

IMMA

HOUSE GALLERIES

6 March – 13 September 2026

# FISHERWOMAN, FISHERWOMAN

Camille Souter & Alberta Whittle



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## Introduction

Presenting the work of the late painter Camille Souter (1929–2023) and contemporary artist Alberta Whittle (b. 1980), the exhibition 'Fisherwoman, Fisherwoman' brings together two distinct art practices that insist upon working against the grain. Singularly, they unpick urgencies of life and death, resistance and regeneration.

Spanning a period of 70 years across two generations, the works in this thematic exhibition range from painting, collage and watercolours to immersive film, sculptural installation and live performance. One of the largest exhibitions of Souter's work to date, it features works-on-paper from the 1950s as well as one of her final paintings, alongside previously unseen sketches, archival materials, and a rare bronze sculpture by the British-born Irish artist. Many of Whittle's installation works have been specially reimagined and refabricated by the artist for IMMA's galleries, in what is the first showing of the Barbadian-Scottish artist's practice in Ireland.

Where these two art practices meet, we see layered intersections of ecological and humanitarian concerns. Various, Souter and Whittle call attention to issues of extraction and land use, geology and weather, industrialisation and labour, movement and migration. They each create work from the personal and the local, yet it is shaped with an unerring global awareness.

Across this exhibition, carnival, poetry and magic are bearers of wayward joys and hope. While these artists are unafraid of the darkness of humanity, they also seek fissures where joy and light seeps through. In this way, these women become fishers. Diving into cracks to unearth silenced or wilfully forgotten truths, both past and present, they conjure up better worlds for us, on a search for truth, respect, justice and love.

## Ground Floor

### Entrance Hall

As you enter the House Galleries, Camille Souter's black bicycle leans against the wall. This bicycle was found in the artist's studio on Achill Island, a private space that no family, friends or visitors had ever been allowed to access. Stories of the artist cycling across Italy, as well as the lush lanes of Wicklow with her young children in tow, are part of Souter's legacy, and they are a subject within her paintings. She learned to drive in her late 50s when she moved to Achill in 1987. This is the bicycle she had always been meaning to use on the island but as far as we know, rarely, if ever, did. It stands here as an invitation to arrive, relax, and take your foot off the pedal... It also reminds us of the potential to reinvent our own myriad ways of moving through this world.

Towards the stairwell, we glimpse Alberta Whittle's *Totems of Brass (Part one)* (2023), a beaded coil that reaches from the top of the stairwell on the first floor down to Whittle's installation *Memorial for "The Great Carew" aka Neville Denis Blackman (sargassum hues)* (2019–2026) in the basement. The beaded work, woven together with cowrie shells, pearls, bells and other materials, streams vertically like a connective spine through each floor of the building. Coils are a recurring motif in Whittle's work. As objects, they link each of the elements of her practice – the paintings, films, installations – to the history of domestic craftwork and communal exchange, forms of experience that the artist understands as being necessary for the creation of new familial connections. At over 11 metres, this is the longest coil Whittle has created to date.

### Room 1

Several of Souter's most significant paintings hang together in this room. The artist often worked in series and many of these works represent a wider series of paintings that she would have produced over many years. Dead fish, hanging meat, slaughterhouses, war and violence, volcanoes, boglands and geology – all of these themes are featured here, and find common ground in their exploration of the schism between life and death, the earth's natural resources and what lies beneath.

Paintings such as *Desert Shield – Gulf War* (1991), *We don't want to see blood* (2004), *Red Poppy Rain* (c.1982) and *Red brick and it's not a game* (1973) are some of her most politically charged works, speaking variously of the Gulf War, the Iraq War, the First World War and the conflict in Northern Ireland. Others, such as *The slaughtered cow, ten minutes dead* (1973) and *Self-Portrait as a Cod's*

*Head* (1993), connect the human condition with the animal world. In these works, we stare into the eyes of an animal that has recently been killed for human consumption. Their blood is still warm, the light seemingly still lingering, as they appear to stare back at us unblinking. A sense of interspecies empathy and respect emanates from these works – one life gives life to another.

Souter was fascinated throughout her life by physiology, the body, muscles and organs. Her Medical Notes series (1990–1992) stems from her early career as a nurse, treating airmen wounded in WWII. Later painting these injuries from memory, she makes them slightly larger than life, though keeps the works intimately scaled and crops them tightly. The effect almost transforms the gouged flesh into sunset landscapes and reveals the beauty she found in them.

One of Souter's last known paintings, *Iceland – Afraid* (2011) is included here. The artist travelled to Iceland in her 70s to explore forms of volcanic and geothermal power. This work can be viewed in connection with earlier works that also centre on what lies beneath the earth's surface – paintings made after her travel to Mount Etna, an active volcano in Sicily, or her series of quarry paintings in the 1990s. Similarly here, *Achill '59* (1959) and *Red Achill* (1982) look at geology and Irish bogland, while *Thinking of Kuwait* (1999) was painted following Souter's travel to Kuwait to research oil fields and deserts.

In this room, the textured walls are a bright, lustrous red. It is a colour that Souter was known to use exceptionally well. Of it, the artist comments: "Bloody good colour, literally. It's such an earth colour."

## **Room 2**

Landscape and forms of power spill into the adjoining room, where to our right-hand side, hang Souter's *Allenwood Cooling Tower* (1975) and *Power Station* (1978) that speak of an abundance of energy and industrialisation.

Other works pick up on changing land use and agricultural practices. The paintings *The Last of the Radicio* (1964) and *Forgotten Island near Venice* (1964) are two of several painted after a trip to Chioggia and Venice in 1963, which criticise urbanisation. Hanging next to these works is a somewhat tender painting, *Tommy Sutton getting in the spuds in snow* (1965), that in contrast touches on small-scale farming, sustainability, the local and the personal.

The forces of weather, sea and storms are a constant within Souter's work. Here, we see some of these paintings, including *The sea at Booterstown just beginning to die down after a storm* (1972) and *Pelting rain near Ashford, County Wicklow* (1966). From 1979 onwards, Souter took flying lessons which gave her new perspectives on the landscape, weather, speed and movement. The artist deliberately flew on stormy days and her fascination with turbulence is apparent in *Now find Shannon Airport* (1979) showing a view from the cockpit obscured during bad weather.

Many of these works are rooted in time, seasons and place. Through her paintings of wet, grey Irish skies, boggy land, canals, rock pools and the ocean, we witness the artist being with nature, with the weather, with the land. This experience is articulated in the titles of the paintings, for example in *The Bog, Early Morning* (1963), *Sky, County Clare* (1979), and *Winter Evening, Calary* (1964). A sense of the passage of time and being present is further apparent in works such as *Waiting for the sun to come out* (1965), *Off to the West* (1964), *Over the Bog* (1962), and *We all went down to the river* (1962). Souter, in effect, puts us in her shoes in real time; we follow her journeys.

A large vitrine in the centre of this room houses a selection of the artist's archive. Seen here for the first time by the public, sketchbooks, objects and books are on view that connect to Souter's core subjects and life-long research. A small number of publications from the artist's library, made up of rare, gifted and gathered books, show Souter's range of interests spanning geology, philosophy, poetry, medicine, gardening, physics and flight. Objects from her home and studio, such as a glass jar labelled "Sand from United Arab Emirates", fossils and stones collected from around the world, maps and magnifying glasses, point to Souter's hands-on approach to self-led study and exploration. This often involved traveling to sites of interest, frequently returning again and again. Pages of her notebooks show quick sketches, remarks and questions jotted down by the artist. Many directly relate to paintings within this exhibition but others too offer rare insights into the artist's wider creative practice and thought processes.

One of the only existing sculptures by Souter is also in this vitrine. A solid bronze cast of a carved piece of turf, it resembles a crouched or sleeping figure; a woman of the earth. It was carved by Souter in the late 1950s, then cast circa 1995 by her son, the bronze sculptor Tim Morris. Souter kept it as part of her own collection.

## **Alcove**

In the alcove hangs Alberta Whittle's watercolour triptych, *Invest in Love* (2023). A key work within the exhibition, it asks us to question our way of being in the world, our relationship to ourselves and to one another. The work invites us to confront difficult truths from past and present to find collective healing. Whittle's message is one of hope – a call for us to 'invest in love'. The work is one of several others made previously by the artist which repeat the same phrase but within different contexts, from a large-scale billboard in Edinburgh to a bespoke limited-edition print.

## **Room 3**

*from the forest to the concrete (to the forest)* (2019) is a film installation by Whittle, featuring a ten-minute video, seating elements, and a hanging coil work within an immersive wash of ultramarine walls.

The work reflects on climate-related devastation in parts of the Caribbean, linking the havoc of climate change to the structural inequalities left behind by European colonial presence. Developed in the wake of Hurricane Dorian that devastated the Bahamas in 2019, it mourns the loss suffered by communities across the Caribbean. Whittle interweaves performance with footage of the cyclone's destruction, skies filled with chaos, underwater sea life, movement and travel. The film begins with a quote by Octavia Butler: "People have changed the climate of the world. Now they're waiting for the old days to come back."

An exploration of empathy over erasure, *from the forest to the concrete (to the forest)* calls upon viewers to reflect on their own position in relation to the societal inequalities affecting the Global South. It seeks to highlight the Western world's complicity in colonialism and climate catastrophe, particularly how the majority of communities at risk are Black people and Global majority.

With a soundtrack that is at once haunting and hopeful, the film ends with the artist's voice speaking of blackness as love, refuge and rebuilding, endurance and transcendence.

## First Floor

### Room 4

The stories of Souter and Whittle's work and lives surround us in this room, marking moments of personal significance from childhood to now, and noting wider local and international contexts of influence. These stories do not attempt to provide comprehensive timelines of the artists' lives but instead offer information where it relates to the development of the artwork and thematic in this exhibition.

The vitrines contain materials from Souter's archive, such as photographs, books from early childhood, artist notebooks and ephemera. They mostly touch upon the artworks featured in the adjacent rooms – her early paintings and those from her circus and carnival series.

This room is also a reading room, made up of key publications that Whittle has identified as important to understanding her practice and thinking. Books include *Strength to Love*, Martin Luther King Jr. (1963); *Hostile Environment: How Immigrants Became Scapegoats* by Maya Goodfellow (2019); and Whittle's monograph, *Make: How Flexible Can We Make The Mouth* (2019). The artist's family quilt work, *blue + blue (Quilt)* (2019), rests on furniture that's either from or inspired by Souter's Achill home. Visitors are welcome to sit and read and be comfortable in this space.

### Room 5

A selection of Souter's earliest surviving paintings from 1955–1961 are presented in this room. While frequently misunderstood to be abstract, these works are based on real life subjects. We see works about cycling, carnivals, and card games, many painted while in Italy. Others could be interpreted as more socio-politically aligned, such as *Il Papa e' Morto* (The Pope is Dead) (1961), *Internazionale* (1965), *La Verit L'Espresso* (1957), and several *Untitled* works, in which the artist has incorporated visible sections of newsprint, its content forming part of each painting's narrative.

The use of cheap materials like newsprint and kraft paper was introduced to Souter by artist Ralph Rumney, while her mark-making was partly influenced by Abstract Expressionism and action painters, such as Jackson Pollock and Franz Kline. On seeing their work in Paris, Souter commented, "I knew I could use anything – aluminium paint, black enamel bicycle paint... It opened the door... I was exploring. I was learning by looking." Critics also note aesthetic

resemblances to the more contemplative style of Mark Tobey, influenced by Asian calligraphy, and to the process-driven movement of Tachisme, often seen as a European response to Abstract Expressionism, the artist Hans Hartung, or the earlier Paul Klee.

Self-taught, when Souter speaks of artists she looked to, she mostly notes Rembrandt, particularly his portraits, and Renaissance painting. In terms of contemporaries, the artist Nano Reid was significant. Souter notes: “She could grasp, almost like in a medicine, the vital essence of something, the active principle.”

### **Alcove**

One of Whittle’s tondo paintings, *When water holds sand, we vibrate towards recovery* (2023), is installed in the alcove. A vivid, underwater scene shows a female figure resting on the seabed, a glowing jellyfish floating above, embraced by the ocean’s darkness and swirling life. Raffia ribbon trails from the work.

A richly symbolic and deeply personal painting, this scene of refuge, mythology, magic and transformation imagines a world outside of damaging systems of brutality. It refers to, but at the same time seeks to transcend, the harm caused by colonialism, the Transatlantic trade in enslaved people, and the climate crisis.

### **Room 6**

Dreaming and care as resistance strategies continue as we move into the next room where Whittle merges two distinct bodies of work: *RESET* (2020) and a series of watercolours (2021–2023).

*RESET* is a response by Whittle to the context of the Black Lives Matter movement, the global pandemic and climate emergency. The work consists of the installation you see in this room, together with a film and a live performance, both of which will be presented at IMMA during the exhibition. The work is informed by the writings of queer theorist, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, interweaving gothic imagery, fears of contagion, xenophobia and the ensuing moral panic that often follows such anxieties. Exploring timely questions relating to personal healing and the cultivation of hope in hostile environments, this urgent political work offers moments of grief and reflection, but also empathy and desire.

Inscribed in hand-painted script, each of the framed watercolours expands from the triptych work downstairs, *Invest in Love* (2023), acting as direct calls

to action and as reminders to bring love, care and courage into the everyday. Messages include *Fill your heart with hope* (2023) and *Step Lightly* (2023) – tender encouragements by the artist that come in the spirit of hope. These are situated alongside more defiant and rebellious calls, such as *Raise the Alarm* (2023) and *Create Dangerously* (2023), a reference to Haitian writer Edwidge Danticat and their meditation on the lived experience of an immigrant artist, telling stories of those who have managed to thrive and create, in spite of the harrowing events they have experienced.

Of these watercolour works, Whittle says: “I return to [American activist and writer] bell hooks time and time again. She reminds us to centre love in how we move through the world and to replenish ourselves in our active learning with others. Living in the catastrophe of racial and cultural violence, we need to hold onto love with all our hearts. Invest in love.”

## **Room 7**

Artworks by both Souter and Whittle share this space. Whittle’s textile work, *Belly of the beast ((oceanic vibrations))* (2026) has been specially refabricated for this exhibition, originally created to accompany her film work, *Congregation (creating dangerously)* (2022). At IMMA, the floor-to-ceiling piece is shown with paintings by Souter from her circus and carnival series. *Belly of the beast ((oceanic vibrations))* is made from recycled denim scraps, cotton, sea salt, vinegar, acrylic, and raffia. The work can be seen as a theatrical banner or a backdrop; a curtain to enclose or to comfort. It echoes aesthetics of carnival, pageantry and circus while at the same time conjures images of the night sky, the stars and traversing an ocean in darkness. Souter’s paintings similarly evoke a melancholic joy, as in *A Tent to Himself* (1964), and an excitement for dreaming or play, as in *Carnival in Nice* (1998) and *Make Believe of all this Winter* (1964). Whittle’s oval painting with raffia trails, *Only the magic and the dream are true* (2023), further move us into the realm of ritual and enchantment, seen as tools for resistance and transformation.

## Basement

Moving downstairs to the basement, we encounter what appears to be the remnants of a chattel house porch, disfigured after a storm or flood. A chattel house is a small, traditional, movable wooden house from Barbados, built to be easily dismantled and relocated, while the porch area of the house suggests a moment of rest or a place to gather. The installation, titled *brug-ga-dung* (2026), is a reimagined part of Whittle's work, *Memorial for "The Great Carew" aka Neville Denis Blackman (sargassum hues)*, (2019–2026) which is located further into the basement. Here the work consists of a video, *between a whisper and a cry* (2019) – projected onto another part of the sunken chattel house – composed of archival and filmed footage. The thematics expand on those of the video installation upstairs, *from the forest to the concrete (to the forest)* (2019), with colonialism, the transatlantic slave trade, and the climate crisis ever-present. Whittle incorporates scholar Christina Sharpe's seminal description of anti-Blackness as a type of "weather" and Barbadian poet Kamau Brathwaite's research, into the work, structuring the film according to the hurricane season, from "June too soon" to "October all over." At the time of making *between a whisper and a cry*, the Caribbean had experienced three consecutive years of hurricanes and storms. For the visitor to this installation, it is as though the space has emerged from such weathering and devastation, the walls soaked with the brown-red colour of Sargassum seaweed, the rusted chains of a ship anchor entangled on the floor; what lies beneath has risen to the surface. Like Souter's paintings of seasons, weather and time, the artist puts us in another's shoes. This time it is to confront our own responsibility – body, mind, and heart – for the aftermath of colonialism and slavery still present today.

Spotlit in the far corner, two large paintings by Whittle – *Autumn Equinox - an awakening* (2023) and *Autumn Equinox - abolition invocation* (2023) – accompany the video installation. The artist incorporates many symbols into these paintings, from the sunflowers and skeletons to the latticework and fretwork frames. These works speak of ancestry, affection, hauntings, and repair, echoing the themes of the video installation. They are works that seek to offer healing – in the words of Whittle's collaborator, Ama Josephine Budge, "To relish the spectres and the discomfort. To dive in and re/collect ourselves, if necessary, bone by bone."

## **About Camille Souter**

1929–2023; b. Northampton, England; lived and worked predominantly in Achill, County Mayo

Camille Souter was raised in Ireland and originally trained as a nurse at Guy's Hospital, London, before taking up painting in the mid-1950s.

From early works, often abstract in appearance yet always subject-based, to more representational figurative work that came later, Souter's endless curiosity in the journey of life was a constant. Her work was firmly based within reality, the everyday and, more often than not, the 'extraordinary everyday' depicted in its sheer simplicity. Often working in series, recurring themes have included flight and the mechanics of flying, carnivals and circus, landscape and weather, the destruction of war, extraction and industry, raw meat and medical notes.

Souter was the recipient of numerous awards, from the Prix de Ville de Monaco (1977) to the IMMA Glen Dimplex Artists Award for contribution to visual arts in Ireland (2000). She was an Honorary Member of the RHA and was elected Saoi of Aosdána in 2009. In 2015, Trinity College Dublin awarded her an honorary doctorate. Her works can be seen in many public and private collections including the National Gallery of Ireland, Hugh Lane Gallery, Ulster Museum, and the Arts Council of Ireland. Souter's work within the IMMA Collection is regularly exhibited at IMMA, as well as at venues across Ireland and internationally.

Souter exhibited extensively from the 1960s onwards and represented Ireland at the Paris Biennale in 1961. Major retrospectives of her work were held at the Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin (1980); Ulster Museum, Belfast (2000); and more recently at Custom House Studios, Mayo (2019), in celebration of the artist's 90th year.



### **About Alberta Whittle**

b. 1980 Bridgetown, Barbados; lives and works in Glasgow, Scotland

Barbadian-Scottish artist Alberta Whittle's multifaceted practice is preoccupied with developing a personal response to the legacies of the Atlantic slave trade, unpicking its connections to institutional racism, white supremacy and climate emergency in the present. Against an oppressive political background, Whittle aims to foreground hope and engage with different forms of resistance.

Whittle received her MFA from Glasgow School of Art (2011), PhD at the University of Edinburgh (2024), and is currently a Research Associate at the University of Johannesburg. She has exhibited and performed in various solo and group shows internationally and represented Scotland in the 59th Venice Biennale in 2022. She is the recipient of numerous awards including the Margaret Tait Award (2018/19); a Turner Bursary, Frieze Artist Award, and Henry Moore Foundation Artist Award (2020); and Paul Hamlyn Award for Artists (2022).

Recent solo exhibitions and performances include: 'Under the skin of the ocean, the thing urges us up wild', Mount Stuart, Isle of Bute, Scotland (2024); 'between a whisper and a cry', Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2023); and 'create dangerously', Modern One, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh (2023). Her work has been acquired by the UK National Collection, National Galleries of Scotland, Tate, Barbados National Art Gallery, and Glasgow Museums Collection.

## Public Programme

### IMMA Talks

#### Thursday 5 March

Coinciding with the preview of 'Fisherwoman, Fisherwoman', IMMA Talks presents a roundtable conversation exploring the exhibition's themes and the practices of artists Camille Souter and Alberta Whittle. Speakers include artist Alberta Whittle, art historian Dr Sarah Kelleher, and curator Rachael Gilbourne.

### Living Canvas at IMMA

#### March, June, August & September

As part of the exhibition, Whittle's film *RESET* (2020) will be screened on Living Canvas at IMMA, Europe's largest digital art screen on the grounds of IMMA.

Screening dates:

5 – 18 March

18 – 24 June

In addition, a curated series of film and moving image works that link to and extend the shared thematics of Souter and Whittle will be screened: Farah Al Qasimi, *Surge* (2022), Emre Hüner, *IELEKTRÖİZOLASYONU* (2021-2024), and Jane Jin Kaisen, *Wreckage* (2024).

Screening dates:

27 August – 9 September

Living Canvas at IMMA runs daily from Monday to Sunday from 9.30am to 6.30pm.

### Live Performance

#### Sunday 21 June

As part of the exhibition, Whittle's performance work *RESET* (2021–2026), with choreographer and performer Mele Broomes, will take place across the museum's grounds on the evening of the Summer Solstice, for Summer at IMMA.

### Art In Motion

#### Summer

IMMA has partnered with the NTA's Transport for Ireland (TFI) brand to create a mobile artwork for Dublin. One of TFI's buses is being wrapped in a vibrant artwork created by Alberta Whittle, featuring poetry composed by members of

local writers group Fatima Groups United's The Poetry Vigilantes. The bus-wrap is being developed through workshops with Whittle and poet Dagogo Hart, inspired by themes explored in the exhibition 'Fisherwoman, Fisherwoman'.

### **Poetry Film Series**

In collaboration with Adrian Brinkerhoff Poetry Foundation, IMMA is creating a series of short poetry films reflecting on the themes of the exhibition 'Fisherwoman, Fisherwoman', with a key focus on the work and legacy of Camille Souter. Directed by filmmaker Matthew Thompson, the project is co-commissioned by IMMA and Adrian Brinkerhoff Poetry Foundation, and supported by the Adrian Brinkerhoff Poetry Fund of the Sidney E. Frank Foundation.

For more information on the Public Programme, please visit [imma.ie](http://imma.ie), or speak with a member of our Visitor Engagement Team.

### **Artist Limited Edition**

To accompany the exhibition, Alberta Whittle has created a bespoke artist limited edition, cast in glass in a rainbow of colours.

Alberta Whittle

*Summoning spirit - building a new vessel, 2026*

Cast glass

Approx 13 x 11 x 5 cm, 5 1/8 x 4 3/8 x 2 in

Varied Edition of 11 plus 4 artist's proofs

For enquiries, please contact the IMMA Shop, visit [imma.ie](http://imma.ie), or speak with a member of our Visitor Engagement Team.

## **Acknowledgements**

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Exhibition curated by Rachael Gilbourne

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Raffaella Lanino, Collections Manager & Senior Registrar

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The exhibition is supported by:



**OPW** Oifig na nOibreacha Poiblí  
Office of Public Works



'Art in Motion' is a partnership project between IMMA and the National Transport Authority (NTA) under their Transport for Ireland (TFI) brand. The artwork created as part of 'Art in Motion' is by Alberta Whittle working in collaboration with poet Dagogo Hart and Fatima Groups United's Poetry Vigilantes.

IMMA Project Team:

Rachael Gilbourne, Assistant Curator: Exhibitions, Projects & Partnerships

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Melissa Ndakengerwa, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Executive: Public Engagement



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Front cover: Camille Souter, *Orange Cross*, 1956. Oil on board. IMMA Collection: Gordon Lambert Trust, 1992.

Page 13: Alberta Whittle, *Following behind the serpents' tails*, 2023. Watercolour on paper. Courtesy of the artist and The Modern Institute/Toby Webster Ltd., Glasgow. Photo: Patrick Jameson.

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