

# Ageing Iconography: Non-normative Representations of the Irish Maternal Body<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** This essay looks at ageing and disability in two recent short films from Ireland: Ken Wardrop's *Undressing My Mother* (2004) and Evan Barry's *Walking Dreams* (2008). Each piece stars the filmmaker's own mother and, in both instances, the maternal body – one of the most iconic presences in the Irish imagination – is reconfigured to accommodate non-normative standards of physicality. Through their scripts and images, the two films address such urgent issues as disability, old age, reification, exposed nudity and sexuality, to make us reflect on the potential of corporeal subversiveness on the path towards social change. However, the artistic approach is radically different in the two cases: whereas Barry keeps the image of his disabled mother off-screen, Wardrop's camera falls directly on the sexualised parts of his mother's ageing and overweight body. Although both films predate the Repeal-the-8th Campaign, a campaign to remove Ireland's near-total constitutional ban on abortion, this essay contextualises them within the ongoing debate on women's rights to decide on their own reproductive destinies. By examining the two maternal bodies under scrutiny here, I will argue that national iconography does *age* to clear a space for the subversive and the new.

**Keywords:** disability, ageing, Irish mothers, visual culture