

Venice Viewpoints

The British and Irish contributions to the 2016 Biennale are shaped by the desire for social impact, suggest curators Shumi Bose and Yeoryia Manolopoulou

Venice Architecture Biennale
28 May – 27 November 2016

Irish Pavilion: Losing Myself Yeoryia Manolopoulou

The 'report' that Niall McLaughlin and I have co-curated for the Venice Biennale is a reflection on the lessons learnt through designing buildings for people with dementia. Visitors enter our space at the end of the Arsenale through a gap in the partition walls. The room is darkened, in contrast with the brightness of a projection on the floor, a 4.8 by 6.4-metre animated drawing of Niall McLaughlin Architects' Alzheimer's Respite Centre in Dublin.

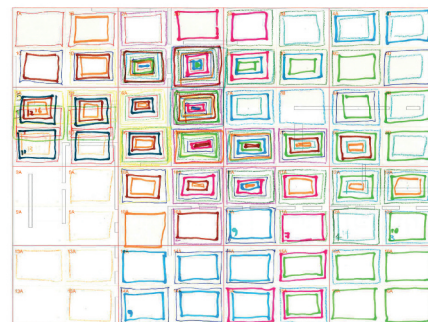
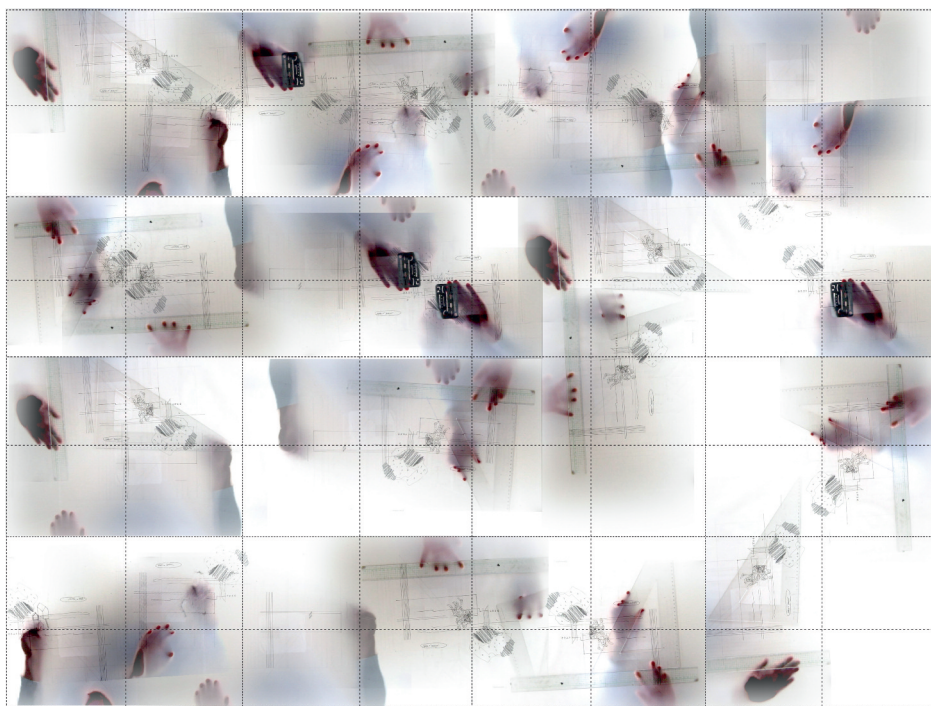
The drawing is dynamic, with multiple projected hands merging and overlapping as they create fragments of a plan. These hands represent multiple individuals inhabiting a series of rooms at the Centre. The projection labours towards the clarity of a completed plan but falls short of achieving it. Suspended loudspeakers create a soundscape, in which the noise of the act of drawing itself is layered with the sound of murmured conversations, rain and the sea, a kettle boiling, children playing – and the bells of the Angelus.

The installation attempts to communicate and interpret some of the changes to spatial perception caused by dementia, informed by conversations with a broad range of people – neuroscientists, psychologists, health workers, philosophers – about the brain and the role of design in dementia care. These conversations are recorded on a website, www.losingmyself.ie.

We are interested in the social function of architecture: how it can improve the lives of people with dementia. Beyond this, we hope that our research into the impact of the condition on spatial cognition will equip us with a deeper understanding of how all of our minds interpret space. This research has also highlighted the shortcomings of the traditional architectural plan: an inhabitant may never experience the building from the architect's fixed, allocentric vantage point. This disconnect is particularly apparent if the inhabitant has lost the ability to use memory and projection to see beyond their immediate situation and create a stable model of their environment. Our animation attempts to address this by working to develop a technique for drawing buildings from the perspective of inhabitation.

The process was collaborative, enlisting the skills of an animator, a composer, AV experts, graphic designers and many drafters, with whom we planned, tested and adapted our drawing technique. At times, we needed to design tools of production, such as glass tables for recording the drawing process.

In that process we have had to accept a level of unpredictability and uncertainty regarding the finished product – itself a consequence of attempting to represent a cognitive state which remains only partially understood, using a medium that we are developing through iteration and experiment. **▲**



Above, left

Sketch and projection still from the 'Losing Myself', a collaboration between Niall McLaughlin and Yeoryia Manolopoulou that forms the Irish contribution to the 2016 Venice Biennale. The installation – a time-based projected drawing – is part of an ongoing research project creating a "mosaic of information aimed not only at architects, but at anyone working in the field of dementia and individuals who deal with the condition day-to-day" explain the curators.