



These Islands: WaterLands IV Studio Research

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These Islands



The inspiration for our WaterLands Studio this year began with a vision of WB Yeats's Tower, Thoor Ballylee in Galway when it was surrounded and semi-submerged by the flooding of the nearby Cloone river. The poet's house had become an island, as imagined on the cover of his most famous book of poetry *The Tower*: reflected in an inverted and imagined world. We were inspired also by the navigational stick charts of the Micronesian Pacific Islanders which were used to identify patterns in ocean conditions. The charts were constructed of very basic, available materials, but carried sophisticated maritime information. They communicated direct experience as a register of invaluable knowledge of the navigation between different islands in the Pacific.

Each student was asked to select an island from across the island of Ireland, and to make three individual drawings: to consider the coastline, the inner space and topography of the island, and an existing building on the island. The three drawings were then incorporated and composed into a fourth drawing to make a large collective archipelago drawing. Students were asked to position themselves (their islands) around a large table which was specially constructed, on which the drawing was made. Different geographical positions and associations with other islands were adopted. Reference was made to the Surrealist Map of the world produced in 1929 which deliberately inverted scale and political and colonial dominance. This drawing set the thematic and research territory for the year, which we called *These Islands*.

Our vertical studios have students from first year all the way

to through to 6th year, so different capabilities, approaches and skills are revealed and shared. The expert and novice, so to speak, are in direct contact with each other, influencing, inspiring and mentoring each other. Drawing is our studio's central research methodology. To quote Peter St John, 'ideas are in drawings, and everything can be held in a drawing.' Places, programmes, processes and ideas are interrogated, explored and communicated through the specific medium of drawing, and in which analogue and digital means deliberately overlap, merge and interconnect. Our affinity with drawing is as a way of seeing and uncovering ideas beyond the limits of drawing seen only as commodifying quantities, or as representation. The aim of the studio work, and through this notion of the drawing as 'device', is always towards very specific, material and contextual project proposals.

Islands have many different stories and many different storytellers. Our approach was to discover and to attune to each island's unique story before beginning to suggest and propose any project. On Tory Island, off the north-west coast of Donegal, the project began by recalling the disappearance of the filmmaker's Neville Presho's house and the silence of the islanders as to the circumstances of its disappearance. The project proposed to reinstate a sort of 'ghost house' as an open frame, Japanese inspired, wooden structure, encircled and veiled in translucent material as a cinema of multiple projections. It was carefully perched on the rocks and by association temporal, and in exactly the same location as the original house. A family of wooden buildings accompanied this, set in different locations across the island, with which to support a yearly film festival and

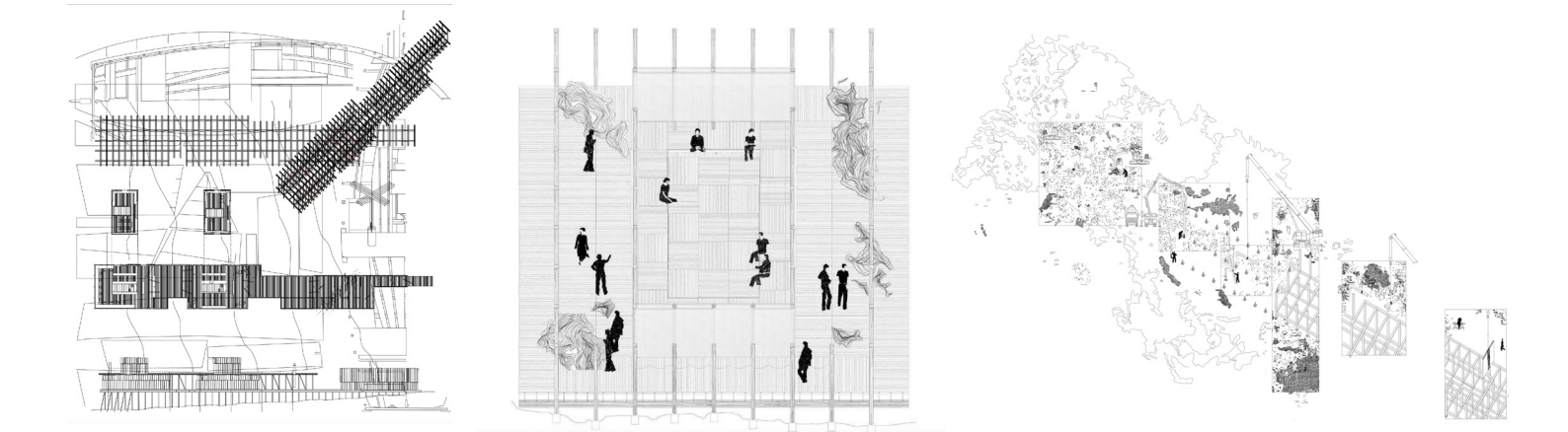
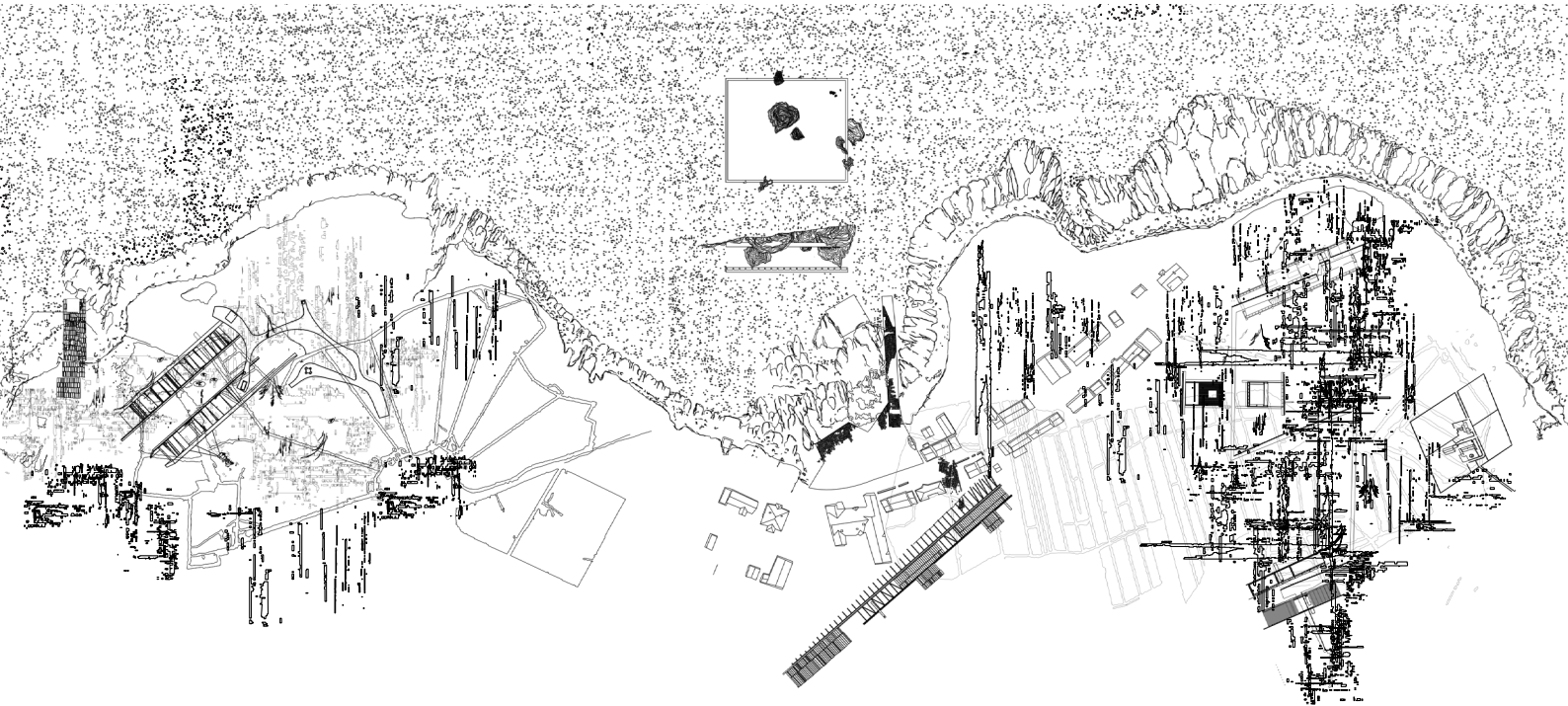
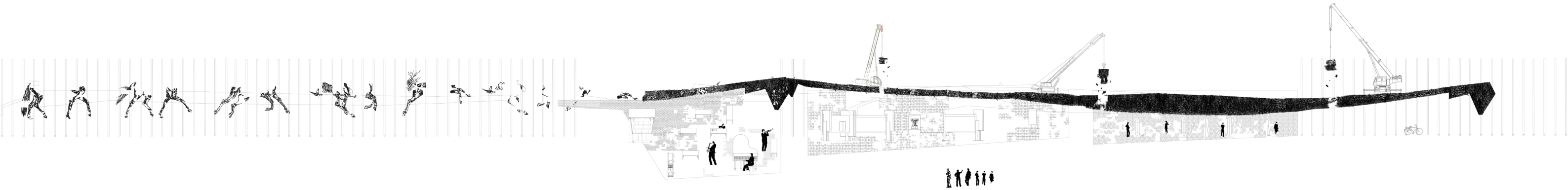
community of visiting filmmakers. A filmic sense of time becomes central to the making and observation of Amar's drawings. His study of Kengo Kuma's ArtLab in Lausanne, uses filmic framing and a rhythmic sense of the building's linearity to chart its subtle geometric and material shifts. He used this technique to explore the sequence of construction of his buildings on Tory Island.

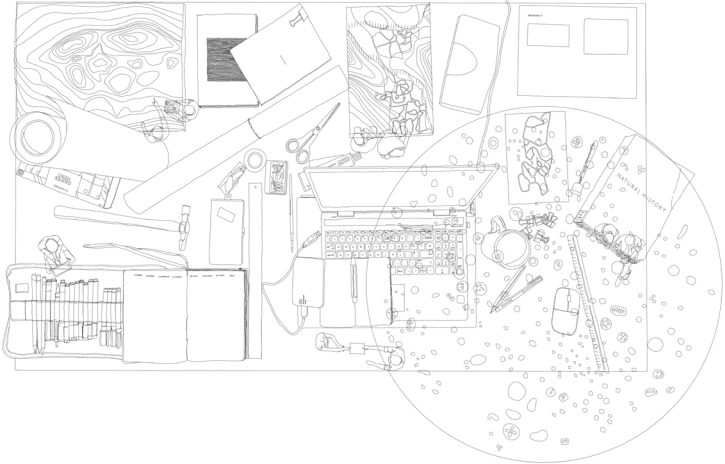
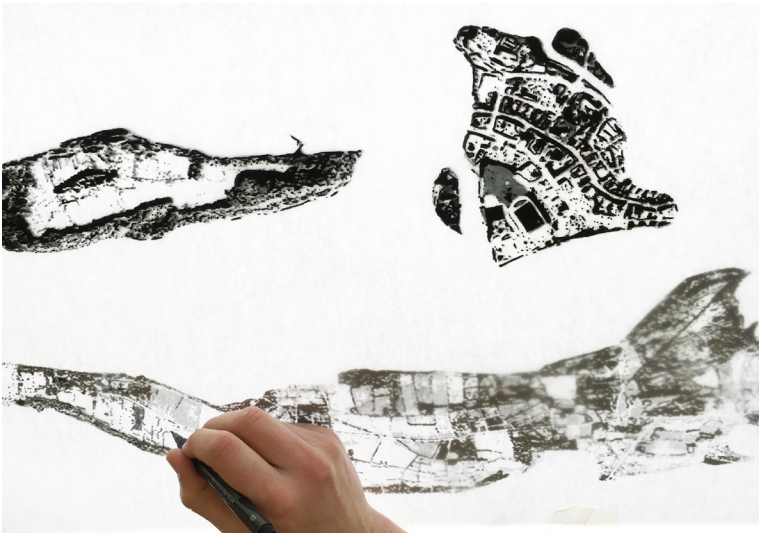
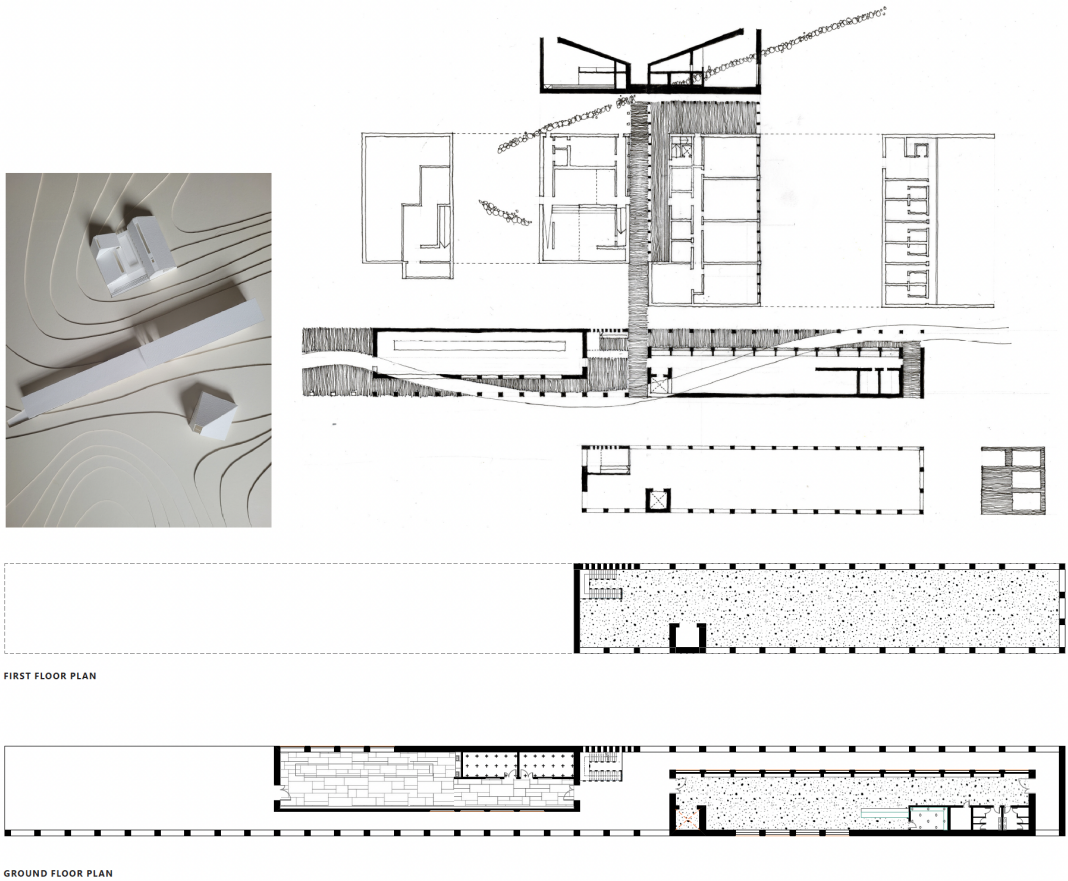
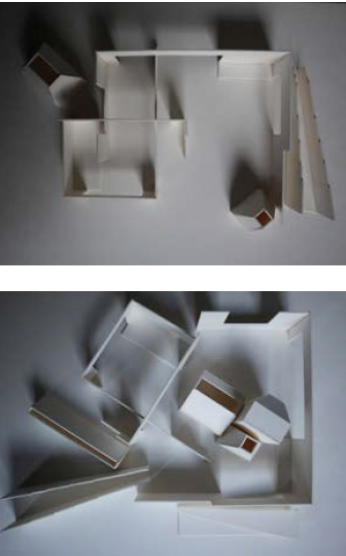
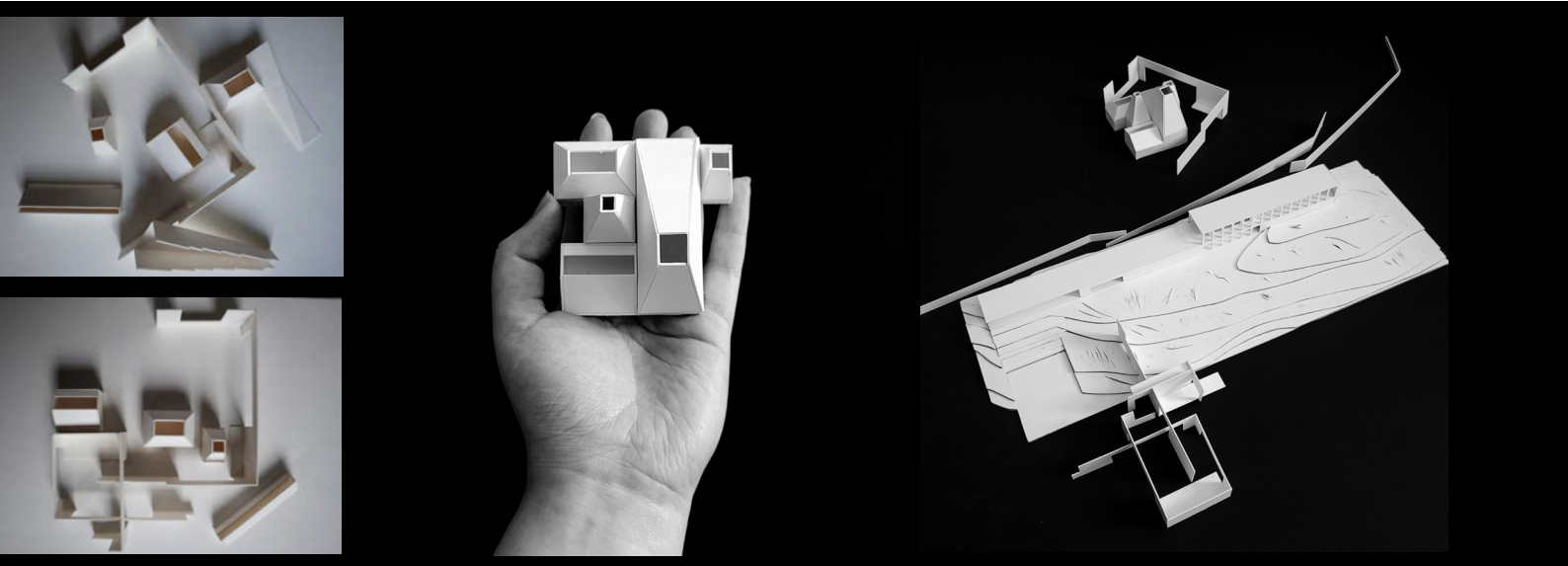
Rathlin Island was another of the islands explored in the studio. The proposal began by suggesting the possibility of an island being interpreted as the best manifestation of a physical archive. Embedded deep in each island are multiple histories and memories, be it in the language of the place names and townlands, the structures that inhabit the land and which are made of local materials and understand implicitly the weather and the importance of orientation, or in the nature and way of life of the people working and living on the island. All of this in a sense constitutes a living archive. Zoë's project for Rathlin began in drawing the townlands with both an imaginative and forensic sense of detail. These drawings aimed to draw out such important aspects as the physical geography, the wildlife, the flora, and the family histories, which are encoded in each townland name, and which required a 'translation' through drawing, to begin to reveal them. At the opposite end of the island from the famous bird sanctuary, a new archive was proposed gathering around three notions of different island characters: the maker, the cartographer and the performer. The craft of the hand, the line of the map maker, and the movements and sounds of the performer, all to resonate with, and to draw out a deeper understanding of the island's history and future. The three buildings constructed

to support these were approached with the simplicity of a boat being built amidst the landscape. Timber structures directly expressed their making and ecology, in order to be at home in this remarkable landscape. The beautiful drawings and working process was itself presented as a carefully made boxed archive.

On other islands such as Lough Derg a new halo of a renewing landscape and buildings was proposed to open the island to everyone beyond the pilgrims, and to form a new sustainable community. A new town was proposed along the edge of Lough Neagh evolving from studying Ram's island, and a Water Institute overseeing the responsibility for an all-Ireland water ecology, was proposed for the island of Enniskillen, strategically placed to connect the beautiful waterscapes of Upper and Lower Lough Erne. A taxonomy drawing of all the islands on Lower Lough Erne was produced by Mark in his study to understand the interdependence of these small islands and their unique ecology.

We drew and imagined our tables as islands, the plans of buildings became read as cartography and topography to discover, and our own studio space was considered as an archipelago of possibility to chart and adapt to our different ways of working. The large drawing that began the year, was by way of getting to know one another again. In the wake of the pandemic and the segregating impact of social distancing and the blurr of so much time working online, this large drawing became a sort of collective self-portrait to witness and celebrate being back in the studio.





The islands became a metaphor to rediscover each other's ideas, thoughts and work, and to position ourselves in collaborative space. To enjoy drawing and working in the studio again, for which there is no substitute. The year then became the navigation and discovery of both the physical and metaphorical archipelago of *These Islands*. ○

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Zoë Gibson
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Lauren Kane
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