The Irish Face is a research project that interrogates how Irish identity has been historically constructed, classified, and disciplined within British and European cultural institutions. Its first iteration comprised a residency, a site-specific performance, and a pamphlet—designed by Daly Lyon. This phase unfolded at Tate Britain in 2025 through a collaboration between Tate and Askeaton Contemporary Arts.

At its core, the project critiques the colonial knowledge systems that continue to structure how Irishness—and national identity more broadly—is organised and rendered legible. Rather than treating institutional classification as neutral, the project exposes its reliance on imperial epistemologies: frameworks developed to measure, rank, and contain cultural subjects within hierarchies that served the political needs of the colonial state.

The research drew from multiple sites and narratives, including the legacy of Derry's Orchard Gallery; the carceral history of Millbank Prison—the former panopticon on which Tate Britain now stands; and canonical representations of Ireland held in the National Gallery of Ireland. By placing these narratives into a shared investigative structure, The Irish Face assembled a counter-taxonomy that revealed persistent institutional blind spots, omissions, and distortions in the preservation of cultural memory.

Image taken 12 December 2024 at 15:34

Shrapnel damage on the façade of Tate Britain, caused by an almost nightly barrage of bombs that struck the building and its grounds during the Blitz. On 19 December 1940, two incendiary bombs pierced the roof of the building, setting fire to the floorboards in one of the galleries.

Image taken 21 January 2025 at 13:01

An empty shelf in the section dedicated to international catalogues, specifically for nation states beginning with the letter 'P'. The visible books and folders are the backs of items on the shelf behind, seen through the gap.

Image taken 10 July 2025 at 16:58

Close-up of the front cover of John Carson's *A Bottle of Stout in Every Pub in Buncrana* of 1978. An unspecified circular stain appears on its front cover, perhaps created by the base of a stout bottle, a ghostly imprint of the book's own subject matter. It is not an intentional design feature.

Image taken 17 September 2025 at 14:30

An image caption seen in *InsideOut: Street/Art in Ireland*, a 2012 compendium edited by Rua Meegan and Lauren Teeling. It reads: 'Artist unknown – Thomas Street / Dublin 8'. The caption obliquely references a large outdoor painting by Frank Wasser, created during his time as an art student on a temporary hoarding owned by the National College of Art and Design.

The pamphlet presents a series of photographs taken over the last year, each key encounters in the making of *The Irish Face*.

Image taken 21 January 2025 at 13:01

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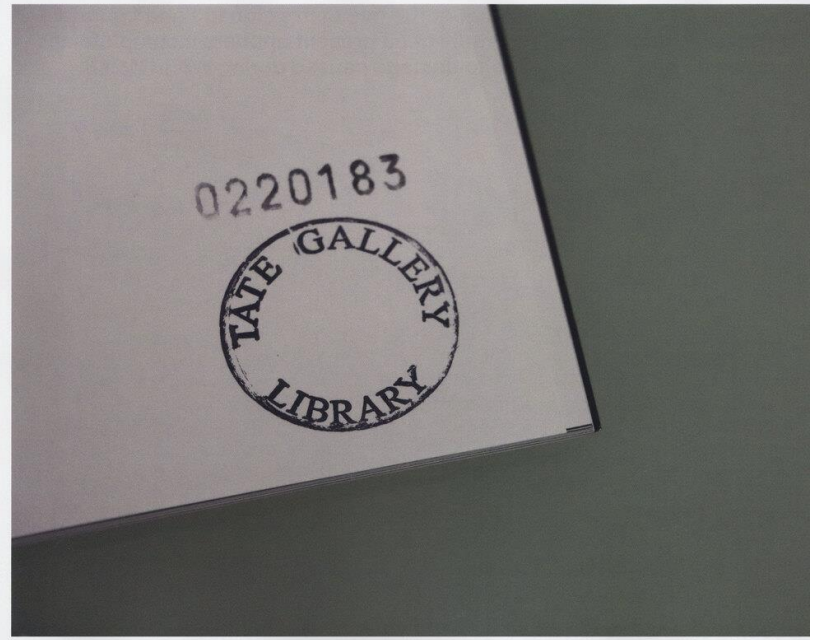
01. The inside cover
number.



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during his time as an art student on a temporary h
of Art and Design.

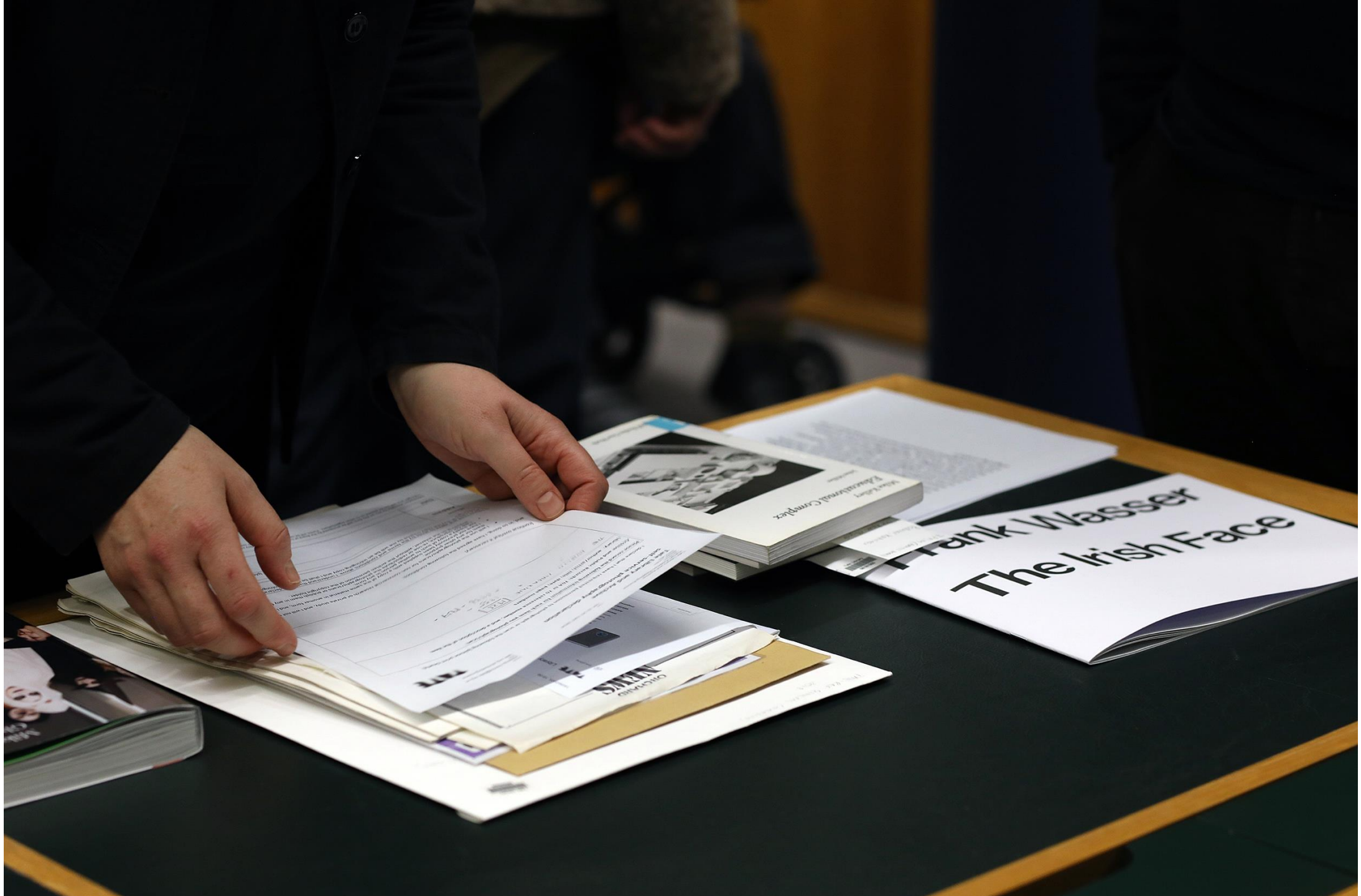

KEY ARTISTS
KEY WORKS
2
DISPENSAL
The Holography Show
A travelling exhibition of holograms
produced at Goldsmiths' Holography Workshop, 1980-82
A BOTTLE OF STOUT
IN EVERY PUB IN BUNCRANA
THE STORY OF AN ARTWORK BY JOHN CARSON

Tate Library and Archive
self-service photography declaration

I declare that I have requested permission to photograph or scan the following [please print clearly]:


BRITAIN
The
Dark
bject
na Palmer
THE DUBLIN
MAGAZINE
A Quarterly Review
of Literature, Science and Art
Edited by SEUMAS O'SULLIVAN.
JULY—SEPTEMBER
1937.
Price 2/6
TATE GALLERY
MILLBANK
THE DUBLIN
MAGA

The Irish Face
Swift & his Age
The Irish Face
THE IRISH · 1870 · 1970
NATIONAL GALLERY OF IRELAND
THE IRISH · 1870 · 1970
THE SURREAL IN IRISH ART
Church Disestablishment
1870 - 1970
A Centenary Exhibition
THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF IRELAND
Merrion Square Dublin 2
May 1970
'Irish Republic: Group Exhibition Catalogues'
The materials displayed on this table are drawn from the library's collection of Irish group exhibition catalogues produced throughout the 20th century. These publications capture significant moments in which exhibitions were used to explore, shape, and project ideas of Irish identity through visual art. Among the most notable examples is The Irish Face, published by the National Library of Ireland in 1986, which examined how Irish identity has been represented in portraiture over time. Another key item is the catalogue for the exhibition "The Irish.", held at the National Gallery of Ireland, which presented a collective image of the nation through a curated selection of artworks.
These catalogues are more than records of exhibitions—they reveal how cultural narratives were formally constructed, organised, and circulated during the 20th century. Their design, typography, and institutional framing reflect how Ireland was represented at home and abroad. Notably, their archival classification within the library—using terms such as "Irish Republic"—remains in place today, offering insight into the language and categories through which cultural heritage has been catalogued and interpreted over time.
The design and material qualities of these publications were of particular interest to Frank Wasser in his research. They served as key reference points in the development of his monologue performance, informing its visual, conceptual, and narrative approach to
exhibition histories, national identity, and the persistence of archival language.
54
Group exhibition catalogues
53
Group exhibition catalogues
52
Group exhibition catalogues


Frank Wasser
The Irish Face


Frank Wasser

The public performance on 17 October operated as a deliberate interruption within the Library and Archive Reading Room—a space shaped by silence, surveillance, and the authority of the archive. Throughout the afternoon, research materials, artefacts, and ephemera were made available, while performed readings and the activation of archival quotations unsettled the spatial and behavioural norms of the library. This rejection of imposed quietude foregrounded how such environments regulate not only what can be read, but *how* reading is performed and *who* is socially authorised to speak within them.

By mobilising performance against the disciplinary logics of the library, The Irish Face underscored how archives function as ideological infrastructures: sites where institutional narratives harden, where erasures become systemic, and where the politics of visibility shape the contours of cultural knowledge. Tate's Library—holding more than half a million publications on British and international art—acted both as a resource and a problem, exemplifying the geopolitical biases embedded in the formation of art-historical archives.


TATE
EXHIBITION


TATE
EXHIBITION
CATALOGUES
TATE
EXHIBITION
PAUL NASH
LIFE BETWEEN ISLANDS

for more details please contact

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All performance documentation by Deirdre Power

Full video documentation of performance is available upon request