

# ARCHITECTURE IRELAND

*Public Architecture and Public Space*  
Umbrella Project, Temple Bar, Dublin  
The Metals, Dun Laoghaire  
Limerick City Art Gallery  
Kevin Roche at 90  
2012 Irish Architecture Awards  
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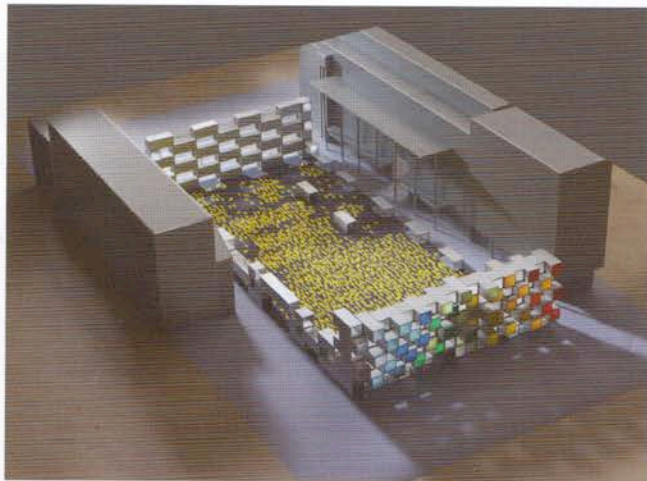
Public Architecture  
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## Architecture at the RHA

By Des McMahon, PRHA, FRIAI

The architectural content of the 182nd Annual Exhibition of the RHA sits comfortably with a stated Academy tenet; the championing of innovation and the understanding of tradition. Maybe the comfort is because these sometime opposites are inexorably present in the centre of the architectural process, or maybe it is because the boundaries in this year's show are more blurred.



There is a vivid sculptural dimension to abgc's "Cat's Cradle", where the geometry and rules of the children's string game of the same name have been taken and developed into a folly/garden pavilion for a young family. Each element of the piece is a variation on the 'North Star' Cats' Cradle figure. Beautifully crafted in inlaid polished concrete, mirror glass and folded steel, the concept is scalable; the same 'Northern Star' figure manipulated to become the structure for the table, the sun catching pavilion within which the table sits and the landscape design around it. The different manifestations of the design are represented here also at different scales; a 1:100 scale model sitting on a site plan represented by inlaid lines in the concrete surface of a 1:1 scale table supported on a folded steel rod frame.

In Grafton Architects' "A New Geography" we see the practice in search for metaphor as they develop conceptual thoughts for the design of a university campus in Lima, Peru, a recent competition winner. Their thinking is lyrically expressed in coloured pencil atmospheric sketches with supporting text. Points of reference include climate, place, and impact of buildings on the earth; the harshness of the site's interface with a motorway as the unique notion of a 'stadium' of learning emerges.

One of the engaging features of the exhibition is that it presents snapshots of the designers' work at various stages of its evolution. They are not in the too often self-conscious finalised product categories. Hassett Ducatez, for example, present a scale model study developed for an actual current project to develop final design certitude - an abstract model of roof structure for a new Department of Social Protection offices developed as a precast concrete diamond structural frame with infill rooflights GKMP Architects have made a beautiful pencil drawing exploring the section of a vacant house on Fishamble Street, Dublin. It shows the split-level arrangement with large one-and-a-half storey living rooms about which the other rooms are organised. The drawing endeavours to convey the imagined life and atmosphere of the building by suggesting the quality of light and materials. The silhouettes of City Hall and Christchurch Cathedral locate the building in the city.

Lotus Architects go all the way by bravely making an actual spatial construction in the form of a triptych folded opened out to make a sheltered space which the visitor is invited to occupy the folded canvas element of the triptych frames a view to the surrounding gallery.

The model submitted by LID Architecture is a development of a successful entry for a competition for a temporary installation, (four year duration), for an open space down at the O2 sponsored by the RIAI. The design celebrates the temporary nature of the project. The shipping container, symbol of global trade and exchange, is utilised as a building element to solve all the pragmatic and design issues as well as opening further possibilities and appropriations. Easy to assemble, disassemble, transport and re-use as well as being locally sourced from container holding companies at the port, the shipping container is an ideal sustainable building element. During the day, the checker-board configuration of the screen creates a changing pattern of shadows and light. At night, the containers provide the lighting concept, resulting in a lighting atmosphere of special character. A victim of the economic downturn we can only visualise how good it might have been.

PAC Studio's multimedia tour de force is in the form of a two sided light-box titled. Exquisite corpse collages together fragments of representation techniques for two houses and in doing so present alternative means of understanding each fragment and each house in a variety of new contexts. This method is informed by cadavre esquis a collective game played by the surrealist movement of the 1920's. Architectural space as light is represented through drawing using a mix of photomontage, technical and digital drawing techniques to develop layers and depths within the flat surface of the drawing. The peepholes in the surface of the drawing reveal the luminous qualities of the spaces represented, teasing the viewer to tentatively peek into this private domain, a hidden world of physical models of domestic life. The physical interaction of the viewer with the surface of the drawing to discover other representations of the space inside recalls Marcel Duchamp's posthumous installation *Étant donnés*.



Together, and separately, this all makes for an absorbing insight into the ever-varying imaginative process of architecture. Carried out by architect participants ranging from the thoroughly established to the relatively, as yet, unknown, they contribute a lively thought provoking element to the exhibition. Throughout there is a confidence and assurance of touch. The pieces are engaging and highly individualistic, all are impressively conceived, some are exquisitely made. Not to be missed.

The participating architects will talk about their work, Thursday 1 August 1, 5.30pm at the RHA. Ely Place