

Take a Breath

Jun 14, 2024 — Mar 17, 2025 | Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Ireland

IMMA (Irish Museum of Modern Art) is delighted to present *Take a Breath*, a major new exhibition that provides an historical, social, political, and personal examination of breathing - why we breathe, how we breathe and what we breathe – exploring themes of decolonisation, environmental racism, indigenous language, the impact of war on the environment and breath as meditation.

Featuring the work of Marian Abramović, Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Mercedes Azpilicueta, Giacomo Balla, Ammar Bouras, Alex Cecchetti, Bruce Connor, Maud Cotter, Forensic Architecture, John Gerard, Sheroanawe Hakihiiw, Maria Hassabi, Susan Hiller, Belinda Kazeem-Kamiński, Waqas Khan, [Joseph Kosuth](#), Clare Langan, William McKeown, Ana Mendieta, Khadija Mohammadou Saye, Isabel Nolan, Yuri Pattison, Mark Ruwedel, Belinda Quirke, Hajra Waheed, Patrick Scott, Pamela Singh and JMW Turner. The exhibition will also explore breath through movement and sound with performances by Okwui Okpokwasili in collaboration with Peter Born, Alex Cecchetti, Maria Hassabi, Isabel Nolan with Belinda Quirke, and Camille Norment Trio with Crash Ensemble.

Taking as its starting point the nature of breath and its vital role in our very existence, the exhibition reflects on the social, political, environmental, and spiritual aspect of breathing, tracking this vital act from the impact of post-industrial air pollution to modern-day wars and the effect on environment, health and how we live; to the suppression of protests of voices from different communities, where breath is a symbol of community and resistance; and the use of breath as personal meditation.

A central concern of the exhibition is to explore the impact that actions and climatic events have on the world as whole, illustrating how we are profoundly interconnected. In 1815, the largest volcanic eruption in history, at Mount Tambora on Sumbawa Island, Indonesia, was recorded. The ramifications of the eruption were felt across the world for years, resulting in the ‘year without a summer’ of 1816, when remaining volcanic dust persisted in the atmosphere, resulting in spectacular sunsets that were recorded by J.M.W Turner in his paintings. This period also saw the advent of the industrial revolution, often referred to as the beginning of the Anthropocene, when human activity had a significant impact on our planet. The Italian futurist Giacomo Balla chose to recurrently portray the automobile to represent speed, highlighting the advent of a technology that transformed our experience of the world. The exhibition juxtaposes the work of these artists with Yuri Pattison, whose work *Sun[set] Provisioning* (2019) collects data that monitors the pollution in the air and translates this to a digital rendering of a sunset, tracks our trajectory to the digital age.

The notion of breathing became part of global collective consciousness during the Covid-19 pandemic and, concurrently, through the Black Lives Matter movement, in which the last words of George Floyd, ‘I can’t breathe’ became a rallying cry against systemic racism and oppression. Environmental, social, and political activism plays an important role in the exhibition: Black Lives Matter protests in the USA are documented in Forensic Architecture’s *Tear Gas Tuesday* (2020), a film work which documents the excessive use of tear gas to oppress protests in downtown Portland, Oregon. Despite being broadly banned in warfare under the terms of the 1925 Geneva Protocol, tear gas as an agent for so-called ‘riot control’ has become the preferred means for police, in the US and around the world, to clear dissenting voices from public spaces. Hajra Waheed’s *A Letter From My Sister* (2023), an audio recording of an intimate letter from the artist’s sister in which she responds to the implementation of a state of emergency in France following the Bataclan attacks, transposes human struggle and a radical politics of resistance and resilience.

The exhibition acknowledges the need for a space for personal reflection and meditation in response to the sometimes, overwhelming nature of world events, and the last chapter of the exhibition, in IMMA's East Wing, is a meditative and reflective space. Through the works of Patrick Scott, William McKeown, Alex Cecchetti and Waqas Khan, the exhibition explores the importance of the awareness of breath in our daily lives through meditation or spiritual exercises. A newly commissioned tapestry piece incorporating cosmological elements by Isabel Nolan creates space for an ethereal moment where it is possible to see beauty in chaos.

As part of the exhibition, contemporary artist and choreographer Maria Hassabi will stage a series of performances. Hassabi's performance piece *White Out* (2023) reflects on the concepts of time and the human figure, with the breath being the ultimate movement emphasising the passage of time as a pinnacle of human experience. Okwui Okpokwasili's partnership with the director, designer, and filmmaker Peter Born creates a movement piece that creates an intimate exchange between the performer and the audience. Camille Norment Trio, comprised of the Norwegian hardingfele, electric guitar, glass armonica, feedback and electronics, partners with Ireland's Crash Ensemble to perform Norment's piece *Sounds for new Seeds*, a composition of sound and voice that creates sonic sensations which envelop the listener both individually and collectively. Isabel Nolan's and Belinda Quirke's new sound and word composition will respond to shared interests in breath, the cosmos and an idea of deep time that is implicit in the exhibition.

The exhibition's film programme includes Bruce Conner's *CROSSROADS* (1976), one of most provocative films of the Atomic era which features 37 minutes of extreme slow-motion replays of the 1946 Operation Crossroads Baker underwater nuclear test at Bikini Atoll in the Pacific, and Clare Langan's *The Heart of a Tree* (2020), which highlights the importance of trees to the survival of the planet and explores the disconnection between man and nature.

Commenting on the exhibition, Annie Fletcher, IMMA Director said; "Take a Breath is an important exhibition that explores how we think about and consider the everyday practice of breath. The exhibition includes national and international artists that reframe the act of breathing as a political, social, environmental and personal act. It's a very pertinent exhibition for this particular moment in time."