The Drawing Board
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An architects' contribution to the Table of Contents project.
This project aims “...to offer insight into the creative process from a variety of perspectives, by collaborating with practitioners from a range of art and design disciplines and also from wider fields of science, engineering and the humanities.”

Its curators are Róisín Lewis, Alan Keane and Peter Morgan, in collaboration with staff and students at Limerick School of Art and Design.

The Drawing Board
A team of architecture students from SAUL, the School of Architecture at the University of Limerick, was asked to contribute to the Table of Contents exhibition. The curators are looking for an indoor installation to facilitate the viewing of a short documentary film. The conception and design of this installation is part of the exhibition as an exemplar of architectural creativity. – ‘The Drawing Board’ are Edel Murphy, Diarmuid O'Súilleabháin, Adrian Clery and Jan Frohburg.
Concept
**Room within a room** – Taking inspiration from the many depictions of St Jerome in his study, the idea is to create a ‘room within a room,’ a situation that induces focused attention whilst maintaining a tensioned balance between the imposing presence of the Church Gallery and the intimate experience of watching artists’ creations unfold before your eyes. The intervention intends to remove the viewer from the simultaneous confines of the white-walled exhibition space and the former church.
Seeing the space differently - Architecture is site-specific. We seek to relate our intervention to its spatial context, the conditions of its making, and the exhibition's discourse. Themes of movement, slowness and threshold combine in an attempt to change one's perception of the space existing, to allow for it to be seen differently, and to create a new sensual experience.
Material complexity – With an interest in slowness comes attention to detail and texture that informs the choice of materials. The design engages materials that combine apparent lightness and sensuality with an assertive strength vis-à-vis the eclectic church interior. Experiments aim at creating softness out of rigid materials, at giving stability to pliable fabric, or at transforming flat sheets to volumes. Materials are investigated for their potential to be both, structure and surface.
Seating – The intent is to seat 10-15 people informally. The use of low, backless easel benches ('donkeys') allows for flexibility, in that they can be re-arranged. They are already marked with the process of their previous use within life drawing classes. The seating enables further interaction within the space, as it allows for a document of process to be mounted and viewed, and for an engagement with work to happen.
Process
Creative process – It starts with certain distinct moves before the process takes on a dynamic of its own. A time frame applies both structure and handicap to the process.

Gather information - emphatic interview, site survey
Identify key concerns - group discussion
Relate emerging ideas - creative conjecture
Define concept - authoritarian assertion
Test first materialisations critically and research open questions - individual effort
Re-iterate and re-formulate design goals - dialectical dialogue...
Documentation – Apart from keeping traditional sketchbooks, the progress of evolving ideas was recorded in daily online entries, at http://thedrawingboard10.blogspot.com/.

“The notion of living on is multiple and lets remember that the process of thought, which is being displayed in this blog through drawings, diagrams, photographs, comments etc displays your working methods. In a sense this needs to be shown, which will illustrate how decisions are both rejected and accepted.”
Site investigation – The Church Gallery is the site for our intervention and an important starting point for our design effort. It was surveyed, drawn and described: “Although it’s big, it’s also small this space and it’s an awkward space in lots of ways as you can see with the divisions and the lines, it’s quite a problematical space in lots of ways, so yeah.” A cast model survives.
Conceptualisation – Very much like in a cognitive map of ideas inspirational images, key concerns and random associations became related by thematic threads, by lines of thought. Multiple relations strengthen an idea within the emerging concept while other ideas may end up marginalised. Connections between ideas that had, so far, existed in isolation establish our field of concern: Slowness - Movement - Threshold - Change of Experience.
Response - “I wrote down a couple of things here; and you can have this. It's multipurpose, re-useable, i.e. sustainable, so that what you make, doesn't just serve the function of the show that we are curating and creating now but has a life beyond that. Yeah, so it isn’t just for this but could be used again in the future.” - Our own awareness and shared concerns regarding sustainability, albeit unclear about the full extent of this concept, prompted an extensive consideration of using found objects and re-using materials, from 'borrow and return' to 'recycling' to 'up-cycling through design.'
**Technical research** – Our objective is to create a viewing setting for a documentary film as part of the Table of Contents exhibition. Shot in high-definition, a large-size monitor was requested. The film is about 30 minutes in length and slow paced, hence asking for attention and calmness to be viewed. Optimum viewing condition were established, including viewing angles, ambient light and sound.
**Dead ends** – “I am just curious as to, like we're like sort of practising artists, and I have collaborated a few times but I am just wondering how the team will work creatively, you know the way like for any project I suppose there is this maybe a moment of poetry or something where you are inspired and how do you deal with that?” As rare as moments of poetry, dead ends are manifold. So, instead of looking for answers we keep asking questions. Through a process of prioritisation and exclusion we ask: Is there a way in which the piece can advance?

“Are we searching for something that is looking us in the eye?”
Material imagination – The idea of using materials that have a history or an afterlife is a response to demands for sustainability and flexibility alike. Materials may relate to site (linen replete with the smell of detergent in the context of a Magdalene laundry) or making. The active engagement of our hands creating various folding patterns allowed ideas to emerge.
Taking a stance – With no funding available for the project, the actual costing of our proposal and the idea of sponsorship becomes imminently relevant. Faced with the possibility of pairing down our current proposal so that it can be cheaply realised, we prefer to engage design intelligence to propose a convincing way to construct and ultimately realise our design. Or, as it has been put more frankly, “It would be a pity if it wasn’t built, but it would be more of a pity if it was crap.”
Re-design – With the project limited to a minimal budget, the design takes recourse to using borrowed materials and rendering an elementary spatial condition by defining two sides of an enclosure and the floor. – The proposed intervention still intends to remove the viewer from the simultaneous confines of the white-walled exhibition space and the former church, and to provide a distinctly different sensorial experience that allows the space to be viewed in a new way.
Bring into being - Ideas only reach so far. Once matter related to ideas becomes a tangible reality it takes on a presence of its own. It is this material reality that advances our ideas. The final action of building and constructing completes the creative process, going from ideas to concept, from imagination to material presence. In the end, architecture is the art of enabling, creation means to bring into being.
Proposal

The Drawing Board
The Church Gallery has a T-shaped plan with a central dome. The natural route through the gallery moves from the entrance to the south wing, on to the mezzanine wing and finally into the north wing.

The position of the viewing space works with this natural route through the gallery. While being present and getting noticed upon entry, it does not create a visual obstruction.

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A platform raises you off the gallery floor, an suspended envelope suggests a room within a room. Upon entering you are brought to a halt to observe the film. The boundaries of the space allow for optimum viewing of the documentary film.

The envelope is positioned at approximately 1.80m above the existing floor level, thus maintaining a clear view through the expanse of the gallery.
Having completed the tour of the exhibition and slowly circumnavigating the platform, you are invited to view the artwork situated at the far end of the gallery wing. Three steps rise to 45cm above the gallery floor and create a sense of departure from the white walled space of the gallery, thus preparing for the viewing of the documentary.
The envelope is positioned so as to block out views of the exhibition walls and allow you to focus on the film. If your eyes wonder upwards, the church structure becomes dominant. The controlled movement allows area of detail to become apparent and the experience in terms of the space and the film is heightened.
The suspended envelope is intended to be something other than a curtain or a drape. Carrying its own weight and that of the monitor, the envelope's structure matters. Set against the ornate decoration of the former church and the flat neutrality of exhibition panels, the proposed envelope employs a folding pattern. It thus combines structural properties and textured surface, granting it presence vis-à-vis its context.
Realisation
Standard wooden transport pallets are stacked to create the platform. Each layer is sequentially strung together with polypropylene strapping. Borrowed from a local supplier, the pallets will be returned at the close of the exhibition. For comfort and sophistication the platform is covered with a layer of industrial-grade felt. – At just 45cm above ground, no balustrade is required.
Above the platform, a rail is suspended. The continuous rail is manufactured from tubular steel sections. Four wire ropes suspend the rail from brackets behind the partition walls. Tensioned cables across prevent the rail from deforming.

The Drawing Board
A looped steel cable suspends the tubular frame from the existing wall bracket. An angle protector guards the wall panelling. A secondary wire stretches across the frame to minimise tension. Stock tensioners and fasteners are used in the assembly.
The top rail supports the envelope made from folded cardboard sections. Two intertwining cable ties attach the folded sections to the tubular rail.
**Platform including felt cover**

- total 1,525 EUR
- for assembly 4 people / 1 day

**Suspended envelope excluding monitor**

- total 440 EUR
- for assembly 4 people / 2 days

**Lead times for orders**

- Transport pallets  3 weeks for free supply
- Industrial felt    6 working days
- Tubular steel rail 1 week

**Material costs 2,000 Euro / Assembly 3 days for 4 people**

Local suppliers preferred. All prices include VAT.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Price</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transport pallets</td>
<td>120 EUR</td>
<td>(54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underlay</td>
<td>25 EUR</td>
<td>(20sq.m)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PP strapping, seals</td>
<td>70 EUR</td>
<td>(1500m roll)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strapping tools</td>
<td>110 EUR</td>
<td>(tensioner and crimp sealer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt cover</td>
<td>1,200 EUR</td>
<td>(20sq.m incl. delivery – student discount)</td>
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Underlay – local hardware suppliers

Standard wooden transport pallets, 800x1200x145mm
Free loan (120 EUR for delivery and return)
Thomas O’Neill Timber Recycling, Castleconnell Co. Limerick

Heavy-duty polypropylene strapping, crimp seals and tools
Faulkner Export Packaging Ltd. Dublin 01-4647300 www.discountpackaging.ie
Safety Direct, Galway 091-745150 www.safetydirect.ie

Felt, grey, industrial grade, medium density, 9mm thick, 230g/sq.m
183cm wide rolls, 125 GBP per metre
British Felt +44 1908 263304 www.britishfelt.co.uk

The Drawing Board
Steel frame  250 EUR+
Wire rope    25 EUR (approx.25m incl. delivery)
Cardboard  50 EUR (approx. 60 sheets)
Cable ties  15 EUR (pack of 1000)
Fittings    100 EUR

Tubular steel frame – prices available only upon commission

Wire rope, 3/4/5/6mm thick, 0.35/0.40/0.45/0.60 EUR per metre, 10 EUR delivery
Wire Rope Ltd. 0404-67375

Corrugated brown cardboard, sheet 1000x1200mm, 6-8mm thick, 0.80 EUR per sheet
Limerick Packaging 061-400035

Fittings and cable ties – local hardware suppliers

Monitor and suspension braces – to be supplied by the client/exhibition curators!

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Re-arrangement – Responding to limited funds and time for realisation, the design is revised and the arrangement simplified. Materials are reduced to rough wooden pallets and soft felt covering. The raised platform is enclosed on two sides. The stack-pattern creates a niche for the monitor, now becoming an integral part of the structure.
Logistics - Issues of sponsorship and delivery, of access and construction sequence had to be coordinated. Health & safety concerns were addressed; a Method Statement has been issued. "I think we have reached a state of obfuscation, that needs a temporary intervention, but not let this mumbo jumbo destroy the essence of creativity!"

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Building – Six people working over five hours transform the 'raw' material into the intended spatial arrangement. Final adjustments to the exact location are made. The wooden pallets are lifted into position and strapped tightly. Despite all planning, spontaneous invention occurs.
We want to thank all our suppliers for their generous support.

Wood Systems Ltd. Ballinrobe, Co. Mayo

Limerick Packaging, Ballysimon industrial estate, Limerick
Speedline Engineering, Moyross enterprise centre, Limerick
Limerick Paint Supplies, Pennywell road, Limerick
James Clery Furniture & Flooring, Clare street, Limerick