

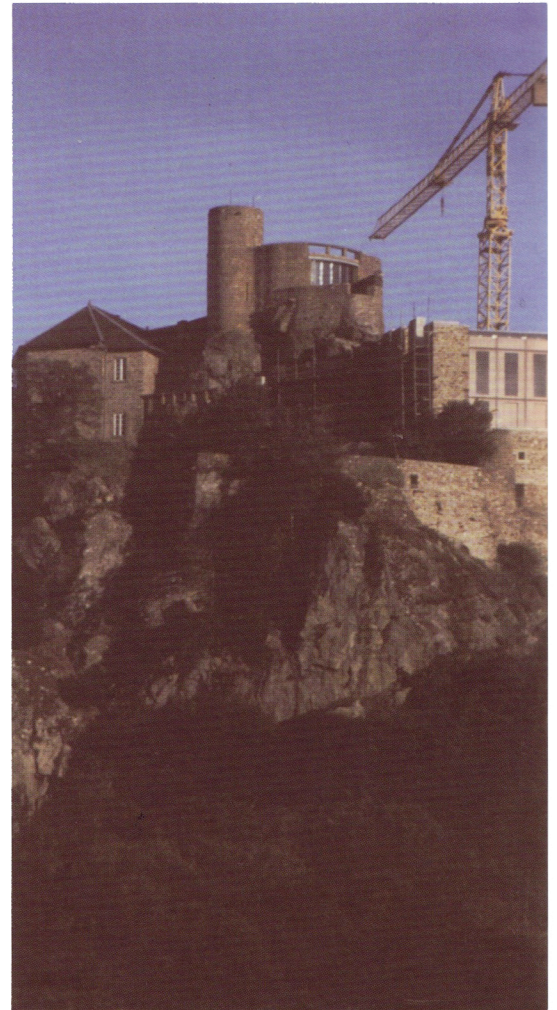
TALK BACK

"Love architecture, the stage and support of our lives," appealed Gio Ponti in his 1957 treatise 'In Praise Of Architecture,' a sentiment expounded by the recent lecture series hosted at the University of Ulster entitled 'Passion and Love.'

The series focused on a host of locally based architects who have worked in far-flung contexts with high profile practices before 'repatriating' to Northern Ireland. The lectures posed the question what has been 'brought back' from these diverse physical, sociological and professional contexts to contribute to the canon of Northern Irish architecture?

What emerged from each talk was the pure joy and pleasure these diverse practices derive from building. Discussing his time with London based **Eric Parry Architects** Neil Mathews conveyed a true sense of the enjoyment of the process of construction. From quarry to workshop, workshop to site, the Belfast based practitioner talked about following an amorphous lump of rock from its point of origin to becoming a lintel in the Royal Lancaster Hotel in London. What emerged was the idea that the architecture is borne out of technology and materiality. Each design element should have both a technological and architectural purpose.

Alastair Beckett of Hall Black Douglas echoed this joy in materiality when quoting influential Hungarian architect **Imre Makovecz**. "Architecture," he claimed, "takes materials from the earth and puts them in touch with the sky." Alastair, who ►



Above / Chateau: Eric Parry Architects. Photograph by Neil Mathews.

Below / National Cultural Factory, Cork. Architect Tom de Paor. Photograph by Aine McEnoy.





Above / Knight House. Architect David Chipperfield. Photography by Ian McKnight.

► worked for Makovecz in the mid 1990s, appeared hesitant to openly praise the jarringly unconventional work presented, yet displayed an innate understanding of its difficult and wrought context which ratifies the radical nature of the architecture. Makovecz's architecture was a direct rebellion against the communist regime under which he operated for the majority of his career. In his work he celebrates "community, context and craftsmanship," concerns marginalised in favour of unrelenting modernist standardisation across Central and Eastern Europe during the early years of the Cold War.

Reflecting upon her time with the Dublin based practitioner **Tom de Paor, Aine McEnoy** explained that she was "drawn to working in his office due to his absolute commitment to making architecture and the pleasure of making things." Using the example of de Paor's architectural 'insertion' in Cork's National Sculpture Gallery Aine demonstrated how de Paor adheres rigidly to a concept, ensuring that every detail of the design radiates and communicates this underpinning hypothesis. This highly industrial space required a series of administrative spaces that did not impinge upon the workshop space. Therefore the new office accommodation was conceived as an 'inhabited beam' suspended above the shop floor; yet another piece of industrial equipment. Despite being an extremely small project, a rigorous design process was applied to ensure that the choice of materials and the detailing accurately communicated this concept.

George Brennan discussed his time with **Foster & Partners** (a practice who boasted a mere fifty to sixty employees when the Londonderry practitioner joined the firm in the mid 1990s, a number which had swollen to over a thousand by the beginning of the decade) while **Ian McKnight** of Belfast practice Hackett Hall McKnight reflected upon his employment in **David**

Chipperfield's London office. What emerged from both talks was that, much like Tom de Paor's office, both firms possess rigorous design methodologies. George Brennan abbreviated Foster's unique modus operandi to listening (conversations and consultations); analysing (sketching); proposing (drawing); testing (modeling); delivering.

Discussing Chipperfield's approach, Ian McKnight described the technique in two distinct sections, processing and process. Processing consists of consideration of context (either reactionary or sympathetic), techniques of construction and materiality, and formal approaches (suggesting a series of default methodologies). Process consists of concept (in the form of sketches), modeling (for both development and representation) and drawing.

From these talks we can devise an (almost) exhaustive design checklist. Makovecz asks us to devise a concept is based upon local and national identity, dealing with symbolism and issues of political power. Tom de Paor asserts that once devised the concept is rigorously applied throughout the project. Chipperfield suggests that a hermeneutic design process should be implemented, using the concept, the context the client and the end user as tools for interpretation. Foster tells us that the design must be tested and retested using a combination of sketching, drawing, modeling and proposing; a process continuing throughout construction. Parry encourages an enjoyment and pleasure derived from the fabrication of a technological and sociological space existing in spite of its context and because of its context simultaneously.

The 'Passion and Love' lecture series is set to continue in the New Year. ●

Andrew Molloy