Tangible Thinking: Methods in the Work of TAKA Architects

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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* Carried out in association with others (see project pages for details).
House 01

Job Number 001
Status Completed 2009
Size 150 sqm
Location Donnybrook, Dublin

Description
A new-build mews house, sharing a rear garden with a Victorian House (House 2). The brickwork bonds are the result of separating the traditional Victorian wall into layers. Throughout the house the construction is exposed to add texture, detail and robustness.

Awards
2009 – Best International Project – BDA Brick Awards
2010 – ‘Best House’ – RIAI Irish Architecture Awards
2010 – Award – Architectural Association of Ireland Awards
2011 – Nominated For Mies van der Rohe European Union Award

Front Elevation
House 02

Job Number 002
Status Completed 2009
Size 320 sqm
Location Donnybrook, Dublin

Description
An extension and refurbishment of an existing Victorian House, sharing its rear garden with a new mews dwelling (House 1). The dining room is the only new space added to the original house. The dining table is made from cast and polished concrete, the ceiling joists are made from twinned plywood and custom glazed bricks form part of the wall. Throughout the rest of the house, interventions into the original structure from the 1970s have been removed and replaced with new furniture or windows.

Awards
2009 – Best International Project – BDA Brick Awards
2010 – ‘Best House’ – RIAI Irish Architecture Awards
2010 – Award – Architectural Association of Ireland Awards
2011 – Nominated For Mies van der Rohe European Union Award
House 04

| Job Number | 003 |
| Status     | Completed 2011 |
| Size       | 100 sqm |
| Location   | Firhouse, Dublin |

Description
A new-build house located in a suburban estate. The materials of the surrounding houses are re-used but articulated in an alternative manner. Internally the communal spaces are lined in birch ply fitted furniture. The bedrooms are lined in plasterboard, with individual pitched ceilings. The 1st floor landing space is lined in mirror.

Awards
2012 – Award – Architectural Association of Ireland Awards

2013 – Highly Commended – ‘Best House’ – RIAI Irish Architecture Awards
Burlington Mews

Job Number 004
Status Pre-planning, incomplete
2015
Size 240 sqm
Location Donnybrook, Dublin

Description
The proposed development consists of 3 no. terraced mews dwellings for use as single family homes.
3.1

Venice Biennale 2008

**Job Number** 005  
**Status** Complete 2008  
**Size** N/A  
**Location** Irish National Pavilion, ‘The Lives of Spaces’, Palazzo Giustinian Lolin, Venice, Italy

**Description**
A viewing armature contains a glass prism which overlays 3 video projections. The videos depict different stages of the design process for a new family’s new home.
Morehampton Court Landscape

Job Number: 006  
Status: Sketch design, incomplete 2008  
Size: N/A  
Location: Donnybrook, Dublin

Description:
Proposal for hard landscaping to a lane shared by 7 houses.
End of Terrace

Job Number 007
Status Completed 2012
Size 51sqm (extension 13 sqm)
Location South City Centre, Dublin

Description
A small extension to a city centre house. The extension places an open façade to the street behind a more protective brick wall. The timber structure of the new façade offers space for display and storage.

Awards
Special mention AAI awards 2014
Our proposal revolves around the question of how to extend a city into a rural area while preserving the positive aspects of both urban life and rural landscape.

In pursuit of the answer to this question, the generic suburban typology is re-evaluated into one which perpetuates the existing landscape while offering a sustainable and spatially defined urban form of the required density.

*Project carried out with Kevin Walsh & Sachie Nishida*
**Laxie**

**Job Number** 009  
**Status** Sketch design, incomplete 2009  
**Size** 300 sqm  
**Location** Laxie, Co. Kerry

**Description**  
Proposal for single family dwelling in the countryside based on the typology of Irish house of the middle size.

**Proposed sketch ground floor plan**  
![Proposed sketch ground floor plan](image-url)
3.1

Home Villas

Job Number 010
Status Sketch design, incomplete 2010
Size 52 sqm refurbishment, 32 sqm extension
Location Donnybrook, Dublin

Description
A refurbishment and extension of a small house based on creating an enfilade of spaces.

Proposed sketch plans
Edenvale Road

Job Number: 011
Status: Sketch design, incomplete 2009
Size: N/A
Location: Ranelagh, Dublin

Description:
An incomplete design for a rear extension to a house.
Belgrave Mews

<table>
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<th>Job Number</th>
<th>012</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td>Completed 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size</td>
<td>130 sqm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Rathmines, Dublin</td>
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</table>

Description
A two storey new build house. The site is located in a conservation area and is beside two old stone cottages.
**Breakfast Room**

**Job Number** 013  
**Status** Completed 2010  
**Size** 60 sqm  
**Location** Clonskeagh, Dublin

**Description**  
The extension is north-facing. The deep, thin, roof structure spans across the space to allow east and west light in from the sides. An arched picture window faces the garden.
### Venice Biennale 2010

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<th>Job Number</th>
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<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td>Completed 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Irish National Pavilion, 'of deBlacam and Meagher', Chiesa di San Gallo, Venice, Italy</td>
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**Description**

A curation of the work of de Blacam and Meagher architects. Presented for free dissemination in 9000 volumes on oak pallets in the oratory of St. Gall in Venice.

* Co-curation with Tom de Paor and Peter Maybury.
Churchtown Road

Job Number 015
Status Planning, incomplete
Size 17 sqm
Location Churchtown, Dublin

Description
Proposed single storey brick Garden Room to rear of an existing house.
**Aobhineas Competition**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td>Competition 2010, incomplete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Dublin</td>
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**Description**

Winning entry of an international competition. The design proposes a new house-like form in the garden of an existing women's refuge. The brick volume houses children's facilities and act as a robust background to everyday activities.

*Project carried out as Burke Culligan Deegan*
**Merrion Cricket Club**

**Job Number** 017  
**Status** Completed 2014  
**Size** 380 sqm  
**Location** Donnybrook, Dublin

**Description**  
A new-build cricket pavilion, replacing a flood damaged predecessor. The new pavilion incorporates a flood protection strategy using waterproof concrete around the perimeter. The entrance portico is located so as to frame the cricket square on approach. The viewing terrace is organised to allow for multiple seating and viewing opportunities.

**Awards**  
2015 – Best Leisure Building – RIAI Irish Architecture Awards  
2015 – Award – Architectural Association of Ireland Awards  
2017 – Short-listed For Mies van der Rohe European Union Award
Loretto Sports Hall

**Job Number** 018  
**Status** Competition 2010  
**Size** N/A  
**Location** Dalkey, Dublin

**Description**
Our approach is guided by the established, intimate relationship between Loretto College Dalkey and its coastal setting. Our intention is that this sports hall will join the family of existing school buildings that directly address the sea and are permeated by its presence.

It is the intent that the powerful experience of visiting and using this sports hall will offer an unforgettable place, synonymous with the College and Dalkey.

*Project carried out as Burke Culligan Deegan.*
Woodbine Road

Job Number 019
Status Incomplete, 2009
Size N/A
Location Mount Merrion, Dublin

Description
Refurbishment of an existing house. Project not progressed.
3.1 Engaging with Architecture

**Job Number** 020
**Status** Completed 2011
**Size** N/A
**Location** Dublin

**Description**
Series of workshops with primary school students introducing them to architectural design. Organised by Dublin City Council.
3.1

St Micheal’s Estate

Job Number  021
Status      Incomplete, 2011
Size        N/A
Location    Inchicore, Dublin

Description
Invited competition to make a proposal for an art installation in a housing estate destined to be demolished and rebuilt.
3.1

Dromleigh

Job Number 022
Status Tender 2011, incomplete
Size 170 sqm
Location Dromleigh, Cork

Description
A new house in rural Cork. The volumes of the new house loosely define an external space with an adjacent farmouse ruin. The roofs of the new volumes reach up towards the east and south, with the roof structure bouncing and attenuating the light as it enters the interior.
Wallpaper House

Job Number 023
Status Completed 2011
Size N/A
Location Aran Islands

Description
Invited exhibition of notional design for ultimate retreat. Our proposal is based on the edge of Inis Mor and features a walled communal space with individual cells facing the cliff edge.
**Made**

**Job Number** 024  
**Status** Completed 2012  
**Size** N/A  
**Location** RHA Dublin, UCD School of Architecture, Ormeau Baths Gallery Belfast

**Description**  
A speculative design testing structure, light and space, articulated through the language of plywood. Made as part of a wider group show.
Tullamore Arts Centre

Job Number 025
Status Competition 2011
Size N/A
Location Tullamore, Offaly

Description
The countryside and urban centres of the Midlands are interspersed with big houses which form objects in the landscape or punctuations within towns.

Our architectural strategy is to collect the various strands of the programme together into a singular volume, so that they overlap and interact with each other – engendering a truly creative environment within the new arts Centre.

*Project carried out with Damien Culligan.
### Sandford Avenue

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<tr>
<td>Size</td>
<td>200 sqm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Donnybrook, Dublin</td>
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**Description**

An extension, to the rear of an existing house, is sunken into the garden. A large steel beam spans the entire width of the site, to allow the rear wall of the house to open completely.
3.1

The Granary

Job Number: 027
Status: Incomplete, 2012
Size: N/A
Location: Temple Bar, Dublin

Description
Proposal to reconfigure the circulation space of an existing apartment building and add a lift access.
Irish Times Card

Job Number 028
Status Completed, 2011
Size N/A
Location N/A

Description
Invited submission for postcards by various designers/artists for Irish Times to portray contemporary Irish culture. Our postcard is a measured survey of a snug in Toners Pub.
**Sandford Mews**

**Job Number** 029  
**Status** Completed 2012  
**Size** 55 sqm  
**Location** Donnybrook, Dublin

**Description**  
This mews house is a single storey timber clad mews house which opens onto a linear courtyard.
3.1

Clonskeagh Road

Job Number 030
Status Completed 2013
Size 18 sqm
Location Ranelagh, Dublin

Description
A glazed steel structure containing a staircase and seating area, to the rear of a protected structure giving access from the piano noble to the garden.

Photograph of staircase
### Window to Practice

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<tr>
<td>Size</td>
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<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>UCD School of Architecture, Dublin</td>
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**Description**

A group exhibition, exploring the use of drawing, particularly tender and construction drawings, that seek to fully describe how a building or part of a build is to be made. The focus of the exhibition is the domestic window.
Purple

Job Number  032
Status       Completed 2012
Size         N/A
Location     Projects Arts Centre, Dublin

Description
Set design for John Fosse play, Purple. Horizontal curtains & backlighting are used to give a sense of voyeurism into the world of the performers.
20 Chairs Exhibition

| Job Number | 033 |
| Status     | Completed 2012 |
| Size       | N/A |
| Location   | Dublin |

Description
Exhibition, in which 20 Architects were asked to choose and briefly describe their favourite chair. We chose Gio Ponti’s Supperleggera chair for its refined anonymity.
Closkeagh Mews

Job Number: 034
Status: Planning, incomplete 2012
Size: 85 sqm
Location: Clonskeagh, Dublin

Description
Refurbishment of stables to the rear of a villa into ancillary family accommodation.
Waterloo Lane

Job Number 035
Status Completed 2013
Size 100 sqm
Location Donnybrook, Dublin

Description
A series of new screens are placed within an existing mews house. A garage door is replaced with a planted screen to make a window onto the lane for a new kitchen. Sliding doors are replaced with a bespoke window which looks up towards the mature trees beyond. A small utility shed in the rear garden is faced in mirror to double the planting to the small town garden.

Awards
2015 – Award – Architectural Association of Ireland Awards
**DCU Entrance Competition**

**Job Number** 036  
**Status** Competition 2012  
**Size** N/A  
**Location** Dublin City University, Dublin

**Description**  
Our vision is to make an outward marker, a transformative threshold and a unique sense of place at the main entrance to DCU. Our proposal seeks to create an entrance sequence and front square which will be both practical and inspirational, and will grow with DCU as an institution of learning.

**Awards**  
Highly Commended Entry
3.1

**Sherlock Park**

*Job Number* 037  
*Status* Completed 2014  
*Size* 47 sqm  
*Location* Skerries, Dublin

**Description**  
Extension of an existing 1950’s council house.

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*Proposed ground floor plan*

*Practice Catalogue*
Mount Juliet

Job Number 038
Status Sketch design, incomplete 2013
Size N/A
Location Kilkenny

Description
Proposals to introduce a variety of elements into an estate in Kilkenny to enhance the enjoyment of the landscape.
3.1

Swilly Road

Job Number  039
Status     Planning, incomplete 2013
Size       47 sqm
Location   Cabra, Dublin

Description
Extension & refurbishment of a 1950’s ex. council house.
### Artangel

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<tr>
<td>Size</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Belfast, Northern Ireland</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Description**
Submission made with artist Maud Cotter to create a new 'house' for culture in Belfast.
St Patricks Park Tearoom

| Job Number | 042 |
| Status     | Completed 2015 |
| Size       | 47 sqm |
| Location   | South City Centre, Dublin |

Description
A new Tearoom and Public Toilets were inserted into existing storage spaces behind the historic arches. All new interventions into the historic fabric are carried out in bespoke steelwork elements. A new terrace outside features a 5m long communal table set underneath a magnolia tree.

Awards
2016 – Commended Best Public Space - RIAI Awards
Woodstown Way

Job Number 043
Status Proposal, incomplete 2014
Size 50 sqm
Location Knocklyon, Dublin

Description
Extension of a suburban house.
1916 Centenary Chapel Competition

Job Number 044
Status Completed 2013
Size 50 sqm
Location Dublin

Description
Our design is based around the unique experience of Dublin’s ever-changing sky, a distinct characteristic of the city which has remained unchanged since 1916.

We seek to use the subtly shifting qualities of the sky to create a chapel which is given a sense of luminous serenity and quiet change.

Awards
Highly Commended Entry
3.1

Architect’s Bursary 2014

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<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td>Location</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Description
Bursary award from the Arts Council of Ireland to create prototype ironmongery.
Seafield Road

Job Number 046
Status Sketch design, incomplete 2014
Size 53 sqm
Location Clontarf, Dublin

Description
Refurbishment & extension of Victorian villa.
Etsy

Job Number 047
Status Sketch design, incomplete 2014
Size N/A
Location N/A

Description
Sketch proposal for fit out of new European headquarters for online marketplace Etsy.

*Project carried out with Damien Culligan.
3.1

**RDS Competition**

- **Job Number**: 048
- **Status**: Competition 2014
- **Size**: N/A
- **Location**: Ballsbridge, Dublin

**Description**
Incompleted competition entry for new stand at the Royal Dublin Society in Dublin.

*Existing site plan*
Strand Road

Job Number  049
Status       Completed 2015
Size         N/A
Location     Sandymount

Description
A new vehicular entrance to the front boundary of a house facing the sea.
Woodfield Dalkey

Job Number  050
Status       Sketch design, incomplete 2015
Size         200 sqm
Location     Dalkey, Dublin

Description
Sketch design for reorganisation of an existing house.

Sketch ground floor plan
Massey Bros

Job Number: 051
Status: Sketch design, incomplete 2015
Size: 178 sqm
Location: The Coombe, Dublin

Description
Proposal for a new emblaming suite and coffin workshop for a funeral home.

Proposed plan
3.1

Vicar Street

Job Number 052
Status Completed 2016
Size 120 sqm
Location The Liberties, Dublin

Description
Refurbishment of an existing warehouse into architects offices.
ID2015 London

**Job Number** 053  
**Status** Completed 2015  
**Size** 100 sqm  
**Location** Kings Cross, London, UK

**Description**
A temporary structure built for the London Festival of Architecture. Designed in a collaborative process with Steve Larkin and Clancy Moore Architects, the pavilion seeks to recreate multiple civic elements of the city.

**Awards**
2016 Shortlisted for AR pop-up awards

* This Project was a collaboration between TAKA, Clancy Moore and Steve Larkin Architects.
Hainault Road

Job Number 054
Status Tender 2016
Size 304 sqm
Location Foxrock, Dublin

Description
Refurbishment and extension of existing single storey detached house.

Proposed ground floor plan
3.1 Ramleh Park

Job Number  056  
Status      Sketch proposals, incomplete, 2015  
Size        N/A  
Location    Milltown, Dublin  

Description  
Extension of a Victorian house.

Sketch plan
Belvedere College Sports Pavilion

Job Number 057
Status Tender 2017
Size 1400 sqm
Location Cabra, Dublin

Description
A new-build sports pavilion containing changing rooms at ground floor level, with social spaces above. A viewing mound facing the pitch conceals the private shower spaces below and offers an informal grandstand. A large roof unites the complex programme and is articulated to create shelter and entrance spaces underneath.
Blessington Basin Tearooms

| Job Number | 058 |
| Status     | Feasibility Study 2015 |
| Size       | N/A |
| Location   | North city centre, Dublin |

**Description**

The brief was to provide a new Tearoom and associated seating areas in the general location of the existing depot building.

The building itself is a contemporary brick and timber structure with a pitched slate roof. It is of modest scale and expression, so as not to dominate the setting of the park.
Oliver Plunkett Road

Job Number 059
Status Tender 2017
Size 60 sqm refurbishment, 22 sqm extension
Location Monkstown, Dublin

Description
An extension which acts as a viewing box for a garden of rare palm trees, with a large turtle tank built into the end wall of the living space.

Proposed ground floor plan
Griffenstown Glen

Job Number 060
Status Sketch proposals, incomplete 2016
Size 160 sqm
Location Wicklow

Description
Proposal for new stables which create a courtyard beside an existing rural house.
Percy Lane

Job Number 061
Status Planning, 2016
Size 269 sqm
Location Percy Lane, Ballsbridge, Dublin

Description
Proposal for 2 no. new semi-detached 3-bed mews houses with rear garden terraces at 1st floor and flat roofs with flat rooflights at 2nd floor.
A Domestic Landscape

Job Number: 062
Status: Invited Competition 2016
Size: 2300 sqm
Location: Ballsbridge

Description:
A family compound made from a series of interrelated internal and external rooms, laid out across the entire site. The external rooms are open to the sky, while the internal rooms have a constructed sky of white concrete vaults.
Pembroke Row

Job Number: 063
Status: Sketch design, incomplete
Size: 3480 sqm
Location: Ballsbridge, Dublin

Description
A proposal for a mixed-use development on Pembroke Row. The scheme was mainly residential with at least 1 no. commercial unit at ground floor.
Hibernian House

Job Number 064
Status Planning 2017
Size 460 sqm
Location Monasterevin, Kildare

Description
Our design approach to the refurbishment of the protected structure Hibernian House has been to retain as much of the existing material and character as possible while making focussed interventions to allow the house to function as a comfortable family dwelling.
Belvedere College Masterplan

Job Number 065
Status Sketch design 2017
Size 8480 sqm
Location North City Centre, Dublin

Description
Masterplan of inner city school campus. Work includes a strategic review of existing facilities, consultation with members of staff, and the incorporation of desired future requirements into an overall masterplan for the College.
3.1

Belvedere College Front Entrance

| Job Number | 066 |
| Status      | Construction 2017 |
| Size        | N/A |
| Location    | North City Centre, Dublin |

Description
A new proposal for the front doors of Belvedere College. The proposed design is for a steel-framed insertion into an existing stone surround.
Le Cheile Trust

Job Number 067  
Status Sketch design 2017  
Size 170 sqm  
Location Terenure, Dublin

Description
An administration and meeting building for a Catholic schools trust, located amongst mature trees. The building is organised in two wings with walls enclosing a small entrance courtyard and larger walled garden. The roofs of each wing pitch up to clerestory glazing facing east and south.
3.1

**Middleton Park**

*Job Number* 068  
*Status* Pre-planning 2017  
*Size* 82 sqm renovation, 123 sqm extension  
*Location* Killugh, Co. Westmeath

*Description*

A series of interventions on the grounds of a small gatehouse which was historically part of a larger Demesne. A new living area, separate guest house and a small stables share a material language in order to create a mini demesne, for the enjoyment of the landscape.

*Image of proposed living room*
Rush

Job Number 069
Status Pre-planning 2017
Size 150 sqm
Location Rush, Co. Dublin

Description
A proposal for a new-build single-storey house located in a hollow in a dune landscape near the north Dublin coast.
Kanaus Competition

Job Number: 070
Status: Incomplete Competition
Size: 11,750 sqm
Location: Kanaus, Lithuania

Description
A proposal for a new concert hall on the banks of the Nemunas river in Kanaus, Lithuania. The proposal deploys the elements of the brief in order to create a series of indoor and outdoor urban spaces.

* This Project was a collaboration between TAKA, Clancy Moore and Steve Larkin Architects.

Sketch elevation detail
Practice Research Symposium
The following pages summarise my progress through the European Practice Research Symposium from 2013-2016. Each page contains a brief summary of the research presented at the PRS, some images or documents related to the presentation, and a reflection on how this presentation inflected the final research document.
Pre-PRS
Joint presentation, Ghent April 2013

Summary of Presentation and Feedback
We introduced our practice using examples of details of vernacular buildings as touchstones and gave an overview of our completed work to date. We ended the presentation with some initial ‘research’ drawings to give an indication of how we might proceed with our PhD research.

Feedback centred mainly around our insistence that our work was somehow connected to the Vernacular. It seemed clear to the panel\textsuperscript{10} that we were perhaps using the wrong term (vernacular). We clarified that when we say vernacular we are referring to the work’s connection to place and local construction methods, rather than a reimagining of traditional forms or types.

Exaggeration\textsuperscript{11} was identified as a design tool – which may give the work its slight sense of strangeness, coupled with richness. There was a discussion about the spatial character of our work which confused us as we viewed our projects primarily as tectonic assemblies.

Reflection
We had already come to the conclusion before the presentation that the analytical drawings were not useful. We felt the ‘icon drawings’ were starting to get at something; beginning to help us interrogate what we were interested in, in a manner that was reflective of our practice working method. These drawings were not dissimilar to drawings we might make to communicate ideas in a competition situation. The flat and reduced orthographic style would become the basis of a reflection on how we design.

This presentation was the 1st time I grouped the images of my childhood home with photos of House 01 & 02. It helped make explicit our statements\textsuperscript{12} about memory and social ritual. I have since come to realise that we are actually doing something far more visceral and immediate, through the intensification of physical building characteristics. The comment on exaggeration\textsuperscript{12} as a design tool precipitated this realisation.

The panel’s observation of the ‘obviously spatial’\textsuperscript{13} character of our work bemused us for a long time. But had an effect on later research.

Key
1. Paint detail over front door of Tibetan House
2. Eaves and ridge detail, Ise Jingu, Ise, Japan
3. ‘Icon’ drawing of shoe-removing stone, Katsura Imperial Villa, Japan. Drawing by TAKA
4. Analytical drawing of House 01, TAKA Architects
Summary of Presentation and Feedback

We described our architectural lives to date, including a brief description of how travel influences our work. We presented a selection of 40 reference images, shown against 40 images of our work\(^\text{14}\), only describing the reference image in the presentation. We introduced our idea of ‘critical drawing’ and presented a series of ‘icon’ drawings which represented aspects of our architectural attitudes.

The combining of the reference images with images of our work, along with the drawing of icons, was effective in its communication of our practice values and interests. However, we were criticised for being ‘too polished’\(^\text{15}\) in our presentations; that we were not allowing the PRS to see the inner workings of our Practice.

Reflection

The demonstration of references (some architectural, some poetic) led to a conversation about how we use references when we design. The discussion helped us articulate that they are physical experiences and artefacts which are incorporated in new forms into our buildings, rather than just sources of inspiration or touchstones. In this context the references came to be termed ‘fascinations’\(^\text{16}\) and went on to influence Cian’s research.

The Icon drawings represented a distillation of practice values or goals. The values themselves were of limited use to the research. But the act of ‘critical drawing’ as a means of communicating was a precursor to more useful things.

I can now see that the drawing of the Icon from the reference image is a direct reflection of what I discovered (later) about how our practice designs; the essential meaning of the reference (to us) is distilled and intensified from the photo to the drawing, in order to articulate our relationship to it. The analytical drawing is reduced and flat.

The ‘too polished’ criticism was difficult to assimilate as we didn’t know of any other way to present together. We struggled with this for the next presentation and only overcame the problem when we presented separately.
Summary of Presentation and Feedback

This presentation was difficult for us. We attempted to analyse our spatial history and community of practice. But with little success, as our analysis was too generic. However, the transcription of a design conversation between myself and Cian for a competition entry was more useful. It demonstrated the true ‘inner workings’ of our practice and showed us that our research must be based in the ‘actual’ processes of our practice. It also highlighted the very direct manner in which we use our ‘fascinations’ (or reference buildings), as a shorthand for physical experiences.

Jo Van Den Berghe made some insightful comments about the flat and frontal nature of the photographs of our buildings. This precipitated my reflection on the relationship of our photos to how we think about and see buildings.

Reflection

The recording of the design conversation demonstrated the nature of the collaboration between myself and Cian (a sometimes petty and childish, but usually productive, ‘back and forth’).

It’s significant to my research that the conversation is about the competition entry for the Glasnevin Chapel. I have identified this (unrealised) project as a turning point in our practice; the tipping point at which our latent spatial ambitions come to the fore. This is demonstrated by the nature of the conversation; a comparison of the spatial effects of various reference precedents, through the medium of tectonic expression. It’s worth noting that the design for this project was carried out after we had made our first two Pre-PRS presentations.

The identification of a correlation between the photos we choose to display of our buildings and the drawings we make was revelatory in terms of how we think. The drawings and the photos tend to be frontal (flat), of a building fragment and emphasise a density or richness.
Finding out what it isn’t……

Conversation between Cian (C) and Alice (A) about competition entry design for Glasnevin Centenary Chapel on the subject of how light comes into the main chapel space.

Nov 2013 – Un-edited duration c.64mins.

Start
11mins
C I suppose talking about Bregenz (Gallery by Zumthor). Not physically Bregenz but the sense that there’s a volume that changes with sky conditions that is held above you.
A Hmmm…
C I think if it’s just light reflected onto surface it’s just, ah…it’s not quite right. Somehow getting light in through these high walls and there being some kind of volume or structure that holds that light.
A Glows is what you’re saying
C Yeah glows and changes, subtly changes
A But in all these things you’re looking at you can’t see the source of the light. Does the niceness of the glow come partially from the fact that you can’t see the source?
C Well I always think a spiritual type light is an indirect light
A OK…so then it’s not glass walls
C It depends on how transparent they are from the inside
A So is it a volume, some sort of translucent volume inside? Like if we were to think that this is almost something contained in that – that’s quite solid but lets the light through?
C Yeah it might very well be a separate thing. If we drew the section like this?...that this skin makes light and there’s something in there that holds that light.
A It’s a double skinned lampshade…Let’s say, let’s go basic here, so it’s something like that – where you stand there and you can’t see out to there, to that outer skin.
C Yeah I suppose that’s the basic version of it…yeah
A OK it’s the basic version of it, but the minute you put fins in and you see over there it becomes totally different
C Hmmmmmmm (frustrated sigh)
A I wonder then is there something about filigree in here…
C Yeah, I just feel that’s over-articulated though
A Yeah, but what you’re saying contradicts itself
C In a way, yeah
A Not in a way. It actually does. To have something glowing with an indirect light and to have that made of fins…
C Yeah well you want it to be both
A Well I think we need to choose. So I’d say something like that (points to Chilida reference) which you’re going for, has zero view out.

Break - Discussion on fabric
21mins
C Don’t draw on this fucking expensive book, do you know how much this book costs?

A I don’t care
C You just drew on it
A In pencil, it can be rubbed off
C Agghhh – what could it be????
A What churches do we like? What about that Siza one (Santa Maria de Canaveses) how does that get light in?
C Through the top.
A What about the woodland cemetery? (Woodland Chapel, Stockholm, Asplund)…What if it’s a dome and an oculus?
C I don’t think that would give enough changeability…
A I just find it so frustrating that you have something in your head that’s contradictory and doesn’t quite make sense and everything else is pushed to the side. Like that (points to Chilida model) is not physically possible, that’s a wax model…unless you start using stretched fabric - which doesn’t seem right.
C I dunno
A And I will not do a ceiling like Bregenz
C I don’t want to do a ceiling like Bregenz

Break - Discussion about alabaster, glass blocks
42mins
C I’m just thinking about it being an attractive space to them (the jury). I think it’s getting closer but it’s the materiality of the glass blocks is a bit aggressive maybe. In an ideal world, in my mind, they would be solid sheets of alabaster. I know that can’t happen
A (Frustrated sigh)
C I’m just trying to communicate…
A Yeah, I know, I get it. But I don’t think it’s doing what you want it to do. If they were solid it would be more like what you want.
C No – because if they were solid the light wouldn’t come through.
A I get that the light wouldn’t come through them but each one of those spaces would glow from reflected light.
C Yeah but I want the whole thing to glow…

Break - further discussion
54mins
C We need to try to think about this in a totally different way, I think. None of this is working.
A I’m not sure what we’re measuring things against…about what’s working and not working.

Conversation ends with no resolution. However it is clearer what it is not. Breakthrough on executed roof structure happens at later point following many more discussions.

Fig 6 Transcribed design conversation, November 2013
Summary of Presentation and Feedback
This was my first solo presentation. I ‘borrowed’ an analytical method from Jo Van Den Berghe’s PhD and examined our projects to test whether our assumptions about the nature of our practice were correct. I was surprised by the results: our practice was NOT largely domestic work for friends and family in Dublin. This led on to the identification of ‘significant’ projects in the practice and a comparison of the technical sections of each ‘significant’ project. This was the beginning of my research into how the tectonic expression of our buildings results in a particular spatial character.

Reflection
This presentation was a big leap into the unknown for me. Cian and I work closely together in all aspects of our practice. So working and presenting on my own was daunting.

The process of establishing the ‘facts’ of the practice helped me to isolate and define which of the projects within the practice we consider to be ‘significant’ and what we mean by ‘significant’. But I felt that I was still hovering above the work – that I was holding it at a distance.

The first ‘discovery’ I made was that I hate diagrams (despite having made some while trying to figure out what I wanted to do). I needed to find a way in to the work. I’m not good with abstract thinking and need to work with tangible things. I found that I was much more productive when interrogating the substance of the buildings; in this case through looking carefully at our section drawings.

The reason I chose the sections is simple: I am interested in architectural details and, more specifically, the profile of the detail. In our day to day work, I enjoy the struggle of making something beautiful out of solving a prosaic technical problem; usually achieved through carving or moulding the profile of the detail. In our day to day work processes and interests.

This is discussed in more detail in Section 2.4 How We Design

I found that my research is more successful when it reflects my daily work processes and interests.
Summary of Presentation and Feedback
Between PRS 03 and PRS 04, I started to look at other PhD research, most notably Simon Pendal’s presentations for the Australian PRS. I again ‘borrowed’ a method from this research: allowing my research to be led by direct responses to PRS panel comments from previous presentations. I developed the ‘Small Things’ drawing method as a response to Kester Rattenbury’s comment about whether our analytical drawings should always be reduced and diagrammatical. I also made examination of our practice’s use of concrete, following Jo Van Den Berghe’s encouragement to ‘show the mess’ of practice.

Reflection
I had a very productive period between PRS 03 and PRS 04. The work was carried out intuitively, using the comments from the panel for PRS 03 as a guide.

The ‘Small Things’ window drawing helped me demonstrate how we think when we design; that, for us, an artefact is a layering of distilled essences of ideas or experiences. The drawing is a representation of the way we think and design (though not of the way we physically work).

This drawing and research method is explained in Section 3.2 How I Research.

The concrete essay was a direct depiction of the way we work in practice every day. It demonstrates how we learn ‘on the job’ and our relationship to our architectural colleagues, contractors and sub contractors.

I developed a method of formulating distilled conversations to communicate the nature and tone of the relationships. Construction photos, extracts from specifications, contract drawings and meeting minutes gave the presentation an immediacy which contributed to the success of the essay.

The graphic essay ‘An Apprenticeship in (Beautiful) Concrete’ is reproduced in full in Section 2.3 How We Practice.
Summary of Presentation and Feedback

We had been advised to present jointly again; to see if we could find connections or overlaps between my and Cian’s research. We summarised the insights we had made in our separate research and identified how panel comments had influenced the research. Cian took my ‘Small Things’ method and used it to identify how ‘fascinations’ are used in a case study of one of our projects, which was at design stage.

I built on my previous research into the spatial character of our work for PRS 03 and PRS 04, and identified a practice design method (Distillation/Exaggeration) and design goal (Intensification). I could show how our own work was starting to operate in the same manner as the ‘fascinations’ Cian had identified, by influencing the design of current projects.

Reflection

Coming back together to jointly present our separate research was difficult, but worthwhile. We were both enjoying the opportunity to think individually.

We found correlations between our separate investigations and decided to try and use parts of each other’s findings to test our own. Cian took my ‘Small Things’ drawing method to investigate and communicate the role of ‘fascinations’ and ‘moments’ in a particular project (Belvedere Sports Grounds).

I then analysed some of the ‘moments’ in the same project; finding that they could be seen as intensifications of ‘moments’ in a previous project (Merrion Cricket Club). The group of ‘fascinations’ we had uncovered in PRS 02 was now expanding to include our own work.

The series of investigations leading to the identification of the Distillation/Intensification design method came directly out of my previous research.

However I was still concerned that I hadn’t managed to recapture the energy of the Concrete essay from PRS 04. For me, this study was still sitting somewhere outside of the rest of my research.

Joint practice insights so far...

The Practice’s foundation is a mixture of Conservatism (decorum – formative spatial history) and Exotica (field of fascinations - transformative spatial history)

We like to make intense architectural experiences

We do this through creating moments or fragments within the building

And through a process of exaggerating/distilling/reducing and tuning.
**3.2**

**PRS 06**

‘Tangible Thinking in the Work of TAKA Architects’, Solo Presentation, Ghent, April 2016

**Summary of Presentation and Feedback**

I made a new introduction of the practice, using transcribed excerpts from an interview which we gave to the AAI\(^2\) in January 2014, at the beginning of the PhD process. The intention was to describe our mentality at the start of the research, demonstrating how our thinking has changed as a result of the PhD/PRS.

I presented an outline of the draft PhD document and an idea of how we might make an exhibition of our research. The exhibition proposal includes drawings that accrete (overlay) on screen, representing our work process. And a layout of physical designed objects in the exhibition space, representing our distilled, intense buildings.

**Reflection**

The final PRS presentation is meant to be a draft of the final PhD viva presentation; giving an indication of the research document structure and content, and an outline of the proposed exhibition layout.

For me, PRS 06 came too soon. I can see that there was a lack of clarity to the presentation. I presented the research ‘as found’ and without the clarifying presence of an over-arching viewpoint; a connecting thread to make sense of the differing strands.

Luckily I was 6 months pregnant giving the presentation. An enforced hiatus from the research was imminent…

The realisation that all my research related to ‘Methods’ was a revelation\(^2\) which came a few months after PRS 06. This helped connect the different strands and to group them under the headings: ‘How We Work, How We Research, How We Practice and How We Design’.

The simple fact of having distance from the research, enabled me to see more clearly what it was I had been doing; to guide the pipette through the cone of my research, as Leon Van Schaik’s ideogram (right) encourages us to do.

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\(^2\) Architectural Association of Ireland. See 1.1 Practice Introduction for interview excerpts

\(^3\) See 3.4 How We Design: Distilling, Exaggerating and Intensifying Character

\(^4\) ‘The PhD Moment’?
It is important to record the effect the PhD has had on the Practice. To do this we need to remember how we were ‘before’; to regress to the pre-PRS entity.

But this is more difficult than it seems. It’s incredible how quickly change is assimilated and how quickly we accept our new ways of thinking; as if this is how we always thought.

At the beginning of each PRS presentation, the PhD candidate is required to give an overview of their practice to ensure all members of the audience and panel are familiar with their work.

So in the spirit of my pragmatic and ‘small’ approach to my research, I thought it might be worthwhile to examine the description of our practice we gave in presentations before the PhD (pre-PRS, Ghent, Apr 2013) and ‘after’ (PRS 05, Barcelona, Nov 2015). See following pages.

The comparison of the descriptions before and after going through the PRS process is by its nature superficial. The practice descriptions don’t consider the full weight of the research. But they do give an indication of how we view our Practice; and the difference two and half years of focussed research has had on our ability to communicate this viewpoint succinctly.

In comparing the early and late descriptions, I am heartened to see that the practice’s core values have remained the same. The purpose of the PhD is not to ‘re-make’ the Practice or to fundamentally change intrinsic characteristics. Instead we become better able to articulate and communicate what it is we are trying to do; to others and, more importantly, to ourselves.

The brevity of the later description is in part due to the pragmatic time constraints on a 40min presentation; which must give an overview of the practice, summarise the research and highlight any new investigations. However, in making this comparison I have realised that, if asked to give a lecture tomorrow, I would make few alterations to the length of the description of our practice.

The original 84 slide, 40min long ‘before’ overview has been boiled down to 10 slides, taking about 3 mins to present. We have designed this succinct introduction in much the same way we design our buildings. The original presentation has been distilled and intensified. 84 slides is now 10; 40mins is now 3 min. Each slide has been given weight through the distillation; the accompanying explanation is reduced but clear.

I can see that the PRS process has given us confidence and clarity. Meandering explanations of who/what we are, are no longer necessary. The succinct explication of our practice viewpoint leaves space in a presentation for other things. In much the same way, the clarifying effect of the PhD reflective process has swept away the need to laboriously define ourselves; it has given us room to concentrate on other things.
Pre-PRS Practice Description, Apr 2013

1. Practice values introduced through reference to descriptions of vernacular buildings we have visited. The Tibetan House is held up as the exemplar; an ideal incarnation of culture, place and time. Something which our buildings aspire to be.

2. The 2 most significant projects to date (House 01 + 02, 4House) are described in detail with reference to Memory, Social Ritual, Tectonic Expression and Context and introduced by the 1st Biennale project (Venice 2008) as a primer.

3. Smaller projects (Magennis Sq, Dromleigh, Wynnsward Park) are described more prosaically, but in similar terms. Wynnsward Park is held up as a less than successful experiment with arches.

4. Our 1st public building (Merrion Cricket Club) appears as balsa model and section drawing.

5. Exhibitions and ‘paper projects’ are grouped together with short descriptions (Venice 2010, Purple, RHA, Wallpaper)

Duration: 30-40 mins
Slides: 84

To encourage the rituals of life through architecture, to reinforce meaning, social rituals as secular religious acts.

To explore the bare medium of architecture, to have a distinct attitude towards how we build, construction as a cultural act and not merely as a means to create the desired image.

Fig 10 Selection of slides and text from Pre-PRS practice description, 2013
**PRS 05 Practice Description, Nov 2015**

1. Images of vernacular buildings are still present but they are not described. They are more like totems now; representing the core practice values (which have not changed).

2. Descriptions are succinct and to the point.

3. We are clear about our architectural interests (context, building culture, foreign cultures, materials, the framing of life)

4. The detailed description of projects is limited

5. New types of projects and ways of working appear (Merrion Cricket Club, the Red Pavilion)

6. It ends with an image of a project currently under design (our largest project to date)

**Duration:** 3 mins  
**Slides:** 10

We are interested in Architecture as an expression of a culture

Up until fairly recently we have been doing largely domestic work for friends and family

We are interested in tectonic expression

Our buildings are firmly rooted in their place. The context – cultural or physical – is almost always our starting point for a design.

Travel and the experience of foreign architectural cultures influence how we operate

We have completed our 1st public building

We are interested in materials and how things are made. Architecture as an expression of a building culture

We collaborated on this pavilion after the last PRS

We like to think of Architecture as a frame for life

This is a building we are currently designing

**Fig 10 All slides and text from PRS 05 practice description, 2015**
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Photography:

House 01
House 02
AHouse
RHA
Venice 2008
Wynnsward Park
Merrion Cricket Club
Venice Biennale 2010
Waterloo Lane
St. Patricks Park

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Ch 1.2
Fig 2  Overhang in Boa Nova Tea House, Alvaro Siza Viera
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Ch 1.3
Figs 1&2  Eye Sight Test
Source: http://cleareyesight-batesmethod.info/id25.html

Ch 2.2
Fig 3  Page from ‘Stair Rooms’
Courtesy of Queens Architectural Press

Ch 2.3
Fig 27  Concrete colonnade in Extension to the Lake House
Courtesy of Clancy Moore Architects
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Case Study 2
Fig 5  Vila House Family Centre
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Fig 7  Leagain House
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Ch 2.4
Fig 6  Extract from ‘The Elaborated Window’
Courtesy of Queens Architectural Press

Fig 24  Overhang in Boa Nova Tea House, Alvaro Siza Viera
As above

Ch 3.2
Fig 9  ‘Cone and Pipette’ diagram
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