

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Irish Architecture Foundation seeks a curator for the 2006 Venice Architecture Biennale

The Irish Architecture Foundation has been appointed by Culture Ireland to co-ordinate and support Ireland's entry at the 2006 Venice Biennale, which opens next September. The foundation is launching an open competition to find a curator to work with in order to develop a concept for Ireland's entry. This is the first time there has been a competition of this sort in Ireland. Individuals and groups are invited to present their preliminary ideas and concepts for Ireland's entry to the Biennale.

Concepts should respond to the overall theme set by the Biennale's Director, Ricky Burdett, which is Meta-City. Meta-Cities are the conurbations of the 21st century. They bear little relationship in either form or concept to the traditional city. Changing rapidly in terms of their physical boundaries, population composition and working habits, they throw up new issues for both governance and architecture. The theme of the 2006 Biennale is particularly pertinent for Ireland, which finds itself in the middle of such a process of rapid transformation."

As Ireland does not have a permanent pavilion in Venice, the site of Ireland's entry will not be established for several months. It should be

assumed, however, that the venue will be indoors, probably in the Arsenale complex, as in 2004. (See <http://venicebiennale.archeire.com>)

Submissions outlining initial concepts should make reference to the general type and nature of work(s) that will be shown, as well as the intended 'atmosphere' of the installation.

Submissions should take the form of not more than 2 no. A4 written pages, accompanied by a 1-page outline CV. No illustrative material is required to be submitted at this stage.

Submissions should be emailed to the Irish Architecture Foundation by 10.00am on Thursday 20 October 2005. Send submissions to: maeve@lovingarchitecture.com

Submissions will be assessed promptly. The authors of up to 3 shortlisted proposals will be invited to visit this year's Art Biennale in Venice on October 28-30, accompanied by personnel from the Foundation, to see the Arsenale and the various national pavilions in use and to look at potential sites for Ireland's participation in 2006.

Shortlisted proposals should be further developed by the competitors following the trip to Venice and in advance of interview. The aim is to appoint a curator for Ireland's entry during November 2005. The Foundation will take primary responsibility for fund raising and project managing all aspects of Ireland's entry and will work closely with the selected curator in developing and delivering their concept over the next year.

For information purposes only and to provide general guidance to competitors about the level of information that is required in their initial submissions, a copy of Ireland's curatorial concept for the 2004 Venice Architecture Biennale is attached.

9th International Exhibition of Architecture: Metamorphoses

Theme: Letterfrack – Transformation of an Institution

Architects: O'Donnell and Tuomey

<http://www.odonnell-tuomey.ie/>

O'Donnell and Tuomey's project of redemption for Letterfrack, Co Galway, is often presented in a straightforward architectural manner, as "interesting sheds in a landscape." The story is much bigger than that. The isolated village of Letterfrack, hard against the Atlantic, has been the locus of three distinct phases of rural development over the past 150 years.

In the mid-19th century, following the Great Famine, a Quaker couple, John and Mary Ellis, made their way from England to this remote and impoverished location and initiated a short-lived programme of planting and construction. A number of cut-stone buildings and extensive areas of woodland survive as physical evidence of their ethical ambitions for the economic regeneration of a dejected community.

Towards the end of the 19th century the Christian Brothers built an Industrial School between the Quaker buildings and the village crossroads. The new institution was part of a nationwide programme of penal reform to provide skills training and disciplinary control for large numbers of juveniles from the urban slums. The harshness and cruelty that became endemic in this system of incarceration is one of the social scandals of modern Irish society. However, the industrial school also brought infrastructural development to Letterfrack, in the form of trade workshops and hydroelectricity, and the Christian Brothers capitalised on the earlier investment of the Quakers to continue the urbanisation of an isolated settlement.

The site, with its institution that dominates the village, has now passed into the ownership of Connemara West, an educational and community development group. O'Donnell and Tuomey have prepared a

framework plan that incorporates the existing buildings, integrates new purpose-designed structures and provides for future phases of development of both institution and village. O'Donnell and Tuomey describe the transformation thus:

“We looked at the history of the site to provide a basis for the next move. We were interested in the strategy of cut-and-fill that grounds the older buildings into the hillside. We were determined to transform the institutional self-containment of the former industrial school. We wanted to hold the sound structural shell of the old building but to loosen its bonds by shifting the symmetry, clearing out the corridors and lowering the windows to permit people to see out.

“With the institutional axis extinguished, the whole school now hinges around a freestanding chimney, placed in the same alignment and height as the chimneys of the existing building. It fixes the forecourt and suggests a new centre – one in balanced equilibrium rather than certain symmetry.

“No tree in Connemara grows straight up from the ground; every bush is bent by the wind and surviving trees are sculpted into shape over time. We wanted our workshops to lean towards the north light and away from the south-west wind, so an initially regular structure was deformed into an asymmetrically trussed arch. The timber frames are bolted down to concrete haunches, the hammerheads of ground beams that lift the workshops out of the wet bog.”

This gesture may itself be read as a kind of architectural metamorphosis – of James Stirling's Queen's College, Oxford. Ireland's presentation in Venice will itself be a metamorphosis of the architectural transformations currently underway in Letterfrack.