

■ Designed by O'Donnell and Tuomey Architects: clockwise from left, The Lyric Theatre, Belfast; the LSE student centre, London; and the Ranelagh Multi-Denominational School, Dublin

Irish pair win top architecture prize

Dublin-based couple recognised as being at vanguard of contemporary architecture

FRANK McDONALD
Environment Editor

Multiple award-winning Dublin-based architects Sheila O'Donnell and John Tuomey are to receive Britain's Royal Gold Medal in recognition of their lifetime's work as a "tour de force in Irish and British architecture".

Regarded as the world's most prestigious architecture award, personally approved by Queen Elizabeth II, it is given by the Royal Institute of British Architects (Riba) to those who have had a significant influence on the advancement of architecture.

Ms O'Donnell and Mr Tuomey are only the third and fourth Irish citizens to win the Royal Gold Medal, after Michael Scott in 1975 and engineer Peter Rice in 1992.

Previous husband-and-wife winners include Charles and Ray Eames (1979) and Michael and Patricia Hopkins (1994).

Awarded since 1848, previ-

ous Royal Gold Medal winners include American deconstruction wizard Frank Gehry (2000), prolific modernist Norman Foster (1983), the extraordinarily influential Frank Lloyd Wright (1941) and Gothic revivalist Sir George Gilbert Scott (1859).

"We're humbled to find ourselves in such a company of heroes," the Irish pair said. "We believe in the social value and the poetic purpose of architecture and the gold medal encourages us to prevail in this most privileged and complicated career."

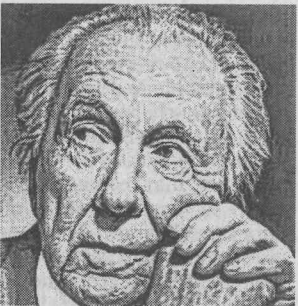
Riba president Stephen Hodder said they were "at the vanguard of contemporary Irish architecture".

Their work was "always inventive, striking yet so well-considered, particular to its place and brief, beautifully crafted and ever developing".

They set up O'Donnell + Tuomey Architects in 1988, a bleak time in Ireland, having previously worked together in



"We're humbled to find ourselves in such a company of heroes" Sheila O'Donnell and John Tuomey



■ Frank Lloyd Wright won the Royal Gold Medal in 1941

London for internationally renowned architects Stirling Wilford Associates and Colquhoun & Miller, after graduating from the UCD School of Architecture.

"Their new practice coupled Sheila's quiet, studied 'rationalism' alongside John's fluent, rhetorical 'constructivism' and through their buildings, publications, exhibitions and teaching they have forged a confident new identity for Irish architecture," Riba said.

In the early 1990s, O'Donnell + Tuomey Architects were part of the Group 91 consortium of architects who drew up the masterplan for Temple Bar in Dublin.

Their first major project, the Irish Film Institute in Eustace Street, won acclaim for its dynamic re-working of the Quaker Meeting House.

Their early work, from a disaggregated private home in Navan, Co Meath to the Ranelagh Multi-Denominational School in Dublin showed how public housing and community buildings "provided the canvas for them to experiment and evolve their unconventional creative approach and celebrated style", according to Riba.

More recent projects include the modest but brilliantly realised Photographers' Gallery in London's Soho and their Saw Swee Hock Student Centre for the London School of Economics (LSE), a veritable brick riot just off Lincoln's Inn Fields that is loved by its users.

O'Donnell and Tuomey have been shortlisted for Riba's Stirling Prize a record five times: for the Ranelagh Multi-Denominational School (1999), the Glucksman Gallery at UCC (2005), An Gaeláras in Derry (2011), the Lyric Theatre in Belfast (2013) and now the LSE student centre.

It seems highly probable that they will win the Stirling Prize when it is announced next month.

They have also exhibited three times at the Venice Architecture Biennale and continue to teach at the UCD School of Architecture, where Tuomey is professor of architectural design.

They will be presented with the 2015 Royal Gold Medal at a special event at the Riba's headquarters in Portland Place, London, on February 3rd, 2015, 40 years after it was awarded to the last Irish recipient, Michael Scott.