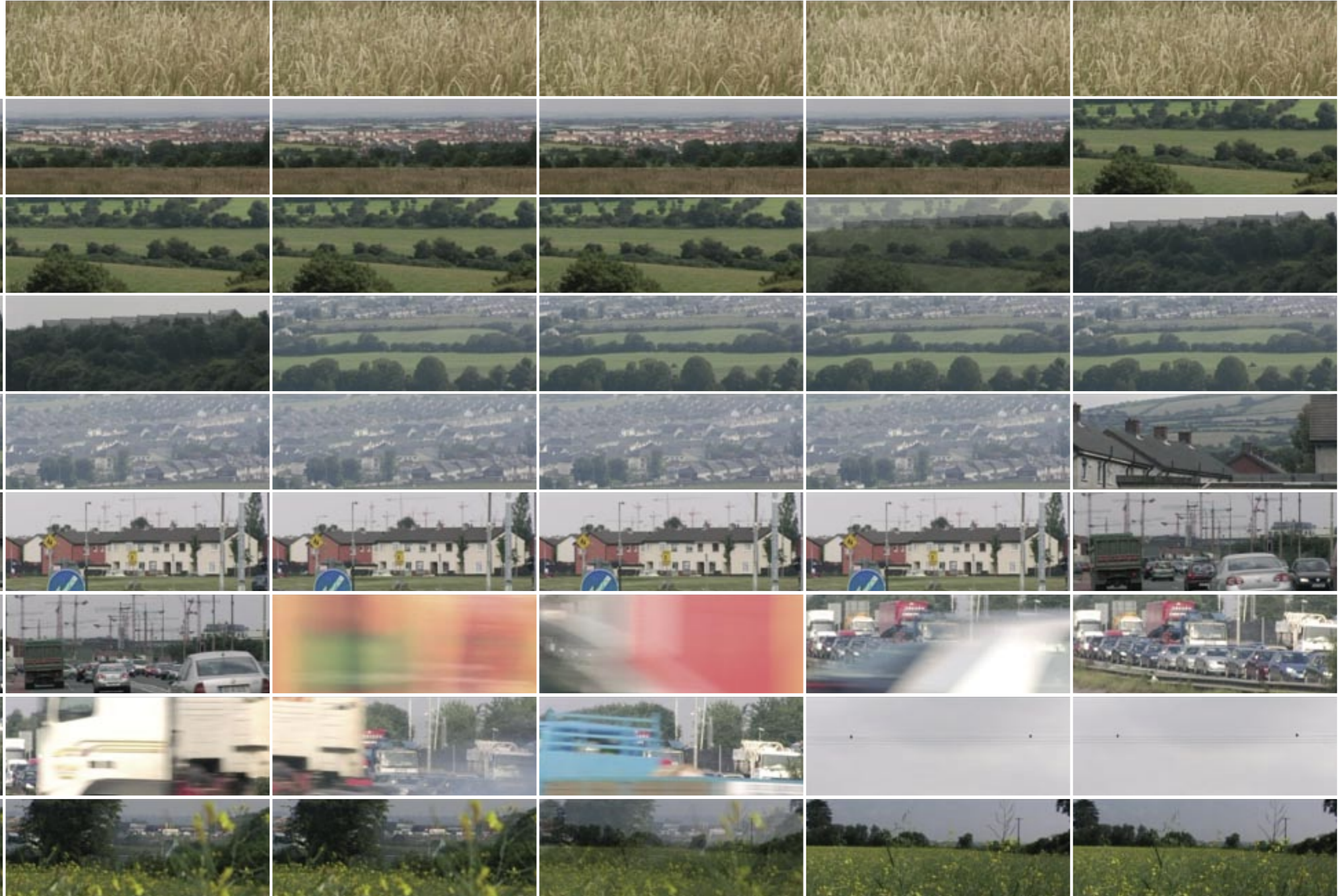


'Detached' a film by Jennifer Keegan commissioned by FKL architects as part of the SubUrban to SuperRural installation in the Padiglione Italia, Giardini di Castello, Venice.



Shane O'Toole and Ciarán ÓGaora are Commissioner and Deputy Commissioners of Ireland's entry at the Venice Biennale 10th International Architecture Exhibition on behalf of the Irish Architecture Foundation.

# Introduction

## Shane O'Toole

## Ciarán ÓGaora

‘Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men’s blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will never die, but long after we are gone will be a living thing, asserting itself with ever-growing insistency. Remember that our sons and grandsons are going to do things that would stagger us. Let your watchword be order and your beacon beauty. Think big.’

DANIEL BURNHAM,  
*Chicago architect (1864-1912)*

A quarter of a century ago, Ireland was a different place—an introverted, monocultural society and economic basket-case on the verge of a deep recession that would lead to widespread emigration. There were no faxes in 1980, no PCs, internet, mobile phones, CDs, low-cost airlines, DART or LUAS. On the other hand, before our recent experiment in extreme suburbanisation, the frustration of long-distance commuting by car through miles of sprawl, with its debilitating effect on the social lives of so many, was also unknown.

Today, ours is among the most globalised and successful economies in the world, with an estimated 167 languages in daily use. Productivity growth in the period 1995-2005 was nearly twice that of our nearest EU competitor, Finland, and almost four times that of the EU-15. 40% of our homes are less than 15 years old and we are building new houses at five times the rate of Italy, six times that of Britain and seven times that of Germany.

The population has increased 50% in less than half a century and will grow by more than a third again in the next 25 years. But the future is hardly discussed here, let alone planned for.

While continuing to celebrate the quality of rugged individualism that makes us what we are, Irish society must come to grips—now—with the fact that all our futures are bound up with one another. A new disposition towards the land is urgently called for, one that ditches the old urban-rural divide in favour of a vision that treats our small island, town and countryside, as an integrated entity. How is that to be agreed, let alone achieved?

A culture like ours, in which personal freedom is privileged over social cohesion, may never have much use for visions of utopia but the first Venice Biennale devoted to *Cities, architecture and society* is a global call to take stock as the world enters the urban era—when, for the first time in history, more people than not live in cities—and a reminder that societies need to be self-aware. This is precisely what we are not. We choose leaders who tell us what we want to hear and enable us to carry on although we suspect the road leads to ruin.

What might an alternative Ireland look like in 2030? Architects are not soothsayers, but somebody needs to fill the visionary vacuum and illustrate some of the characteristics of success that should mark our society a generation hence. Nine architects of the generation who will shape that Ireland have prepared a series of projects and scenarios, curated by FKL architects, that offer different glimpses of what might be. Scenarios are not predictions, however. They are stories built around methodically constructed plots; their importance lies in the conversations they spark and the decisions they inform.

Let the debate begin.

