

Roscommon Women's Network (RWN)
Intercultural Art Textile
Project

**Folktales & Plants from Around the World, Shared in
County Roscommon: A Catalogue**



Introduction

This booklet is a catalogue of the folktales that the women of this project brought from their countries and cultures, giving the stories behind their own creative interpretation that you see in the art piece.

The folktales represented in this project tell a larger story of historic and present day global migration and the weaving together of different tales. Like the Mami Wata of Nigeria which is also celebrated throughout the African Caribbean diaspora or the story of the old Traveller wagon which is a symbol of the rich nomadic culture of the Travelling community here in Ireland. This project celebrates the weaving together of folktales, art as well as *human stories*.

Background

This project spanned nine months starting in September 2023, with monthly meet ups in different locations throughout the county of Roscommon including Ballaghaderreen, Castlerea, Athleague and Monksland, as well as smaller local weekly meet ups.

Fifty-six women from twenty nationalities/ethnicities living in county Roscommon took part in this project at different stages throughout these nine months, they were Ireland, Irish traveller, Syria, Algeria, Nigeria, Palestine, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Afghanistan, Eritrea, Kenya, Pakistan, Morocco, England, Brazil, The Congo, Germany, Scotland, Ukraine and Slovakian Roma. The project included women of migrant background, women currently in the asylum system, Irish traveller women and Irish settled women. The project was formally unveiled at The Abbey Hotel on Friday, the 17th of May 2024.

This booklet has been translated into four languages; English, Arabic, Farsi and Tegrinya.

A Special Thanks To

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Background.....	1
Special Thanks.....	1
Flowers and plants from around the world	3
Folktales From Around the World Shared in County Roscommon	6
Brid – I Measc ár Scealta.....	7
1. Ireland – Salmon of Knowledge.....	8
2. Irish Traveller – The Old Traveller Wagon.....	9
3. Syria - The story of Aladdin.....	10
4. Algeria – the story of the fennec.....	11
5. Nigeria – the Mami Wata.....	12
6. Palestine – The Al Badawi Olive Tree.....	13
7. South Africa - The Tokoloshe.....	14
8. Zimbabwe -The Nyaminyami.....	15
9. Afghanistan - The Bamiyan Buddhas	16
10. Eritrea – Libey (my heart) by Bereket Mengasteab.....	17
11. Kenya – Crying Stone of Kakamega (Crying Stone of Ilesi).....	18
12. Pakistan – The story of Anarkali.....	19
13. Morocco – the Atlas Lion.....	20
14. England – The White Hare.....	21
15. Brazil – Oya/ Iansã.....	22
The Journey.....	23
Reference list.....	27

Flowers and Plants from around the World



The Protea - the flower of South Africa



White Jasmine - the flower of Syria



The Shamrock - the flower of Ireland



The Tulip - the flower of Afghanistan



The Orchid - the flower of Kenya



The Rose - the flower of England



The Gerbera Daisy -The flower of Eritrea



The Iris Tectorum - the flower of Algeria



Jasmine - the flower of Pakistan



The Flame Lily - the flower of Zimbabwe



The Rose - the flower of Morocco



The Yellow Trumpet - The flower of Nigeria



The Faqqua Iris - the flower of Palestine



The Tecoma Chrysostricha - the flower of Brazil

Folktales From Around the World

Shared in County Roscommon

Ireland

Irish Traveller

Syria

Algeria

Nigeria

Palestine

South Africa

Zimbabwe

Afghanistan

Eritrea

Kenya

Pakistan

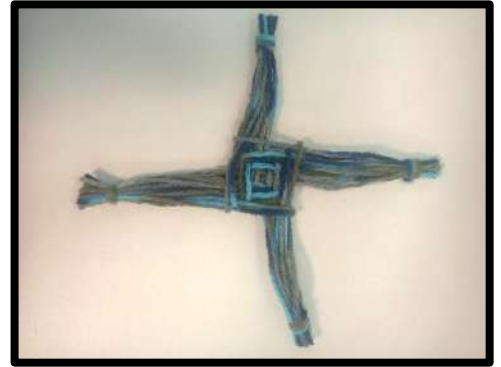
Morocco

England

Brazil

Bríd – I Measc ár Scéalta (In the Centre of our Stories)

Brigid (nó Bríd as Gaeilge) has been celebrated on this island for many thousands of years. The 1st of February is celebrated as Lá Fhéile Bríde (Brigid's day) which is traditionally seen as the first day of Spring, a time of welcoming the new light and new life.



Brigid's crosses are traditionally made from rushes on the 1st of February and are hung above doorways to protect against fire, evil spirits and hunger.

The Brigid cross which symbolises Bríd herself is the centrepiece of this art piece of shared stories.



‘Women’s stories are as powerful, inspiring, and terrifying as the goddess herself. And in fact, these are the stories of the goddess. As women, we know her because we are her.’

1. Ireland – Salmon of Knowledge

In the River Boyne there was a magic fish called the Salmon of Knowledge. It was said that the first person to taste its flesh would be wiser than all other men. Finegas was a poet who lived near the River Boyne, where he read books and wrote poems. He was one of the wisest men in Ireland. Finegas had tried for seven years to catch the fish but he had no luck.

A young warrior named Fionn had come to live with Finegas. Fionn was unaware of the legend about the salmon of knowledge. When Fionn asked Finegas why he spent his days fishing, Finegas just smiled and gave no answer. Then one morning in springtime, Fionn heard a shout and a mighty splash. Finegas had caught a salmon. It was a beautiful fish and its body shone like silver. Finegas immediately knew he had caught the salmon of knowledge.



Finegas was tired after his struggle to catch the fish so he told Fionn to cook it. Finegas warned Fionn not to eat the fish, not even a mouthful. Fionn built a fire and cooked that salmon very carefully, but when he was turning it, the hot skin burned his thumb. He quickly put his thumb into his mouth to take away the pain.

When Fionn brought the fish to Finegas, the wise poet noticed there was something different about Fionn. There was a new wisdom in Fionn's eyes. "Have you eaten any of the salmon?" Finegas asked. Fionn told Finegas he hadn't, but then he remembered he had burnt his thumb and put it in his mouth. Finegas knew at once that Fionn now had the wisdom of the salmon of knowledge. Finegas was very sad, he knew he would never be the wisest man in Ireland, but he was happy for Fionn. Soon afterwards Fionn left Finegas. Fionn went on to become leader of the Fianna and the greatest warrior they had ever known. (Ireland's Myths and legends)



2. Irish Traveller – The Old Traveller Wagon

In Irish Traveller culture, the old traveller wagon is very important, “it identified us as Travelling people” said Mary Margaret McDonagh, remembering her childhood living on the road with her family in the 1970s-1980s.

At the front of the wagon are the shafts for the horse. On the back is the rack and pan box for holding pots and pans and other items when travelling. Inside are beds and presses, and a stove. The chimney of the stove was always on the right-hand side, away from the edge of the road where it might hit against tree branches. The paint work and designs bring beauty and cheerfulness to the wagon. The vibrant yellow, green and red colours were among the popular colours found on barrel-top wagons. Motifs and designs cover the wooden frame. (National Museum of Ireland)

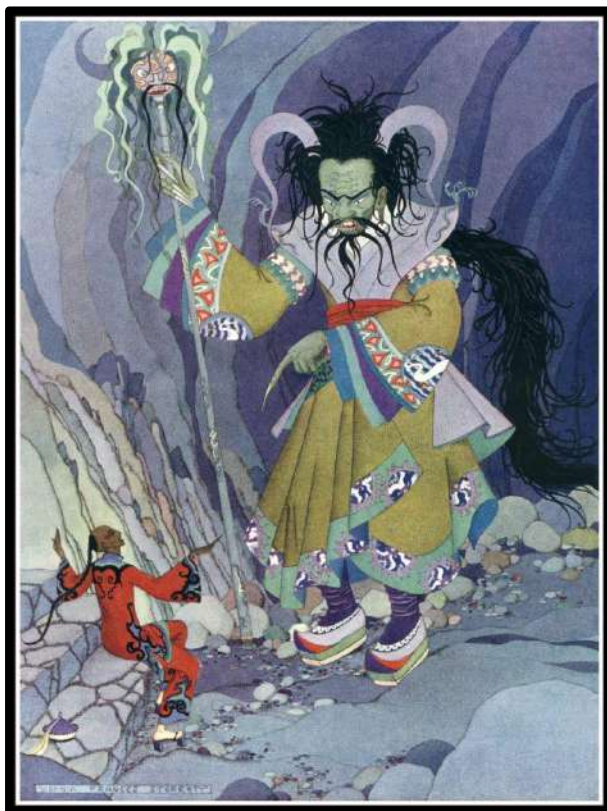
“Our fathers were tin-smiths, so they’d park up on the side of the road and they’d look in the woods for timber to light a fire” she said. “then we’d cook the food in a metal pot on the fire. We often survived on food from the neighbours. My mother used to make paper roses and clothes pegs out of timber and twine. She’d make these sat by the campfire next to the wagon. Depending on the weather, the smaller kids would be with my mother and the older kids with my father.”

“It was a lovely way of life passed down through generations. The memories that you hold in you, these were hard poor times but good times.”



3. Syria - The story of Aladdin

Once upon a time there was a young man named Aladdin. He lived in a poor family, and one day, Aladdin went with his uncle who was a selfish man to look for treasure in the cave, his uncle asked him to go deeper and to bring whatever valuables he found. As the hatch of the cave slammed



shut behind him, Aladdin grew scared. He soon stumbled upon a sea of treasures, and as he walked among the jewellery, he noticed a very old lamp. Aladdin took it and wiped away the dust. Then, the lamp began to shake and suddenly a huge genie appeared. The genie thanked Aladdin for taking him out and said "Abracadabra, I'm in your hands, what should I do to help?" the genie asked!

Aladdin wished to be freed from the cave, and the genie granted his wish.

Aladdin's village was ruled by a powerful Sultan who had a beautiful daughter named Jasmine.

Aladdin loved Jasmine, but he thought that being with her was impossible. He expected the Sultan to refuse his marriage to Jasmine because he was poor. He went to tell his mother what happened to him.

Then Aladdin asked the Genie to give him enough wealth to be able to marry Yasmine, but the Sultan refused as his daughter was already engaged to the son of a minister.

Aladdin asked the genie to help him sabotage the engagement.

The genie did it! The marriage ceremony did not take place, so Aladdin again asked the Sultan to marry Jasmine. The Sultan agreed on the condition that Aladdin build a huge palace for himself and the princess. Again, Aladdin asked the genie and so a beautiful palace appeared.

Aladdin married Jasmine, and they lived happily in the palace. After a while, Aladdin's uncle heard that he had become rich with a magic lamp. Aladdin's uncle came to the palace in disguise as a lamp vendor, he fooled the princess and stole the magical lamp!

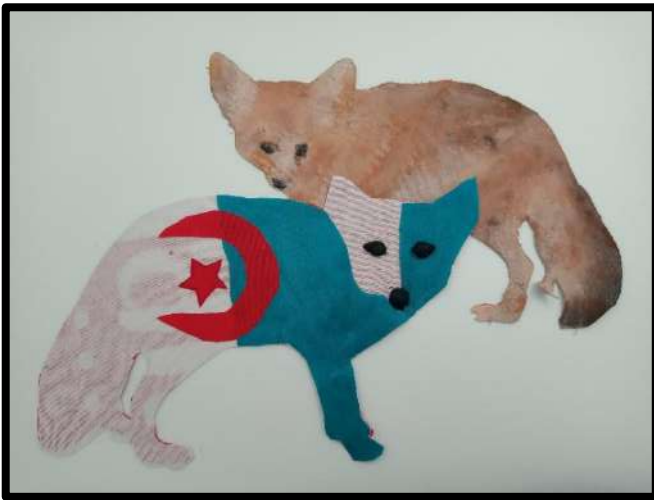
Aladdin knew that his uncle's intentions were not good and so he disguised himself and deceived him, taking the lamp without his knowledge. He decided to free the genie, but the genie wanted to serve him because he was an honest young man with good morals.

Aladdin then helped everyone in the city with the magic he got from the genie, and became a hero. He lived a happy life with his mother and wife, full of adventures and love. Happiness filled their hearts forever.



4. Algeria – The Story of the Fennec

The fennec is considered one of the most famous animals in Algeria. It is one of the smallest types of fox that live in the Sahara desert and it is distinguished by its very large ears. Some believe that the fennec is not a fox at all as it has some unusual habits including living in packs while foxes traditionally are solitary creatures.



The fennec was on the verge of extinction some centuries ago due to it being hunted for its thick soft coat. Today, the fennec is a protected animal and it lives in nature reserves including those in the Hoggar region in Algeria.

The Fennec has become the well-known symbol of the Algerian football team. Wherever they go, they are called 'The Fennec'. The shirts of the national team's players' have an image of the fennec, like the rest of the African teams, whose players' shirts appear with the image of the animal for which the country is famous.

5. Nigeria – the Mami Wata

Beautiful, protective, seductive, and dangerous, the water spirit Mami Wata (Mother Water) is celebrated in Nigeria as well as throughout much of Africa and the African Atlantic. Often appearing with the head and torso of a woman and the tail of a fish, Mami Wata straddles earth and water, culture and nature. She can exist in the form of indigenous African water mermaid or assume aspects of a Hindu deity or a Christian saint.

The Mami Wata is especially significant for African Caribbeans who were brought to the Caribbean via slave ships. It is believed that approximately two million people did not survive this journey by sea, and those who did survive went on to experience the violence of slavery which included punishment for worshipping African gods and goddesses.

As a mother of water, the Mami Wata is the protector of mothers and children, and her worship creates a sense of strength as well as the recognition and the respect for women as healers and leaders. Water connects our world with otherworld, life with afterlife. Among Africans dispersed across vast oceans, these waters are emblematic of the ultimate journey back home to Africa and all those distant yet living ancestors. Worshipping and appeasing Mami Wata is believed by devotees to heal physical and spiritual problems, provide wealth and help them achieve their goals and aspirations in life. (The National Museum African Art)



6. Palestine – The Al Badawi Olive Tree

The Al Badawi olive tree is a 5,000 year old tree that lies in the Al-Walaja village in Bethlehem, in occupied Palestine. Named after a Palestinian villager who would sit beneath its shade over 200 years ago, Al Badawi (the nomad) is said to be the oldest olive tree in the world.



It's mother trunk, old, wrinkly, and wide, with a nine-meter diameter, supports twenty-two other smaller trunks that have sprouted from its roots.

After 5,000 years, the Al Badawi tree sits steadfast on the land, Abu-Ali was elected by his family to be the third-generation caretaker of the tree, “the beauty and size of this tree is really special, it captivates the mind – it is the most beautiful tree in Palestine”. The tree used to produce half a tonne of olives each year but due to

water restrictions by Israel this amount is now considerably less, however, due to it's age, the taste and quality of the olive oil that it produces is the best you can find.

7. South Africa - The Tokoloshe



The Tokoloshe is a small and terrifying creature from the Zulu, Xhosa and Sotho mythology of South Africa.

These creatures are malevolent and very dangerous. They are said to crawl into sleeping people's rooms and cause all kinds of havoc - from simply scaring them to choking them to death with their long, bony fingers. They wear a charm around their neck, in some parts of South Africa they believe that the charm renders the Tokoloshe invisible to adults.

Tokoloshes are creatures called upon by those with magical abilities (like witches) to wreak havoc in a community. One of the ways the witches are able to keep them docile is to cut the hair out of their eyes so they can see and to feed it curdled milk.

If a Tokoloshe continues to terrorize a household or a community then a *sangoma* (Zulu witch doctor) is summoned to exorcize the area and/or the home with the use of *muti*, a kind of traditional magic practiced by the sangoma.



8. Zimbabwe -The Nyaminyami



The Nyaminyami is the most revered River God of the BaTonga (Tonga) people living by the Zambezi Valley of Zambia and Zimbabwe. He is a large serpent-like creature believed to have the head of a fish on the body of a snake.

The Nyaminyami River God is a major force in the society around the Zambezi Valley. He is believed to have supernatural powers; local people living by the valley have believed for many centuries that they are under the care of their River God, that it was he who would ensure a supply of food and water, as well as protecting them in troubled times.

When news came of the plans to dam the Zambezi River in the late 1940s, the local BaTonga people said the river God, Nyaminyami, would not approve as he had lived upstream with his wife on the Zambian shore, and the construction of the dam wall would separate them, therefore the people believed that he would destroy the wall in revenge.

In the late 1950s as construction began on the dam, the worst floods ever known washed away the foundations causing the collapse of part of the wall and in the process drowned both local and Italian construction workers. Again, two years later brought even worse floods (on a scale of once in a thousand years) destroying the coffer dam, the access bridge and the existing walls. Eleven Italian and local workers were drowned, their bodies were not recovered. Local people believed the wall had infuriated the river God Nyaminyami, they believe that as he forced his way back upstream he caused the destruction, thus taking his revenge.



9. Afghanistan - The Bamiyan Buddhas

In Bamiyan, a valley in central Afghanistan, two gigantic Buddha statues were constructed in the sixth century CE. Hewn directly out of the sandstone cliff, they were 35 meters and 53 meters tall respectively, and the largest standing Buddha statues in the world. The Bamiyan Buddhas were wonderful examples of the eclectic blend of cultural influences that characterized the region as the Buddhas were Indian, but they were wearing Greek clothing.



Introduced to Afghanistan already in the fourth century BCE, Buddhism flourished during the Kushan empire. At the time, Bamiyan was a hub on the routes which connected India, Central Asia and China. From the monasteries constructed there, Buddhist influences spread far and wide. A Chinese pilgrim, Xuanzang who visited Bamiyan in 630 CE noted that two enormous Buddha statues were “decorated with gold and fine jewels.”

The statues were destroyed by the Taliban government in March 2001. To the Taliban they were “idols,” and they were angry that the international community allocated funds for maintaining the statues while the Afghans themselves were starving. The destruction was carried out in stages and it took weeks to complete. Public opinion world-wide was outraged by this act of cultural vandalism. Various proposals have been made for reconstructing the statues, however to adopt the spirit of the Buddha “Nothing in this world is for ever,” he would have pointed out, “everything must pass.”



10. Eritrea – Libey (my heart) by Bereket Mengesteab

Bereket Mengesteab sings romantically for Eritrea as if his homeland were a young *weyzerit* (miss or woman). He starts by singing how his heart wants to leap and go to “her”, and he nostalgically describes different parts of his country that he longs for. The song was released during the dark days of the armed struggle when many Eritreans like himself were living in exile. It embodies the ‘longing for home’ that many were feeling at the time.

He describes his longing for “her” by asking how she is doing, if he could come to her or she to him.

He names many places where this “girl” that he longs for grew up and describes the landscape, the nature and people who lived there and those who raised his beloved.



11. Kenya – Crying Stone of Kakamega (Crying Stone of Ilesi)

To the Luhya tribe of Kakamega, who are mainly farmers and fishers, the 131 foot or 40 meters Crying Stone of Ilesi will forever be a sacred and a revered part of their everyday lives because it has supernatural powers. The stone is a place of rituals, healing, resolution, cleansing, and sacrifice. The Luhya tribe believes that when the stone cries it is a sign that good things are about to happen. When there is drought, the Luhya performs rituals to bring rain.

Luhya legend has it, a wife left her husband for another man and the heartbroken husband has not stopped crying to this very day.



12. Pakistan – The story of Anarkali

The Great Mughal Emperor Akbar and his wife, Mariam-uz-Zamani (Jodha Bai), had a son named Prince Saleem (later Emperor Jahangir). He was considered to be a spoiled and rude boy. Akbar sent his son away to the army for fourteen years to learn the discipline required to rule the empire. Finally, Emperor Akbar allowed this son to return to the main palace in Lahore. Since this day was one of great celebration, the harem of Akbar decided to hold a great Mujra (dance performance) by a beautiful woman named Nadira. Since she was beautiful and strong "like a blossoming flower", Akbar called her Anarkali (blossoming pomegranate).



During her first and famous Mujra in Lahore, Prince Saleem and Anarkali fell in love. Prince Saleem informed his father, Emperor Akbar, of his intention to marry Anarkali and make her the Empress. Despite her fame in Lahore as a dancer, Anarkali was not of noble blood and so Emperor Akbar forbade Saleem from seeing her again. Emperor Akbar ordered Anarkali's



arrest and placed her in one of the jail dungeons of Lahore. Prince Saleem helped Anarkali escape, and in a fit of rage Emperor Akbar gave his son two choices: either to surrender Anarkali to them or to face the death penalty. Prince Saleem, out of his love for Anarkali, chose the death penalty. Anarkali, however, unable to allow Prince Saleem to die, came out of hiding and approached the Mughal Emperor, Akbar. She asked him if she could be the one to give up her life in order to save Prince Saleem, and after Akbar agreed, she asked for just one wish, which was to spend just one pleasant night with Prince Saleem.

After her night with Saleem, she left the royal palace with guards. She was taken to the area near present-day Anarkali Bazaar in Lahore, where a large ditch was made for her. She was strapped to a board of wood and lowered in it by soldiers belonging to Emperor Akbar. They closed the top of the large ditch with a brick wall and buried her alive.

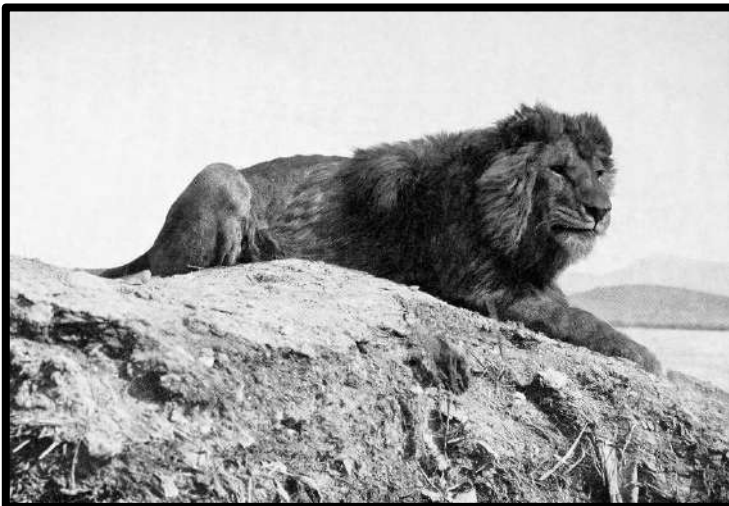
13. Morocco – the Atlas Lion

The Atlas lion is the most popular symbol of Morocco. It symbolizes courage and royalty and is considered the “King of the Beasts”. Historically, the Atlas lion was found in the Atlas Mountains of Morocco, as well as in parts of Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya.

Atlas lions were considered to be powerful and majestic animals and have played a significant role in Moroccan culture and history. Tribes used to hunt the Atlas lion and its cubs as a token of their loyalty to their Sultans. Due to these practices and habitat loss, the Atlas lion is now considered to be extinct in the wild. The last wild Atlas lion was killed in 1922.

However, there are small populations of Atlas lions in captivity around the world, which are considered to be important for the preservation of the genetic diversity of the Atlas lion.

One of the most notable captive populations of Atlas lions is located in the Rabat Zoo in Morocco.



14. England – The White Hare

In the village of Littlebredy (Dorset, England), there was a group of four farm labourers who went out at night hunting with dogs to catch animals for food. While they went hunting, they left their farming tools by the house of an old woman.

There were some people in the local villages, suspicious and small-minded folk, who called the old woman a witch and blamed her for all manner of malaises and mishaps. But there were others from the village who beat a path to her door; who came to her for help in the secrecy of night. And to all who came she listened with gentle understanding, before offering herbal remedies or healing words. The hunters themselves rarely saw the old woman as she was often out at dusk, but they were grateful to her and often they left her a little loaf of barley bread by way of thanks for looking after their tools.

One evening, whilst the men were out hunting, they caught a glimpse of a mysterious and magical creature – a pure white hare – racing over an open field before darting down into the valley and disappearing into a copse



of trees. They wanted to catch this alluring creature but they never got close – she was too cunning for the hunters and too fast for their dogs. Catching the white hare became an obsession for the men and one evening they were almost successful. They cornered the white hare and she was thrown about and bitten by the dogs but still managed to escape.

When the men went to collect their tools, they found the old woman lying on the floor in her cottage badly injured with her clothes ripped and bloody. Most of the men left quickly, filled with fear and guilt, but one stayed with the old woman and nursed her back to health. Chastened by this experience, the men vowed never to hunt the white hare again. (A Dorset version of the shape shifter myth is told by local story teller Martin Maudsley)

15. Brazil – Ọya/ Iansã (Yorùbá: Ọya or Iansã in Latin America)

Ọyá - called Iansã in Brazil — is a prominent warrior deity (Orisha) from Yoruba mythology celebrated as the goddess of winds, lightning, and severe storms (I think Ọyá loves Ireland!).

She is the fierce and powerful goddess of fertility, death and rebirth. The gatekeeper between worlds and responsible for guiding the souls of the dead to the afterlife.



Ọyá is associated with change, transformation and destruction but also with courage, strength and leadership. She is often called upon to help people overcome obstacles, navigate difficult transitions and embrace new beginnings (her Celtic equivalent is Brigitte).

The Journey









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A Project by Roscommon Women's Network (RWN) / Women's Collective Ireland (WCI) Roscommon, Roscommon County Council and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY)



Women's
Collective
Ireland



Comhairle Contae
Ros Comáin
Roscommon
County Council



An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,
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