

Postgraduate Education

Plan C: Whereabouts?

MICHAËLE CUTAYA DISCUSSES THE MAKING OF GMIT'S MA IN CREATIVE PRACTICE GRADUATE SHOW.

IN JULY THIS year, Ruby Wallis and I were invited to curate the GMIT School of Design and Creative Arts MA in Creative Practice graduate show. This was the first time outside curators were invited but that was only one of the unusual features of this year's exhibition. The show included graduates from 2020 as well as 2021 – last year's students were invited to exhibit, as they did not get the chance to do so prior to their graduation, in effect doubling the number of exhibitors to 21 and making it the largest MACP show to date¹.

Another unusual feature was that most of the academic year was spent online, with only a few students availing of their studio on campus, a set-up which continued throughout the summer. In effect, the opening was the first time they all actually met in person, scattered as they were across the country and even abroad. And yet talking to the students via various connected means, the overall impression was one of a cohesive group that communicated well and supported each other.

Since its first iteration in 2017, the MA graduate show had taken place in the main temporary exhibition space in the city (the Connaught Tribune Printworks Gallery back then, the GPO now); however, because of art events dates shuffling, this year it was occupied by the Galway International Arts Festival. The exhibition was then programmed to be in the college itself, where it ran from 11 to 17 September. What it lost in centrality was gained in extra spaces and it also had the advantage of giving us some solid ground in the planning of the exhibition – both Ruby and I are alumni of GMIT and thus well acquainted with the building. This really helped us to visualise how works only previously encountered via PDF could be deployed.

The Cluain Mhuire building, a former Redemptorist monastery built in the 1940s, is quite striking with its high ceilings, long corridors and cell-like studio spaces with herringbone parquet floors, as well as a chapel with an overhanging gallery. The variety of spaces can accommodate the intimate and the monumental alike and the students made full use of both.

Seeing an exhibition materialise during install is always something of a conjuring trick. This is even more so when the works have only been encountered online previously; encountering the artworks in their exhibition spaces

felt quite magical. There is no space here to do justice to all the hard work the students put in to this exhibition, but I would like to point to a few trends which may have been the result of the working conditions of the past year. There were a noticeable number of small-scale, intricate works, such as Megan O'Malley's exactly hand stitched transitory artefacts, Sally Hewetson crocheting her way through articles of the Constitution, or the Byzantine and numerologically inspired drawings of Ekaterina Ivanova. There were also aspirations towards a restorative domestic place, seen in the meditative ceramic still-lives of Caitríona Lynch or the geometric colour arrangements of Luke Reidy.

By contrast, Maura Finegan and Gerry Murray negotiated the limitations of working at home to produce some large-scale works, through inward searching, and the transformation of found toys via 3D printing into furniture respectively. Steffi Delaney, Shania McDonagh and Sona Smedkova kept working in the college and they made the most of this opportunity in planning some really ambitious installation and performance pieces. Filmmaking was four of the students' main mediums, and in consultation with them it was agreed that a dedicated film programme in the main conference room of the college would offer them the best viewing conditions.

Early in July we workshoped with the students for a title for the exhibition that would capture the overall feeling of their year. They had much to suggest, and two ideas emerged: 'Plan C' to hint at the endless adaptability that was needed to get through the year, as well as connecting to a series of relevant or recurring C words (Covid, Culture, Climate, Creativity, Change ...); and 'whereabouts', to allude to the decidedly uncertain coordinates of our positions, whether online or 'offline'.

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Notes:

¹The MACP exhibiting students were Jill Beardsworth, Hien Cao Nguyen, Steffi Delaney, Holly Ellis, Sabrina Fallon, Maura Finegan, Orlagh Heverin, Sally Hewetson, Ekaterina Ivanova, Caitríona Lynch, Shania McDonagh, Gerry Murray, Luke Moloney, Nicole O'Donnell, Conor O'Grady, Megan O'Malley, Luke Reidy, Sona Smedkova, Harshita Strivastava, Juman Tamimi, and Tala Zeitawi.



Maura Finegan, 'Plan C: Whereabouts', GMIT, 2021; photograph by Ruby Wallis, courtesy the artist and GMIT.

Architecture

Momentum

EMMETT SCANLON REFLECTS ON A NEW EXHIBITION PROGRAMME AT THE IRISH ARCHITECTURE FOUNDATION.



Noreile Breen, 24 Carat, installation view, 'MOMENTUM', July 2021; photograph by Peter Maybury, courtesy the artist and the Irish Architecture Foundation.

THE EXHIBITION IN architecture is no longer limited to displays of absent buildings in photographs and models. 'MOMENTUM' is a new, bi-annual exhibition programme organised by the Irish Architecture Foundation (IAF), intent on propelling ideas in architecture forward, from the minds and hands of architects, out into the public domain. As IAF director/curator Nathalie Weadick declares in her introduction to the catalogue for 'MOMENTUM', she is liberated by the "potential of architecture exhibitions as a device to communicate and disseminate architecture". The inaugural edition, which ran from 9 July to 29 August, presented site-specific work from three accomplished architects – Noreile Breen, Tom O'Brien and Plattenbaustudio – described by Weadick as "a new generation... around whom exists a growing critical consensus".

First, on the doorstep of IAF HQ at 15 Bachelors Walk, is the sculptural work, 24 Carat, by Noreile Breen, glowing out front, facing south. Once intended to be at the scale of the skyline, mounted up on the roof, the final installation – a gold-lined concave funnel, mounted on a tripod – is an altogether more intimate affair. The cone is bespoke, precious, dazzling; the legs are generic, spindly, mundane. The physical thing itself feels emergent. The head is confidently searching for sun and the limelight, with legs working hard to secure stable ground. As a piece it is both elegant and awkward, certain and unsure. Breen, I think, thrives there, in-between, but this is by no means Breen at her limit; she's an architect in need of more scope.

Inside, Tom O'Brien exhibits like an architect, his installations dealing with one room, in section from street to basement. It feels, at first, that O'Brien has just left stuff behind; it is not clear if the work is going up or down, being installed or removed. This brings a sense of time and contingency – this is thought in action. There is a flag made of hi-vis material, concrete tests, a battered bench, a printed poem, a table, a fragile frame holding back retaining walls. These are things temporarily here, but also *somewhere else*. In the catalogue O'Brien reveals his hand, in a car, nails filthy from working with stuff. This is a revealing self-portrait of an architect for whom material clearly matters.

Finally, up top, in 'All Mod Cons', Plattenbaustudio share some spatial results of commod-

ified housing¹. They present 52 plan-drawings of often awful rooms for rent, drawn from photos and online descriptions. Alongside is a 'room', 'built' at 1:1 scale almost entirely out of paper, complete with replicas of objects of ordinary life. It is a work of phenomenal technical achievement. Perhaps Plattenbaustudio best communicate the critical value of the exhibition in architecture, as here architecture-specific skills are harnessed to reveal often hidden realities of living in the built environment. All-white to feel like a drawing, the 1:1 model is an ambitious departure from exhibiting drawings alone; however, the pure white forms, made by hand but resistant to touch by a visitor, perhaps starts to draw Plattenbaustudio's intentions away from the lived reality of housing, with which the pair so sincerely wish to engage.

The catalogue, deftly designed by Peter Maybury, is wonderful. Of particular note are the reviews of the installations by three writers – Colm Ó Murchú, Alex Curtis and Róisín Cahill – under the Emerging Architecture Writers Programme. These are brilliant, personal responses to the works, yet critical attempts to mediate and situate the ideas encountered in theory and practice.

'MOMENTUM' is a truly welcome, ambitious addition to a rather irregular infrastructure of architecture exhibitions in Ireland. Yet, the curatorial approach raises a wider issue: the ubiquitous championing of those of a 'new generation', while here sincerely intended as support, is arguably a strategy successfully adopted by the profession of architecture for decades. It is one which has surely contributed to 'youth' being equated with inexperience, inexperience being (deliberately yet inaccurately) associated with risk, all tacitly used to sustain a commissioning culture intended to secure work for the usual few, not the growing, diverse many. 'MOMENTUM' is here to stay, and so are these architects, all ready.

Emmett Scanlon is an architect, curator, writer and host of the podcast *What Do Buildings Do All Day?*

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¹Plattenbaustudio is an architecture and drawing studio based between Berlin and Dublin, which was founded in 2018 by Irish architects, Jennifer O'Donnell and Jonathan Janssens.