 1,000 roses that

Romero installed next to the border fence in Colonia Libertad in 1997. The once hope-filled vehicle becomes a symbol of immobility and decline. Some visitors may recognise the car from when it was installed in IMMA's courtyard in 2005 as part of *The Hours* exhibition.

The suspended work *Amarillo al Cubo* is reminiscent of the decorative cut-out papers traditionally displayed in small towns and cities during Mexican celebrations. This is a mixed tradition of Asian origin brought to Mexico via Spain, which the artist describes as "A fusion made of acceptance and resistance, contribution and recycling. Endless movement in our culture of colonisation." As with her other works, this installation acts as a window to the past and a safeguard of memory against time and movement. In the work *Geografias* convex mirrors adorned with patterns literally follow this vocabulary of revelation and reflection.

Room 8 - Bassam Al-Sabah and Dennis Oppenheim

Wandering wandering with a sun on my back is a new CGI film work by Bassam Al-Sabah that explores the relationship between fictional narratives and lived experience in relation to war and childhood fantasies. On loan for this exhibition, it is presented here in dialogue with works from the IMMA Collection. Al-Sabah's work is deeply influenced by his childhood memories of life in Baghdad, before his family moved to Dublin in 2004, and the sense of disorientation that comes with being uprooted and shifted from one culture to another.

His work embodies the intense and earnest ways that young people consume and connect with characters from pop culture and the inevitable disillusionment of adult realities. A main reference for *Wandering wandering with a sun on my back* is *Grendizer*, a series of highly popular Arabic-dubbed Japanese

anime that were broadcast across the Middle East from the 1980s. The hero, Grendizer, a hyper-masculinised robot forcefully protecting his homeland from the outside invader, reappears in different forms throughout Al-Sabah's practice.

Archival and fictional dialogues narrate the moving images in this CGI film, creating a sense of a dislocated reality. The body of the central character appears skinless, uncontained and in a constant state of emerging and disappearing, similar to the figures of Nalini Malani's video *Stains* in Room 5. Elsewhere in the room, short animations play on stacked monitors. Their domestic scale points to the influence of media broadcast in the home.

Also in this space is a key work by American artist Dennis Oppenheim, *Reading Position for Second Degree Burn*. In the 1970s Oppenheim's focus shifted inward from the looking at the earth and its landscape to looking at the microcosm of the body and its endangerment. He was specifically interested in considering the body as a means of accessing the mind.

For this work he lay topless in the sun for five hours with an open book on his chest. He described the piece as having its roots, "in a notion of colour change. I allowed myself to be painted, my skin became pigment." The methodical exposure of the body to sunlight also links to photographic development, including the processes which would have produced these images. There is a heightened sense of the vulnerability of the human body in relation to the elements of nature. Often Oppenheim's works involve uncontrollable external influences that are subject to climatic or other natural forces.

Front cover:
Mary Farl Powers
Mask Head 1, 1973
Monochrome etching
30.5 x 25 cm
IMMA Collection: Donation,
Powers Family, 2009