



Golden couple Riba medal given to Irish architects

Poets of concrete and magicians of brick, the Irish architects Sheila O'Donnell and John Tuomey have been named as the 2015 recipients of the Riba Royal Gold Medal, one of the world's most prestigious architecture awards. Both in their early 60s, they are among the youngest architects to win the gong, joining an illustrious list that

includes Frank Lloyd Wright and George Gilbert Scott, Norman Foster and Frank Gehry.

Founded in Dublin in 1988, their practice, O'Donnell and Tuomey, has worked over the past 30 years on schools and public housing, theatres and community centres, producing buildings that are characterised by their internal spatial power and an obsessive attention to the craft of making. From the Lyric Theatre in Belfast to London's new LSE student centre, their projects often stand as monolithic chiselled forms that contain an unfolding sequence of spaces.

Trained at University College Dublin,

where they met, O'Donnell and Tuomey worked in the London offices of James Stirling and Colquhoun & Miller before returning to Dublin in the early 80s, where they declared an intention to forge a new Irish architectural identity. It is a language that has continually evolved over the decades, drawing on sources from the ancient vernacular forms of Irish tower houses to classical villas, inflected with their interest in sharp, tortured geometries. O'Donnell and Tuomey's approach is refreshingly medieval, using materials that are cast and moulded, baked and ground.

As part of Group 91 Architects, they helped to spearhead the regeneration of the city's neglected Temple Bar and built the acclaimed Irish Film Centre there in 1992. Since then, they have been shortlisted for the Stirling prize a record five times.

Their LSE building in Aldwych, central London (pictured) is the favourite to win the Stirling prize this year.

"They have at no point rested on their laurels - nor are they likely to do so," said juror Joseph Rykwert.

Oliver Wainwright
Main photograph: Nigel Stead