Brutalist extension under construction
Photograph © National Museums Northern Ireland
Collection Ulster Museum

ABSORBING MODERNITY

1914-2014

17 October - 1 November 2014

From diverse political regimes to random personal trajectories, from social tensions to the emergence of new technologies, and from individual talents and friendships to avant garde manifestos, architecture's evolution over the past 100 years has been shaped by many different factors.

This series of events and exhibitions looks at the history of architecture with specific reference to the impact of modernity in Northern Ireland over the course of the past century. It was inspired by the 2014 Venice Architecture Biennale directed by Rem Koolhaas, and the exhibition A Clockwork Jerusalem at the British Pavilion in Venice.

This mini festival within the Ulster Bank Belfast Festival at Queen's is programmed by the British Council, and supported by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. Events have been developed in partnership Belfast Exposed, Forum for Alternative Belfast, PLACE, Queen's Film Theatre, Queen's University, the University of Ulster and the Ulster Museum.

Further information and tickets available via Belfast Festival at Queen's Website & Box Office - belfastfestival.com

Introduction

Kevin Bean
Absorbing and resisting modernity in Northern Ireland

Given its reputation as a place apart, post-war Northern Ireland appears to offer a most inhospitable terrain for the transformative project of modernity to take root. If modernity embodied the hope of a better future through a radical break with the past, Northern Ireland, with its famously blind adherence to entrenched tradition, not least the absolutes of religious faith, seems its very antithesis. Yet the same powerful forces creating the conditions for modernity on the global stage were making a significant mark on Northern Ireland's political and social landscape, both in the public realm and the private sphere. Whilst historians highlight the official rhetoric of modernity as expounded by politicians and planners, other powerful currents of modernity were emerging, expressing a widespread enthusiasm for change and progress from below.

The reception of modernity into the fabric of regional life was largely determined by Northern Ireland's complex relationship with the rest of the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland had been broadly subject to the same mobilizing ideology of a progressive 'People's War' against fascism. Beyond official propaganda, the war was perceived in the popular imagination as a struggle to remove the old political class and the failed systems that had caused the poverty and unemployment of the 1930s. Inspired by visions of 'building a New Jerusalem', Britain's post war modernization drove the creation of the Welfare State and related developments in education, social policy and Keynesian economics. In a similar vein, architects and planners, drawing on the work of their European and American contemporaries, imagined radically different forms of private and public space in which new modes of living were to be consciously created.

Although Northern Ireland's embrace of modernity reflected many of these wider British themes, the experience was distorted, refracted through its own peculiar conditions and distinctive political structures. For example, Unionist hostility towards the introduction of the Welfare State in the late 1940s often expressed explicitly sectarian attitudes towards the potentially disloyal Catholic poor, defined as the undeserving beneficiaries of the system. This simultaneous absorption of, and resistance to, modernity reached its apogee during Terence O'Neill's government in the 1960s. In drawing on the fashionable rhetoric of Harold Wilson's white-hot technological revolution O'Neill seemed, both at the time and retrospectively, to fully justify his reputation as a modernizing reformer. Conscious technocratic intervention was placed at the heart of his project:

> "Our task will be to transform the face of Ulster.
> To achieve it will demand bold and imaginative measures…
> Northern Ireland… [can] capture the imagination of the world.

Policies that combined state action with multi-national investment in new industries obviously resonated in a region where traditional industries were in terminal decline. Indeed, beyond the rhetoric, the Northern Irish state's re-articulation of the universalist language of modernity in its own provincial voice resulted in major policy changes in civic planning, housing, regional and economic development. By the mid 1960s, from the expansion of public sector and local authority housing in Greater Belfast to the development of the new town of Craigavon and the creation of the New University of Ulster, Northern Ireland's future as a successful, modern society seemed assured. However contemporary critics and later historians have identified contradictions at the heart of O'Neill's technocratic programme, explaining his commitment to reform as the triumph of style over the substance of modernity. Allegations of sectarian bias arose from decisions in housing and development planning, whether the dedication of the new town of Craigavon to one of Unionism's founding fathers or the New University of Ulster's location in a staunchly unionist area. Consequently, many people concluded that 'modernization'

in the Northern Irish context was just another stratagem in the region's zero-sum game of communalized politics. The limitations of O'Neill's reformism and the local conditions that ultimately determined its character were starkly revealed in a celebrated interview he gave after leaving office in 1969, just as the Northern state began its descent into chaos:

> "It is frightfully hard to explain to Protestants that if you give Roman Catholics a good job and a good house, they will live like Protestants, because they will see neighbours with cars and television sets. They will refuse to have 18 children, but if a Roman Catholic is jobless and lives in the most ghastly hovel, he will rear 18 children on National Assistance. If you treat Roman Catholics with due consideration and kindness, they will live like Protestants…

If these conservative tendencies provoked cynicism, the lived experience of modernity was proving to be more authentic and profound. Buying cars, moving onto new estates and with new worlds opening up through television and travel, for the people of Northern Ireland the adventure of modernity was both enticing and unsettling. Equally significant in the political and economic sphere, new ideas and international models as diverse as the struggle for black civil rights in the United States, the liberalizing impact of Vatican II and modernist housing projects across Europe were to have a major impact on the ways modernity was being absorbed and experienced in the North. Colliding with the immovable structures of the Unionist status quo, however, these new ideas and dynamic forces were soon to give rise to even more disruptive forms of modernity that would ultimately explode onto the streets.

Northern Ireland's experience of modernity seems to suggest that the pursuit of a unifying vision for transformation must also engender disunity and conflict. Yet, like Britain the condition of modernity in Northern Ireland was patchy and full of ambiguity. In one unexpected area of life, often in rural landscapes and at the most parochial level, the absorption of modernity was startlingly realized in the building of modernist churches.

Neither entirely material nor spiritual, but a confluence of the two, the influence of modernity on church architecture seemed to express a yearning to transcend the provincial, whilst somehow accommodating to the particularities of place and seeking stability amidst uncertainty. Modernist church architecture was a particular feature of, although by no means exclusive to, the Catholic tradition, both pre-empting and responding to the doctrinal development and liturgical changes of Vatican II.

One of the giants of 20th century Irish architecture, with Corbusier, Gropius and Alvar Aalto among his stated influences, Liam McCormick's modernist churches were genuinely popular in rural parishes amongst people often regarded as a most conservative religious and social milieu. In applying radical ideas from Northern Europe to the building of both Catholic and Presbyterian churches, his work engenders a surprisingly emotional engagement that seems to speak of a startling ambition to create something altogether modern in the heartlands of rural Ulster. It is an exemplar from which we have may still have much to learn.

The modernist project in Northern Ireland, as elsewhere, may have been imperfectly absorbed and incompletely realized, but continues to offer a model for our times. The common thread linking all modernist projects is a belief in the collective subjectivity and creative ability of humanity. It is this inspiring legacy that shows us that we are not prisoners of history, mere passive objects cast adrift in the world, but rather, conscious subjects capable of making history, and transforming our world.

Kevin Bean teaches Irish politics at the Institute of Irish Studies, University of Liverpool. His research interests include theories of nationalism and national identity.

Talk

A Place Apart?
Absorbing and resisting modernity
in Northern Ireland

Sat 25 Oct, 2.00pm – 3.00pm
Lecture Theatre, Ulster Museum, Stranmillis Road
Free admission

With its reputation for adherence to entrenched tradition,
Northern Ireland might appear to offer an inhospitable
terrain for any transformative project of modernity.
But is this really so? From schools to churches, and from
garden city estates to urban motorways, many of the facets
of modern architecture and urbanism have been reproduced
within Northern Ireland. In this session a panel of experts
explore how history met the future, and how the local sparred
with the international in shaping the architecture of the last
century of modernity.

Speakers:
Michael Corr, Creative Director, PLACE
Alan Jones, Director of Education (Architecture)
Queen's University, Immediate Past President of the RSUA
Chair, **Alastair Donald**, project director, British Pavilion,
Venice Architecture Biennale 2014

Linfield School, 1929-31, Photograph © Dr Paul Larmour

Second contract drawing No. 5, 1923
Drawing by J.C. Wynne
Collection Ulster Museum, National Museums Northern Ireland

The Ulster Museum, formerly Belfast Municipal Museum and Art Gallery, viewed from Botanic Gardens, c.1964
Photograph © National Museums Northern Ireland, Collection Ulster Museum
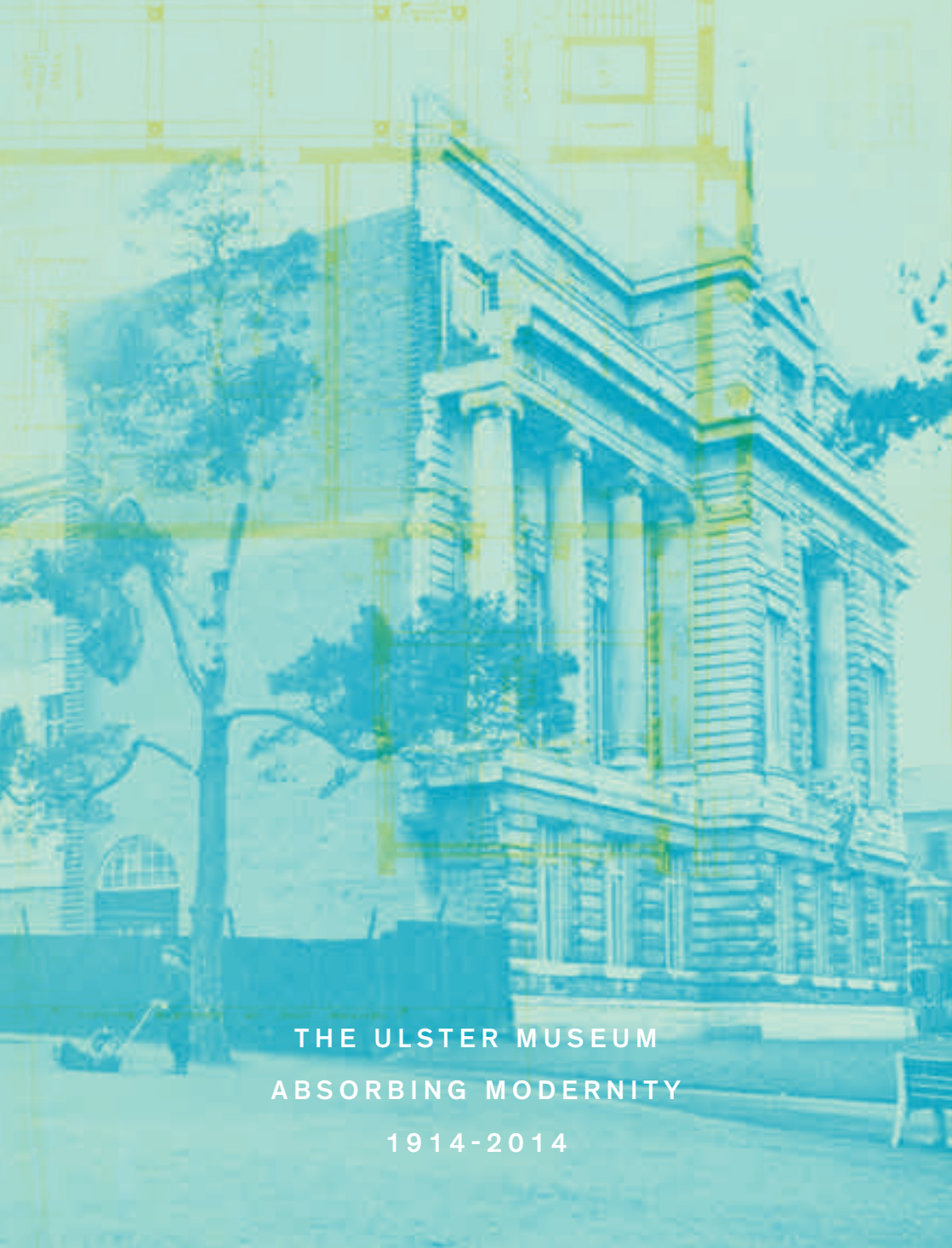
THE ULSTER MUSEUM

## ABSORBING MODERNITY

1914-2014

The Ulster Museum

Rosaleen Hickey
The Ulster Museum 1914-2014: Evolution amidst Revolution

The Ulster Museum as it stands today, set within the Botanic Gardens in Belfast, is the result of three main phases of development which, remarkably, coincide with defining periods in the history of the province: the birth of Northern Ireland, the outbreak of the Troubles and post-Good Friday Agreement. The museum has evolved not only amidst political revolution, but during a time of radical change within architecture. In fact, the building illustrates the central revolutions that took place in architecture across a century. By casting an eye from right to left across its north façade it is possible to see the literal representation of the theme of the 2014 Venice Architecture Biennale: 'Absorbing Modernity: 1914-2014'.

In the autumn of 1913, an open competition was announced for the building of the Belfast Municipal Museum and Art Gallery, to be judged by the renowned Scottish architect
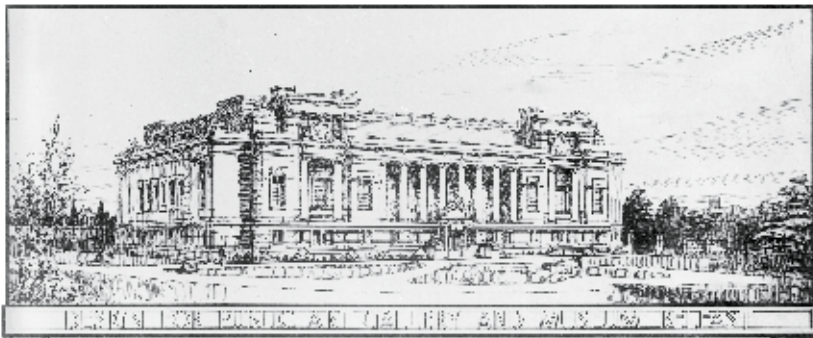
Perspective drawing of 1914 proposal
Collection Ulster Museum, National Museums Northern Ireland

Belfast Municipal Museum and Art Gallery, viewed from Stranmillis Road, 1930
Photograph © National Museums Northern Ireland
Collection Ulster Museum

John James Burnet. In May 1914, the winning design was confirmed to be that of James Cumming Wynnes of Edinburgh. His Neo-Classical design consisted of a central courtyard flanked by four wings and conformed to the concept of the museum as a 'temple'. The proposed entrance façade, overlooking the Botanic Gardens to the north, was composed of a giant Ionic colonnade comparable to that of Burnet's Edward VII Galleries at the British Museum.

However, following the outbreak of World War One, the construction of the museum was postponed indefinitely. Building did not commence until 1924, following political upheavals in Ireland (civil war, partition and the birth of Northern Ireland), progressive developments in museum design, and the burgeoning of modern architecture. When the museum finally opened its doors on 22 October 1929 its monumental Neo-Classical style was already outdated. Individualistic detail, including a stone-carved figurehead and prow of a ship projecting from the north façade, proclaimed the building's Edwardian spirit and differentiated it from the internationalism of the modern movement. Furthermore, due to

a lack of funds, less than half of Wynnes's original design had actually been realized. The building presented unsightly stub ends and an unenclosed courtyard to the Botanic Gardens.

In 1959 Captain Terence O'Neill (then Minister of Finance for NI) proposed a scheme whereby the government would finance the completion of the Belfast Municipal Museum and Art Gallery if it changed its status from a municipal collection to a national institution. This took place in 1962 and was reflected in its new name: the Ulster Museum. Consequently, in October 1963 a competition was launched to extend the museum, with Sir Leslie Martin, a celebrated modern architect, as assessor. First prize was awarded to the small architectural office of Francis Pym, based in London. Remarkably, the winning design emerged from a
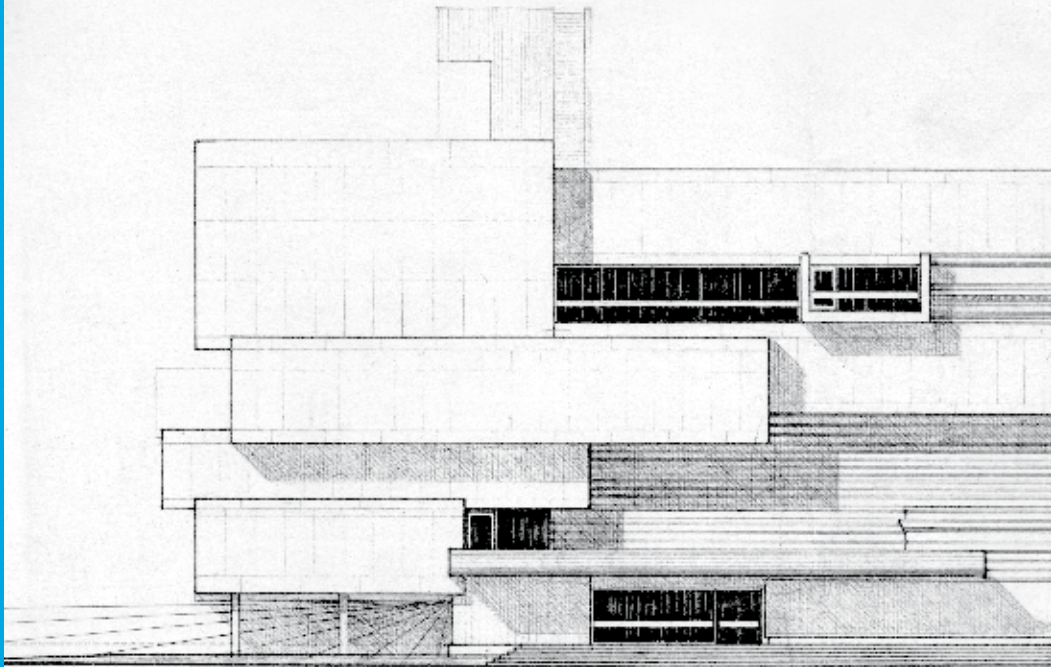

North elevation showing proposed Brutalist extension, 1964
Drawing by Patrick Lawson and Anthony Judd
Collection Marigold Pym

collaboration between the aristocratic Francis Pym and a 22-year-old architectural assistant from Portaferry, County Down: Paddy Lawson. The design knitted the existing building and the proposed extension together, achieving the complete fusion of old and new in plan, section and elevation. Whilst the basic concept was an ascending spiral, the overriding aesthetic was Brutalism, a provocative style of architecture, described by Reyner Banham in 1966 as "a violent revolutionary outburst."

A small team, led by Paddy Lawson and Tony Judd, prepared all the working drawings for the extension, and construction started in September 1966. Ove Arup and partners, the renowned engineers of Sydney Opera House, were employed as structural engineers. Ulsterman Brian Lowe worked on
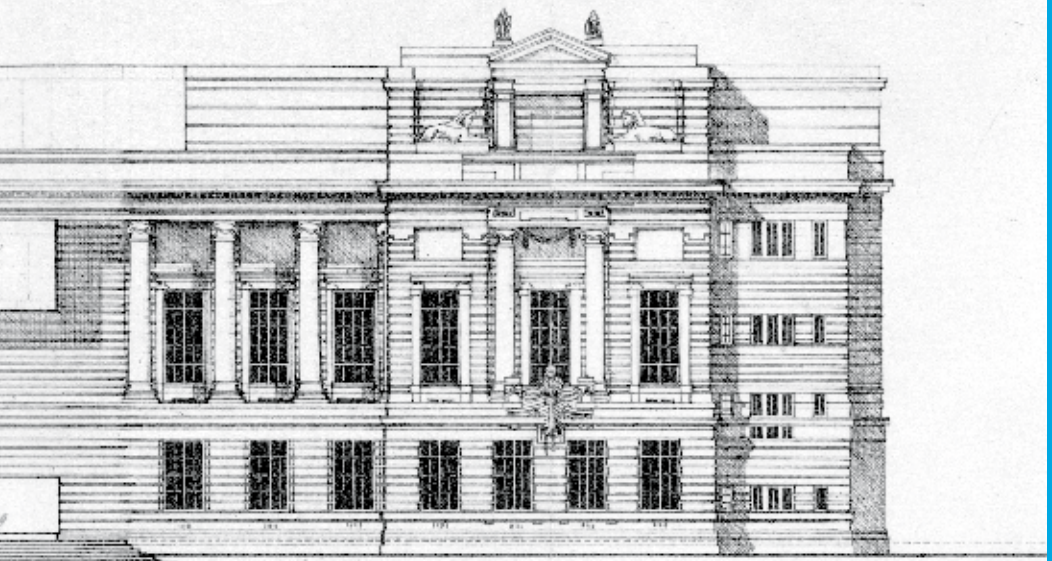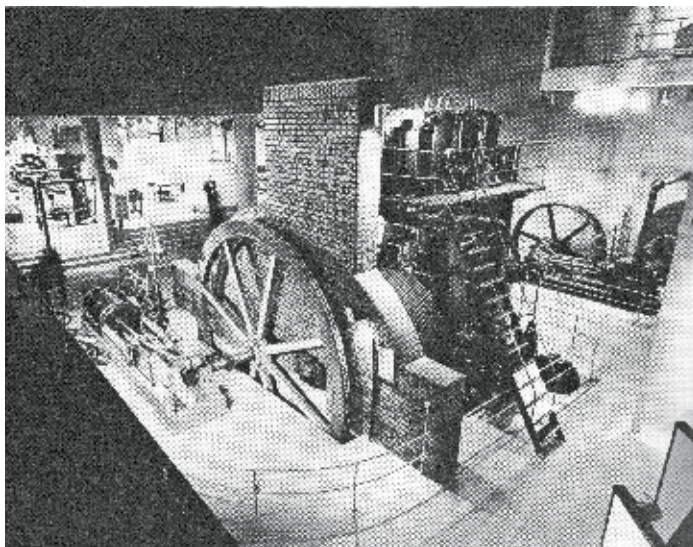
Engineering hall, 1972
Photograph © DESIGN Magazine / John-Perkins

the interiors of the museum, whilst Healey Mills, a London company, developed the graphic design and drew up concepts for the galleries. Although Pym resigned in 1968, and the remainder of the work was supervised by the architect's department of the NI Ministry of Finance, with John Harrison as chief architect, Lawson continued as the de facto architect on site and oversaw all aspects of the design. The museum officially re-opened on 30 October 1972.

The dominant 'ascending spiral' concept dictated both the internal layout and external massing of the extension. Each gallery in the ascent sequence was externally expressed in the form of a concrete box. This featureless concrete bore a striking contrast to the elaborate Edwardian modelling of the original building. However, the finish of the concrete was carefully designed to harmonise in tone and colour with the existing building. Furthermore, Neo-Classical details were extended as far as the concrete projections, thus achieving the effect of the fade-out of the old building into the new.

The entrance foyer was dark, low and wide. A short, broad flight of steps - a recurring element from the exterior and the initiation of the ascending spiral - led from the cave-like foyer to a large, tall engineering hall which was dedicated to local industry. This spiral then ascended through history and science exhibits to conclude with the large art galleries at roof-level. The spiral was highly complex, encircling the engineering hall and the open courtyard, dovetailing with the existing museum, and manoeuvring the public under and over storage areas. Although concrete was predominant within the interior, touches of colour were provided by un-tinted Irish linen and two stained glass windows by local artist Neil Shawcross.

The influence of Le Corbusier (1887-1965) pervaded the form, materiality and features of the Brutalist extension. The concept of a spiral museum, and the dark-to-light ascent sequence also lent much to the French architect. Similarly, the emphasis on a specific route through the building was a reference to his 'promenade architecturale'. 'Musical windows' based on Le Corbusier's proportional system called the

'Musical Windows'
Photograph © Rosaleen Hickey 2010

'Modulor' were designed by Paddy Lawson's younger brother, Leonard, who, fresh from school, was employed as a draughtsman in Francis Pym's office. Leonard Lawson was also responsible for designing the 'UM' lettering adjacent to the main entrance.

In later years, several alterations to the museum took place. The central courtyard was closed over and there was increasing disenchantment with Brutalism. Then in 2006 the museum underwent major redevelopment, led by Belfast-based Hamilton Architects. The museum officially reopened on 22 October 2009 boasting additional exhibition space and a radically transformed interior. In place of the cave-like entrance foyer, visitors are now directed into a large atrium; a light-filled, open space, dominated by expanses of unadorned white walls, that aligns with international trends in museum design. Outside, the entrance now breaks through the north façade at the area of transition between old and new, whilst large areas of glazing have been introduced, encouraging greater engagement between the museum and the Botanic Gardens. This has created the effect of a 'fortress' being opened up, with holes punched through the once impenetrable concrete structure.

The Ulster Museum is a unique, iconic, and highly didactic building. Nearly one hundred years in the making, it not only witnessed, but also illustrates, the revolutions that took place in architecture. This year, in the centenary of its original design, it is appropriate to reflect on and appreciate the architectural importance of the Ulster Museum.

Thanks to: Brian Lowe, Rosie Lowe, Leonard Lawson, Frances Lawson, Bronagh Lawson, Marigold Pym, Tony Judd and Peter Bowes.

Rosaleen Hickey is an architectural historian, currently completing a PhD in architecture at Queen's University, and has recently led architectural tours in collaboration with PLACE, UAHS, Household Belfast and Belfast Exposed.

Redeveloped exterior, Ulster Museum
Photograph © Rosaleen Hickey 2010

The Ulster Museum

Exhibition

The Ulster Museum 1914-2014: Evolution amidst Revolution

Fri 17 Oct – Sat 1 Nov, 10am-5pm (Closed Mondays)
The Belfast Room, Ulster Museum, Free admission

This exhibition traces the evolution of the Ulster Museum over the last 100 years with rarely seen archival drawings, photographs and models, shedding new light on one of Belfast's most iconic buildings. We explore the influences - both local and global - that shaped the building, and consider how the forces of modernity were absorbed over the course of the century into its architecture.

Tour

Thu 23 & 30 Oct, 1pm
Duration, 40 mins
Meet in the atrium of the Ulster Museum, Stranmillis Road

This tour accompanies the exhibition 'The Ulster Museum 1914 -2014: Evolution amidst Revolution' and is led by Rosaleen Hickey, architectural historian and exhibition curator. The tour traces the spiral ascent through the Ulster Museum, explores the junctions between old and new, and discusses the ideas and influences that guided the evolution of the museum across a century.

L-R: Peter Luker (structural engineer from Ove Arup's London office),
Paddy Lawson and Francis Pym, working on drawings
Photograph, Collection Marigold Pym

The Ulster Museum

Film

An Epoch translated into Space

Sat 25 Oct, 4.30pm-5.15pm
**Lecture Theatre, Ulster Museum, Free admission**

A film by Forum for Alternative Belfast

In 1963 a young architecture student from Portaferry saw an announcement for a competition to design the extension to the Ulster Museum in Belfast. Ten years later Paddy Lawson handed over the keys of the new building.

The role of Paddy Lawson in this building has never been fully acknowledged. Through documentary, original drawings, photographs and discussion Forum for Alternative Belfast tell this unknown story.

Brutalist extension, Ulster Museum
Photograph © Mark Hackett
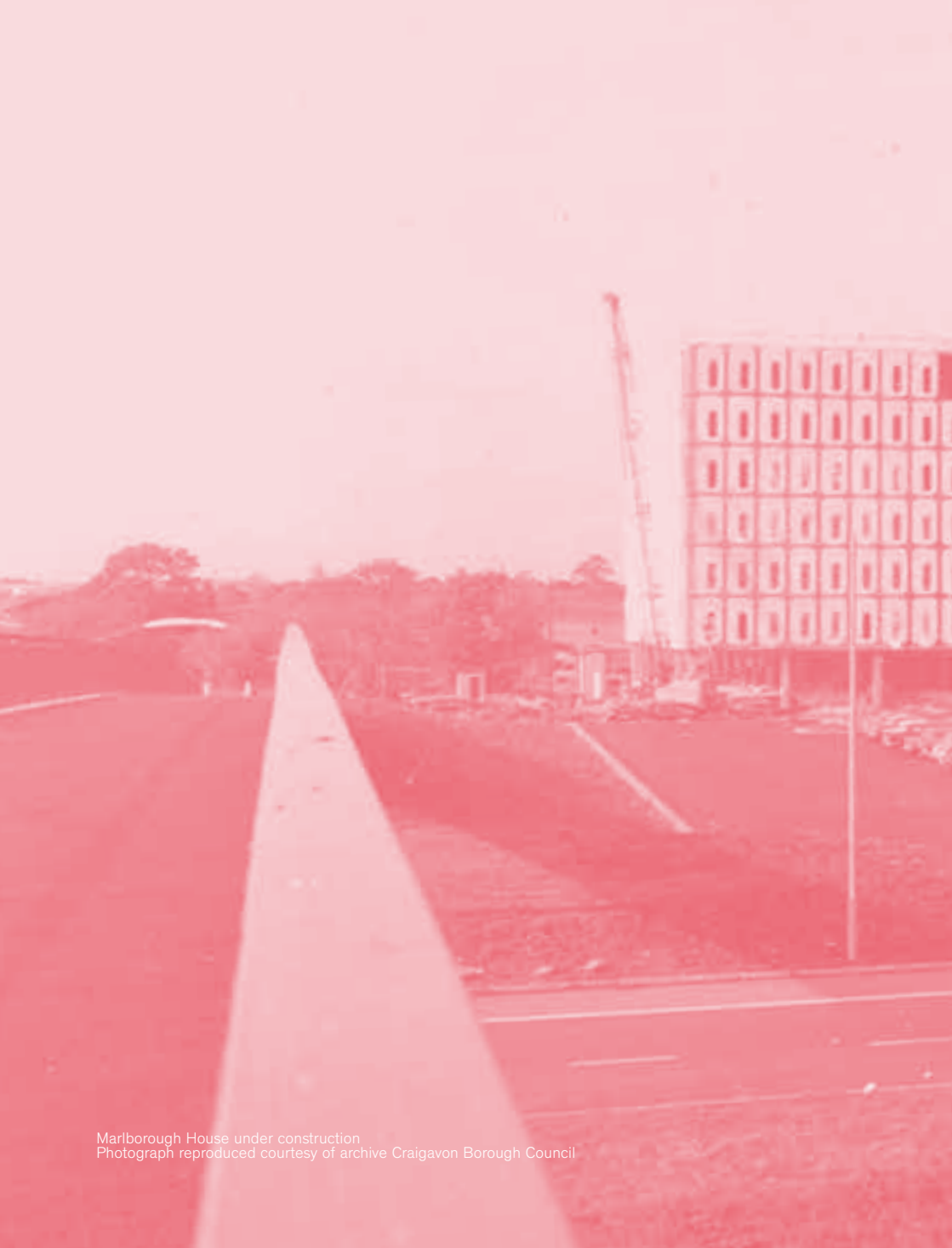
Marlborough House under construction
Photograph reproduced courtesy of archive Craigavon Borough Council

CRAIGAVON

ABSORBING MODERNITY

1914-2014

Craigavon

Rebekah McCabe, PLACE

> *"To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world – and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are."*

Modern life, according to the American writer, Marshall Berman, is a commotion of contradiction and paradox. The intense social upheaval that has marked the last 100 years is most physically legible in the changes to forms and patterns of urban life, driven by a century's flourishing of architecture & urban planning.

The director of the 2014 Venice Architecture Biennale, Rem Koolhaas, offered participating countries a single theme with which to engage – Absorbing Modernity 1914-2014. The provocation is that modernity, since the outbreak of the First World War, has erased national character, producing architecture and urban form that is universal and indifferent to place.

Our exhibition Craigavon New Town: 50 Years of Modernity, is intended as a modest response to this proposition. As Northern Ireland's first and only true new town, Craigavon is uniquely situated to be a locus for modernity's ambiguities and contradictions. In its physical form – a linear city with residential 'villages' set amid wide open landscaping and carefully planned infrastructure, it embodies the urban pastoral values of British modernism. Its innovative and risky housing design drew inspiration from around the

world, rejecting indigenous housing styles and embracing modern European aesthetics.

There is a captivating early drawing of the new city: two hand-drawn white lines sweep out across the map, westward from Belfast. The lines diverge to follow the routes of the M1 and southern section of the M2. As the divergence widens at the southern shore of Lough Neagh, against the black and white matrix of existing land and road networks, there is a circle marking the location of the future city. A note, hand-written by the urban planner, Geoffrey Copcutt reads, '150,000 pop. new city to link existing towns'.

Craigavon is a place borne out of modernism's powerful belief in the capacity of design and architecture to

Craigavon from the air
Photograph © Colin Willliams

transform people's lives, to improve economic conditions, and to herald new ways of living. Like that hand-drawn image, the vision was deceptively simple, confident in its own purpose. But building a city is not just a physical act, it is a symbolic exercise too, with each bringing form and meaning to the other. The story of Craigavon, long before a sod was turned or a brick laid, is an idiosyncratically Northern Irish one.

It was marred by sectarianism and suspicion early on, scarred and abandoned during the Troubles, and is now enjoying a tentative resurgence as it heads, next year, for its semicentennial. As with all significant anniversaries, the story of the place will be retold next year. For some, it will be a story of political intrigue, for others, comedic farce, or a morality tale, depending on who does the telling.

The photographer Victor Sloan's documentation of Craigavon, privileged through his proximity to the place throughout his

Image reproduced courtesy of archive Craigavon Borough Council

life, tells a more granular story of modernism in Northern Ireland. In Sloan's images, there is a gentle absurdity to Craigavon in those early years, the futurist forms rising from the countryside, the stylised pastoralism of the manufactured landscape set against the functioning agriculture of the surrounding land. In his more recent photographs, taken by revisiting sites captured on film in his earlier work, there is a raw sadness to the passing of time in the city of the future. Banal and overlooked urban objects, such as lampposts, stubbornly persist, whereas the voids left by the destruction of residences and, in some cases, entire estates, create a new kind of abject landscape. The mossy footprints of Craigavon's demolished houses are an element of the modernist landscape now, vestigial reminders of future past.

Rebekah McCabe is Creative Producer at PLACE and holds a degree in marketing from Dublin Institute of Technology. She is currently completing a PhD in socio-cultural anthropology, funded by the Irish Research Council.
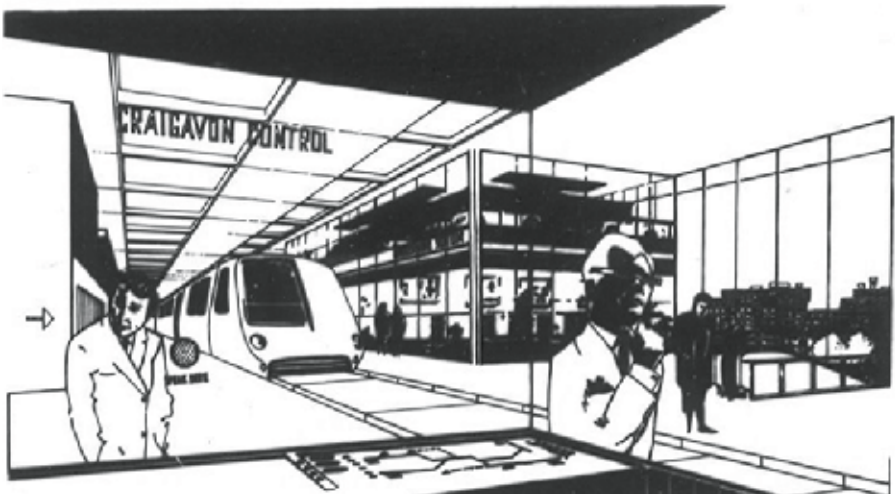

Image reproduced courtesy of archive Craigavon Borough Council

Craigavon

Exhibition

Craigavon New Town: 50 Years of Modernity

Fri 24 Oct – Sat 1 Nov, daily 11am-5pm
(Closed Sundays & Mondays)
Golden Thread Gallery (front space), Free admission

Opening Fri 24 Oct, 6-8pm

This exhibition created by PLACE, features new and archival photography by Victor Sloan alongside selected historical materials documenting the founding of Craigavon, telling the often-strange story of the modernist city that rose out of the Northern Irish countryside. Drawings, plans and strategies for the Brownlow development tie in with the work of Geoffrey Copcutt and modernist housing design such as Cumbernauld in Scotland and Thamesmead in London made infamous in Stanley Kubrick's A Clockwork Orange. The opposition of Sloan's uneasy imagery of life in a new city with the idealist, utopian visual culture of 1960s town planning, tells the story of a place in which quotidian normality is layered on top of the absurdity of the project's unrealised ambition.

Victor Sloan is one of Ireland's major visual artists. He was born in Dungannon, Co. Tyrone in Northern Ireland and he lives and works in Portadown, Co. Armagh. Over the years Victor has returned to Craigavon many times and his work shows a fascination with the place.

On a straightforward level his intention was to depict the new town of Craigavon but on a deeper level we witness the stirrings, not only of an emotional reaction to the subject matter, but also of a hesitantly articulated critique.
Extract from Marking the North - the Work of Victor Sloan, by Brian McAvera, published by Open Air, Dublin and Impressions, York, England

As part of this exhibition Victor has produced a number of new photographs, looking at places and buildings in Craigavon. These photographs are shown together with some of the original photographs taken in the 1980s.

Victor Sloan, 'Pinebank, Craigavon'
Silver gelatin print and toners, 26cms x 26cms, 1985

Craigavon

Film & Discussion

The Lost City of Craigavon

Sat 25 Oct, 3.00pm –4.30pm
Lecture Theatre, Ulster Museum, Free admission

A screening of the 2007 BBC documentary
The Lost City of Craigavon will be followed by a panel
discussion that sets Craigavon within the broader context
of modernist trends in landscape architecture. The panel
will feature the documentary's narrator Newton Emerson,
William J Cairns, former Chief Landscape Architect at the
Craigavon Development Commission, and Dr Susan Wilson,
Research Historian of Landscape Architecture & Garden Art.

Tour

Sat 1 Nov, 12 noon
Bus departing from the Golden Thread Gallery
Free, booking essential

Join us on a guided drive around the town, and learn
about its origins, inspiration, missteps, and resurgence.

Underpass, Craigavon
Photograph © Joe Magowan

CINEMAS

ABSORBING MODERNITY

1914 - 2014

Cinemas

Michael Open
Cultural modernity in Belfast
– the cinema

Though other technological inventions in the last years of the 19th Century (the motor car, electricity generation and the telephone, for example) had greater influence on the lives of the population, the most important cultural development of this cusp between the Victorian and modern worlds was the invention of the cinema. We have an American (Thomas Edison) to thank for the invention of film-making and a family of Frenchmen (the Brothers Lumière) to thank for its unique method of presentation.

Within twenty years of the first-ever public film show (1895), what began as a fairground-style novelty had become, in effect, the first autonomous art form to be invented for a thousand years. By the end of the first decade of the 20th Century, it had become clear that the new medium had enormous economic potential and that purpose-built facilities for the presentation of films were required to meet the ever growing demand.

Initially, films were the choice, largely, of working class people with an 'inner ring' of cinemas being built in the crowded 'inner city' areas – for example, the Shankill Picturedrome, the Mountpottinger Picturedrome and the Clonard. However, later higher levels of luxury were provided in, for example, the 'Classic' in Cornmarket.

At the end of the 1920s, the cinema world that had become an established industrial entity was shaken to its core by the invention of the 'talking picture'. This provided a threat to the proprietors of Belfast cinemas that was unprecedented
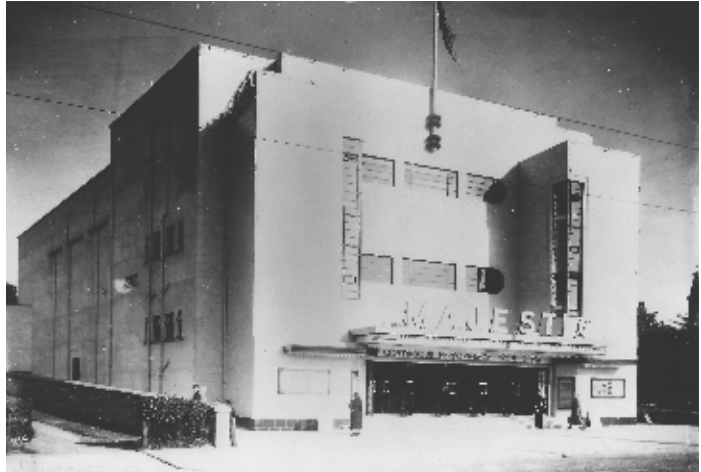
The Majestic, Lisburn Road
Photograph reproduced courtesy the Trustees of National Museums Northern Ireland
© National Museums Northern Ireland, Collection Ulster Museum

until the recent arrival of digital technology. Not only was it necessary to re-equip the cinemas with new and expensive projectors, but auditoria that had happily allowed musical accompaniment, were found sadly wanting in the acoustic department when the subtlety of human speech was to be played to an audience of over a thousand.

This necessitated the building of an entirely new breed of cinema – either with redesigned interiors – like the Mountpottinger Picturedrome – or newly designed cinema buildings, many of which presented themselves as 'Picture Palaces' equipped with all the latest gadgets and facilities and, often, designed in the dominant architectural style of the era – art deco.

Northern Ireland's leading cinema architect of this movement was John McBride Neill. From his first cinema, the Apollo by Ormeau Bridge in 1933 until his much maligned re-vamping of the Hippodrome as the Odeon in the mid-50s, he brought a sense of scale and style to all of the buildings he designed. The most famous examples are the Majestic

on the Lisburn Road, which continues to exist as a furniture store, the Curzon Cinema on the Ormeau Road and the giant Tonic cinema in Bangor that remained the apogee of Northern Ireland's cinemas until the time of its demise. In this context, mention should be made of two other of Belfast's 'super-cinemas', that were not designed by Neill – the Ritz, that became the ABC and ultimately the Cannon, was Belfast's largest cinema seating over 2200 spectators and featured a spectacular array of neon lighting in its earliest manifestation; secondly the Stadium on the Shankill Road, which was Belfast's largest 'single tier' cinema, having a huge (1400-seat) auditorium on a single but variably raked level.

They were typified, externally, by an integration of (often nested) rectangular structures softened by curved ornamentation, and internally by a wash of then high tech fittings, hidden lighting and original abstract design features. These buildings came to typify the experience that the local population had of 'the golden age of cinema' – roughly


The Forum, Crumlin Road
Photograph supplied courtesy of Belfast Central Library;
Photographer William Montgomery attrib.

1935- 1955. This is not to say that all of the cinemas were 'picture palaces': there were many cinemas, especially those that survived from the silent era, that were relatively unremarkable from a design point of view. But, given that, for the most part, the films that were shown tended to represent a glamorous lifestyle, it was the more opulent cinemas that fitted in with the films that they were showing.

This was the era in which the whole population of the city went to the cinema, on average, once a fortnight, but this dominance as the entertainment of choice for an ever more sophisticated audience lasted only forty years from 1915 until 1955 when television wrecked the cinema's financial dominance of the entertainment market and began the great slide with cinema closures first a trickle and then, especially with the onset of the Troubles, a torrent.

Michael Open is a former Director of Queen's Film Theatre and a curator, writer and publisher on cinema.
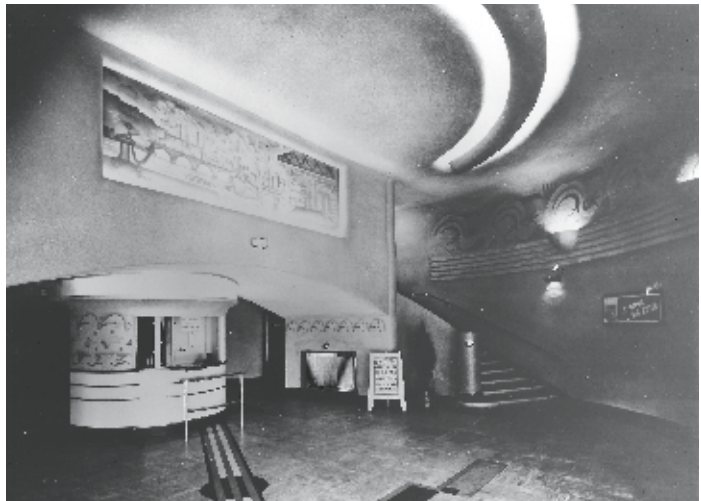
Foyer, The Stadium
Photograph reproduced courtesy the Trustees of National Museums Northern Ireland
© National Museums Northern Ireland, Collection Ulster Museum

Cinemas

Exhibition

Building for the Silver Screens of Belfast

Thu 16 0ct – Sat 1 Nov
6pm-10.30pm Mon-Fri, weekend times vary
Queen's Film Theatre, 20 University Square
Free admission

When, during the first decade of the 20th Century, the cinema burst onto the public stage as a social phenomenon, the need for appropriate buildings in which to present the films led to a boom in design and construction of the new concept of 'a cinema', which evolved into the spectacular art deco picture palaces of the 1930s.

This exhibition and talk gives the flavour of those long-gone days when over forty cinema buildings were operating in Belfast and seeks to show the wide diversity of cinema experience and design that was on offer.

Cinemas

Talk

Michael Open
Building for the
Silver Screens of Belfast

Thu 16 0ct, 6.30pm-7.30pm
Queen's Film Theatre, 20 University Square
Free admission

A flavour of the days when over 40 cinemas
were operating in Belfast.

The Curzon cinema
Photograph courtesy the Gaston Family

Cinemas

Tour

## *Heritage Tour: the Strand Cinema*

Sat 18 Oct, 12.30pm – 1.30pm
The Strand Cinema, 152-154 Holywood Road
£3 (limited to 10 spaces, booking essential)

Heritage tour with the Strand's expert projectionist and
film enthusiast, Alan McClurg. Come hear about the Strand's
history and its unique Art Deco architecture. Get behind
the scenes to see the workings of the original 35mm film
projector and new digital projectors.
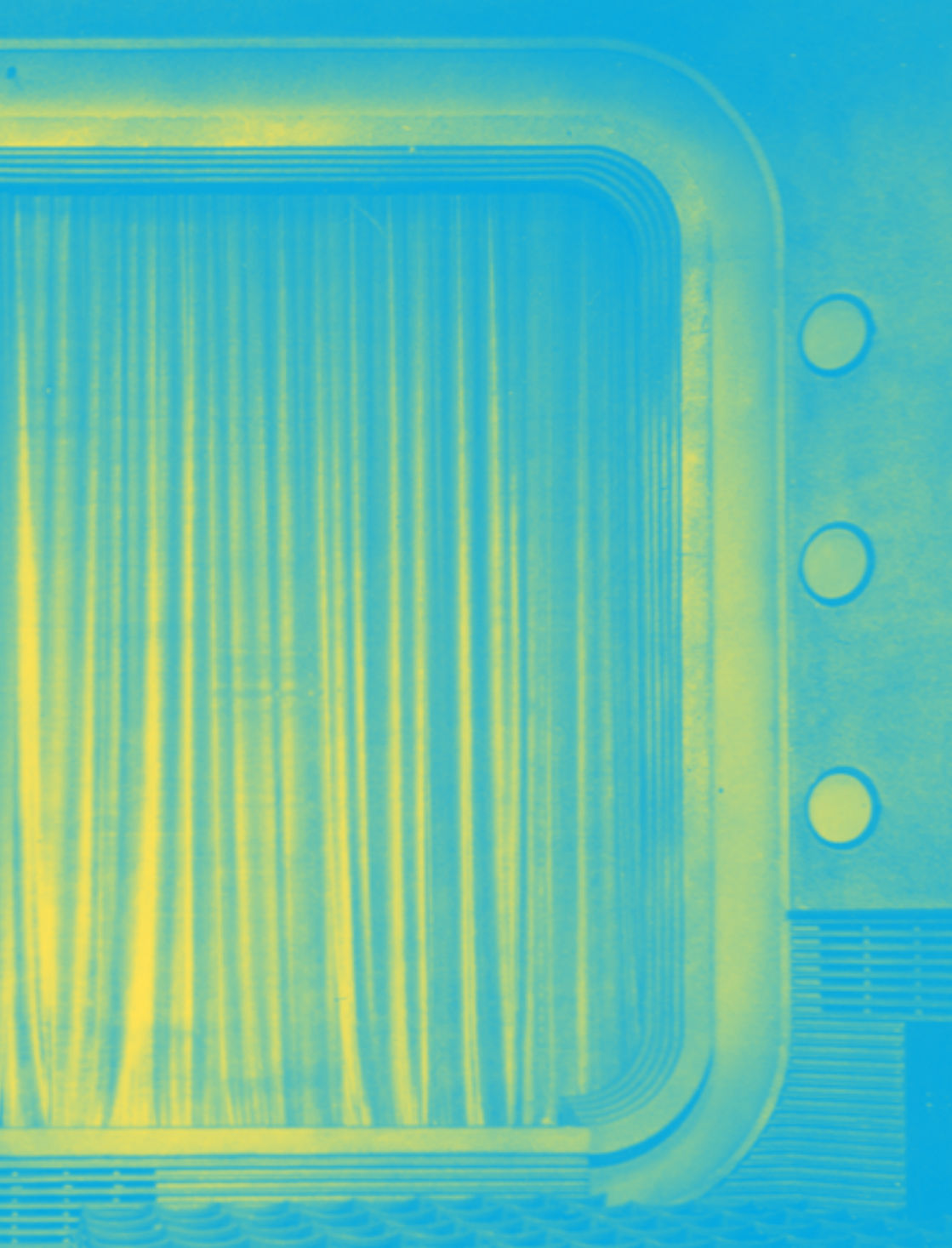
Film

Modernity on Film

The art form for the modern age, throughout its 100 plus year history, cinema has echoed many of the themes and concerns of Modernity. This short selection of films, screening in QFT and the Strand Arts Centre, explores how modernity has influenced some of cinema's leading lights including Chaplin, Hitchcock and Godard.

Strand Arts Centre

Modern Times
With Charlie Chaplin & Paulette Goddard

Sat 18 Oct, 2pm
£5, £4 Students & £3.50 OAP & Children

The Uncle Jack
A cinematic portrait by filmmaker John T. Davis, dedicated to the cinema architect John McBride Neill, his uncle Jack. *Introduced by John T Davis*

Sat 18 Oct, 4pm
£5, £4 Students & £3.50 OAP & Children

North by Northwest
Hitchcock film with Cary Grant, Eva Marie Saint & James Mason

Sun 19 Oct, 2pm
£5, £4 Students & £3.50 OAP & Children

Queen's Film Theatre

The Cabinet of Dr Caligari
With Werner Krauss & Conrad Veidt

Fri 24 Oct, 6.30pm
£6.50, £5 Concession
(£4 Students & under 16s)

Le Mépris
Brigitte Bardot, Michele Piccoli & Jack
Palance, directed by Jean-Luc Godard

Fri 24 Oct, 8.45pm
£6.50, £5 Concession
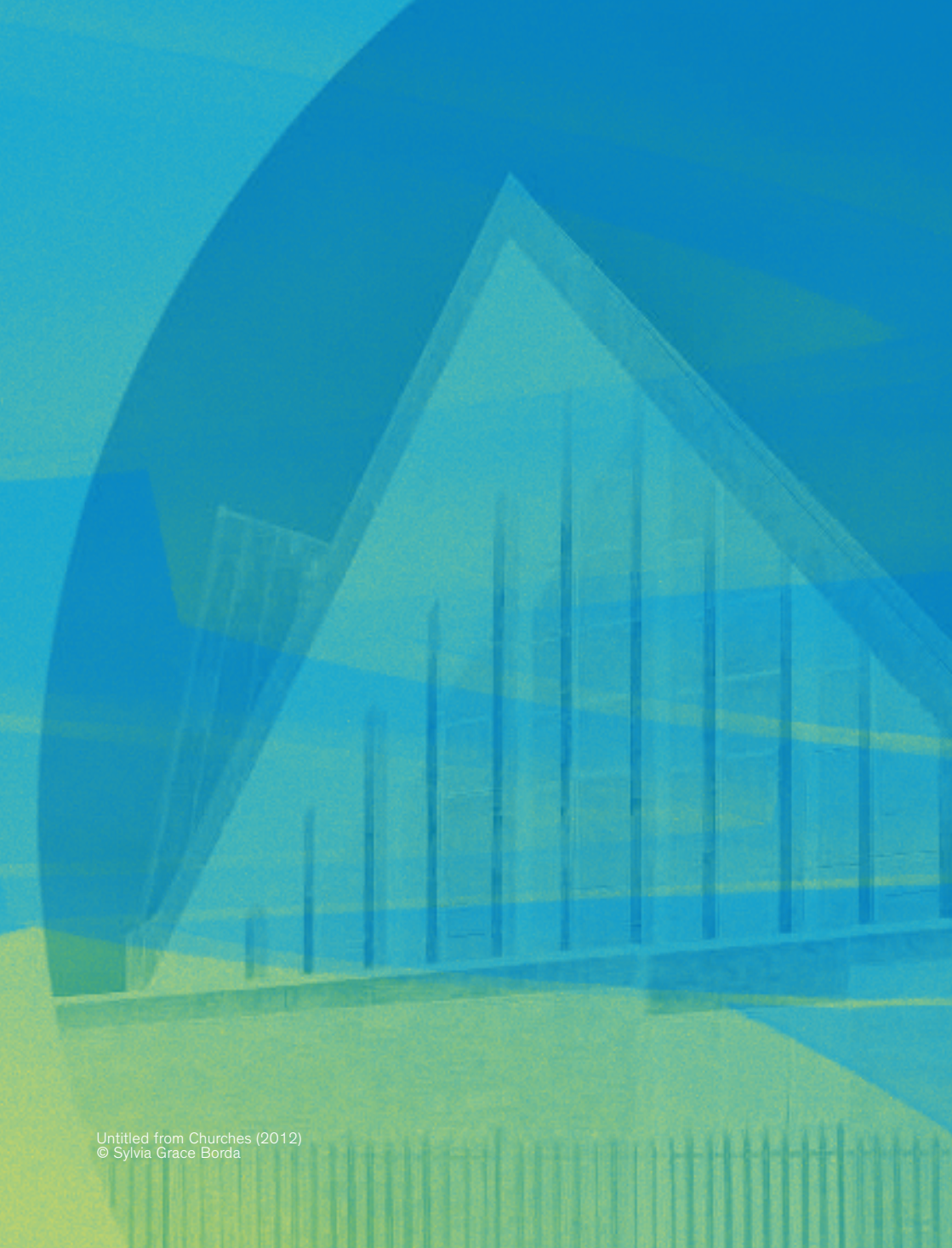**(£4 Students & under 16s)**

The Fountainhead
Gary Cooper, Patricia Neal & Raymond
Massey

Sat 25 Oct, 6pm
£6.50, £5 Concession
(£4 Students & under 16s)

Untitled from Churches (2012)
© Sylvia Grace Borda

CHURCHES

ABSORBING MODERNITY

1914-2014

Churches

David Brett
Churches, building and modernity

There is a whole set of complicated problems buried here, thick as bodies in an old graveyard. No sooner have you dug up one layer and made an attempt to sort that layer out, than your spade breaks into another layer - cholera victims, famine casualties, medieval and earlier... Norman brigands, vikings, jutlanders, and though in Ireland we seem to be spared Romans, we ought not to be too surprised if, scratting about in the fields south of Drogheda, we unearth Sarmatic legionnaries. And each of these layers has it's manner of building, its monuments, its grave goods etc.

What, if any, is the manner congruent to modern conditions? The question works both ways, and we can read off the society from the buildings and the buildings from the society. Or so we think. We expect the one to identify the other.

In fact it is always more difficult than that. We often make buildings that look deliberately archaic, or mimic the very latest while being at root rather old fashioned. And we look for arguments to describe what we think we are doing. The coupling of 'church' with 'modernity' is just such a tricky confusion. I think we may need to avoid prior definitions; we discover 'modernity' in the use of the term.

This, of course, is a critical enterprise; critical in the important sense of reflecting upon its own premises.[1] Can there really be such a field as 'church architecture' which is be 'modern' in a well-considered religious sense: i.e. something more than merely 'recent' or 'contemporary'?

There needs to be something that makes the building (or for that matter, the art or the music) 'religious' and religious in a distinctly modern manner.

We cannot discuss these questions without tackling issues of a theological and liturgical character.[2] Briefly, how you worship changes the spaces you worship in. And vice - versa. These have been most dramatic in the Catholic rite. The Second Vatican Counsel encouraged the congregation to see what was going on. In terms of buildings, this pushed the Catholic liturgical spaces in the direction of John Calvin, with an absence of partitions, screens and alcoves.

Untitled from Churches (2012)
© Sylvia Grace Borda

A useful comparison can be made between two twentieth century cathedrals - the Liverpool Anglican cathedral (1902-1942) designed mainly by Gilbert Scott, in a gor-blimey Gothic Revival manner, and the Catholic Metropolitan Cathedral (with a first stage by Edwin Lutyens (1920s) and main structure by Frederick Gibberd. (1962-68). The agon of these two epic constructions and the struggles to come up with liturgically acceptable solutions foreshadow all the problems that can be seen in Northern Ireland today.[3]

Closely related to this - but a question of a different kind - is the theological question of the sacred. Is the church a sacred space or an ordinary space that may be used for worship - a domus dei, or a domus ecclesia. The difference between the two roughly aligns with how you regard the Roman practice, and the very concept of 'church'. Does the church inhere in the building or the congregation? But both sets of answers tend to coincide; the plainest whitewashed congregational chapel may be so lovingly cared for, polished and flower-adorned to have become as numinous as a Lady Chapel; and this seems to have little to do with 'architectural quality'. I write as one brought up in a Quaker atmosphere, to whom the almost wholly domestic interiors of country meeting houses epitomise 'the sacred'.[4]

Northern Ireland is the only place in Britain where new churches are actually being built. This makes it a kind of test-bed for church design, which can't be divorced from the design of congregations.

David Brett is Emeritus Reader at the University of Ulster and is author of many books on design and architectural history.

1. Here I am indebted to writers such as Hayden White, Jerzy Topolski and F.R Ankersmit; in Brett (1996.)67
2. In a longer piece this would also lead to a discussion of the foundational role of theology in all theories of art!
3. One of the proposals for the first Anglican Cathedral was by C.R.Mackintosh - a Glasgow Style epic comparable to Gaudi's Sagrada Familia.
4. See Brett, D The Plain Style 2nd ed. Lutterworth Press (2004)

Exterior, St Bernadette's Church, Belfast
Photograph © Rosaleen Hickey

Churches

Tour

Modernist Churches of Belfast Bus Tour

*with architectural historian Rosaleen Hickey
in association with Belfast Exposed*

**Sat 25 Oct, 11am, duration 1 hour
Meet at Ulster Museum, Stranmillis Road
Free (limited to 30 spaces, advance booking essential)**

This tour will frame Modernism, its impact and ideals within a local context. You will be introduced to a wide spectrum of examples of Modernist Churches from across Belfast and look at the extent the universalising tendencies of modernism erased the differentiation between Protestant and Catholic churches.

Interior, St. Andrews Church, Belfast
Photograph © Rosaleen Hickey

Churches

Talk

Modernism and the Church: A Northern Ireland Legacy

Sat 25 Oct, 12.30 – 1.30pm
Lecture Theatre, Ulster Museum, Stranmillis Road
Free admission

Modernist civic buildings in Northern Ireland have been characteristically imposing, often adopting brutalist architectural strategies. On the another hand, many modernist churches aspired to be ethereal and open - as revealed by 'Churches', the 2012 exhibition commissioned by Belfast Exposed Photography Featuring Sylvia Grace Borda's photographs of Modernist Churches throughout Northern Ireland.

This discussion will look at the social and aesthetic impact of modernity on church architecture. Given their reputation as the most traditionalist of institutions, what shaped the adoption by churches of a modernist aesthetic?

Speakers:
Sylvia Grace Borda
Artist, 'Churches, Coming to the Table',
Research Fellow, University of Stirling
Pauline Hadaway
Researcher, University of Manchester,
ex-director of Belfast Exposed Photography
Chair **Alastair Donald**
Project director, British Pavilion,
Venice Architecture Biennale 2014

Avoniel School, 1933-35
Photograph © Dr Paul Larmour

SCHOOLS

ABSORBING MODERNITY

1914-2014

Schools

Dr Paul Larmour
Modern schools in Belfast: The Work of R.S. Wilshere

Reginald Wilshere (1888-1961) was an English architect skilled in school design who moved to Northern Ireland in 1926 to take up the position of Belfast Education Architect, a post he held until his retirement in 1954. During his years in Belfast he transformed school architecture in the city. In place of the many small one-to-two-room, dimly lit, and poorly ventilated schools that characterised Belfast in the nineteenth century, he built a series of 'modern' schools. These were based on a new type of school evolved in England, in which there was an emphasis on plentiful light and fresh air, with separate rooms for each class, and special rooms for certain subjects, all usually laid out around a quadrangle.

Early examples were in the prevailing Neo-Georgian style of the time, but the architectural treatment soon became more varied as the influence of contemporary Dutch, German, and Scandinavian design helped to shape what eventually became known as 'the famous Wilshere style'. By the end of the 1930s Wilshere was known as an expert in his field not only at a local level, but also wider afield; his Belfast schools were acknowledged as being amongst the best anywhere in the British Isles. Some of these inter-war schools have now been demolished - such as Finiston, Grove, and Grosvenor . However, the majority still stand, mostly fulfilling their original function. Among them are Fane Street, Mountcollyer, Riga Street, Elmgrove, Seaview, Avoniel, Nettlefield, Edenbrooke, Cliftonville, Carr's Glen, and Botanic. They are easily recognisable via their walls of rustic brickwork, large multi-paned windows, a mixture of flat roofs and hipped roofs,

the latter sometimes with red Roman tiles. Often they incorporate a few unusual details seemingly designed to appeal to the child.

Wilshere's service to educational building in Belfast spanned the 1920s to 1950s and saw him complete 37 new schools in all, as well as making a significant contribution to the city's housing stock in the years during and just after the Second World War. However, it is his series of 26 highly distinguished and very individual schools of the inter-war era which are his most enduring legacy. It has provided the city of Belfast with the most important body of work by any one modern architect.

Dr Paul Larmour is an architectural historian and Reader in Architecture at Queen's University Belfast.

McQuiston School, renamed School of Music, 1934-36
Photograph © Paul Larmour

Schools

Talk

Modern schools in Belfast: The Work of R.S. Wilshere
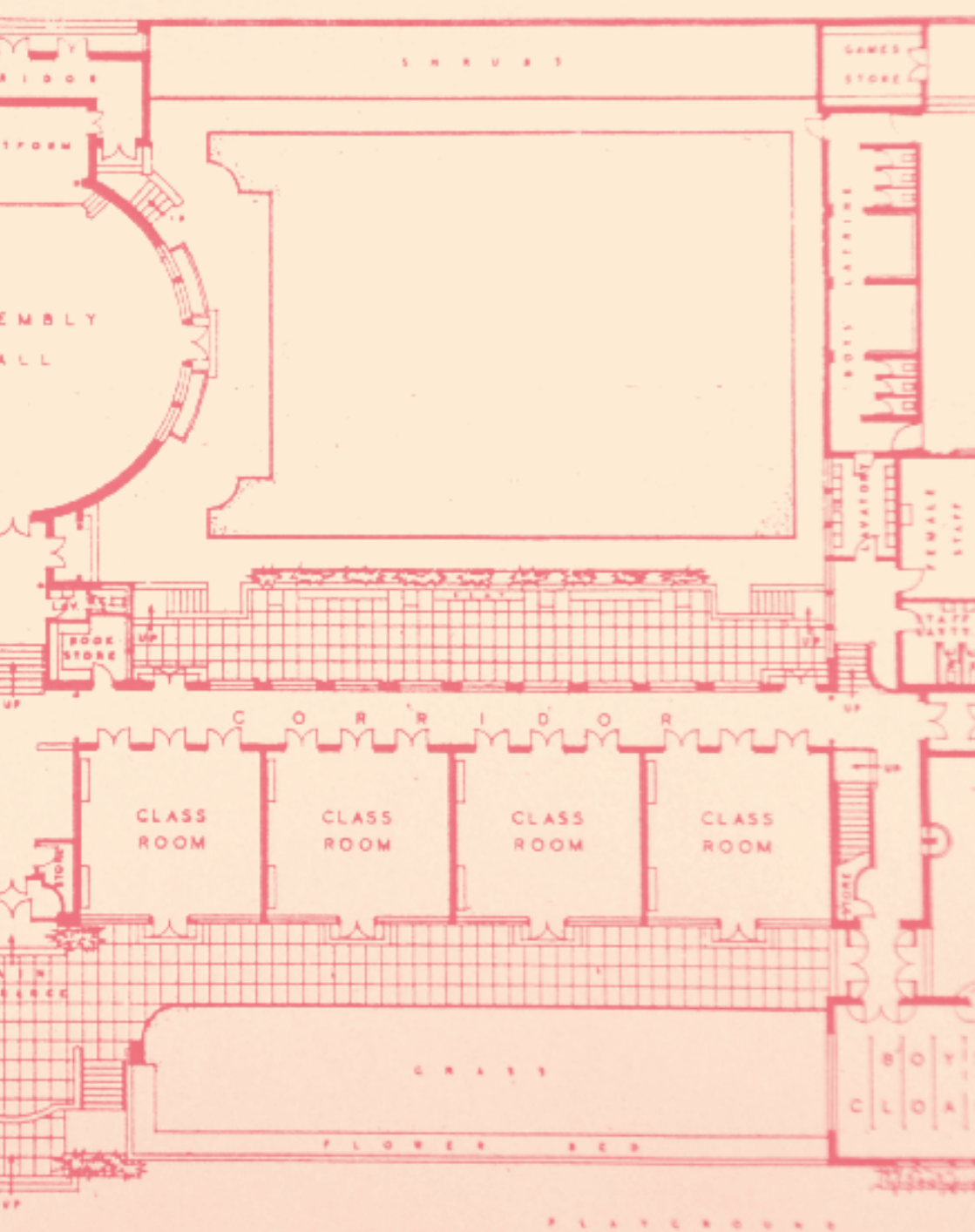
Thu 23 Oct, 6-7.30pm
Lecture Theatre, Ulster Museum
Free admission

Dr. Paul Larmour, architectural historian and Reader in Architecture at Queen's University Belfast (School of Planning, Architecture and Civil Engineering), gives an illustrated talk on the work of the English-born Belfast architect, RS Wilshere who is best remembered for his Belfast schools of 1920s and 1930s. Overseeing the design and construction of 26 new schools, he was recognised in his time as having designed the first modern schools anywhere in Ireland.

Plan, Grove School, 1937-39
Image courtesy of Dr Paul Larmour

GAMES
STORE

S H R U B S

RIDOR

TFORM

BOYS LATRINE

EMBLY
ALL

LAVATORY

FEMALE
STAFF

LOY

BOOK
STORE

UP

STAFF
LAVATO

UP

UP

C O R R I D O R

UP

UP

| CLASS ROOM | CLASS ROOM | CLASS ROOM | CLASS ROOM |

STORE

STORE

G R A S S

BOY
CLOA

FLOWER BED

UP

UP

P L A Y G R O U N D

LOOR   PLAN

Afterword

This brochure has been created for the Ulster Bank Belfast Festival at Queen's as part of Northern Ireland's international arts programme. The essays, exhibitions and events in the brochure are part of the engagement with Absorbing Modernity 1914-2014, the theme of the Venice Architecture Biennale, 2014. Biennale director, the architect Rem Koolhaas, asked countries to explore the architecture created during the period to ascertain the impact of modernity. He declared that "in a time of ubiquitous google research and the flattening of cultural memory, it is crucial for the future of architecture to resurrect and expose these narratives."

Northern Ireland's collected response, developed by the British Council as part of the Belfast Festival at Queen's, has produced a series of fascinating exhibitions. Highlights include the Ulster Museum's Evolution amidst Revolution exhibition curated by architectural historian, Rosaleen Hickey which reveals previously unseen archives, photographs and plans to trace a hundred year history of one of Belfast's most iconic buildings.

Building for the Silver Screens curated by Michael Open shows how much we have lost in terms of the built environment in Northern Ireland specifically its cinema architecture. Open's extensively researched exhibition facilitated by National Museums Northern Ireland (NMNI) captures a bygone era when over 40 cinemas were operating in Belfast. Today the Strand Arts Centre Cinema stands as the last remaining example of modernist cinema architecture in Belfast.

During a similar period, RS Wilshere modernised and transformed building in Northern Ireland's education sector. Dr Paul. Larmour's illustrated talk at the Ulster Museum presents the huge contribution this underrated architect made to Northern Ireland - taking us through the wealth of the architect's work, the particularity of Wilshere designs, and stunning examples of his schools from interior to exterior.

Progressive ambitions in architecture are explored by PLACE, Northern Ireland's centre for the built environment. Looking at Craigavon 50 years after its birth - and particularly Brownlow, a modernist housing scheme - the exhibition at the Golden Thread Gallery reveals the bright ambitions for housing development in Northern Ireland in the post war period. Explored through archives and plans, this exhibition is also an opportunity to see the work of one of Northern Ireland's finest photographers, Victor Sloan. Having photographed Brownlow throughout his career, Sloan presents us with both his earlier and later work offering a compelling survey of changing times.

As well as Belfast Exposed building upon Churches, their 2012 exhibition of Sylvia Grace Borda's wonderful body of work, the other highlights of the festival are to be found on the screen: Forum for Alternative Belfast's film An Epoch translated into Space shows local architect Paddy Lawson's involvement with the Ulster Museum building; meanwhile the series of films curated by Susan Picken to be shown at Queen's Film Theatre and the Strand Cinemas have the effect of bringing to life the architecture of modernity.

Northern Ireland's engagement with Absorbing Modernity 1914-2014 has created an in-depth look at an important period in architecture and one that we can still learn so much from.

www.belfastfestival.com   Twitter: @BCouncil_NI
www.britishcouncil.org/arts   @StudyWorkCreate

Brochure design: Tom Hughes

Botanic Primary School
Photograph courtesy Dr Paul Larmour

ABSORBING MODERNITY

1914-2014