

From the news editor

O'Donnell and Tuomey are deserving recipients of this year's Royal Gold Medal, says *Richard Waite*



No one would argue that Dublin's architects' architects Sheila O'Donnell and John Tuomey didn't

deserve to win the profession's most prestigious accolade. The husband and wife team who founded O'Donnell + Tuomey in 1988 are justifiably highly regarded for the way they craft buildings and how they have immersed themselves in every corner of 'architecture' – from their three-time appearance at the Venice Biennale to teaching at Harvard.

Over three decades, their work has developed style-wise 'from mannered Neoclassicism in the European vein, to a highly crafted low-tech vernacular, through to a boisterous Constructivism' – Niall McLaughlin's elegant words, not mine.

Their work is overflowing with dynamic spaces, combined with unwavering attention to detail.

As Mary Duggan, of Duggan Morris, says: 'There's a consistent high quality about their work.'

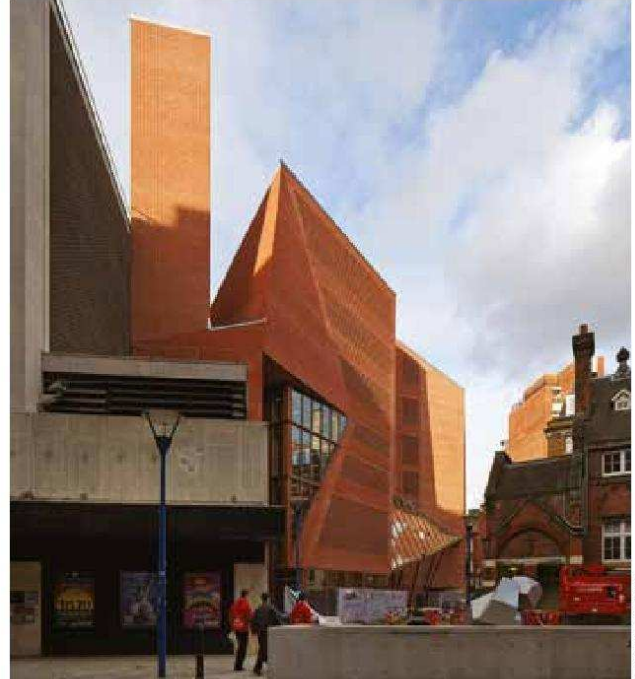
'Each project is a judicious response to site and context, with a clever choreography of spaces. Bold and polite. Nimble and clumsy.'

Yet, regardless of the plaudits, the practice still remains best known as the perennial Stirling Prize runner-up, repeatedly missing out on the award, despite having been shortlisted five times.

This year the firm's red-brick LSE student centre (*pictured*), which has been so cleverly whittled and carved to fit in with the surroundings, has been heavily backed and has become odds-on favourite with the bookies to scoop the 2014 gong for the 'best building in the UK'. Of course, favourites don't always win – especially in the Stirling Prize.

And landing the institute's Gold Medal is no guarantee that O'Donnell and Tuomey's much-publicised and much-visited building will succeed in ending their Stirling Prize hoodoo.

The medal, which was first awarded in 1848, recognises a lifetime's achievement and has been won by the likes of Mies van der Rohe, Norman Foster



DENNIS GILBERT

and Louis Kahn. It is not given in recognition of just a couple of showstoppers. Arguably the Saw Swee Hock student centre at the LSE is not even their best building. For some, the Lewis Glucksman Gallery in Cork (shortlisted in 2005) and the Lyric Theatre in Belfast (shortlisted in 2012) feature more ingenious, better-crafted spaces.

In 2011, the gossip from the judges was that the An Gaeláras cultural centre in Derry/Londonderry, with its 'circulatory intrigue' and impressive atrium, had almost made it, eventually coming a very close second to Zaha Hadid's Evelyn Grace school.

But hats off. They are one of the youngest ever recipients of the medal which, given that there are others such as Zaha Hadid and Denise Scott Brown who are still waiting, shows the importance of their works to date. Perhaps on 16 October they'll have something else to celebrate.

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Front page



Heatherwick Studio completes distillery for Bombay Sapphire

Heatherwick Studio has completed the conversion of a former paper mill in Hampshire into a distillery for Bombay Sapphire. The project involved adapting more than 40 historic buildings and the creation of two glasshouses, in which are grown exotic plants used to flavour gin.

IWAN BARN

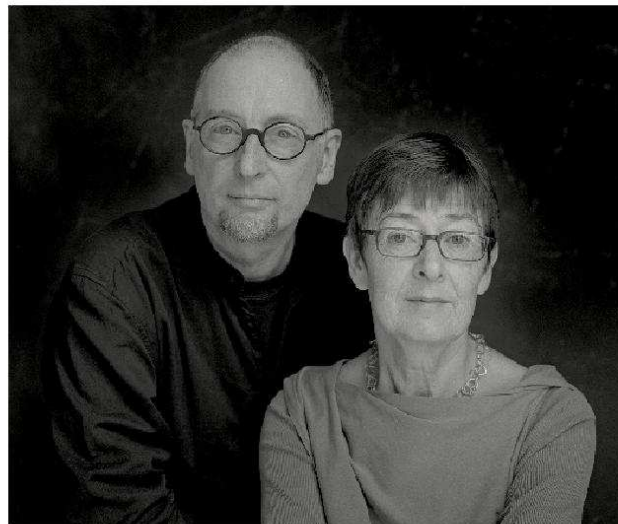
Sheila O'Donnell and John Tuomey win RIBA Royal Gold Medal

Five-times Stirling-nominated Irish husband-and-wife team recognised for lifetime's work as 'tour de force' in contemporary architecture

Irish architects Sheila O'Donnell and John Tuomey (*pictured*) have won the 2015 RIBA Royal Gold Medal in recognition of their lifetime's work.

The pair, described by the RIBA as a 'tour de force' in contemporary architecture, join the likes of Le Corbusier, Alvar Aalto and Mies van der Rohe in being conferred the prestigious award.

The Dublin-based married couple founded their practice O'Donnell + Tuomey in 1988, having worked for Stirling Wilford Associates and Colquhoun & Miller in London. Among the practice's most recent work is the 'brilliant'



Photographers' Gallery in Soho and 'exceptional' Saw Swee Hock Student Centre at the London School of Economics (LSE), which the architects hope will give them their first Stirling Prize victory. The practice has had five buildings shortlisted for the award since 1999, but has so far missed out on the prestigious prize. But its 'startlingly original' brick building at the LSE is currently the bookies' favourite at 11/8.

RIBA president Stephen Hodder said: 'O'Donnell + Tuomey's work is always inventive—striking, yet so well considered, particular to its place and brief, beautifully crafted and ever developing. It is an absolute joy and inspiration to hear them describe their work, and always a delight to experience one of their buildings.'

The two architects, both in their early sixties, are among the youngest recipients of the medal. They were nominated by Niall McLaughlin and 2014 Royal Gold Medallist Joseph Rykwert. >>

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Sheila O'Donnell and John Tuomey win Royal Gold Medal

McLaughlin and Rykwert praised O'Donnell and Tuomey's wider contribution to 'architecture' beyond their buildings.

The citation for the medal reads: 'They are, of course builders first of all: but they are writers and teachers as well as professionals, active through the Architectural Association of Ireland in whose recent revival they were instrumental, so that their presence on the Irish scene is a powerful one, and their influence as teachers and writers has been extremely important.'

When they collect the award in February, O'Donnell and Tuomey will be the third husband and wife team to receive the Royal Gold Medal, following on from Charles and Ray Eames in 1979 and Michael and Patty Hopkins in 1994.

The accolade is approved personally by the Queen and is given each year to a person or group of people who have had a significant influence 'either directly or indirectly on the advancement of architecture'.

ANTHONY COLEMAN

The Photographers' Gallery, London



Q+A WITH SHEILA O'DONNELL + JOHN TUOMEY

How do you feel about winning this award?

SHEILA We're humbled to find ourselves in such a company of heroes – architects whose work we have studied and from whose example we continue to learn.

JOHN It has really taken us aback to be ranked with people like Mies and Aalto.

Would you rather win the Royal Gold Medal or the Stirling Prize – for which you have now been nominated five times?

JOHN It is hard for us to say. We have never won the Stirling Prize so we can't compare it!

SHEILA With the Stirling Prize, it is like other competitions, where you go through a gradual process of submissions and rounds etc. But there is something very uplifting to receive something [out of the blue] and from your peers.

Architecture is sometimes very hard. But for us this award

O'Donnell + Tuomey's Stirling Prize-shortlisted schemes

1999

Ranelagh Multidenominational School, Ranelagh, Dublin



1999 + 2005 PHOTOS BY ALICE CLANCY

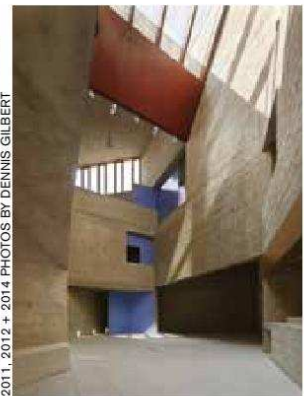
2005

Lewis Glucksman Gallery, University College Cork



2011

An Gaeláras, Irish language arts and cultural centre, Derry



2011, 2012 + 2014 PHOTOS BY DENNIS GILBERT

[recognises] that we have tried to dedicate our life to the subject of architecture and engage with its culture.

Have you placed a bet on yourself to win the Stirling Prize this year?

SHEILA Somebody has put money on us. But it wasn't us.

JOHN We should have put money on us before... when the odds were good.

You worked with James Stirling at the start of your career. What did he teach you?

JOHN Initially he was my hero, but he became like an uncle. By osmosis or contagion, I've learned to stick with your concept the whole way through. You have to be the last man standing. Believe in the project. Focus. Stay with it.

He also warned me that you should only expect to build one in 12 projects you design. He was not that wrong.

What have you got left to do as a practice?

SHEILA We feel we are getting started. Emergence takes a lot longer in architecture than other fields. I would like to work on bigger schemes and would love to do more social housing.

JOHN Can we now be labelled as having emerged? All of our work is very intensive but we have never got beyond schemes for medium-sized buildings. I'd like to design something more strategic – where something gets going.

Is being an architect harder now than it used to be?

SHEILA Practice is getting harder. It is not just in architecture – everything is increasingly regulated. Everybody has to be more trained and do more CPD. And winning work is getting harder. It is frustrating that you have to have done 10 of everything [before you get considered] and there are so many more boxes to tick.

JOHN We are specialists in non-specialism. But it is hard to make the value of that understood. People want to know you've

done it before. Yet some of the best buildings in the world have been done by people who have never designed that kind of building before.

How do you feel about the competition process?

JOHN Every project in the office has come through competitions. Our only private commissions have been for houses. We wouldn't have an office if it wasn't for contests.

It's great to win but it's exhausting when we lose. Actually I absolutely hate them – but we need the eggs.

SHEILA It is such a trap to do competitions – but I can't imagine life without them.

How does teaching influence yourselves and the practice?

JOHN We teach to keep our own minds open and keep our responses springy. We both actually like students.

The thing I enjoyed about the students in the US was how productive they were, especially

with their hands. There is a wonderfully artisan feel there.

No woman has ever won the Royal Gold Medal on her own.

Is it becoming any easier for women in the profession?

SHEILA Things are changing. Before founding O'Donnell + Tuomey [in 1988] I set up on my own. At the time I was the only practice headed by a woman.

But the women are coming – the winner of this year's Gold Medal is 50 per cent woman. It probably won't be too long before it is a 100 per cent winner.

My advice to any young woman about to begin a career in architecture is the same I'd give to anyone. It is about tenacity and hanging in here. Only do it if you love it.

You have to accept that architecture is very broad and touches on so many aspects, from sociological to technological.

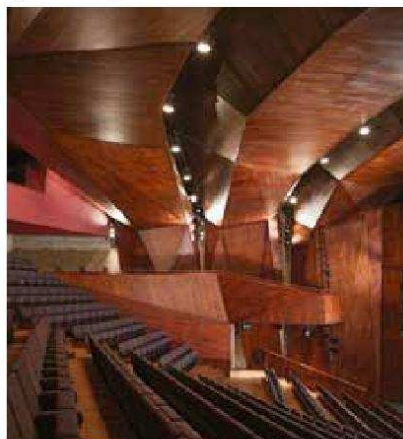
Women can handle the complexity of these issues and pull together all the strands as easily as a man.

2012

2014



Lyric Theatre, Belfast



Saw Swee Hock Student Centre, LSE, London



Astragal

Popular Open House

This year's **Open House London** was the most popular ever, with numbers up 35 per cent on last year. Buildings by **Foster** and **Rogers** proved most popular. About 7,500 visited **Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners'** newly-completed Leadenhall Building, while some 7,000 took a look around **Foster + Partners'** 2004 Stirling Prize-winning Gherkin. The most popular building was the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, with about 15,000 visitors over the weekend. But buildings outside central London didn't pull quite such large crowds. Just two people joined a Saturday

afternoon tour of **David Adjaye's** Stephen Lawrence Centre in Deptford. Meanwhile, it looks like the Walkie Talkie has sprouted a particularly apt antenna in **Matt Yeoman** of Buckley Gray Yeoman's picture taken from RSHP's Cheese Grater.



Ooray for Hollywood

Former FAT director **Charles Holland's** new practice **Ordinary Architecture** has been playing with Los Angeles' famous 'HOLLYWOOD' sign. The practice's installation, which formed part of the **On the Road** festival in the US city made it appear that the famous letters had come toppling down the hillside.

Large white letters were placed along the trail leading up to the sign and viewfinders installed that made it appear that the letters were missing from the hillside. The practice said: 'Whilst enjoying an inherent preoccupation with larger-than-

life signage, our installation attempts to satisfy the desire of every visitor in their impossible mission to reach the elusive sign. The accompanying viewfinders build a playful narrative, which suggests that the letters have tumbled down the hill, and at the same time imagines how the loss of such an landmark might affect this legendary vista.'

Parametric pieces

Earlier this month we reported on the 3D-printed chess set created for the launch of **Open House London**, whose pieces were representations of some of London's iconic buildings.

Now **Zaha Hadid** has also decided that if you want to say something about architecture, say it with a chess set. Zaha Hadid Design's Field of Towers set reduces several of the practice's towers to a parametric chess pieces. Part of her debut homeware collection, which launched at **Harrods**, it is yours for just £4,860.



Contest of contests

It seems the contest to design the new **Guggenheim Helsinki** (AJ 06.06.14) might not be the most popular architectural contest after all. An eagle-eyed reader pointed out that the 1992 **Future Bauhaus – European Architecture Student Competition** attracted 1,733 entries, just topping the Guggenheim's 1,715.

