



The Irish at Venice



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ONE innovation at this year's Biennale di Venezia, the 12th international architecture exhibition which opens to the public tomorrow and runs until November 21, is a series of 20 collateral events where international organisations and institutions have organised their own exhibitions and initiatives in Venice. This represents an enrichment of the programme for the world's leading architectural festival, which takes place in Venice every two years.

One of these collateral events focuses on the garden as an ideal space for living. It aims to present artworks and projects by artists and architects illustrating new architectural and urban models which are respectful of the planet.

The underlying idea is to propose sustainable lifestyles for the individual and the global community through landscape architecture and biodiversity, art and architecture with sculptural installations as well as art and urbanism.

Voltaire famously urged us to cultivate our gardens. The organisers of this event are driven by the belief that we live in an almost gardenless age, not really seeing the gardens in our towns and surrounding environment.

Historically, gardens were places of self-discovery, of spiritual cultivation and of personal transformation. Examples like New York's new High Line are cited.

This 1.5 mile long public park by Diller & Scofidio is built on an abandoned elevated railroad stretching from the Meatpacking District to the Hudson Rail Yards in Manhattan. Inspired by the melancholic, unruly beauty of this post-industrial ruin, where nature has reclaimed a once vital piece of urban infrastructure, the new park interprets its inheritance. It translates the biodiversity that took root after it fell into ruin in a string of site-specific urban microclimates along the railway that include

sunny, shady, wet, dry, windy.

Another example is San Francisco's California Academy of Sciences by Renzo Piano. The new Academy rises on the same site of the former California Academy of Sciences in Golden Gate Park. Sustainability was a key aspect of the design, as this project is one of the ten pilot "green building" projects of the San Francisco Department of Environment. According to sustainable design strategies, natural ventilation instead of air conditioning for large parts of the building, carefully chosen building materials, an efficient use and re-use of water, as well as the generation of energy, are integral parts of the design.

A green roof, landscape with native plants species, will unify the different functions. It undulates to accommodate the Academy's major components: the new Planetarium, the Rainforest Exhibit and the Steinhart Aquarium entrance.

For the realisation of the 2015 Milan Expo, the Master Plan conceived by a team of international architects composed of Jacques Herzog, Richard Burdett, Stefano Boeri and William McDonough is mainly based on a pattern of "greenhouses". Exhibiting pavilions will offer an entire "planetary garden" as the primary scenario for the Expo.

Ireland is represented at the Biennale (which is directed by Kazuyo Sejima and organised by la Biennale di Venezia under the presidency of Paolo Baratta) with a stand entitled "of de Blacam and Meagher" which seeks to communicate the cultural landscape of Ireland through the seminal work of de Blacam and Meagher Architects. It is curated by Tom dePaor, Peter Maybury, Alice Casey and Cian Deegan.

Ireland's participation at Venice is an initiative of Culture Ireland in partnership with the Arts Council of Ireland. It is commissioned by the **Irish Architecture Foundation** under the directorship of **Nathalie Weadick**.

The Irish pavilion at Venice, in the 18th century oratory of Irish monk St Gall near Piazza San Marco, will address de Blacam and Meagher's built and unbuilt portfolio of the last 33 years and will mark the donation of these docu-

ments to the Irish Architectural Archive. The exhibition will take the form of a book unbound, containing volumes of drawings and photographic reproductions from the archive, contemporary photography and readings of the works with commentaries. As archive and reading room, the space will be furnished with and lit by items from the de Blacam and Meagher archive.

Formed in 1976, this architectural practice has built houses and places of work, commerce, education and worship. In turn, the influence of de Blacam and Meagher has permeated the many facets of Irish life with a distinct cultural presence. The quality of their work has been recognised in Ireland and internationally and the book, *Architects Today*, refers to them as "the godfathers of contemporary Irish architecture".

Over the next 12 weeks it is estimated that some 130,000 people will visit the Venice Biennale.



Architects John Meagher and Shane de Blacam and two of their projects: The Samuel Beckett Theatre in Dublin and a new take on the "quad" at Cork Institute of Technology.



The Irish pavilion at the Venice Architecture Biennale 2010 in the 18th century oratory of Irish monk St Gall near Piazza San Marco.

Picture: Alice Clancy