

PRESS RELEASE

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TAKE HOLD

**ARTISTS: HUSK BENNETT, CHLOE BRENAN, AIFRIC PRIOR BELIERE, LAURA
FITZGERALD, CECELIA GRAHAM, MARIELLE MACLEMAN, SAMIR
MAHMOOD, WILLIAM MCKEOWN, MICHAELA RAZAFIMA NASH**

CURATOR: RACHEL BOTHA

SATURDAY 29 MARCH–SATURDAY 7 JUNE 2025

LAUNCH: FRIDAY 28 MARCH 2025, 7–9PM

Take Hold is a group exhibition curated by Rachel Botha featuring artists Husk Bennett, Chloe Brenan, Aifric Prior Beliere, Laura Fitzgerald, Cecelia Graham, Marielle MacLeman, Samir Mahmood, William McKweon and Michaela Razafima Nash. The project interprets 'hope as a practice' as a tool in the face of the climate crisis, capitalism, and systems devoid of care. The work in *Take Hold* ranges from painting, textile, sound, text, video, sculpture, photography and installation, and aims to reanimate hope and its relevance in our lives, from no singular position or viewpoint.

"hope as a practice, rather than a feeling" is a phrase borrowed from the environmental activist, author, and scholar of Buddhism Joanna Macy. During these times of continued and intensified war, genocide, disinformation, hatred, facism, racism and fear, hope can be a committed form of collective resistance, rather than an ephemeral sentiment, for envisioning a better future. Hope can highlight the necessity of anger in response to injustice, advocating for a motivation that can turn despair into action.

The exhibition shares its title and concept with a publication that invited contributors to reflect on our conditions as humans and artists, to share a vulnerability that explores interconnectedness. This exhibition includes some of the contributors from the publication, encouraging them to revisit the concept from different perspectives such as the social, ecological, personal and political. They are joined by additional invited artists, providing further approaches and contexts.

Take Hold is supported by the National Lottery through the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Derry City & Strabane District Council and the Visual Arts Bursary, Arts Council Ireland and includes a selection of works from the Arts Council Ireland Collection.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Husk Bennett is a visual artist based in Belfast. In 2020 Husk graduated from Manchester School of Art with a degree in Fine Art & Art History. Husk is a former co-director and chairperson of Catalyst Arts (2022-25) and a founding member of The Glue Factory, a collective of 7 artists from the island of Ireland. Husk's approach reflects a critical awareness of the role of agency in artistic creation, acknowledging the interplay between the futility of labour, artistic intention and the ludic nature of the creative process. In 2024 Husk undertook a residency with COVEN, a queer feminist art collective based in Berlin in collaboration with the University of Atypical and Flax Arts Studios.

Chloe Brenan is an artist from rural County Carlow. Using moving-image, language and sound, she creates close and careful examinations of the poetic haptics of daily life and processes on the edge of perception that call into question boundaries between bodies, intimate spaces and wider structures of power. She holds a three year studio at Temple Bar Gallery and Studios and her practice is supported by the Irish Arts Council.

Aifric Prior Beliere is an artist and musician working in Dublin, Ireland. After graduating with a degree in Fine Art in 2021 she was invited to take part in a Digital Media Graduate Residency in Fire Station Artists' Studios and to produce a solo exhibition, *Distances Make Paths Between*

Them, in A4 Sounds Artists' Studios. Since then she has exhibited with Draíocht Gallery Blanchardstown, Lateral Art Space, Cluj Napoca and curated and exhibited work in Seville Place.

Laura Fitzgerald is a visual artist working in drawing, painting, installation, video, text and audio. She is a graduate of both the National College of Art & Design, Dublin and Royal College of Art, London. She received a 2024 Markievicz award to work with the archive of experimental filmmaker, animator and poet, Flora Kerrigan. Laura will present a new body of work at Lismore Castle Arts in June 2025.

Cecelia Graham is a practitioner working between Belfast and Derry. Within her practice, she incorporates curation, writing and participatory event-based forms to interrogate institutional bureaucracy, speculatively dreaming up forms of governance based on collective knowledge-sharing, peer-led economies and use of non-monetary resources. Cecelia's work often considers modes of working that emerge from collaborative processes within ecology, craft, agriculture and acts of love and friendship; striving for a future in common instead of reproducing institutional logics that hoard resources and power.

Marielle MacLeman's practice is rooted in care and transformation, often combining salvaged and context-based materials and craft references. She works across 2D, sculptural assemblage and installation and has worked extensively in Arts and Health contexts. Recent solo presentations include Butler Gallery, Kunstverein Aughtrim, Etnografski Muzej Zagreb, developed from the BoSA Residency with CIMO, Zagreb, and LEER Residency at Leitrim Sculpture Centre with forthcoming group shows at IMMA and BIEN 2025, Slovenia.

Samir Mahmood is a Pakistani-Irish artist whose work encompasses painting, drawing and collage. He explores themes of identity, migration, and spirituality, infusing his pieces with the bodily experiences of queer existence. By focusing on the queer body, Mahmood reflects on human vulnerability and its connection to the world, aiming to propose a liberating new reality. His art incorporates religious references that allude to the experiences of migration and the need to reconcile new, old, and similar ideas and qualities represented across different cultures.

William McKeown studied at Central St Martins School of Art and Design, London, Glasgow School of Art, and the University of Ulster, Belfast. McKeown's near abstract paintings explore states of mind and qualities of nature. McKeown has exhibited extensively including solo exhibitions at the Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin; Ormeau Baths Gallery, Belfast, and Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane.

Michaela Razafima Nash is an artist and art writer based in Belfast. Her writing takes on hybrid forms of art criticism. While her work is multidisciplinary, spanning painting, photography and video installation. Her current project explores chronic illness, nerve pain and the interconnection between the body and crip bed space.

ABOUT THE CURATOR

This exhibition has been curated by **Rachel Botha**, as part of New Curating 2025 at CCA Derry~Londonderry.

Rachel Botha is a curator, her practice investigates how people perceive their social and political framework within the local context. She was awarded the Provost's Curatorial Fellowship at The Douglas Hyde, Trinity College Dublin, and the Emerging Curator at the Kilkenny Arts Office. She was appointed Emerging Editor of Bloomers Magazine, co-director of Catalyst Arts, Belfast, and Early Career Curator at the RCC and Glebe House & Gallery, Donegal.. She is currently the curator of the Tea Houses, a newly activated space to host a responsive public art programme situated by the River Nore in Kilkenny.

ENDS

Centre for Contemporary Art Derry~Londonderry

10–12 Artillery Street, Derry~Londonderry, BT48 6RG, Northern Ireland

+44(0)2871 373538 | ccadld.org | info@ccadld.org

Opening times: Tuesday–Saturday noon–6pm. Free admission

About CCA Derry~Londonderry:

The Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA) is a publicly funded space within the historic city walls of Derry~Londonderry. CCA creates opportunities for audiences to experience ambitious, experimental and engaging art and for emerging artists to develop successful careers. CCA fosters a wide range of artistic, curatorial and critical practices through five programme streams: research and production, exhibition-making, public programmes, publishing and residencies.

CCA was a Finalist in Art Fund Museum of the Year 2021, the largest museum prize in the world. CCA was recognised for its resilience and adaptability throughout the pandemic, and their continued effort to support audiences and artists including creating paid opportunities for artists and freelancers when they needed it most.

CCA is a member of Plus Tate: Plus Tate is a network, which comprises 35 cultural institutions – including the Tate galleries – that have strong artistic vision, a focus on contemporary art, outstanding public programming and a commitment to local community engagement through art. Plus Tate aims to support the development of the visual arts across the UK.

Image:

Aifric Prior Beliere, *Ann* (2022). Gouache and coloured pencil on paper.

For media enquiries:

Seán Ward, Marketing Coordinator for CCA Derry~Londonderry 10-12 Artillery Street, Derry~Londonderry, BT48 6RG, Northern Ireland

sean@ccadld.org | +44(0)2871 373538 | [@CCADLD](https://www.instagram.com/CCADLD)

Take Hold at CCA Derry~Londonderry is supported by:

