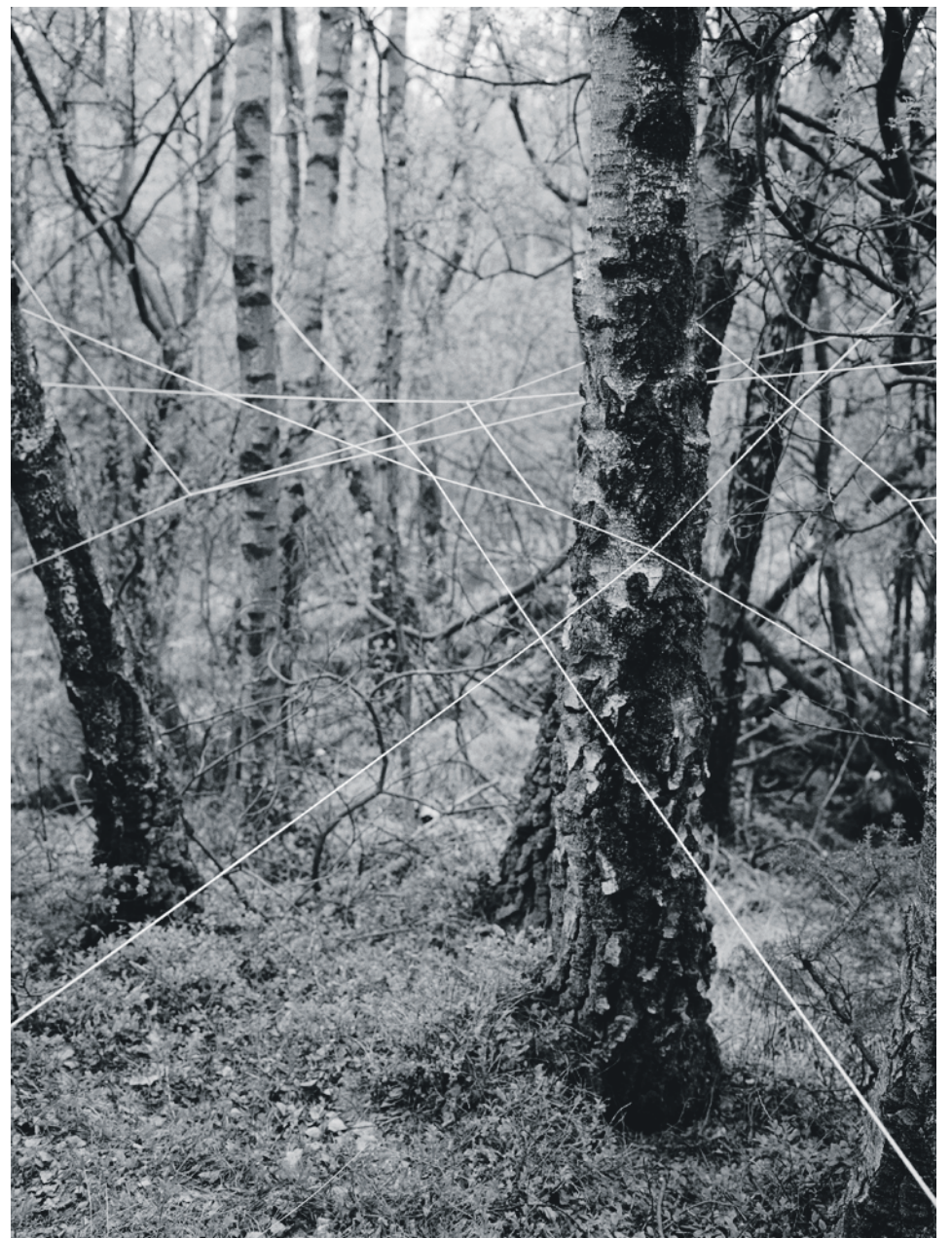




Sarah Flynn, from the series 'Uinse', 2018–2019; courtesy the artist and PhotoIreland Foundation



Cian Burke, from the series 'Rectangular Universe', 2017; courtesy the artist and PhotoIreland Foundation

Physical, Social, Celestial

MORAN BEEN-NOON PROFILES 'NEW IRISH WORKS 2019', WHICH TOOK PLACE AS PART OF THE TENTH PHOTOIRELAND FESTIVAL.

AS DEMONSTRATED IN 'New Irish Works 2019', the medium of photography can highlight aspects of our world that cannot be documented. With tenuous prods at artistic subject matter, the exhibition – which ran from 2 to 28 July, as part of PhotoIreland Festival – conveys a sense of encountering different strands of ongoing research, with each project narrating our world and our bodies within it. 'New Irish Works' is a triennial project, run by the PhotoIreland Foundation, which aims to promote photographic and lens-based practices in Ireland. This is the project's third edition, with ten artists selected by a jury following an international open call. The exhibition is one of several presented at the 'Museum of Contemporary Photography of Ireland', located in The Printworks at Dublin Castle. It acts as a brief survey of current practice, while at the same time exploring the parameters and definitions of photography in 2019.

One recurrent element is the abundant use of archival material as a visual method of inquiry. Sarah Flynn's 'Uinse' and Zoe Hamill's 'A Map Without Words' use material from public archives alongside images from locations where the natural and the societal are perceived to intersect. Flynn focuses on ash trees (*uinse* in Irish) and their history in Ireland, and on the interaction between changes in the ecological and economic landscapes. The work includes a government registry of ash trees and photographs of diseased vegetation and of human hands. A new category is proposed, uniting the social and natural to stand together, countering the economic. Meanwhile, Hamill uses photography as a means of cataloguing the intangible. She indiscriminately documents plants, human-made objects and body parts, without categorising these images. They are numbered, with some placed in a display cabinet, while an archival catalogue maps the network of relationships between individuals and places, based on themes such as 'being' and 'longing'.

Aisling McCoy's project, 'and live the space of a door', also uses archival images and is dedicated to the history of Berlin's Tempelhof airport as a refugee shelter, since the end of World War II. It includes images depicting the airport's architecture, and documentation of refugees at Tempelhof, both in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The work is a visual play between ideas of place and non-place, juxtaposing the functional design of a point of transit – detached from any relational meaning – with



Robert Ellis, from the series 'Proverbs', 2017; courtesy the artist and PhotoIreland Foundation



George Voronov, from the series '... And Also With You', 2019; courtesy of the artist and PhotoIreland Foundation

the unstable messiness of humanity. These themes are conveyed through the individual photographic frames and printing methods, as well as in the artist's approach to installation. It questions the aesthetic and ethical choices made in the airport's design and functions over time.

In Róisín White's 'Lay Her Down Upon Her Back', archival material provided a starting point for researching attitudes towards the medical treatment of women. The historical images recount a story of pain and frustration, echoed in contemporary photographs of awkward body positions and intense floral wallpaper. The latter is a reference to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*, which tells about a woman who is prescribed a "rest cure", and as a result of the imposed long stay in bed, begins to hallucinate a relationship with a woman trapped in the bedroom's wallpaper. White offers multiple angles of this story, looking at the protagonist, as well as inspecting the room from the woman's point of view. Whether the pain emanating from these pieces preceded the medical treatment or is a result of the treatment's outcome, remains undisclosed in this work, allowing it to act as poignant feminist commentary.

Unresolved pain resurfaces in Dorje de Burgh's 'Dream the End', a detailed series of visual research on the elusive nature of loss. Digging into his personal and family archives, de Burgh tells of his relationship with his mother. He anatomises it by exploring the family's background and the story of the mother falling ill and passing away. The work includes textual extracts from the artist's research, which tie the photographs together as a cinematic examination of this raw narrative. The project's anchor as documentary work is in the sobering reality of the radiotherapy mask, starkly installed on a makeshift concrete plinth. A different form of loss emerges in Phelim Hoey's 'La Machine', which chronicles the artist coping with his Multiple Sclerosis diagnosis. This is a deeply pragmatic and emotional account of living with MS, and includes medical imaging, photographed porcelain prosthetics and visual motion studies. Photographs referencing figurative works by Muybridge and Swiss duo, Fischli and Weiss, are used to illustrate the strongest element of this project: a painful relearning of the skills of movement, and the limits of the human body.

Discussing intangible forces beyond one's body is George Voronov's '...And Also

With You'. The work includes photographs documenting spiritual retreats and captured moments from Voronov's everyday life, like a ray of light hitting a water-filled glass, seemingly unrelated to the spiritual narrative. The work tells a story about searching for clarity through fusing social and spiritual situations with the isolated materiality of still life objects. A strong sense of materiality is also visible in Robert Ellis's 'Proverbs'. The project captures the beauty of the Ugandan landscape, which glows in his photographs. Particularly impressive are the night-time photographs. Ellis, an Irish photographer, worked with his portraiture subjects as a photography teacher, studying the contentious topic of cultural ownership of places. The multimedia work features the landscapes and portraits, with accompanying proverbs, recited like poetry.

Jamin Keogh's 'A Constant Parameter' and Cian Burke's 'Rectangular' Universe look at materiality through a visual-scientific lens, using photography as a playful research method for creative questioning about the mechanisms of the world. In Keogh's work, the horizon line – and its changes in different contexts, locations and time zones – is used to pseudo-scientifically examine subjective experiences. The artist allows us to imagine ourselves in place of the camera, trying to trace back to the last time we saw the horizon. Burke's project is a visual manifestation of physics, including photographs and objects that challenge what we see when we look around us. The distance between an object's physical existence and its depiction shifts as we browse through black and white abstract photographs that capture urban settings. Due to the artist's geometrical interventions in the photographed locations, the scenes appear to relay visions of celestial spheres.

The openness of research and the precision of subject matter explored in 'New Irish Works 2019' creates deeply thought-provoking experiences in the viewer. We learn about ourselves, our pain, our bodies and the contexts in which we roam – including occasional tangential journeys out into the cosmos. This snapshot of current photographic practices feels optimistic. The artists strive to arrive at profound understandings, and they do so relentlessly.

Moran Been-noon is an independent curator and artist based in Dublin.