



Images from top left: Felix Faulkner, Rita Varley, Brid Nowlan, Mella O'Callaghan, Peggyann McCann, Wendy Livingstone, Liane Lehnhoff, Lorraine Shanahan, Dairiona Lee, Elke Wilson, Eileen Singleton, Catherine Callanan, Veronica Henley, Rachel O'Hara, Dawn West, Jane Jermyn, Audrey Doocey, Anne Rath, Rena Cody, Helen Hardway

Each year Lismore Castle Arts invites an artist to work alongside a local community over an extended period on a collaborative creative project called *A Space For Lismore*. Working closely with our Learning Team and using Lismore Castle Arts' new print studio as a base, artist Debbie Godsell has spent the year facilitating a series of workshops with a group of women from Lismore.

Drawing on the histories and lived experiences of women in the town, participants explored printmaking processes including screen printing, lino printing, drypoint, monoprint and cyanotype. Through conversation and making, the group reflected on themes of identity, belonging, memory and place, with printmaking becoming a way of giving personal narratives a material presence.

Some of the earliest inspiration in the project was Francis Edmund Currey's photographs of unknown women in Lismore, taken around 1855, and participants were encouraged to explore and use their own family photographs as jumping off points for making work.

The project now culminates in a new exhibition at St Carthage Hall presenting a series of soft-sculptural self-portraits created by the participating women. Constructed from repurposed vintage textiles and incorporating personal materials and embellishments, these works weave together individual stories with shared histories, presenting a thoughtful exploration of self-representation through contemporary printmaking.

Participants included Catherine Callanan, Rena Cody, Audrey Doocey, Felix Faulkner, Jane Jermyn, Helen Hardway, Veronica Henley, Dairiona Lee, Liane Lehnhoff, Wendy Livingstone, Peggyann McCann, Brid Nowlan, Mella O'Callaghan, Rachel O'Hara, Anne Rath, Lorraine Shanahan, Eileen Singleton, Rita Varley, Dawn West and Elke Wilson.

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Image front cover: Debbie Godsell, screenprint inspired by Wendy Livingstone's personal art statement, 2026. Above, Lorraine Shanahan



Debbie Godsell studied at the TUS Limerick School of Art & Design and the MTU Crawford College of Art & Design, Cork where she graduated with an MA in Fine Art. Recent major solo exhibitions at the Source Arts Centre and the Uillinn West Cork Arts Centre focused on identity formation, definitions of nationality and cultural tension. The artist re-examines dominant historiographies and challenges assumptions about what we think we know about our shared past. Her practise spans large-scale print installations, sculpture, film, textile, and digital media. Debbie's work is held in the National Collection, the Crawford Art Gallery, the OPW, and the National Gallery of Ireland. Her solo exhibition Flail was shortlisted for the International Association of Art Critics annual honorary prize for an outstanding exhibition in Ireland, 2025. Debbie is a full member of Backwater Artists group where she has her studio. She is also a long-term member of Cork Printmakers where she produces much of her expanded print projects. She is a recipient of the Arts Council Visual Arts Bursary Awards 2022, 2023 and 2026, Sample Studios *Sample 15* Bursary Award 2026, Cork County Council Arts Bursary 2022, Cork County Council Ballinglen Artist Residency 2019, Cork County Council Tyrone Guthrie Artist Bursary 2017 Award.

22 AUGUST -
20 SEPTEMBER 2026
OPENING RECEPTION
SATURDAY 22 AUGUST, 3-5PM
OPEN FRIDAY -
SUNDAY 12-5PM

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DEBBIE GODSELL

I am
no longer
invisible
I am I am
I am me

A Space for Lismore

Cristín Leach:
All in the Head

Baggage: the material we carry with us.

Stuffed head: a consequence of navigating life.

Self-image: a printed face on a pillowcase.

Self: a person inside your head.

Pillow: a place to lay it all down.

When the artist Debbie Godsell began to work with a group of women for the annual A Space for Lismore project hosted by Lismore Castle Arts, she started with print. Soon, photographic images of the women’s faces were rendered in greyscale, arrestingly present like mugshots in an old newspaper, only here on cotton in black and white. She gave them instruction: to play and be free, to forget to be neat, to work with memory and feeling, to embrace and make space for whatever emerged, and to think about people whose labours are often forgotten by the world – their female ancestors, themselves. The task was to turn these unexpected photographic images of self into soft sculptures, to make a portrait, a self-portrait that says, here I am. She asks them to take and repurpose the old materials she had gathered to hand: vintage fabrics, discarded bedding. To these they should bring and add whatever they have, whatever they want. The task is to make a stuffed head.

The heads they make are squishy and they do feel soft. It is no surprise then to hear that the women talked to them, that they held and carried their heads as they formed. They fed them with buttons and lace, paid attention to their makeup and make-up, adorned them with ribbons and paint, gave them embellishments each their own.

But they were also often silent as they worked. Quiet with the weight of recalling, with the meanings of personal mementos and lingering actions of care, present with once-forgotten gestures and re-remembered ones. In the gallery, the heads have been given their hoists: old tool handles and sticks. The artist hears the women notice how much of a relief it is not to have to think about the body. Everywhere, there are eyes and mouths – open, laughing, covered over, stitched closed. The face is freed from the encumbrance of leg, limb and middle, shoulders even. Everything is reclaimed here, including the self.

I see in this gathering, bits of the hoarded materials and soft stuff I too can never throw out: a baby blanket, a childhood dress, a grandfather’s handkerchief, a mother’s curtain, a lover’s shirt, a scrap of felt. The

materials are remade and reformed into a new self-likeness, one that carries the unspoken legacies of all that came before and much that will come after.

After a year of work, they are together now in the gallery at St Carthage Hall: a body of women, made of heads. Attend to them. Behold.

Starry-eyed, a smile obscured

Joyous heart, a Janus split

Mouth as cave of echoes heard

Wrapped, buttoned, edged, stitched

Felten crown of playful hair

Third eye wisdom masked and shared

A garland harvest, twiggly wish

A devil, aisling, burden, curse

Brightness, darkness, fringe and bow

Ribbons of recall, wool, lace and eyehole

A curtain, a cradle, a glance and a throw

Stuffing, a talisman, a cushion, a blow

Old pillow seeped in tears and sweat

Feathers well-plucked for baby’s berth

Descendants’ ambitions, the love and the hurt

The living’s intention, the ancestors’ work

Flax and a pin, a sigh still-formed

Button-eyed, mouth-bound, return to home

Pick and unpick, stitches and thread

Our mothers’ needles, what’s left unsaid

Here is art. The women’s heads of Lismore tell us, “I am”. Here, is also what happens when we play and collaborate, draw on shared inner wisdom, let go of expectations, turn up as ourselves. And we know this new congregation because parts of us are alive in them and parts of them exist somewhere in all of our heads, where we have met elements of this brilliant, unveiled horde before.

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Cristín Leach, August 2026



Above: Top Francis Edmund Currey, c. 1855, 15 x 12 cm, Blue Album, Chatsworth House Trust. Below: Group photo of participants & artworks, July, 2026