

MYTHOLOGIES OF THE PERSONAL AND THE LAND

The term 'French theory', as understood in English-speaking academic circles, comprehends a wide range of ideas put forward by scholars in the French humanities after the Second World War. These scholars sought to understand Western societies by revisiting historical contexts and advancing new analyses of capitalism. The reception and adoption of these ideas have significantly influenced much of the art produced in English-speaking countries over the past decades.

An exhibition titled 'Echo, Delay, Reverb', which is on view at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris during the Autumn/Winter of 2025 and 2026, exemplifies this process. As stated by the venue, the exhibition 'explores the history of the transatlantic circulation of forms and ideas', showcasing how art in the United States – fuelled by the revolutionary energies of these French thinkers – created tools for a critical perspective on art, both practices and institutions, and broader societal structures, from material to ideological.

Celine Sheridan, an artist showing at this year's Westmeath Artists Award exhibition, 'Mythologies of the Personal and the Land', operates within this framework with both intelligence and skill. Her research-driven approach addresses themes informed by the legacy of 'French theory', translating them into meditations on her experiences as a woman and a mother. For instance, in *The Pitiful Cradling of the Poor Darling* (2024), she examines issues of the body, illness, and care, weaving together various references to breast cancer. The complexity of the theme is handled with nuanced sensitivity; the background story that informs the work unfolds through intricate layers of formal investigation rather than imposing itself directly.

A key figure in 'French theory' is Roland Barthes, whose book *Mythologies*, published in the mid-1950s, is particularly important for understanding the micro-narratives that shape our perception of self and place – the very foundation of our existence. In this book, Barthes scrutinises the interpretation of everyday phenomena within the cultural sphere – including media, advertising, and film – through the lens of semiotics. He explains how artefacts convey meanings about the systems of values, norms, and customs that influence our worldviews.

Sheridan and other artists featured in 'Mythologies of the Personal and the Land' belong to a tradition that furthers a unique position, rooted in the singularity of their concerns. They focus on the minor aspects of social life that help us weave our sense of self and relate with others. For instance, Mimi Seery tackles the tension between connectivity and isolation, societal expectations and subjectivity, transgenerational trauma and current anxieties. In *Altared States* (2025), she cleverly reimagines the Eucharist through a series of ironic, distinctly Irish offerings, with each object parodying Catholic rituals by suggesting alternative forms of nourishment. Although the work is specific to the artist's overall attentiveness to matters of equity, it also expresses universal desires for inclusive social change in Ireland and beyond.

A further artist to highlight is Paul Roy, who utilises writing as a medium to articulate his ruminations on the relationship between existence and illness. His beautifully collaged words – such as in his work *Orange. Dublin* (2025), part of a wider series – blend snapshots of musings with maps of memories. This combination incorporates allusions to light, colour, and space, generating a vivid impression of both locations and emotions.

The Westmeath Artists Award surveys practices in County Westmeath, providing insight into the diverse outputs occurring in the region. 'Mythologies of the Personal and the Land' presents an eclectic mix of artists at various moments of their artistic journeys, showcasing different levels of integration and recognition within both the local and broader art scenes, as well as varied stages of professionalisation. The richness of the exhibition lies in these heterogeneous circumstances, bringing all the artists together on one platform to foster meaningful dialogue.

Many submissions for the Westmeath Artists Award express a deep concern for the land. This includes both representational and metaphorical engagements with nature, the use of materials sourced from the soil, and references to environmental issues. These themes and interactions with our surroundings reflect the belief systems that help us understand our sense of place. They encompass stories, deities, heroes, and other elements associated with territories.

Land can be understood as a grand narrative, which aligns with François Lyotard's propositions in the book *The Postmodern Condition*, published in 1979. Lyotard argues that we are entering an era where grand narratives are losing their influence, as people become more sceptical of their all-encompassing claims. While it is true that social life has evolved in a more fragmented way, recognising the existence of these grand narratives allows us to identify the cohesive traits that unite us as a collective. This is why land is particularly significant when observing the realities of County Westmeath.

A further artist, Aishling Muller, participating in 'Mythologies of the Personal and the Land', exemplifies a connection to the land as a foundation for her practice. Her works illustrate a decade-long introspective consideration of the natural and spiritual realms, merging her mind and body with the earth in a profoundly emotional way. For instance, in *Rupture (Auryn Full Circle Series)* (2021), she portrays herself lying on a burnt, fallen tree trunk, with the pale dress she wears contrasting starkly against the dark trees that surround her. This work is part of a series created during the 2021 forest fires in North Evia, Greece, as she grappled with mental health issues. She ruminates on cycles of destruction and survival to examine the relationship between consciousness and ecology.

The sky, water, mountains, birds, vegetation, and people undertaking miscellaneous activities are just a few of the motifs present in the selected entries of the Westmeath Artists Award exhibition. These works encompass abstract, figurative, fictional, biographical, storytelling-based, psychological, emotional, and physical responses to the conditions of artmaking in 2025. Regardless of their technical and conceptual edifices, what truly matters is how they provide an overview of artistic achievement in County Westmeath when displayed collectively. Altogether, they enhance the remarkable ability to convey their imagination and offer stimulating insights into the aesthetics and intellectual origins of artists living in or originating from the region.

Miguel Amado

Luan Gallery, in collaboration with Westmeath Arts Office, presents MYTHOLOGIES OF THE PERSONAL AND THE LAND, the 2025 Westmeath Artists Awards exhibition, featuring work by 30 Westmeath artists selected by guest Curator, Miguel Amado.

Caroline Coyle

Martina Coyle

Teresa Doyle

Bertille de Lestrade

Mark Duffy

Helen Duncan

Lorraine Dunne

Mariia Golubieva

Tina Hayes

Lelia Henry

Liz Johnson

Fiona Kelly

Orla Kelly

Hilary Kinahan

Garry Loughlin

Ursula Meehan

Lorraine Mimmagh

Aishling Muller

Joan Mulvihill

Emma O'Brien

Valeriia Poliushko

EL Putnam

Catherine Rock

Paul Roy

Mimi Seery

Nóilín Shaw

Celine Sheridan

Annette Treacy

Ann Wingfield

Lesley Wingfield



Photo: Chris Burke @wolfbaneviking

The Westmeath Artists Award is a collaboration between Luan Gallery and Westmeath Arts Office, aiming to celebrate, showcase and support the development of Westmeath visual artists' practices and careers with funding support from the Arts Council of Ireland.

MYTHOLOGIES OF THE PERSONAL AND THE LAND, the 2025 Westmeath Artists Award exhibition, is the 91st exhibition presented by Luan Gallery. As the municipal gallery for Westmeath, Luan promotes a dynamic contemporary visual art programme featuring established and emerging artists on a county, national and international level. It aims to make visual art accessible to all and offers a unique cultural tourism experience for the community and visitors to Athlone.



Elliott Road | Athlone | N37 TH22 www.luangallery.ie Open: Tues–Sat 11am–5pm Sun 12pm–5pm

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29 NOVEMBER 2025 – 2 FEBRUARY 2026