

Press Release Tuesday April 3, 2007

## ***SubUrban to SuperRural*: Ireland's entry to the 2006 Venice Architectural Biennale – Returns to Tour Ireland**

***SubUrban to SuperRural*, Ireland's entry in last year's Venice Architecture Biennale, is an ambitious exhibition curated by FKL Architects that looks ahead at the next 25 years at our pre-occupation with living on the land beyond the city's hold, and to arrive at some predictions and possible solutions for the next generation.**



What might an alternative Ireland look like in 2030? Seaside holiday villages that are only visible when occupied, floating cities complete with shopping and leisure amenities and an efficient railway infrastructure that will halve the commuting time across the country are just some of the new and innovative ideas to emerge from the nine Irish architectural practices involved.

*SubUrban to SuperRural*, widely acknowledged as one of the key exhibits of the 2006 Venice Architecture Biennale, highlights Ireland as a global case study in extreme suburbanisation, but FKL's well-chosen motto also offers hope that the modern regeneration of nature might replace the fragmentary degeneration of the city.

Richard Burdett, Director of the 2006 Venice Architecture Biennale, said of *SubUrban to SuperRural*: *'The context of the planet becoming more urban by the day is extraordinary: for the first time, more than 50% of the world's population now live in cities. What is fascinating about the Irish story is the erosion of rural space, and the fact that the Irish exhibition has dealt with this issue is polemical. To see this exhibition that hits right on the mark of the Cities, Architecture and Society theme makes me very happy, and I feel it is one of the key exhibits in [the] Biennale'*.

The exhibition's Irish tour, presented by the Irish Architecture Foundation and Culture Ireland, is intended to offer plenty of food for thought and spark debate here at home among the general public about how we can improve our quality of life.

*SubUrban to SuperRural* opens at the Ormeau Baths Gallery in Belfast before travelling to Cork, Limerick and Dublin later in the year.

**See overleaf for exhibition venue and dates information. A 24-page large-format tour brochure will be available at all venues free of charge.**

# ***SubUrban to SuperRural:*** **Exhibition on Tour**

**Dates: 10th April to 12th May 2007** (*Official opening 17th April*)

**Venue: Ormeau Baths Gallery, 18a Ormeau Avenue, Belfast**

To coincide with the landmark exhibition of '*Suburban to SuperRural*' (Ireland's contribution to the Venice Biennale 10th International Architecture Exhibition) in Belfast, Ormeau Baths Gallery, in collaboration with the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and the Ulster Architectural Heritage Society (UAHS), is delighted to present alongside it a fresh and timely new show featuring examples of important landmarks of modern architectural design in the 9 counties of Ulster from the early Twentieth Century to the present day: *Modern Ulster Architecture* (10th April to 12th May 2007)

The Gallery will continuously show *Saving Letterfrack – Ireland at the Venice Biennale*, a 30-minute documentary film by Steve Simons on Ireland's 2004 contribution to the Architecture Biennale by O'Donnell + Tuomey. *Saving Letterfrack* was broadcast on RTE1 in October 2005.

## **The Gallery will be presenting a series of lunchtime talks:**

- 19th April MacGabhann Architects
- 26th April O'Donnell + Tuomey Architects
- 3rd May FKL architects
- 10th May Boyd Cody Architects

There is also a full **programme of events and education** for *Modern Ulster Architecture* and *Suburban to SuperRural*:

- 19th April 6.30pm Talk, Ormeau Baths Gallery  
**'Architects and Artists'** by Jes Fernie, author of *Two Minds: Artists and Architects in Collaboration*
- 20th April 1-5pm, Black Box, Cathedral Quarter  
**'Happy to Live Here?'** Housing Seminar (Please register with PLACE:  
Telephone: (028) 9023 2524 | email: [info@place.uk.net](mailto:info@place.uk.net)  
[www.place.uk.net](http://www.place.uk.net)
- 24th April 6.30pm Talk, Ormeau Baths Gallery  
**'Rural'** by dominic stevens architect
- 26th April 6.30pm Talk, Switch Room, Great Patrick St.  
**O'Donnell and Tuomey** (Please register with RSUA)

- 28th April 2pm -5pm, Ormeau Baths Gallery  
**'Apocalypse Now or: will we still be driving ourselves crazy in 2030?'** Panel discussion involving the 'SubUrban to SuperRural' curators, exhibitors and other commentators, led by Shane O'Toole, Irish Commissioner for the 10th Venice Architecture Biennale, 2006
- 1st May 7pm Talk, Ormeau Baths Gallery  
**'Responses to and Influences on Northern Irish Architecture':** two personal responses to architecture from Belfast-based architects Mark Hackett (Hackett & Hall) and Ciaran Mackel (Mackel & Doherty)
- 3rd May 11am, Ormeau Baths Gallery  
**Queen's University Architecture Students' Day** with Shane O'Toole and FKL Architects
- 5th May 11am City Tour starting at PLACE, 40 Fountain St.  
**Architectural Tour of Belfast City Centre** with Patricia Moorhead  
(Please register with PLACE: T.028 9023 2524 E.info@place.uk.net W. www.place.uk.net)
- 8th May 7pm Illustrated talk  
**'The Modern Movement in Ulster, 1900-1950'** by Dr Paul Larmour, co-author of Modern Ulster Architecture

The Gallery will also run a series of children's Saturday workshops:

- 28th April 6 to 8 year olds collage  
5th May 9 to 12 year olds printing  
12th May 8 to 10 year olds drawing

Children's workshops cost £3 per child and run from 10.30 to 12.30. Booking is essential as places are limited. For further information contact the gallery 02890 321402 or mail@ormeaubaths.co.uk. [www.ormeaubaths.co.uk](http://www.ormeaubaths.co.uk)

**Dates: 24<sup>th</sup> May to 8<sup>th</sup> June 2007**  
**Venue: Cork city**

In conjunction the National Sculpture Factory, *SubUrban to SuperRural* will be presented in Cork as part of DES/IRE, a major conference exploring attitudes to domestic architecture and proposing a more creative future for the built environment. Supported by John F Supple Ltd.  
[www.nationalsculpturefactory.com/desire/](http://www.nationalsculpturefactory.com/desire/)

**The exhibition will tour to venues in Dublin, Kildare and Limerick later in 2007 (see press for more details as they become available).**

# EDITOR'S NOTES

## *SubUrban to SuperRural*

**Commissioner:** Shane O'Toole, Irish Architecture Foundation

**Deputy Commissioner:** Ciarán O'Gaora

**Curators:** FKL architects (Michelle Fagan, Paul Kelly, Gary Lysaght)

**Exhibitors:** Boyd Cody Architects, Bucholz | McEvoy Architects, dePaor architects, FKL architects, Henchion+Reuter Architects, heneghan.peng.architects, MacGabhann Architects, ODOS architects, dominic stevens architect.

One third of all the homes in Ireland have been built since 1995, 80% of them outside the major urban centres. Most of these homes sit on their own piece of land, with gardens to front and rear. Owning your own home is a reality for 80% of Irish citizens: the private house is an immensely successful, free-market consumer product, fuelled by our constitutional protection of the rights of private property, our innate desire to live on the land, our national obsession with the car and a deficit of infrastructure, integrated planning and political will unequalled in the developed world.

The singular solution to housing throughout the island has resulted in sub-urban sprawl - a vast, mono-functional organism that is choking our urban centres, devastating the countryside and atomising our traditional sense of community. It is not uncommon to spend 15-20 hours per week commuting, inevitably by car. In little over a decade, the Emerald Isle, with the sixth lowest population density in the EU, has become a case study in extreme suburbanisation.

Ireland's population is projected to grow by up to 38% by 2030 and the government's primary strategic infrastructural response has been to propose yet more roads. In the midst of this rush for more of the same, the absence of any accepted alternative expectations presents a rare freedom to re-imagine Ireland's future at a time of immense change and evolution within society. Are there new models for development that have been overlooked?

Accepting the reality of road-based infrastructure and low-density housing, can Ireland evolve new conditions in which to live? Conditions offering variety, social integration and environmental sustainability? Can we learn to value land again for its intrinsic qualities and not simply as a site for more houses? Can we create a new condition that is not a pale, less-than-urban condition but a ruddy hybrid of the rural and the urban, something more-than-rural - a SuperRural condition?

The emerging generation of Irish architects has been given the challenge to test this paradigm shift through research and the formulation of specific projects that imagine and illustrate a vision of how our SubUrban island can evolve into a SuperRural one between now and 2030.

*Michelle Fagan, Paul Kelly and Gary Lysaght FKL architects*

**Boyd Cody Architects: 26+1**

A vast, ex-bogland landscape, as big as greater Dublin, which would be equivalent to the 16th-largest county in the Republic and currently has a population of 0 (versus 1.2m for Dublin), will come free in the midlands Boora Complex by 2030. What would you do, faced with future food and energy shortages, with a new county if you could start from scratch?

**Bucholz McEvoy Architects: Learning Landscape**

A mapping of 19c/20c national schools in the midlands and the work of the Land Commission prompted two thoughts - that big moves can transform the landscape and the life it supports; and everybody lives an urban life now. As Ireland's future lies within a global economy, trading on ideas (which we haven't managed to date), can we invent a 'learning landscape' - something as powerful as Singapore but where, instead of living in skyscrapers, people can continue to live on the land while contributing to the global knowledge economy?

**dePaor architects: tall-house**

At current levels of output (20,000 per annum, on average), 500,000 new one-off houses will be built in the landscape between now and 2030, consuming 250,000 acres and a road frontage equivalent to 4 times the coastline of Ireland that would take 10 days to drive past. It's just not sustainable, so why not change the planning laws to ban all footprint extension outside urban areas as and from 2006? From now on, you can only build up or down - not out. Development pressure soon leads to demolition of bungalows and the development of new typologies - tall-houses - that curiously look not dissimilar to the tower-houses of old.

**FKL architects: Hinterland**

Develop the hinterlands of the national motorway network planned under Transport 21 for housing, so that everybody can live sustainably in the country but still work in town. Individual plots of 1.5 hectares within 3.3km of the motorway would support a house, vegetables and bio-fuel crops to support a local car culture that links to hubs, whence people commute to towns by bus on a motorway/dual carriageway QBC.

**Henchion+Reuter Architects: Demographics**

If the 1.6m population increase expected by 2030 were concentrated strictly within a 'penta-zone' linking Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway, Sligo and Belfast, it could support high-speed trains, similar to those currently in Denmark, that would 'shrink' Ireland - travel time from Dublin to Sligo would go from 3h20m to 48 minutes!

**Heneghan.peng.architects: ElastiCity**

Dublin-London is the world's second busiest air route. Short-haul flights are fuel-inefficient and may not be viable by 2030. Using oil-rig technology, build a bridge from Rosslare to Fishguard: high-speed trains travel Dublin-London in 2.5 hours and on to Paris. The power of this 'magnet' turns Dublin into an elastic, stretched city along the Irish Sea, instead of a blob spreading out over the midlands.

**MacGabhann Architects: Tideaways**

Holiday homes are killing the Golden Goose of tourism. Tideaways, based on an analysis of the Rundale system, includes seasonal homes in the sea on a pontoon that are towed into derelict Donegal harbours for winter storage and hillside 'sinkable' houses on a hydraulic system, linked to the pontoon, that rise and fall with the tides. When nobody's at home, the empty sinkable house collapses on its hydraulic ram, disappearing from sight into the ground. Its grass roof becomes part of the landscape you can walk over.

**dominic stevens architects: Fluidcity**

The Shannon-Erne River system can support a population of 240,000 (compared to the 80,000 of Limerick, Athlone, Rooskey and Carrick today). People live in the countryside, facing the river. Much like the travelling cinema bus today, a river-borne caravanserai arrives once a week, bringing the city to your doorstep...

**ODOS architects: Vertical Sprawl**

A cautionary tale, told in the form of a comic book from 2030, of what happens when horizontal suburban expansion is no longer possible. In 2030, the sky is the limit...

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