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## **The Art of the Possible: Social Justice in Museum Galleries**

An Exploration of the Hugh Lane Gallery and the Exhibition 'Bones in the Attic' as a Medium to Communicate Issues of Social Justice and Hold Space for Conversations around Change.

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This dissertation is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design & Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment for the BA in Visual Communication Design. It is entirely the author's own work except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.

Signed Emily Lannin \_\_\_\_\_ 13/01/2023

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## Abstract

From cabinets of curiosities to being used as a tool to promote democracy, museums have evolved over the course of history and have influenced the shaping of modern-day society. This thesis explores museums, and museum galleries as essential institutions to communicate issues of social justice to the public and how museum exhibitions can become a middle ground for peaceful discourse and congregation, an amenity needed in society today. Museum gallery practices in the Hugh Lane Gallery are explored and highlight how museums can create space for conversations about change.

This thesis visually and thematically analyses the exhibition *Bones in the Attic* in the Hugh Lane Gallery. It explores how the exhibition expresses the themes of feminism, as an issue of social justice, within the artworks of 11 Irish artists present in the exhibition, through 3 lenses: mythology; feminism and exhibition design. Furthermore, this thesis closely examines the exhibition's educational and social community involvement programme by exploring the event 'Study Morning: Bones in the Attic'. This is an example of advancing museum practice in creating a space for conversations around societal issues affecting women in Ireland, in the past, present and future. The structural limitations of curating exhibitions around topical issues, such as feminism after Covid-19 are discussed and the future directions of museum galleries are suggested.

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## Introduction

Museums galleries have long given me room, physically and metaphorically, to think. There is nothing I enjoy more than wandering through halls of hanging pictures and rooms of curious objects, allowing any thought or idea, my own and of others, to dance in and out of my consciousness. New insights arise with each visit, which encourages me to decipher the themes and subjects present in exhibitions and subsequent conversations also morph and change as new information is synthesised and reflected upon.

When visiting public museums and galleries, I discovered I enjoyed most the ambiguity of interpretation, that not one idea or analysis is right or wrong. The museum and in this case, the Hugh Lane Gallery (HLG), has become a middle ground, a space for the audience to come to their ideas peacefully.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, enabling “individuals to find their place concerning the work of art.”<sup>2</sup> As this thesis will demonstrate, museum galleries also hold space for thoughts and conversations about change; a vital and pressing amenity needed within our society today.

Elaine Gurian is a museum executive, teacher, activist and author whose works have influenced a deeper understanding of how museums can facilitate open discourse on activism and the issues affecting contemporary society today. In her most recent publication, *Centering the Museum: Writings for a Post-Covid Age*, Gurian defines the museum as “a civic space that encourages

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<sup>1</sup> The acronym HLG for ‘Hugh Lane Gallery’ will be used from this point going forward.

<sup>2</sup> Jacob, Mary Jane. ‘*Making Space for Art*’ in ‘What Makes a Great Exhibition?’ The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, 2016. pg136



strangers to congregate peaceably”<sup>3</sup>. This creates a civic environment, where values can be peacefully and respectfully voiced, questioned and heard.

Evolving from the writings of John Dewey on democracy and education, where education is instrumental in creating a better society, and the role of the museum is an educational one, Gurian’s definition creates a broader reasoning for a modern museum.<sup>4</sup> Gurian maintains that complexity in exhibitions and a wider reach of audiences are imperative in future models of museum practice to enable a varied range of educational outcomes and thinking from an audience.

<sup>5</sup> Furthermore assisting learnings which have evolved introspectively from the *guidance* of the curator, not the prescription, stating that “a museum presents forms of evidence so visitors can create understanding and build knowledge for themselves.”<sup>6</sup> By creating a shared space in which society can be guided to explore their understanding of social issues, museums facilitate agency to the public in bettering society for the greater good.

To investigate the museum as a medium to communicate issues of social justice, this thesis will focus on the visual analysis of one exhibition in particular ‘*Bones in the Attic*’ (BITA) in the HLG, which is a contemporary art exhibition concerned with feminism in Ireland.<sup>7</sup> To contextualise this exhibition and this thesis, one must consider the national and international political landscape it is situated in. The state of current world politics alludes to the pillars of democracy crumbling and human rights regressing due to multiple factors affecting society such as the Ukrainian/ Russian

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<sup>3</sup> Gurian, Elaine Heumann. *Centering the Museum*. 1st ed. Taylor and Francis, 2021. Web. 26 Jan. 2023. n.pag

<sup>4</sup> George E. Hein ‘*The Museum as a Social Instrument: A Democratic Conception of Museum Education*’ in ‘*Museum Gallery Interpretation and Material Culture*’ Edited by Juliette Fritsch, Taylor & Francis Group, 2011. pg.15

<sup>5</sup> Gurian, op.cit., n.pag.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. n.pag.

<sup>7</sup> The acronym BITA for the exhibition ‘Bones in the Attic’ will be used from this point going forward.

war in Europe, inflation and the rise of the cost of living and Covid-19.<sup>8</sup> The effects of the pandemic on disadvantaged groups are staggering, including that of women's rights.<sup>9</sup>

The impact of COVID-19 on women's rights has been monumental, according to a report by UN Women,

Gender-based violence, already a global crisis before the pandemic, has intensified since the outbreak of COVID-19. Lockdowns and other mobility restrictions have left many women trapped with their abusers, isolated from social contact and support networks. Increased economic precarity has further limited many women's ability to leave abusive situations. COVID-driven economic and social instability will also heighten the risk of child marriage, female genital mutilation and human trafficking. At the same time, the pandemic has exposed women leaders to the backlash, leading to threats, abuse and harassment both online and offline. Violence against women leaders can prevent them from carrying out their duties regardless of the position they hold.<sup>10</sup>

An extremely prevalent concern in our society today, women's plights are highlighted in the exhibition and illustrates to the audience through ancient elements of mythology that it has been steadfast in Irish society since primaeval times. Through the analysis of the exhibition as the main method of communication in this case study, along with the accompanying social and educational

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<sup>8</sup> Trent, Zimmerman. "Amid the Climate Crisis, Covid and Crumbling Democracies, I Find Hope in People Who Show the Best of Humanity." The Guardian, Guardian News and Media, 30 Dec. 2022

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> UN Women, "Covid-19 Priority Area: Gender-Based Violence." 20 Sept. 2022,

involvement programme 'Study Morning: Bones in the Attic', I will investigate the place of activism in cultural institutions, such as the HLG and its relevance to improving society today.

In chapter one, 'The Museum gallery as a Social Instrument', a deep focus is taken into the HLG, communicating social justice, the legacy of Hugh Lane, its current model in use of museum practice regarding its education and social community involvement and the HLG'S activist 'voice'.

This foregrounds chapter 2, 'Interpreting Bones in the Attic', where the BITA exhibition is situated nationally against the tumultuous history of the subjugation of women in Ireland in 'Feminism in Ireland: past and present'. This chapter then continues to guide the reader through the case study exhibition under three lenses; mythology, feminism and exhibition design. By visually analysing objects and artworks in BITA, the narrative of the HLG's activist curatorial and design approach is explored. Chapter 3, ' Holding Space for Conversations around Change' is a critical examination of the limitations of exhibitions such as BITA regarding the HLG's governing bodies. Furthermore an analysis of the linked educational programme event 'Study Morning: Bones in the Attic' is discussed and the space this event generated, is explored as it highlights the advancement of museums in creating places for peaceful discourse and empathetic societies.

The thesis draws together a methodology based on the theories of George E. Hein, Elaine Gurian, Juliette Fritsch, John Dewey, Mary Condren and Lucy Lippard, in the following areas of research: social science, social justice, socio-political, feminism, education, museum theory and practice, history, mythology and gender studies. The methods of research utilised include descriptive qualitative research including interviews, content analysis, and observation. Interviewed for this thesis were Education Curator Cleo Fagan and Exhibition Curator Meabh Delaney of the HLG. Content analysis is used in the interviews of the exhibition catalogue and pamphlet. Furthermore,

observation was conducted through frequent visits to the exhibition BITA in the HLG and other museum exhibitions and cultural institutions in Ireland such as the National Gallery, the Irish Museum of Modern Art and the Chester Beatty.

Ultimately, the museum as an institution has evolved since its inception, as the needs of society changed so did the traditions of museum practice. The core inquiry of this thesis is to examine the museum galleries such as the HLG as a method to communicate issues of social justice by analysing the *BITA* exhibition and the accompanying educational and social involvement programme. This thesis will argue that as much as the museum is a ‘temple of contemplation’ it has also become a space capable of creating agency and activism for societal change.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Gurian, *op.cit.*, n.pag.

## **Chapter 1: The Museum Gallery as a Social Instrument <sup>12</sup>**

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<sup>12</sup> Hein. Op.cit., pg. 15

## 1.1 Communicating Issues of Social Justice

*“The most significant point is that the [museums] were and are part of an educational and cultural quarter whose clear purpose was to make a difference in society” - George E. Hein <sup>13</sup>*

If we analyse the development of museums, from “cabinets of curiosities,” which showed oddities from around the world to the public during the 1600-1700s. <sup>14</sup> To a tool to promote democracy and a consensus of knowledge among classes, one thing remains constant, engaging an audience.<sup>15</sup>

Museums have further advanced the role of the museum in society to one which is purposefully social.<sup>16</sup> Over the course of history, social justice has been a concern for artists which is heavily expressed through art. From the Black Lives Matter (2020) movement and the emotive portraits of police abuse victims of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor (Fig.1). To the artistic expressions of the current ‘Women, Life, Freedom’ protests in Iran, (Fig.2) which depicts Tehran’s most recognisable 20th-century landmarks the “Freedom” tower, overlaid with Matisse famous dancers.

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<sup>13</sup> Hein. Op.cit., pg. 15

<sup>14</sup> Impey, O. *Origins of museums: The cabinet of curiosities in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Europe*. British Museum Press. 2000 pg. 4

<sup>15</sup> Hein. Op.cit., pg. 15

<sup>16</sup> Hein. Op.cit., pg. 15



**Fig.1** Nickkolas Smith, *Portrait of Breonna Taylor*, Digital Painting, 2020.



**Fig.2** Jalz, *Women, Life, Freedom*, Poster, 2022.

Museums galleries are reflective places, in that they mirror society, presenting common cultural values, while also serving as spaces for individual reflection, each painting or object transforming into windows of inner worlds. In recent times of political and environmental instability, museums and galleries have become conscious reminders of the history of humanity. They are significant in enabling the public to empathise and to access the reparative benefits art allows in the development of a society striving for the greater good. Importantly, museum galleries also raise awareness about the social issues which are preventing this from happening. Presently there are multiple prevalent crises concerning social issues in Ireland.

The focus of social justice in this thesis will concern itself with the rising numbers of violence against women in Ireland and the subjugated systems which oppress them. In this thesis, I will discuss exhibitions in museum galleries as communicative mediums to engage and promote

activism to the public, explicitly focusing on feminism in the exhibition ‘The *Bones in the Attic*’ in the HLG.

For clarity of discussion I would like to define the term ‘Museum Gallery’, it is a public and non-commercial institution curating an exhibition programme for cultural and educational purposes.<sup>17</sup>

The HLG is a part of the Museum Standard Programme Ireland (MSPI) and is owned by the Dublin City Council (a local authority) and is a municipal institution.<sup>18</sup> The institution had to meet specific standards to be MSPI accredited regarding the museum management, care and documentation of collections, exhibition (long-term and temporary), education, visitor care and access.<sup>19</sup> Through this achievement and the high standards of curation and public outreach, the HLG has become a space greatly valued by Dublin and Ireland nationally.

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<sup>17</sup> Delagrange, Julien ‘*What is the Difference Between an Art Gallery and a Museum?*’ Contemporary art Issue, [www.contemporaryartissue.com/what-is-the-difference-between-an-art-gallery-and-a-museum/](http://www.contemporaryartissue.com/what-is-the-difference-between-an-art-gallery-and-a-museum/) 10/12/22.

<sup>18</sup> Fagan, Cleo. “*The Hugh Lane Gallery*” Email received by Emily Lannin, 30/11/22.

<sup>19</sup> ‘*Museum Standards Programme for Ireland*’, *Heritage Council*, 2007, [www.heritagecouncil.ie/projects/museum-standards-programme-for-Ireland](http://www.heritagecouncil.ie/projects/museum-standards-programme-for-Ireland) 10/12/22.



## 1.2 Hugh Lane's Legacy



**Fig.3** The Hugh Lane Gallery

The HLG (Fig.3) located in Charlemont House on Parnell Square North, Dublin is a highly significant museological and cultural institute in Ireland since its establishment in 1908. With a strong focus on modern and contemporary art and excellence in Irish art practice, the HLG is a notable part of the culture in Ireland today with its dynamic and critically acclaimed programmes and world-renowned collections.<sup>20</sup> The rich history of the HLG stands out against the turbulent political landscape of Ireland's coming struggle for independence and the cultural background of a great resurgence of Irish art.

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<sup>20</sup> Hugh Lane Gallery. "About the Gallery." *Hugh Lane Gallery/Dánlann An Hugh Lane*, <https://www.hughlane.ie/about-the-gallery>.

(Hugh Lane) founded the gallery at a time of great promise and hope. At the turn of the 20th century, you had the great Celtic Revival – you had the Abbey Theatre, the playwrights, W.B. Yeats, Augusta Gregory, Synge, and Seán O’Casey. There really was a cultural and literary renaissance happening. Hugh Lane was in the thick of that, so the Gallery is a terribly important part of that.<sup>21</sup>

Hugh Lane, the Irish collector and art dealer, had a specific vision for the gallery which was grounded “in cultivating in Ireland an appreciation of the modern zeitgeist” of visual arts and modern literature and “of his desire to establish a gallery of Irish and modern art that would create a standard of taste and a feeling for the relative importance of painters’.”<sup>22</sup> Essentially Lane wished to situate and establish Irish art and artists nationally to raise appreciation of art among all classes of Irish people. This is evident in his desire to also attract the widest possible audience to the gallery; it has been free admission and has had very flexible hours and even late evenings since its opening and has remained free to this day also. Lane was clear about the ethos he followed about the ownership of pieces of art and where he saw it being of better use hung for the general public by stating,

I never sell a picture until I am driven to it. And if I sell to some millionaire it is lost. I don’t see it again, it may not give any very great pleasure to him and it is lost to everyone else. But if I give a picture to a gallery that is really good business. It is as much mine as ever, I still

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<sup>21</sup> Dawson, Barbara, Interview with Hot Press, “*Hugh Lane Gallery: “A place of participation, engagement and enjoyment”*”, Hot Press, [www.hotpress.com/opinion/hugh-lane-gallery-a-place-of-participation-engagement-and-enjoyment-22942053](http://www.hotpress.com/opinion/hugh-lane-gallery-a-place-of-participation-engagement-and-enjoyment-22942053), 06/12/22.

<sup>22</sup> Dawson, Barbara; Joanna Shepard “*Hugh Lane: Founder of a Gallery of Modern Art for Ireland*” Scala Publishers Ltd, 2008, pg.7.

possess it. I can see it whenever I like and everyone else can see it too, so there's no waste in the matter. I hate waste.<sup>23</sup>

Lane “believed in the value of a decent art education for the very young” and was one of the first to vocalise the importance of teaching art in primary and secondary schools in Ireland, illuminating further his aspirations for the huge potential in the development of Irish art, education was also hugely prevalent in Lane’s “all-encompassing vision” for the future of Irish art.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Lady Gregory, *'Sir Hugh Lane: his life and legacy'*, Oxford University Press, 1973 pg.141

<sup>24</sup> Dawson, Barbara; *"Hugh Lane: Founder of a Gallery of Modern Art for Ireland"* Scala Publishers Ltd, 2008, pg. 51

### 1.3 Education & Social Community Involvement

The philanthropic aspirations Lane held for the first contemporary art gallery in Ireland and the world, remain and resonate still within the mission and management of the museum gallery today. Speaking to the education curator of the HLG, Cleo Fagan talked about the goal of the current education and outreach programmes in the museum gallery,

Our aim is to primarily engage audiences with our exhibition programmes and collection, and with visual art and creativity in a more general sense, through stimulating and meaningful programmes. We seek to match the artistic integrity and intellectual and creative enquiry that is inherent in the exhibition programming and the work of the artists whose work we exhibit and collect.<sup>25</sup>

Fagan also noted that the museum gallery also works in tandem with a Panel of Professional Artists and Guides (30 artists and guides) to create and provide much of the educational programmes which accompany the exhibitions. This is very much reflected in the extensive educational programming created for the *BITA* exhibition, which reached and appealed to a wide breadth of audiences. The programme was extremely meaningful in the sense that it heavily incorporated the many voices of the artists involved. From film screenings, artist's talks, lecture series, study mornings and a summer art school the varied programme created another dimension to the exhibition, one which brought ideas and learning from the art into a welcoming realm of discussions and conversations about the topical themes – feminism, mythology, gender roles,

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<sup>25</sup> Fagan, Cleo. Online Interview. 06/12/2022.

women's safety – the exhibition dealt with. Moreover, speaking of their wide-reach of audiences, Fagan stated,

We engage with individual members of the public, primary and secondary schools, creches, parent and toddler groups, third-level students, teachers, families, retirement groups, adult learning groups, special interest groups, groups with different abilities and more. We work to make our programmes as inclusive as possible and we offer and are developing programmes for the hearing and visually impaired, and the neurodiverse, to name but a few current foci.<sup>26</sup>

As a part of the Teen Culture Club, a programme for secondary schools and youth groups, the HLG, with artist Michelle Hall brought in fourth-year students from Loreto Crumlin (Fig.4) to explore and create visual and written responses to their interpretations of the artworks of Amanda Doran and Elenor McCaughey and the themes of feminism present in *BITA*.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Fagan, Cleo. Online Interview. 06/12/2022.

<sup>27</sup> The Hugh Lane, 'Teen Culture Club' Instagram, 21/10/22, <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cj-4jWDMujg/>.



Fig.4 The Hugh Lane Gallery, @thehughlane, *Teen Culture Club*, Instagram Post, 21/10/2022.

## 1.4 The Museum Gallery: A Voice of Activism

*“But when this institution speaks, it speaks exhibitions”<sup>28</sup>*

A museum voice is critical, it is that voice that is presenting knowledge and ideas in exhibitions to its audience. McManus, writer and museum practitioner writes that the museum voice is dictated by a “strong sense of identity and purpose.”<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, this strong museum voice enables credibility and trust with the audience, which is inherently valuable, as it is what allows for a positive and assured transferral of knowledge between the museum and the audience.<sup>30</sup> It is this transferral of knowledge where design comes in and converts ideas, subjects and ideas into enhanced visually led learning experiences which facilitate exhibitions to provide an “enjoyable means of assimilating information.”<sup>31</sup> An element which is imperative to a cultural institute like the HLG as it is these lasting impressions which encourage visitors to return and create a trusted relationship of learning.

The process of creating an exhibition begins with an idea; it should “seep in from all directions and be sifted constantly, searching for those that fulfil the criteria of public service and education” and overarchingly cater for the needs of the general public.<sup>32</sup> For the HLG to be successful in its mission of “promoting an understanding, knowledge and appreciation of modern and contemporary art” it needs to address current issues communities are facing today.<sup>33</sup> It also is the

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<sup>28</sup> Ferguson, Bruce W. ‘EXHIBITION RHETORICS Material speech and utter sense’ in *Thinking about exhibitions*, London: Routledge, 1996. pg.131

<sup>29</sup> McManus, Paulette M. “Invoking the Muse The Purposes and Processes of Communicative Action in Museums” in *Museum Gallery Interpretation and Material Culture*, Taylor & Francis Group, 2011. Pg. 27

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. pg. 27.

<sup>31</sup> Dean, David. *Museum Exhibition: Theory and Practice*, Taylor & Francis Group, 1996. Pg. 6

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. pg. 12.

<sup>33</sup> Hugh Lane Gallery. *About the Gallery* Hugh Lane Gallery, n.d Web. Accessed 11/02/2023

responsibility of a museum to ensure that the information regarding community needs is gathered from the community itself and not internal assumptions of what they think the needs are.<sup>34</sup> The exhibition *BITA* in the HLG combats the political, cultural and societal narratives women are subjected to today. Undeniably, it is a topic taking high precedence concerning societal issues communities are facing today; from the continuing rise of domestic violence worldwide due to covid-19 to the overturning of *Roe v Wade* in the US and a women's protest for freedom in Iran, triggered by the death of Mahsa Amini, the tumultuous cycle of subjugating the freedom of women is regrettably still commonplace in our society today.

The HLG voice is promoting an understanding, knowledge and appreciation of contemporary feminist art through this exhibition. It is also opening the public up to the significant awareness and dialogue of feminism and freedom and awareness and knowledge are the first steps in creating social change. As previously stated, the role of a museum gallery as an educational institute is to promote knowledge and therefore there is the argument they should also be addressing their responsibility for promoting social justice.<sup>35</sup> The awareness of social justice, in this case, feminism in Ireland, is enabled and encouraged through the museum voice of the HLG and by the curation and exhibition design, a form of communicative activism, in *BITA*.

When the HLG speaks through the exhibition *BITA* it is communicating its position regarding women in Irish society. The voice of an institution is pivotal for the interpretation of information. The tone of voice and what it chooses to say are also inevitably moulded by the staff and the

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<sup>34</sup> Dean, Op.Cit., pg. 13

<sup>35</sup> Hein, Op.Cit., pg.13



institution's collection of artworks. In 1991 Barbara Dawson became the first female director appointed to a cultural institution in Ireland.<sup>36</sup> Again, the HLG is evidently a pioneering force in advancing not only contemporary Irish art internationally but also in subverting and modernising the roles of women in Ireland. Furthermore, in an article, Dawson noted the large body of art created by Irish women in the HLG collection,

We've got a great collection from the early part of the century – all those great women, such as May Guinness, Evie Hone, Mainie Jellet, Grace Henry, Mary Swanzy, Norah McGuinness and Nano Reid. They're fantastic artists and they were very influential in Irish art practice – many of them founding members of the Irish Exhibition of Living Art, with other artists, including Louis le Brocquy...It emphasises that women were to the fore in a lot of visual art practice in Ireland when the Gallery was established, and continuing on today.<sup>37</sup>

These aspects of the institution have influenced and shaped its voice, the exhibitions it displays and ultimately the ideas the institution wishes to express and educate an audience on. This is explicitly apparent in BITA as it communicates themes such as feminism, mythology, and gender roles. The topic is clearly a pressing issue that the curators, artists and directors felt was an appropriate and *necessary* message that the HLG could speak about to the public. Moreover, the institution's voice

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<sup>36</sup> Dawson, Barbara, Interview with Hot Press, "*Hugh Lane Gallery: "A place of participation, engagement and enjoyment"*", Hot Press, [www.hotpress.com/opinion/hugh-lane-gallery-a-place-of-participation-engagement-and-enjoyment-22942053](http://www.hotpress.com/opinion/hugh-lane-gallery-a-place-of-participation-engagement-and-enjoyment-22942053), 06/12/22.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

transects with the museum's role in society, one which is advancing social justice and more specifically feminism in Ireland.

The following chapters in this thesis will investigate and address the social justice issue of feminism in the exhibition *BITA*. By discussing the artworks through the lens of ancient mythology, contemporary narratives of women in Ireland, exhibition and curation design, this thesis intends to explore the advantages of using the medium of exhibitions as methods of 'communication activism' and as educational tools for raising awareness about feminism.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> In Frey, L., & Blinne, K. 'Activism and social justice. In M. Allen (Ed.), *The sage encyclopedia of communication research methods*' Pg.. 12. SAGE Publications (2017) defines Communication Activism as "activism for social justice means engaging in communicative practices to promote social justice."

## **Chapter 2: Interpreting Bones in the Attic**

## 2.1 Significant Context - Feminism in Ireland: Past and Present

The tools of protest used in movements differ among causes of social justice. In regard to the feminist movement, women have throughout history created visuals of their fight for freedom, through tapestries, images and words as their voices. In the Greek myth of Philomela, the daughter of the king of Athens is seized and trapped and her tongue is cut out by Tereus. Physically unable to tell the story of her attack and entrapment – the truth – she turns to her loom with “... a greater motive to make clear the story she wove than any artist ever had. With infinite pains and surpassing skill, she produced a wondrous tapestry on which the whole account of her wrongs was unfolded” the cloak was delivered to Procne, her sister and she was freed.<sup>39</sup> It is no surprise that art – and the exhibition of it – is a core medium through which to communicate social justice and more specifically the feminist movement and its importance.



Fig.5 Philomela handing the tapestry over to deliver it to her sister Procne.

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<sup>39</sup> Hamilton Edith, *Mythology* Boston, Little, Brown and Co, 1942. Pg. 395

Reflecting upon my own experience of narratives of the subjugation of women in Ireland, I realised I had only grasped these horrific stories through the lens of media headlines. The death of Savita Halappanavars, the Paddy Jackson rape trial, the Magdalen Laundries (Fig.6), the murder of Aisling Murphy (Fig.7) and the suicide of Dara Quigley are just a handful of the cases which stand out clearly in my mind from Irish media. These women's names and faces were splashed on front pages of newspapers and online articles, on the radio, and heard in snippets between changing stations and conversation; when it penetrated usual conversation, the most gruesome of details always surfaced first. The stories of the Irish women mentioned above are a selection of stories which only represent the smallest of timelines of the oppression of women in Irish history.



Fig. 6 LEFT Browne, Colette. "A Nations Shame" Irish Independent, 13 January 2021.



Fig. 7 RIGHT O'Driscoll, Seán. "She Fought for her Life" Irish Daily Mail, 19 January 2022.

Discrimination between sexes in Ireland can be seen in Irish law from as early as the 7th century AD. The Brehon laws are largely perceived as progressive and ahead of their time regarding women's rights, however, as Dr Mary Condrón, an academic in Gender studies at Trinity College Dublin, noted in the *BITA* educational study morning, that is incorrect. Contrary to the belief of gender equality in these laws, women had to own property to have equal status and were seen to be in a "subordinate position" to their husbands if they didn't.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, with the establishment of the Irish state, its staunch influence from the catholic church and its archaic values surrounding women did and still to this day succeed in compartmentalising Irish women. In the constitution of Ireland (1937) article 41.2 expresses that the state recognizes a woman's place to be "her life within the home."<sup>41</sup> In 2018, an attempt to withdraw this article was postponed and it is yet to be removed in 2023. The lives of Irish women today and the subjugated stereotypes which still proceed to compartmentalise them are not of relative political importance to the state today and "misogyny is still alive and well in modern-day Ireland."<sup>42</sup>

Internationally, major civil unrest and protests have erupted across Iran following the brutal murder of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old woman who had supposedly violated Iran's mandatory hijab law. Protests are ongoing and it is being seen as one of the biggest equal rights movements in history. In the US, the supreme court overturning *Roe v Wade* made worldwide headlines, the US has regressed to fighting for women's bodies, a right they had once successfully won. Comparing

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<sup>40</sup> Costello, John A. "The Leading Principles of the Brehon Laws." *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, vol. 2, no. 8, 1913, Pg. 438. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30082633>. Accessed 29/10/2022.

<sup>41</sup> Ireland. 'Bunreacht Na Héireann' (*Constitution of Ireland*) Dublin :Oifig an tSoláthair, 1945.

<sup>42</sup> Guest Author for The Countess. "The Irish Constitution and Its Inherent Misogyny." *The Countess*, 12 June 2021, <https://thecountess.ie/the-irish-constitution-and-its-inherent-misogyny/>. Accessed 11/01/2023

the images below of protests for the same cause in 1982 (Fig.8) and 2022 (Fig.9), do not show many differences, a stark reflection of an archaic regression to the plight of pre-feminist movements.



Fig.8 Guerrilla Girls demand a return to traditional values on abortion, march on Washington DC, 1992.



Fig.9 A crowd in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, protests the overturning of Roe v. Wade by the Supreme Court, on June 24, 2022.

The freedom of women and their rights have been brought under attack yet again. Evans, curator of the exhibit makes light of the continuing gendered oppression in the *BITA* in the exhibition introduction.

Recently we have witnessed, internationally, new legislative onslaughts on women's freedom – the wearying and tumultuous cycle continues as women try to wrest control over their bodies. The Covid pandemic lockdown impacted hugely on victims of domestic abuse and saw an escalation in violence against women in our society. What is most alarming is that it continues to rise.<sup>43</sup>

The timing of the *Bones in Attic* exhibition is unparalleled, women's rights are being attacked and abused on a national and global scale with no signs of stopping. The HLG has publicly displayed a timely and extremely relevant exhibition, consisting of the inter-generational work of eleven Irish artists, with its intention to “continue and support the important conversations that are currently taking place in Ireland by informed, talented, thoughtful voices in various cultural disciplines. It is a celebration of what women have achieved so far, a journey towards autonomy, respect and understanding, safeguarding the future of feminism for all.”<sup>44</sup> The significance of this timely exhibition is immense, *The BITA* raises awareness and invites an audience to experience the inner world of Irish women through their lens of expression – sculpture, painting, photography, film, and the written word – that is presented in an outward world which is plagued with political unrest and continued gendered oppression; it is an act of hope and determination.

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<sup>43</sup> The Hugh Lane Gallery. '*Bones in the Attic*' Exhibition Pamphlet. The Hugh Lane Gallery, 11/09/22.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.



This chapter will discuss key works in BITA, which reflect and express the aforementioned philosophies of museum practice in the HLG from chapter one. Through the following lenses, feminism, ancient and contemporary and exhibition design in *BITA*, this thesis intends to create a larger discussion about exhibitions as communicative tools to inform, educate and empower the general public on issues of social justice.

## 2.2 Na Cailleacha - Ancient Narratives of the Witch

*'The same female figures are still considered dangerous: the single woman, the childless woman, the ageing woman – all dismissed with fear, pity or horror.'*<sup>45</sup>



Fig.10 The Hugh Lane Gallery Entryway to BITA.

### *Ancient Myth*

The above quote opens up the BITA exhibition, it is a prefix to the introduction in the exhibition programme, leaflet and the exhibition itself (Fig.10). Fast forward to present-day Ireland and it regrettably still rings true. The stereotypes and narratives of the single woman, the childless woman and the ageing woman are strongly associated with negative connotations in modern society. Albeit significant progress concerning women's roles in society combating these narratives, Kinneret observes that unsurprisingly the myth persists “as a naturalised, undisputed, and insoluble cultural

<sup>45</sup> The Hugh Lane Gallery. 'Bones in the Attic' Exhibition Pamphlet. The Hugh Lane Gallery, 2022.

trope” today.<sup>46</sup> The reasoning behind this, notes Kinneret, is the fact that single women are frequently targeted with “scorn” and “remarks” because “they are seen to pose the constant threat of pervasive perversion to the normative social order”.<sup>47</sup> These particular figures are rebelling against their assigned rigid cultural scripts of mothers and objects of sexual desire. The abandonment of these roles is seen as a threat in society and therefore single, ageing, and childless women are heavily scrutinised and rejected by those conforming to this power structure. A figurative symbol of this ostracism is present in Irish mythology and a motif embroidered throughout the exhibition’s thematic approach and curation, is the *Cailleach*. Symbolism, form and language surrounding the *Cailleach* have shifted and morphed since its primaeval Celtic mythological inception. Ultimately, the figure has transformed due to the *Cailleach* narrative being under the systematic control and manipulation of the societal patriarchal structures which have prevailed in Ireland’s history – aforementioned in the Brehon laws to the present-day free state constitution– which has subjected women to subordinate roles and narratives in society. From once a vibrant symbol of a “ primaeval mother-goddess personify(ing) the Celtic landscape and environment...symbolising the feminine origins of our existence..” and of a cloak, from its Latin derivative of the pallium, which is said to have shaped the Irish landscape and environment.<sup>48</sup> Which solidified her “essential identity with the land and landscape of Ireland”.<sup>49</sup> To the symbol of women, in early Irish literature, which euhemerized goddess-like qualities and substituted a woman of power and awe for one who is lost, old, and occasionally deranged when left without a union with a king; *her rightful ruler*.<sup>50</sup> Moreover to its most recent distillation into one of its most basic

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<sup>46</sup> Lahad, Kinneret. “Facing the Horror: Becoming an ‘Old Maid.’” *A Table for One: A Critical Reading of Singlehood, Gender and Time*, Manchester University Press, 2017, Pg. 52

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* pg.52

<sup>48</sup> Condren, Mary. ‘*Bones in the Attic*’ in ‘*Bones in the Attic*’ Exhibition Catalogue, Hugh Lane Gallery, 2022. Pg 10

<sup>49</sup> Mac Cana, Proinsias. “*Women in Irish Mythology*.” *The Crane Bag*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1980, Pg. 9.

<sup>50</sup> Ní Bhrólcháin, Muireann. “*Women in Early Irish Myths and Sagas*.” *The Crane Bag*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1980, Pg. 12.

and meagre forms to date; of a hag, an evil-looking old woman or witch.<sup>51</sup> These ancient myths and stories about women are still relevant in today's society and are arguably a rationale behind their substantial use and inspiration in the contemporary exhibition in question displayed in modern Ireland. So pertinent in the exhibition is the symbol of the *Cailleach*, that the exhibition title *BITA* was inspired by the legend of the meeting of the *Cailleach* with St. Patrick,

Following a brief conversation, St Patrick banishes the *Cailleach* after he is challenged to count the vast number of slaughtered bullock bones she has hoarded in her attic, indicating her immense antiquity.<sup>52</sup>

Almost as if intimidated by the *Cailleach*'s wisdom and repelled by her age, the *Cailleach* is cast aside, rejected from civilisation. This a fitting conclusion to what has been discussed previously in regard to women in Irish society and to the premise of the exhibition *BITA*.

Continuing on this line of discussion, exhibiting in *BITA*, is a group of 8 women - 7/8 over seventy-named *Na Cailleacha* who are subverting this trope of the dangers and fears surrounding ageing women by exploring “what it means to be older women, arguably becoming invisible, and to develop strategies to overcome the challenges of ageing” through a variety of creative practices from painting, film making, sculpture and writing.<sup>53</sup> In the following section, I will develop an analysis of the *Na Cailleacha* poster exhibited in *BITA* (Fig.11), through a contemporary feminist lens,

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<sup>51</sup> Dawson, Barbara. Foreword in '*Bones in the Attic*' Exhibition Catalogue, Hugh Lane Gallery, 2022. Pg 7

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. pg.7.

<sup>53</sup> *Na Cailleacha*. '*Na Cailleacha*' In '*Bones in the Attic*' Exhibition Catalogue. The Hugh Lane Gallery, 2022. Pg 56

delving further into the history of the feminist group The Guerrilla Girls and exploring their association with Na Cailleacha.

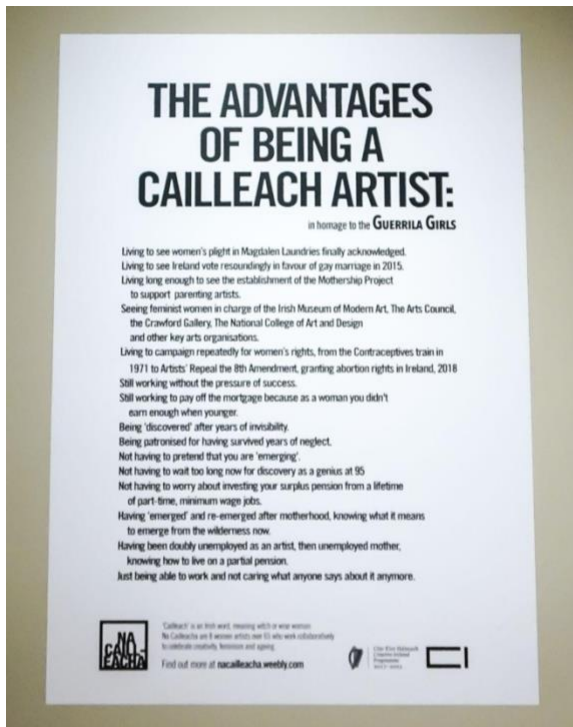


Fig.11 Na Cailleacha, *The Advantages of Being a Cailleach Artist*, The Hugh Lane Gallery 2022.



Fig.12 Guerrilla Girls, *The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist*, 1988.

### *The Guerrilla Girl Impact*

This image above (Fig.11) is a Na Cailleacha version, ‘The Advantages of being a Cailleach Artist’, designed by Cormac Larkin, of Guerrilla Girl’s land-mark typographic poster ‘The advantages of being a woman artist from 1988 (Fig.12). Na Cailleacha with the permission of GG designed their version of the well-known poster. The poster brings to light Na Cailleacha’s accumulated 500 years of lived experiences of being a woman artist in Ireland. The poster details multiple historic happenings that Na Cailleacha have lived through; the Magdalen Laundries finally being acknowledged, the gay marriage referendum in 2015 and the repealing of the 8th amendment in 2018. Arguably, it serves as a manifesto of Na Cailleacha which proposes a new way of thinking

around the subversive narratives and identities of modern women in Ireland and the demographic they represent. Their mission is to make art which is a contemporary meditative inquiry into the 'attitudes to ageing, bodies, and their place in the art world, their feminisms and their different cultural heritages.'<sup>54</sup> Both posters reflect the political, cultural and social concerns for women at the time of production. The homage to the original GG poster reflects a mutual goal both activist groups have, to upend traditional, conformist and suffocating narratives about women.

The Guerrilla Girls are a group of interventionist, anonymous, gorilla mask-wearing female artist-activists who work to expose “sexual and racial discrimination in the art world... and the wider cultural area.”<sup>55</sup> After being outraged by the lack of female artist representation in galleries and museums Guerrilla Girls (GG) created a poster campaign which targeted museums, dealers, curators, critics and artists who they believe enabled the exclusion of women and non-white artists from the exhibiting and publishing art world. The Guerrilla Girls, described as the “conscious of the art world,” by Lucy Lippard – an American writer, art critic, activist, and curator– became a strong and determined voice which broke out of the restricting societal structures artist women were being subjected to.<sup>56</sup> The Guerrilla Girls created “a link between the art world and the grassroots political activism of other feminist artists across the country,” inspiring discussions and changing opinions among the audiences who viewed their work.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Na Cailleacha. 'Na Cailleacha' In '*Bones in the Attic*' Exhibition Catalogue. The Hugh Lane Gallery, 2022. Pg 56

<sup>55</sup> Tate. '*The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist*', Guerrilla Girls, 1988." *Tate*, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/guerrilla-girls-the-advantages-of-being-a-woman-artist-p78796>. Date Accessed 11/02/2023

<sup>56</sup> Lippard, Lucy R. '*The Pink Glass Swan - selected feminist essays on art*' The New Press, New York 1995. pg257

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* pg257.



**Fig.13** Guerrilla Girls, *It's Even Worse in Europe*, White chapel Street, 2016.

Moreover, their actions of “disruptive headlines, outrageous visuals and killer statistics” and their agenda of inclusivity have not remained in America or the 1990s.<sup>58</sup> Today, they are a worldwide group who have consistently, over decades, advanced and furthered the plight of the Guerrilla Girls – and overarchingly intersectional feminism – internationally, castigating and exposing museums and cultural institutions around the world. In 2016 the Whitechapel Gallery in London commissioned the Guerrilla Girls to create their first dedicated UK show, it was titled “Is it even worse in Europe?” and it set about to display the research into the posed question of; ‘Are museums today presenting a diverse history of contemporary art or the history of money and power?’<sup>59</sup> To execute this they surveyed more than 400 European galleries and the poster above (Fig.13) encapsulates the result. The names of the  $\frac{3}{4}$  of museums that ignored the request and did

<sup>58</sup> Guerrilla Girls, ‘GUERRILLA GIRLS: REINVENTING THE ‘F’ WORD: FEMINISM’ <https://www.guerrillagirls.com/our-story> Date Accessed 11/02/2023

<sup>59</sup> Brown, Mark ‘Feminist art activists the Guerrilla Girls get first dedicated UK show’, The Guardian, 19/07/16, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/jul/19/guerrilla-girls-feminist-art-activists-first-uk-show-whitechapel> Date Accessed 11/02/2023

not reply were inscribed on the floor where visitors could walk all over them, a tongue-in-cheek public intervention – a steadfast feature of the Guerrilla Girls work which has time and time again proven successful across the group's entire oeuvre in propelling diversity and motivating change in the art world.

The Guerrilla Girls have further exhibited their work and exposed biases in the art world internationally at the São Paulo Museum of Art, the Venice Biennale, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, Museum of Military History, Dresden; Art Basel Hong Kong.<sup>60</sup> They have inspired countless individuals and groups including Na Cailleacha and the exhibited pieces in the *BITA* exhibition.

#### *BITA Exhibition Design*

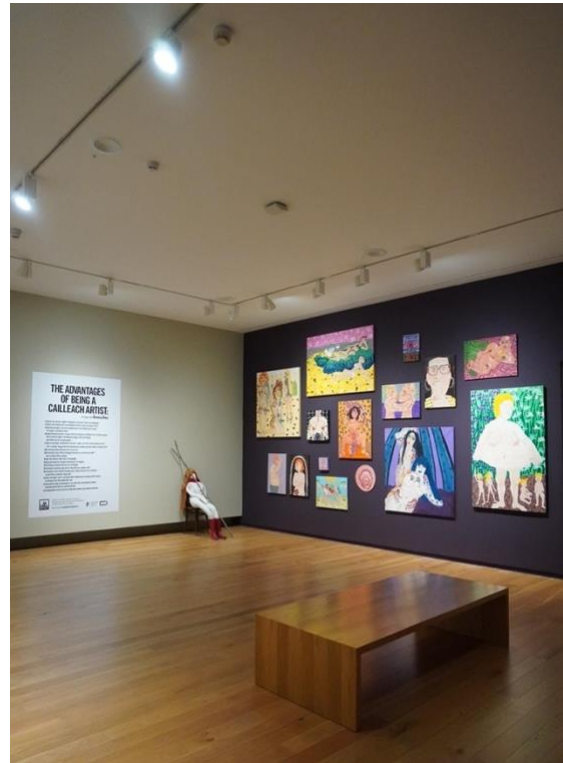
The function of the poster is reflective of the function of the exhibition as a whole; to combat the subjugation of the political, cultural and societal narratives women are subjected to today. Placed in the context of the exhibition, *BITA*, its location situated amongst multiple artworks, certainly influences the way it is read. The poster is one of many curated elements, which when put together, creates the body of work which reflects the exhibition's ideals “...to build a collective foundation of thinking for current and prospective actions directly affecting women.”<sup>61</sup> When the poster is placed amongst multiple forms of art, it creates a sense of dialogue between the artworks.

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<sup>60</sup> Guerrilla Girls, 'GUERRILLA GIRLS: REINVENTING THE 'F' WORD: FEMINISM' <https://www.guerrillagirls.com/our-story>  
Date Accessed 11/02/2023

<sup>61</sup> The Hugh Lane Gallery. 'Bones in the Attic' Exhibition Pamphlet. The Hugh Lane Gallery, 11/09/22





**Fig.14 LEFT** Na Cailleacha, *Child's Play*, The Hugh Lane Gallery.

**Fig.15 RIGHT** Na Cailleacha and Amanda Doran, The Hugh Lane Gallery.

Accompanying the Na Cailleacha poster is *Child's play* (Fig.14). A series of photographs of linen dolls which were created to 'reassert the value of play' photographed by Therry Rudin in multiple settings. Each represents a different member of Na Cailleacha and was influenced by the 'Venetian reclining nude'.<sup>62</sup> Further comparisons of the dolls (Fig.16) can be made to the 'Venus of Willendorf' (Fig.17) which represents a fertility goddess.<sup>63</sup> Catherine B. Silver, in her paper concerned with gendered identities in old age, states that,

Older women's bodies are more likely to be perceived as deformed, ridiculous looking and desexualised. They become frightening 'crones' and 'witch-like', as imagined in children's books and fairy tales. The language that describes older women is indicative of deep-seated

<sup>62</sup> Marshall, Catherine, in the Panel '*BITA Study Morning*', Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin, 21/10/22

<sup>63</sup> Art in Context, "*Venus of Willendorf*" – A Study of This Famous Fertility Goddess Statue" 22/06/22 <https://artincontext.org/venus-of-willendorf/> Date Accessed 11/02/2023

unconscious fears and a rejection of the ageing female body, with its connotations of danger and contamination that need to be kept separate and isolated.<sup>64</sup>

These dolls created by the Na Cailleacha are reimagining the ageing woman's body and reverting the aforementioned negative trope back to one which has deep-rooted deity-like roots of Venus, a fertility goddess and the *Cailleach*. The actual dolls also sit alongside the poster, sitting on chairs in corners and on the floor, their eerie presence alluding constantly to the theme of the ever-present *Cailleach*.



**Fig.16 LEFT** Na Cailleacha, *Child's Play*, The Hugh Lane Gallery, 2022.

**Fig.17 RIGHT** Famous Fertility Goddess Statue, *Venus of Willendorf*, Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria, created 25,000 BP.

Lippard spoke about “the concepts body, pain, pleasure and desire remain the vehicle of much major feminist art”, this is also true for both Na Cailleacha and Amanda Doran and arguably links the two thematically leading to their exhibition in the same room.<sup>65</sup> Although thematically linked, the imagery and art expressed in Amanda Doran's couldn't be more visually different to that of its exhibiting partner, Na Cailleacha. Doran explored the “transformative processes of a contemporary woman's experience with identity...” and centred her work on women's bodies and accepting and celebrating the unique self when society has forced us to do otherwise.<sup>66</sup> The

<sup>64</sup> Silver, Catherine B. “Gendered Identities in Old Age: Toward (De)Gendering?” *Journal of Aging Studies* 17.4 (2003) Pg. 385

<sup>65</sup> Lippard, Lucy R. *The Pink Glass Swan - selected feminist essays on art* The New Press, New York 1995, pg196

<sup>66</sup> The Hugh Lane Gallery. *'Bones in the Attic'* Exhibition Pamphlet. The Hugh Lane Gallery, 11/09/22

paintings are vibrantly coloured, textured and emotive; a stark contrast to the black and white typographic poster being discussed, which is hung beside it. It is the context of the relationship between the pieces which also greatly influences the way the images are read.

The generational gap between these artists connects the artworks to this theme of ‘ancient and future sisterhood’.<sup>67</sup> It amplifies the diversity and intergenerational aspect of each woman’s personal artist’s narrative and life experiences. The location of the poster within this exhibition allows for it to be contextualised differently than if, for example, it was placed on a public street, as then it would have represented just one generation of women. However, the interconnectivity between artworks in the exhibition creates a powerful collective narrative of togetherness.

The tapestry of modern feminist associations woven together with pre-Christian narratives of women creates almost a voyeuristic effect for the audience viewing the exhibition. As if the audience is frozen in time – simultaneously viewing both the past and its powerful narratives of women and the present, and its less encouraging subjugated structures – but hope is abundant for the future here too; in the simple fact that the exhibition was organised and happened. Irish women were brought to the fore in an institutional setting of a museum – which has historically systematically excluded women – to express themselves without structures dictating what they should create or display.<sup>68</sup> The Hugh Lane Gallery voicing the exhibition and the significance it

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<sup>67</sup> The Hugh Lane Gallery. ‘*Bones in the Attic*’ Exhibition Pamphlet. The Hugh Lane Gallery, 11/09/22

<sup>68</sup> Brown, Mark ‘*Feminist art activists the Guerrilla Girls get first dedicated UK show*’, The Guardian, 19/07/16, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/jul/19/guerrilla-girls-feminist-art-activists-first-uk-show-whitechapel> Date Accessed 11/02/2023

brought to the eleven artists being displayed is in itself communicating to the general public that women's art *matters*, moreover that women's safety in society *matters*.

Next, the exhibited work of Jesse Jones will be critically analysed through the same lenses of myth, feminism and exhibition design. The international reflections of the *Cailleach* present in her work which is rooted in feminism will be discussed to further illustrate how art and the curated group exhibition of it in a museum gallery, is a medium which is effective in communicating social justice.

## 2.3 Jesse Jones – Contemporary Narratives of the Witch

*“Are witches for feminism what Spartacus, the rebellious peasants, the French revolutionaries and the Bolsheviks are for the socialists?”<sup>69</sup>*

### *Modern Myth*

Silvia Bovenschen poses this question in her paper ‘The Contemporary Witch, the Historical Witch and the Witch Myth: The Witch, Subject of the Appropriation of Nature and Object of the Domination of Nature.’ Discussed in this paper is the relationship between mythology and the archetype of the witch in contemporary society and how it came to prominence again centuries after the European witch trials, in modern-day feminism. Horsley, academic and professor of religion, describes the early analyses of the witch trials of early modern Europe as a “violent manifestation of Western male culture’s fear and hatred of women, and as an extension of its need to suppress women’s traditional powers, rites and knowledge, which it interpreted as demonic threats”, thousands of people mostly women were tortured into confessing into practising witchcraft and later hunted and murdered.<sup>70</sup> Bovenschen discusses the present-day appropriation of witches and states that the contemporary witches of today “at first glance, have little in common with witches who were burned at the stake” but that contemporary feminists more likely appropriated the archetype of the witch not due to historical significance but due to a “more direct pre-conceptual relationship...between the word on the one hand and the personal experiences of today’s women on the other” and that “the word, the image touched a sensitive nerve, that

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<sup>69</sup> Bovenschen, Silvia, et al. “*The Contemporary Witch, the Historical Witch and the Witch Myth: The Witch, Subject of the Appropriation of Nature and Object of the Domination of Nature.*” *New German Critique*, no. 15, 1978, Pg. 83

<sup>70</sup> Horsley, Ritta Jo, and Richard A. Horsley. “On the Trail of the ‘Witches’: Wise Women, Midwives and the European Witch Hunts.” *Women in German Yearbook*, vol. 3, 1987, Pg. 1

resonated in a moment of experience far beyond their former historical significance.”<sup>71</sup> This has enabled a reform for the word ‘witch’ from the intended patriarchal projection of an evil outcast woman and subverted its meaning to a woman who holds power and demands societal reforms.

In Italy during the 1970s feminist movement, the International Feminist Collective started a campaign for International Wages for Housework. Similar to the aforementioned protests regarding female bodily autonomy and the right to abortions in the United States of America, in 1982 and then again in 2022 with the overturning of *Roe v Wade* (Fig.9), we regrettably see the same occurring in Europe with the 1970s feminist movement (Fig.18) and 2022 protests for the right to abortion, as a new far-right government has entered in Italy (Fig.19).



**Fig.18** The feminist movement, the International Feminist Collective campaign for International Wages for Housework. Italy (1970s)

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<sup>71</sup> Bovenschen, *Op.cit.*, Pg. 84



**Fig.19** Italians march for abortion rights while raising their hands to symbolise the uterus after far-right election victory, Non-Una di Meno (Not One Less) movement and feminist collectives, in Rome, Italy September 28, 2022. Photo by Yara Nardi/REUTERS.

At these Italian protests in the 1970s “Tremble, tremble; the witches have returned!” was chanted.<sup>72</sup> Bovenschen later states that “... women have appropriated the frightening apparition and collectively taken over the myth...” through protest and defying socio-normative predicted narratives of women, this act of taking ownership of the previously negative narrative has essentially enabled women to be “freed from it.”<sup>73</sup> An example of this through art is the work of Irish artist Jesse Jones who mirrored the Italian transnational feminism years later, utilising this symbol of the witch in feminist protest to create her body of work for the Venice Biennale, *Tremble Tremble* (2017). The subsequent installation in BITA consists of *Thou shall not suffer*

<sup>72</sup> Dunne, Aidan ‘*The persistence of the feminine, embodied in the witch, demonised, and hounded*’, *The Irish Times*, 26/06/18 <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/art-and-design/visual-art/the-persistence-of-the-feminine-embodied-in-the-witch-demonised-and-hounded-1.3543103> Date Accessed 11/02/2023

<sup>73</sup> Bovenschen, Op.cit., Pg. 86

(2019) a photo collage print and archival objects from the production of *Tremble Tremble* (2017).

The title came from the aforementioned protest chants of “Tremble, tremble; the witches have returned!” and highlights Ireland’s political landscape at the time and the social movement of ‘Repeal the 8<sup>th</sup>’.<sup>74</sup>

Irish times critic, Aidan Dunne in his review of *Tremble Tremble* (2017) shared an insight that another possible implication of the title is a metaphorical shaking of the political ground of law in Ireland concerning women’s bodies, writing that “...the ground is shaking, we may be on the verge of a radical shift, a restoration of pre-patriarchal authority.”<sup>75</sup> Two months after this article was published the 8<sup>th</sup> amendment was repealed and resigned into law. Looking back from its launch to what transpired in Irish law during its exhibition, Jones’ body of work and its foundations in myth are almost prophetic in nature. The installation “churn(ed) testimony, court statements, song and artefacts into a towering bodily incantation.” Almost as if casting a spell or magically prophesying bodily autonomy for women in Ireland.<sup>76</sup> Talking about *Tremble Tremble* (2017) Jones stated she wanted to try to make an audience “..think about the long duration of feminism, to not think of feminism from first-wave feminism but to think back and imagine feminism 2 million years old” and “how could you create a structure of memory through an aesthetic experience that might conjure a collective idea about how we can have agency.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Dunne, Op.cit.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Talbot Rice Gallery. (2020, February 27). Jesse Jones: Tremble Tremble / At the Gates at Talbot Rice Gallery [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AaDZOxYcPEw&t=74s>

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.



Similar to the aforementioned reclamation of the *witch* by protesters in Italy, the *Sheela na Gig* has also in contemporary times been transformed into its opposite intended meaning to one which gives power back to women. It has been reclaimed as a “symbol against misogyny – one of unapologetic female empowerment and sexuality”.<sup>78</sup> Sheela na Gigs, the earliest dating back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century, have multiple speculative functions, from warding off evil and discouraging sexual sin to the most recent, of a goddess of fertility.<sup>79</sup> A contemporary example of this reclamation is the Irish feminist art group, ‘Project Sheela’.

### *Project Sheela*

‘Project Sheela’ is described on their Instagram (Fig.20) as a “Street art project celebrating female sexuality & empowerment”, they place their own crafted Sheela Na gigs, ceramic naked women with large vulvas, in significant areas where women in Ireland have historically suffered, one such place being the site of a former Magdalen laundry (Fig.21).<sup>80</sup> Project Sheela stated in an article for The Guardian,

We wanted to honour the women who suffered there...the reason women were sent to these laundries was because of the Catholic church saw women’s sexuality as dangerous and sinful – the women were punished and abused by the nuns, who believed they were evil.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Stevens, Jenny. “*Big Vagina Energy: The Return of the Sheela Na Gig.*” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 8 Mar. 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/08/big-vagina-energy-the-return-of-the-sheela-na-gig>. Date Accessed 11/02/2023

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Project Sheela, @projectsheela, Instagram Profile. Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/projectsheela/?hl=en>

<sup>81</sup> Stevens, Jenny. “*Big Vagina Energy: The Return of the Sheela Na Gig.*” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 8 Mar. 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/08/big-vagina-energy-the-return-of-the-sheela-na-gig>. Date Accessed 11/02/2023

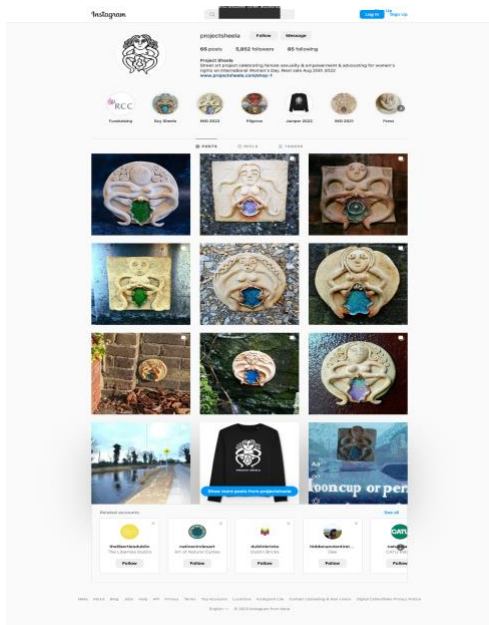


Fig.20 LEFT Project Sheela, @projectsheela, Instagram Profile.



Fig.21 RIGHT Project Sheela, Photo of ceramic Sheela na Gig, Instagram

These symbols of fertility and renewed feminine power are placed and juxtaposed against the stark history of the state and the catholic church's abuse of women and babies. It is reflective of the activist narrative for women in Ireland, one that is simultaneously honouring women's suffering and advocating for systematic change. Through the successful use of mythology in 'Project Sheela', as a method to guide insight and thought, the public is made aware of underlying ancient and modern systems of oppression experienced in Ireland. Project Sheela is a prime example of a modern group of feminists, who like the Guerrilla Girls, use art as a method to raise awareness around issues of social justice regarding women.

### *BITA Exhibition Design*

Exhibitions are a medium which connects design and art, and conversation is ultimately the result of this intersection. Conversations between the art and the viewer, incite new thoughts and

feelings. And the conversations between people, engaging in the exchange of thought and opinion freely. The design provides a structure to the exhibition experience and facilitates enjoyable learning.<sup>82</sup> BITA's exhibition design is effective in communicating the exhibition's intentions of supporting significant conversations happening about feminism in Ireland. It does so through the placement of the artworks and the relationship between pieces which create a narrative of sisterhood. And also through the threading of the underlying concepts and themes of pre-Christian narratives throughout the artworks.



**Fig.22 LEFT** Jesse Jones, *Thou Shalt Not Suffer*, Photo Collage, 2019.

**Fig.23 RIGHT** Jesse Jones, *Bill to repeal the act of sorcery and witchcraft*, Tremble Tremble Archive 2017.

Jones' exhibited art in BITA serves as a central example of a visualised plight of women through an exploration of pre-Christian narratives of women, evident in the Sheela na Gig print collage (Fig.22) and the overpowering systems which oppressed them, evident in the objects of the mini

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<sup>82</sup> Dean, David. 'Museum Exhibition: Theory and Practice,' Taylor & Francis Group, 1996. Pg 6

courthouse and bill wrapped in wax (Fig.23). Jones' exhibited work arose from studies into legislation surrounding women bodies, ritual practices, witchcraft and "...how historical instances of communal culture may hold resonance in our current social and political experiences" such as the aforementioned persecution of women in early modern Europe's witch trials and Ireland's Repeal the 8th movement.<sup>83</sup>



Fig.24 LEFT *Sheela-na-gig*, Sculpture, 12thC.

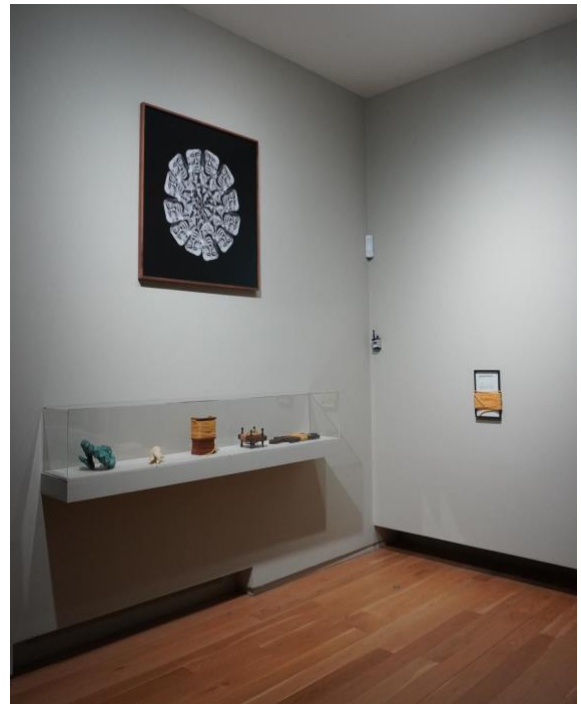


Fig.25 RIGHT The Hugh Lane Gallery, Installation by Jesse Jones in BITA.

Accompanying the collage print are multiple aforementioned objects, including: a bronze reproduction of the Sheela na Gig, located in the British Museum (Fig.24); a wax hand (the cast of the artist's mother Jenny Jones); a miniature courthouse wrapped in wax from the *Tremble Tremble* (2017) production and a bill to repeal the act of sorcery and witchcraft which was

<sup>83</sup> The Hugh Lane Gallery. 'Bones in the Attic' Exhibition catalogue. The Hugh Lane Gallery, Pg 26.

donated to the artist by legal activist Mairead Enright, this bill also served as a protection spell for the work during the Venice Biennale.<sup>84</sup> Discussing Jesse Jones' exhibited work is Victoria Evans, curator of the BITA exhibition who described the objects and prints being displayed as formed together “to create a multimedia installation which reimagines feminist history and law” (Fig.25).<sup>85</sup>

Located beside the work of Jesse Jones is artist Ruby Wallis, an Irish artist who works with photography and moving image. Wallis is similarly reimagining feminist history through her ongoing work *'A Woman Walks Alone at Night, With a Camera'* (Fig.26+27) exploring the safety of women through the figure of the 'flaneuse', the feminine version of a 'flaneur', meaning a person who walks around and observes society.<sup>86</sup> The work calls into question the restrictions and feelings of danger women experience walking in the night, it encompasses a sense of possible freedom for women in a world where they have “...deterritorialized an urban landscape traditionally seen as a male domain”, making it safe for women to wander without fear and to reclaim space.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Evans Victoria, Hugh Lane Gallery. *Bones in the Attic* exhibition [Video]. (2022, November 11). YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4BJSyABI3ek>

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Panel, *'BITA Study Morning'*, Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin, 21/10/22

<sup>87</sup> The Hugh Lane Gallery. *'Bones in the Attic'* Exhibition Pamphlet. The Hugh Lane Gallery, n.pag 11/09/22



Fig.26 and 27 Ruby Wallis, *A Woman Walks Alone at Night, With a Camera*, archival pigment prints, The Hugh Lane Gallery 2022.

Through the analysis of the work of Jesse Jones and furthermore Ruby Wallis, it is evident that the themes of feminism in the BITA exhibition are expressed through their artwork. This relationship between the artworks exemplifies the collective narrative of sisterhood intended in the exhibition and is an example of effective exhibition design. Moreover, the final step of an exhibition is not when all the artworks are labelled and hung; but when an audience enters the space, dancing with their preconceived ideas of the world; eager to be enlightened and challenged, as they were when viewing the aforementioned artworks. The audience is eager to relate, to make connections with their interior worlds with those of others through conversation and to share in the knowledge of the complexities of humanity, to empathise. The next chapter describes how museums are creating this space for conversation and why it is essential in our society today.

## Chapter 3: Holding Space for Conversations around Change

### 3.1 'Demilitarised Zones of Culture'

Museum historian Edward T. Linenthal thought of museums as “demilitarised zones of culture,” how can we best utilise them as such?<sup>88</sup> How can we use museums as points of the congregation for peaceful and reparative discourse with the aim of bettering society? And additionally, what are the barriers in place preventing this from currently happening? This chapter investigates the presence of biases and limitations in exhibitions, governing bodies and museum practitioners concerning the exhibition case study, BITA, as a method of highlighting current methods of activist museum practice.

The current state of the world's socio-political landscape heavily affects the behaviours and beliefs of the public. These behaviours and beliefs infiltrate all forms of the public sphere, including governmental, educational and cultural institutions which continue to inform and guide museum practitioners and educators on issues of prevalence in society today. As illustrated through the analysis of the HLG, these cultural institutions have evolved their purpose in society and continue to do so with each new exhibition and topic explored which is presented to the public. However, there are significant concerns that need to be addressed about museum practice, specifically the role and responsibilities museum exhibitions have within this current socio-political landscape, and what it can do actively in an attempt to improve it. To fully envisage the future potential of these institutions for the general public one might refer to experienced museum practitioner and author

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<sup>88</sup> Gurian in *Centering the Museum*. 1st ed. Taylor and Francis, 2021. Web. 26 Jan. 2023. n.pag



Elaine Gurian. Gurian describes below the most important role the museum needs to take on, creating an empathic, mutual space for both sides to peacefully engage during times of conflict.

For all organisations engaged in civic life, societal reconciliation between the political left and right and amelioration of the effects of income and cultural inequality are two of the most crucial issues for the foreseeable future. I hope that this is how and where museums can engage in what my beloved colleague, Johnnetta Betsch Cole, described as “speaking across differences.” That phrase, currently in use in many places elsewhere, could well be considered the prerequisite for the task of museum centering.<sup>89</sup>

Gurian highlights the need for civic-minded spaces to be created to maintain a working democracy. By museums encompassing this phrase of “speaking across differences” Gurian is envisioning a space, a middle ground as such, where museums become “...part of a system for restoring a climate of civility and mutual respect in the larger society as a whole”.<sup>90</sup> The HLG is an example of this and is a pioneering institution, it has created this platform for the intentional conversation surrounding feminism in Ireland. The following sections will investigate the relationship between museum galleries and their governing bodies and critically analyse the limitations of the exhibition BITA.

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<sup>89</sup> Gurian, Op.Cit., n.pag.

<sup>90</sup> Gurian, Op.Cit., n.pag.

### 3.2 The State and the Limitations of Exhibiting Bones in the Attic

*“Every Museum is perforce a political institution, no matter whether it is privately run or maintained and supervised by governmental agencies”<sup>91</sup>*

Hans Hacke was an artist who was heavily concerned with “investigating the museum’s complex interconnection with commerce and politics, as well as with the personalities who serve in the governing bodies of institutions.”<sup>92</sup> A famous piece of investigative art he created was the *MOMA Poll (1970)*. It was part of an exhibition called *Information* in the Museum of Modern Art in New York. It consisted of two transparent acrylic ballot boxes which the museum visitor was invited to vote for or against the U.S. government’s policy for involvement in the Vietnam war and the results were recorded.<sup>93</sup> This piece of inquiry-based art serves as an example of a direct communicative exercise to gauge political opinions held by the public. Hacke claimed that “Every Museum is perforce a political institution, no matter whether it is privately run or maintained and supervised by governmental agencies” and this is exemplified through the *MOMA Poll (1970)*.<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, Greenberg, in *Thinking about exhibitions (1996)* states that “the museum is one of the most conspicuous of the institutions whose roles are under inquiry.”<sup>95</sup> When there are issues within the state, for example, the aforementioned social issues present in Ireland; such as our

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<sup>91</sup> Putnam, James, ‘Art and Artefact- The museum as a Medium’ Thames & Hudson 2001 p28

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. p28

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. p29

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. p28

<sup>95</sup> Ferguson, Bruce W. ‘EXHIBITION RHETORICS Material speech and utter sense’ in ‘*Thinking about exhibitions*’, London: Routledge, 1996. p127

constitution compartmentalising the role of women in Ireland, these cultural institutions that are state or municipal-funded undoubtedly come under examination.

During my research, I became curious about the role of governing bodies in museums, specifically with the BITA exhibition and furthermore the HLG and whether its influence was evident in the museum gallery itself. I questioned, where these activist voices came from and what part these governing bodies held in motivating such exhibitions like BITA. When speaking to the education curator Cleo Fagan and exhibition curator, Meabh Delaney, I inquired about whether there are any limitations in the running of a municipal cultural institution such as the HLG.

Overwhelmingly the response was positive and emphasised largely the benefits of being municipal-funded, for example, having rich educational and community outreach programmes. Fagan stated,

The wealth of both artists' research and the response of the audience to art is the world that education/engagement programming has the privilege to engage with. I believe this is a very valuable part of our culture that some people in our society highly enjoy and is one that wouldn't exist without state support...the state has a hugely valuable role in supporting the art community as a whole.<sup>96</sup>

Moreover, regarding the state selecting and curating exhibitions, curator Meabh Delaney noted,

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<sup>96</sup> Fagan, Cleo. Online Interview. 06/12/2022.

As we are a state-funded gallery, there are structures in place to ensure the calibre of exhibitions shown at the Hugh Lane remains high. The board and an internal committee receive exhibition proposals from the exhibitions team, the board and committee have a say in which exhibitions get the go-ahead. Once the exhibitions have been chosen, the curatorial team have the freedom to stage and curate the exhibitions as they see fit...Personally, the reason I wanted to become a curator was to exhibit and showcase art and artists to the public that would have an impact or highlight various issues and topics, as with *BITA*. So to conclude, yes there are limitations in terms of freedom to be spontaneous in certain areas, however, the pluses far outweigh the minuses in my opinion.<sup>97</sup>

Yet, it is also important to note that the museum field is “...distinguished by judgements, discriminations, exclusions as much as inclusions” in museum practices and limitations of curatorial possibility.<sup>98</sup> Contemporary art historian Dr Kate Antosik-Parsons makes note of this in her critique of the BITA exhibition in the Visual Artists news sheet. She described the exhibition as “ambitious in its remit”, in its endeavour to cover a huge amount of ground concerning inclusivity. Parsons noted the importance of diversity, plainly stating that “If one aims to stimulate ideas about ‘safeguarding the future of feminism for all’ (Hughlanegallery.ie) then representation matters.”<sup>99</sup> She continues by suggesting the inclusion of “artists from underrepresented cultural or ethnic minority backgrounds” to “further nuance the different barriers women face in Irish

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<sup>97</sup> Delaney, Meabh. Online Interview. 06/12/2022.

<sup>98</sup> Jacob, Mary Jane. ‘*Making Space for Art*’ in ‘What Makes a Great Exhibition?’ The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, 2016. pg134

<sup>99</sup> Antosik-Parsons, Kate, “*Critique: ‘Bones in the Attic’*.” The Visual Artists’ News Sheet Online, 23 Nov. 2022, visualartistsireland.com/critique-bones-in-the-attic. Web. Date Accessed 11/02/2023

society.”<sup>100</sup> Furthermore by declaring that, “No woman is free until all women are free, given the current international socio-political climate, now is not the time for complacency.”<sup>101</sup> Bruce Ferguson in ‘Thinking about Exhibitions’ (1996) muses upon how this essential critical analysis of institutions and their exhibitions, are points of departure for further discourse rather than a transgression stating,

The hallucination of full identity deliberately and too carefully spoken by many art exhibitions must be countered by an analysis of these institutional representations as relationships of tangible difference where the borders of each narrative are always the beginnings—the starting points—not the ends of experience.<sup>102</sup>

Parsons' critical critique described the areas in which the narrative of BITA could have been better regarding representation and inclusion. In creating a space for this line of inquiry and discourse to occur, the BITA exhibition is continuing the experience of the exhibition outside the walls of the HLG and past the exhibition's finishing date. These discussions on disparities are as essential as the discussions on feminism, they take ideas and agency and push them to the next possible level, allowing for cultural institutions in the public sphere to move into the future with clarity of the audience's needs. Furthering this, they create a significant space in today's society; one that is rooted in peaceful discussion and empathetic listening, a space considerably needed. The idea of this space will be developed in the following chapter.

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<sup>100</sup> Antosik-Parsons, Kate, “Critique: ‘Bones in the Attic.’” *The Visual Artists' News Sheet Online*, 23 Nov. 2022, [visualartistsireland.com/critique-bones-in-the-attic](http://visualartistsireland.com/critique-bones-in-the-attic).

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ferguson, Op.Cit, p133

The core of my inquiry here was to examine the interior structures of the running of the HLG and investigate where this voice of contemporary feminism stemmed from and whether a state-funded institution was the appropriate place for this type of social justice exhibition. In this case, I discovered the role of governing bodies in regard to the HLG is overwhelmingly beneficial. How fortunate also is Ireland as a country in the greater picture of women's rights globally today, that our cultural institutions are allowed to publicly exhibit prevalent issues in our society such as women's safety, in order to try to combat them. Ferguson notes, "exhibitions are the central speaking subjects in the stories about art which institutions and curators tell to themselves and to us" the HLG is curating activist exhibitions, making noise nationally and piercing through overpowering systems with clarity of stance, through exhibitions such as BITA.<sup>103</sup> In the next section, the aforementioned created space of peaceful discussion and empathetic listening is discussed through an event, which was a part of the HLG's extensively put together education programme, 'Study Morning: Bones in the Attic' which took place on Friday the 21st of October 2022.

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<sup>103</sup> Ferguson, Op.Cit, Pg 126.

### 3.3 Study Morning: Bones in the Attic

*The personal is political because if we don't know who we are and where we come from, we are going to be singularly ineffective at knowing anyone else, at working together for change.*<sup>104</sup>

Catherine Marshall, a member of Na Cailleacha mirrored the above statement written by feminist Lucy Lippard in the programmed Study Morning for BITA, in the HLG when she spoke of finding the *things* that have shaped us, finding the *language* that has shaped us; to address it and change it. Having delved into feminist texts, art and exhibitions I have arrived at revelations about feminism and my part to play in it. It's been a blanket of comfort but also discomfort. A comfort because I have found a common thinking I can relate deeply to, a sense that I am not alone in this way of thought; but discomfort due to a greater uneasy understanding of the subjugated structures which have subconsciously conditioned these thoughts.

The BITA study morning consisted of a panel of the exhibition's contributors and invited speakers including: lecturer in gender and Women's studies, Dr Mary Condren; writer and podcaster Sophie White; artist, Ruby Wallis; writer, Phillina Sun and curator Catherine Marshall.<sup>105</sup> A gathering of about 30 people sat in the HLG's sculpture hall to converse and listen to talks surrounding women's safety. A significant intention of the BITA exhibition is outlined in the exhibition pamphlet, "...to continue and support the important conversations that are currently

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<sup>104</sup> Lippard, Lucy R. 'The Pink Glass Swan - selected feminist essays on art' The New Press, New York 1995, Pg196

<sup>105</sup> The Hugh Lane Gallery. 'Bones in the Attic' Exhibition Pamphlet. The Hugh Lane Gallery, n.pag 11/09/22

taking place in Ireland by informed, talented, thoughtful voices in various cultural disciplines.”<sup>106</sup>

The HLG has enabled this through the exhibition and more significantly by creating a space of peaceful congregation, conversation and engagement.

Gurian maintains that “...museums should be safe spaces in their areas of concentration for balanced discussions of important and contentious issues.”<sup>107</sup> The HLG has extended the museum gallery as an institute which can transfer knowledge through various methods of communication; where it succeeds in today’s society is creating a reality where ideas can converge peacefully through conversation and where understandings can occur, encouraging a more accepting society. Gurian further expresses that when these important conversations are “embedded in a multinational, multi-institutional campaign, that dialogue can contribute to governmental policy changes.”<sup>108</sup> And it is within these created spaces that this possibility of great societal change can be facilitated.

A Q&A was held at the end of the event, where an audience member asked “how might we begin to change the patriarchal ingenuity that is women now policing other women’s bodies?”. The answer was conversation, listening and talking to one another, talking as an art form to raise awareness. As I sat there, I thought what better medium than a museum gallery space to initiate such conversations? It was a fitting end to the event.

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<sup>106</sup> The Hugh Lane Gallery. ‘*Bones in the Attic*’ Exhibition Pamphlet. The Hugh Lane Gallery, n.pag 11/09/22

<sup>107</sup> Gurian, Op.Cit, n.pag.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.



## Conclusion

*Public debate needs art and exhibition making to contribute to it because it needs diversity, surprise, history, adversity, poetics and yes, activism.<sup>109</sup>*

Upon concluding this thesis, I felt the need to refer back to the initial spark of interest that inspired me to pursue this topic of museums and activism; a curiosity and interest in museums as spaces to reflect, especially when the world outside its doors is turbulent. Research and experiences of such activist spaces such as the BITA exhibition and ‘Study Morning: Bones in the Attic’, have led me to believe that these spaces are imperative in a society that is alarmingly growing politically divisive. Museums such as the HLG are becoming spaces which exist as counterpoints to this reality, facilitating a neutral ground for peaceful discourse and encouraging ideas around change.

This thesis aimed to review museum galleries and the practices, exhibitions and programmes it utilises to communicate issues of social justice to the public and how furthermore museum galleries and exhibitions can serve as a middle ground for peaceful discourse and congregation. This was accomplished through a literature review which supported the development of this concept and questions for an interview, which was used to investigate the voices within the HLG, Cleo Fagan (Education Curator) and Meabh Delaney (Exhibitions Curator).

Through this foundation of research, I went on to explore in chapter one, the legacy of Hugh Lane and the founding ethos, the HLG has been built upon. Moreover, a discussion followed about

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<sup>109</sup> Gibblin, Tessa. ‘Bones in the Attic’ in ‘Bones in the Attic’ Exhibition Catalogue, Hugh Lane Gallery, 2022. Pg 19

how this social ethos is expressed through the museum's voice and activism. This is then built upon, in chapter 2. Through the visual analysis of the exhibition on BITA, I examined how the themes of the exhibition were founded in ancient and contemporary feminism and myth, then expressed through art and further designed into a cohesive collective message in the form of an exhibition that the public can interpret and learn about feminism in Ireland.

The final chapter gave an insight into the Study Morning and how the HLG has advanced and adapted to current socio-political climates by becoming a neutral space to discuss significant or contentious issues in society in a civic and reparative manner. Through this research, the concluding consensus of museum galleries and exhibitions, as effective spaces for creating conversations, agency and awareness regarding issues of societal concern is a welcome outcome.

The HLG and the BITA exhibition has proven to be a prime example of useful methods of communicating issues of social justice to the public. Furthermore, the educational and social community programming surrounding the exhibition, for example, the Study Morning is a factor heavily contributing to the overarchingly positive activism present in the municipally governed HLG communication practice.

To conclude, I would like to reference Olivia Laing, a cultural critic and writer, and an analogy in the foreword of her book 'Funny Weather Art In An Emergency'. Referencing Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, critic and queer studies pioneer, Laing describes the analogy about reparative reading,

A useful analogy for what she calls ‘reparative reading’ is to be fundamentally more invested in finding nourishment rather than identifying poison. This doesn’t mean being naive or undecieved, unaware of crisis or undamaged by oppression. What it does mean is being driven to find or invent something new and sustaining inimical environments.<sup>110</sup>

This analogy could also be applied to the approach of museum practice the HLG has already begun through the exhibition BITA, a “reparative museum practice”. A practice which prioritises nourishing minds of new possibilities emulates hope and envisions new ways forward. Museum galleries are great amenities in culture, “reparative” institutions such as the HLG are conscious of the socio-political environment which surrounds it, and the people which live in it and most importantly, aim to actively help to improve the issues of social justice affecting it. Moving into the future, with this approach in mind one can envision the boundaries museums will push further in creating space for solutions and creating change in our societies.

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<sup>110</sup> Laing, Olivia. *‘Funny Weather Art in an Emergency’* Picador, 2020.

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## Appendix

### Image Sourcing

**Figure 1** Nickkolas Smith, *Portrait of Breonna Taylor*, Digital Painting, 2020.

<https://www.npr.org/2020/06/29/883490848/artist-nikkolas-smith-combines-art-and-activism-into-a-singular-superpower>

**Figure 2** Jalz, *Women, Life, Freedom*, Poster, 2022.

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**Figure 3** Hugh Lane Gallery.

[https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&curl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.tripadvisor.com%2FAttraction\\_Review-g186605-d187624-Reviews-Dublin\\_City\\_Gallery\\_The\\_Hugh\\_Lane\\_Dublin\\_County\\_Dublin.html&psig=AOvVaw3I0fMbAxw7yj1Iqyz1xD3\\_&ust=1674658736727000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CBEQjhXqFwoTCNiR7Yu84PwCFQAAAAAdAAAAABAD](https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&curl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.tripadvisor.com%2FAttraction_Review-g186605-d187624-Reviews-Dublin_City_Gallery_The_Hugh_Lane_Dublin_County_Dublin.html&psig=AOvVaw3I0fMbAxw7yj1Iqyz1xD3_&ust=1674658736727000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CBEQjhXqFwoTCNiR7Yu84PwCFQAAAAAdAAAAABAD)

**Figure 4** The Hugh Lane Gallery, @thehughlane, *Teen Culture Club*, Instagram Post, 21/10/2022. <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cj-4jWDMujg/>

**Figure 5** Joyce, Hetty E. "9: Picturing Rape and Revenge in Ovid's Myth of Philomela". *Receptions of Antiquity, Constructions of Gender in European Art, 1300–1600*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2015. Web.

**Figure 6** O'Driscoll, Seán. "*She Fought for her Life*" Irish Daily Mail, 19 January 2022.

**Figure 7** Browne, Colette. "*A Nations Shame*" Irish Independent, 13 January 2021.

**Figure 8** Guerrilla Girls demand a return to traditional values on abortion, march on Washington DC, 1992.

<https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/barbara-kruger-jenny-holzer-nan-goldin-artists-respond-to-roe-supreme-court-draft-opinion-1234627508/>

**Figure 9** A crowd in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, protests the overturning of Roe v. Wade by the Supreme Court, on June 24, 2022.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2022/06/photos-protests-against-overturning-roe/661399/>

**Figure 10** The Hugh Lane Gallery, Entry to BITA Exhibition. Photograph: Taken by the author.

**Figure 11** Na Cailleacha, *The Advantages of Being a Cailleach Artist*, The Hugh Lane Gallery 2022. Photograph: Taken by the author.

**Figure 12** Guerrilla Girls, *The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist*, 1988.

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/guerrilla-girls-the-advantages-of-being-a-woman-artist-p78796>

**Figure 13** Guerrilla Girls, *It's Even Worse in Europe*, White chapel Street, 2016.

<https://www.guerrillagirls.com/projects>

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**Figure 18** The feminist movement, the International Feminist Collective campaign for International Wages for Housework. Italy (1970s) <https://ilbiondino.com/author/nicoletta/>

**Figure 19** Italians march for abortion rights while raising their hands to symbolise the uterus after far-right election victory, Non-Una di Meno (Not One Less) movement and feminist collectives, in Rome, Italy September 28, 2022. Photo by Yara Nardi/REUTERS.

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/italians-march-for-abortion-rights-after-far-right-election-victory>

**Figure 20** Project Sheela, @projectsheela, Instagram Profile, 06/03/22.

<https://www.instagram.com/projectsheela/?hl=en>

**Figure 21** Project Sheela, @projectsheela, Photo of ceramic Sheela na Gig, Instagram, 06/03/22

<https://www.instagram.com/p/B9ZfbcOHA21/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y%3D>

**Figure 22** Jesse Jones, *Thou Shalt Not Suffer*, Photo Collage, 2019. photograph: Taken by the author.

**Figure 23** Jesses Jones, *Bill to repeal the act of sorcery and witchcraft*, Tremble Tremble Archive 2017. Photograph: Taken by the author.



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[https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H\\_WITT-258](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_WITT-258)

**Figure 25** The Hugh Lane Gallery, Installation by Jesse Jones in BITA. Photograph: Taken by the author.

**Figure 26** Ruby Wallis, *A Woman Walks Alone at Night, With a Camera*, archival pigment prints, The Hugh Lane Gallery 2022. Photograph: Taken by the author.

**Figure 27** Ruby Wallis, *A Woman Walks Alone at Night, With a Camera*, archival pigment prints, The Hugh Lane Gallery 2022. Photograph: Taken by the author.