

REFLECTING THE REAL



YOUNG PEOPLE'S GUIDE

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE



Start by looking carefully at the photographs.

Take your time to observe what you notice first, and then what details emerge the longer you look.



Use the prompts provided to help you reflect on and analyse the work.

Use the questions to help you think about the work. They can be used with any of the images and are there to support your thinking about what you see, what it might mean, and how it was made.



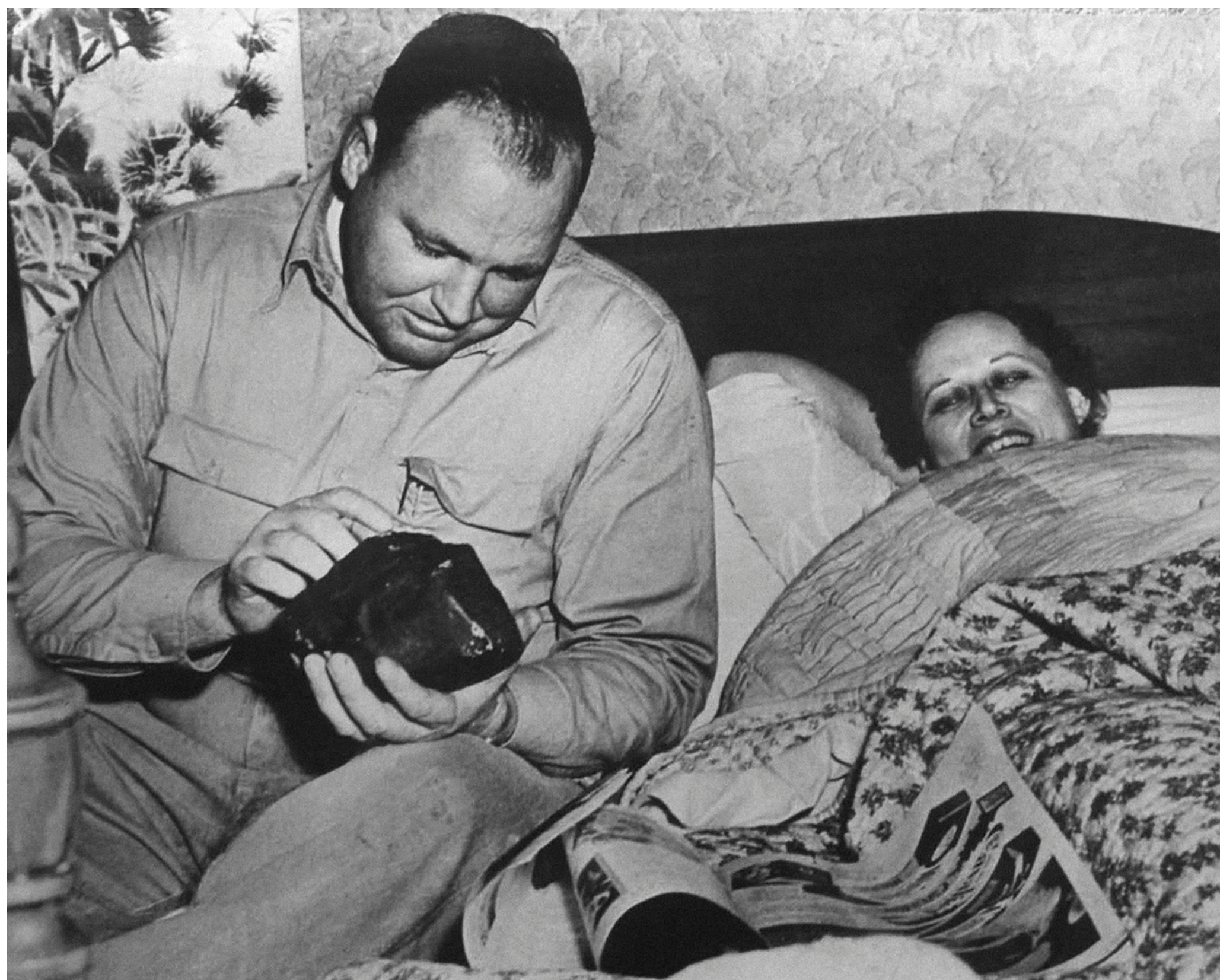
As you engage with the work, consider your own thoughts and responses.

What ideas, emotions, or connections come to mind? How does this work relate to your own experiences, or to what you know about culture, history, or art?



Refer to the Key Terms Glossary

To help you describe what you see and support your analysis using appropriate visual language.



What do you see?



Emilia Martin, domestic (part 1), United States of America, 1954, from the series I saw a tree bearing stones in the place of apples and pears

Digitally altered archival image of Ann Hodges, a first person known in history hit by a meteorite in her home in Alabama, USA, in 1954.

“I carefully read countless myths and tales of meteorites from around the globe, many so ancient that their origins are lost to time. Some of them recount how cosmic rocks were sent by angered gods or Satan, while others describe them being chained to the ground, to prevent their return to heavens. I read of a meteorite that was ground into powder and consumed by those who witnessed its fall, believed to be a divine medicine sent from above. In many communities, these celestial stones became central figures, revered as sites of worship, grief, sacrifice.

Despite these countless stories surrounding meteorites, modern Western science only acknowledged them as a scientific fact in the late 18th century, dismissing centuries of the countless reports as fictional fables, often created by the people such my ancestors: peasants, working long hours under the bare skies.”



What themes or ideas is the artist exploring?



Laure d’Utruy, Pooya* sits on his bed at home as he enjoys a break from the barracks. Tehran, Iran, 2019.

*For safety reasons, the name of the subject has been changed. The subject of this portrait posed in order to preserve his anonymity. From the series Mashmul.

“Military service of up to 24 months is mandatory for Iranian men aged 18 to 40, with few exemptions and none for conscientious objection. These men, referred to as mashmul in Farsi (مشمول) can not get a passport, leave the country, or access official services such as government pensions or housing loans, until service is completed. Yet many refuse to enroll due to the ideology this system represents, the loss of freedom or the work conditions they might face. Some take great risks or act illegally to avoid military service. Others fail, give up, or comply to reclaim freedom and plan for their future. Those who desert face criminal prosecution and are barred from leaving Iran.

My work investigates the experiences of those who reject the system and ideology embedded within the military system. It reflects on the impact of mandatory military service on these men’s freedoms, choices, and futures. Amidst a landscape heavily influenced by national imagery, I document their resistance and often unseen realities”



What emotions or questions does the work bring up for you?



Ciarán Dunbar, War Games,
from the series We Have Stood Together All The Years

“We Have Stood Together All The Years deals with the memory of losing my brother to cancer. He was 24 years old. He left everything he owned to me. What does a 24 year old leave behind, but random belongings and memories of his life. As my brother’s heir, I feel the weight of responsibility to keep his memory alive.

The process of photographing his belongings and looking at old photographs unlocked memories of places and things we used to do. Although the memory of losing my brother is always at the forefront of my mind, this reminded me to look beyond that and remember the better times I spent in his company.”



Who is being represented? And how?



Deb Choudhuri, Introspect, from the series The Weight of Earth

“Constructed over a period of seven years, this project is laid out in a multilayered narrative, often documenting the growth and transition of the same people over time. It also encompasses my experience of coming out as queer later in life, the guilt and shame associated with living a dual life, the subsequent overcoming of those feelings, and how people express grief and desire through image and performance.”



How do you think this photograph was made - what choices did the artist make?



Dimitri Stefanov, Untitled, from the series AMEN

“"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."
— John 1:1

Amen is a photographic project born from the sense that faith has become a foreign land in the contemporary world. Inspired by fragments of the Bible, the project longs to restore an emotional connection with the Word—not as religious doctrine, but as inner truth.”

“This series emerges from a personal longing—to make peace with the past, to find forgiveness, and to understand what faith still means today. Amen is not about preaching or teaching. It’s about searching for a connection that words alone cannot restore. And when the final word is spoken not by us, but through us, will it sound like an Amen?”

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

The five photographers below were selected from over 700 submissions for Reflecting the Real, Photo Museum Ireland's first International Open Awards exhibition. In a world filled with images - and often shaped by misinformation - we look to artists to help us see things more clearly. Their work offers powerful, personal, and honest perspectives, challenging us to think about what's real, and what really matters.



Ciarán Dunbar studied photography at Ulster University in Belfast. His parents left Northern Ireland during the Troubles, and his work explores identity, displacement, land usage, and the hidden tensions in local communities. His photographs have been shown across Ireland as part of the Reframing the Border programme. Ciarán lives and works in County Louth and is currently Artist-in-Residence at Photo Museum Ireland.

Find out more: ciarandunbar.com

Debmalya Ray Choudhuri is a non-binary queer artist from India, now based in New York. Their work combines photography, performance, and text to explore personal trauma, identity, and mental health. Deb's deeply emotional images challenge taboos around addiction, suicide, and queerness, and explore the meaning of love, care, and representation. Their work has been published in Granta, British Journal of Photography, and exhibited internationally, including at Les Rencontres d'Arles and the LGBT Center in New York.

Find out more: rayd.space/introduction





Dimitri Stefanov is a Bulgarian photographer whose work combines documentary photography with a poetic, emotional approach. His long-term projects focus on themes such as cultural identity, everyday life, and personal transformation. He sees photography as a visual language that can express both the world around us and our inner lives.

Find out more: www.dimitristefanov.eu

Emilia Martin is a Polish artist based in The Hague, working with photography, writing, and sound. Her practice explores myths, stories, and rituals, and how they shape society. Emilia grew up between rural and industrial regions in Poland, during a time of major political and economic change. These contrasting experiences inform her work, which questions the boundaries between fiction and truth. Influenced by intersectional feminism, she uses vulnerability and interconnection as both themes and artistic methods

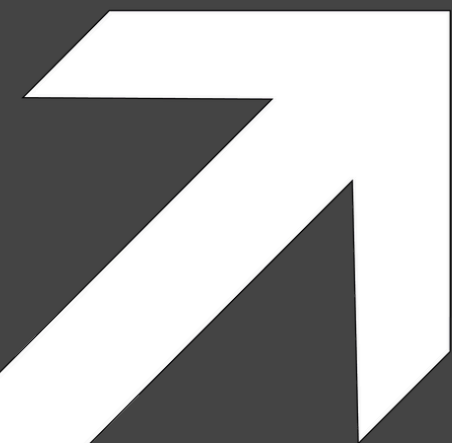
Find out more: www.emiliamartin.com



Laure d'Utruy is a French photographer based between Cairo and Berlin. Her work combines documentary and fine art photography to explore human rights and social issues. Laure has photographed personal freedom in Iran and disability advocacy in France and Egypt. In 2021, supported by National Geographic, she documented the effects of COVID-19 on children with mental disabilities. Her work has been exhibited widely, including at Photo Marseille and Visa pour l'Image, and she has been a member of Women Photograph since 2017.

Find out more: www.lauredutruy.com

MEET THE CURATORS



What is the role of the curator?

“As a curator, my role is to select and shape the exhibition - choosing the artists, developing the themes, and helping visitors connect with the work in meaningful ways. I also plan how the work is hung in the gallery: thinking about the flow of the space, how each image is seen, and how the artworks relates to each other. Every decision, from lighting to layout, affects how the audience experiences the exhibition.”

The artists in this exhibition were chosen through an open call. What is an open call, and why might a curator use one to select work?

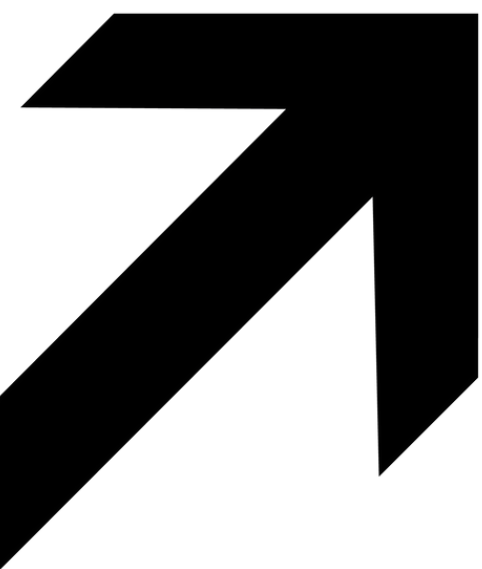
“An open call is a public invitation for artists to submit their work. It allows us to discover new voices from around the world and build a show that reflects a wide range of ideas and experiences.”

Why is this work important?

“These artists are exploring what’s real in a time when truth feels harder to see. Their work helps us slow down, look more closely, and think more deeply about the world we live in.”

Curators of Reflecting the Real; Trish Lambe and Darren Campion





CREATE & RESPOND

The artists in Reflecting the Real are responding to social or political issues. Choose one artwork that feels connected to something happening in the world today - this could be something you've seen in the news, in your community, or on social media.

What real-world issue or conversation do you think this artwork is part of?

How does the artist use photography to make us see or feel something important?

Inspired by the work you have selected - take a photo that represents something that you believe is important in your community or society now.

Share your photograph @PhotoMuseumIRL

CURRICULUM LINKS

Visual Studies (Leaving Cert Art); Today's World: The Artist as Social Commentator.

Politics and Society (Leaving Cert); Strand 2: Active Citizenship & Strand 3: Human Rights and Responsibilities.

Wellbeing/SPHE
(Junior Cycle & Cross-Curricular):
Strand 1: Who am I?, Strand 2: How I relate to others & Strand 3: Respecting diversity

GLOSSARY

Term	Definition
Curator	A person who selects and organises artworks for exhibition. They design how the public experiences the show and guide its themes.
Open Call	A public invitation for artists to submit work for consideration in an exhibition or project. Usually judged by a panel.
Photographic series	A group of related images, often telling a story or exploring a concept over time.
Visual narrative	A story told through images, often without words.
Identity	How someone sees themselves or is seen by others - includes gender, nationality, culture, or lived experience.
Documentary photography	A style of photography that captures real people and events, often focusing on social issues.
Representation	The way people, places, or ideas are shown in art or media - which can include or exclude different groups.
Empathy	The ability to understand or feel what another person is experiencing.
Social justice	The idea that everyone deserves equal rights, opportunities, and dignity. Often a theme in politically engaged art.
Post-colonial	Refers to the lasting impact of colonialism on cultures, identities, and power - often examined in contemporary art.
Archival Image	A historical or older photograph, often used in new ways to explore memory or history.
Social Commentary	When artists reflect on or critique issues in society, politics, or culture through their work.
Intersectionality	The idea that people’s experiences are shaped by overlapping social identities (e.g. race, gender, class, disability).

What terms are new to you? Add them here	

We'd Love Your Feedback

If you have suggestions or ideas for how we can improve this resource, we'd love to hear from you.

You can get in touch by emailing:
education@photomuseumireland.ie

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