



INTERVIEW: TOM DE PAOR

Of de Blacam and Meagher is an exhibition that seeks to communicate the cultural landscape of Ireland through the seminal work of de Blacam and Meagher Architects. Curated by Tom dePaor, Peter Maybury, Alice Casey and Cian Deegan, it will represent Ireland at the 12th International Architecture Exhibition in Venice and address the practice's built and unbuilt portfolio of the last 33 years. It also marks the donation of these documents to the Irish Architectural Archive. The venue, the Chiesa Di San Gallo, will act as both archive and reading room. Taking the form of a book unbound, the exhibition will contain volumes of drawings and photographic reproductions from the archive, contemporary photography and readings of the works with commentaries. *Architecture Ireland* speaks to Tom dePaor about the exhibition and the relationship of curating and making.

AI: Tom, your acclaimed turf structure N³ marked Ireland's first official representation at the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2000 under Commissioner Raymund Ryan. This year, you are curating with Alice Casey, Cian Deegan and Peter Maybury. How has your own participation – also in 2006 with *SubUrban* to *SuperRural* and in 2008 with *The Lives of Spaces* – influenced your curatorial role?

Tom: I have seen Curatation at work and I am interested in that. It is a very creative act. Taking care of things is important. After *The Lives of Spaces*, Cian Deegan (TAKA) asked me what I thought the next Irish show might be about. I thought that the next show had to be about de Blacam and Meagher and when the IAF issued a call-out for curators, it was put to me again by Cian. Cian himself was baptised in the Firhouse Church – he is very proud of that.

AI: de Blacam and Meagher have a significant influence on generations of architects through their teaching and

buildings – how have they impacted on you and your studio?

Tom: In my final year at UCD School of Architecture, Shane de Blacam was my year master. I remember him well but I am not sure if he remembers me. Fundamentally they make good buildings and I like that. We have been through a very interesting six months. Alice, Cian, Peter and myself have been looking through projects, photographs and their archive.

AI: How difficult is it for the curators to 're-present' the work of another practice, edit from a large body of work, as well as manage the engagement with the work by several 'readers'? How do de Blacam and Meagher feel about being the subject?

Tom: John and Shane have been extremely generous with their work. It is a particular privilege. It is their work. It is their show. Of course, decisions have to be taken by the curatorial team. We have a point of view – how the work can be seen – but our first duty is to the authors. It's a bit like rearranging the furniture. The readings themselves are rich, very diverse across many disciplines. Among the readers are choreographers, wood workers, academics, people who laboured on drawings, sculptors, and entrepreneurs.

AI: What will the exhibition look like and why have you chosen the Oratory dedicated to St Gall?

Tom: Aside from the Irish connection with St Gall, the Oratory is a lovely room. It has a beautiful chequered floor made from Carrara marble and limestone. We deposit nine thousand sheets of A1 paper stacked on pallets in the space and trust that people will take it away. It is a very simple exhibition.

AI: You are also going to bring some furniture items from the de Blacam and

Meagher archive?

Tom: We have become very interested in the furniture that they have made. We are making a chair for the exhibition. When de Blacam and Meagher were making chairs for the Dining Hall in TCD, they found a 19th century kitchen chair in the basement of the Casino Marino and adapted it for the Dining Hall and made hundreds of chairs, which have been used for over 20 years. We have taken this iteration and adjusted it again, in oak of course. I hope that John and Shane will enjoy this. I like the exhibition to be around continuity and tradition.

AI: Tom, thank you very much for this interview.

NOTES: Ireland's participation was launched on 7 July in the Atrium, TCD by Mary Hanafin TD, Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport. of de Blacam and Meagher will open on August 27 in the Chiesa di San Gallo, near Piazza San Marco, Venice. The exhibition 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**. It is sponsored by the RIAI, the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the Embassy of Ireland in Italy. www.irelandatvenice.ie

The Curators: Eán Duggan, Tom dePaor, Aike Casey, Peter Maybury (Photo: Anna Hoffmann)
Chiesa di San Gallo (Photo: Peter Maybury)
John Meagher, Shane de Blacam
(Photo: Fiona McCann)

