

Architects win gold for design of Lyric Theatre in Belfast

O'Donnell + Tuomey awarded the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland's highest honour



The Lyric Theatre in Belfast. Picture: Dennis Gilbert

WED, 08 DEC, 2021 - 09:50

EVE KELLIHER

The Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (RIAI) has today awarded the RIAI Gold Medal (2010-2012) to O'Donnell + Tuomey, for the Lyric Theatre in Belfast.

The medal was presented by RIAI President Ciaran O'Connor FRIAI to Sheila O'Donnell and John Tuomey, co-founders of the practice.



The Lyric Theatre. Picture: Dennis Gilbert

This is the second RIAI Gold Medal for O'Donnell + Tuomey who were previously awarded for the Ranelagh Multi-Denominational School.

Founded by Sheila O'Donnell FRIAI and John Tuomey FRIAI, O'Donnell + Tuomey is a studio-based practice, with offices in Dublin, Cork and London.



Picture: Dennis Gilbert

Standing on sloping site between Belfast's brick streetscape and the serpentine parkland of the River Lagan, the design of the Lyric is a response to site, setting and context.

The building's striking irregular shape is a direct response to these conditions. Materials have been chosen to endure and for their craftsmanship and this extends to the rich timber-lined auditorium.

The RIAI Gold is the highest honour in Irish architecture and has been presented by the RIAI since 1934 for a design of exceptional merit by an RIAI architect, in Ireland or internationally.



Sheila O'Donnell and John Tuomey. Picture: Al Higgins

The project must be completed within a defined three-year period and the medal is awarded several years after completion so that the success of the building can be confirmed by the passage of time.

In a message to the winners and the RIAI, President Michael D. Higgins said architecture was "an invaluable gift to society".

"As a society we place enormous trust in our architects, charging them with visualising and designing the buildings which shape the environment in which we live our daily lives.



UCC Hub, Cork, by O'Donnell Tuomey Architects. Picture: Jed Niezgoda

"Our architecture not only reflects the contemporary moment in which it was built. It also captures that moment for future generations, allowing them a greater understanding of the past from which the modern age has flowed. That is an invaluable gift to society, and a great responsibility for all those charged with the creation and construction of the edifices which define our landscapes."

The Lyric Theatre was the subject of a design competition won in 2003 by O'Donnell + Tuomey, noted the jury citation.

"The architects then engaged in an intense and extensive dialogue with client and users before being novated in 2009 to join the main contractor for a two-year construction period," it added.

"Viewed after a first decade in service the Lyric today is a deeply considered and exquisitely crafted building that responds to and engages with its physical and cultural contexts and enriches both.

"It combines the welcome of arrival with the drama of movement and the surprise of discovery on many levels.



UCC Hub, Cork, by O'Donnell Tuomey. Picture: Jed Niezgoda

"It integrates public functions and programmatic requirements in a generous, innovative and mutually supportive way and it serves as a focal point for the local community and the wider creative community of the city and beyond. This distinguished piece of Architecture is a very worthy and welcome addition to the ranks of the winners of the RIAI Gold Medal."



St Angela's, Cork, ODT. Picture: Alice Clancy

The practice has an international reputation for its engagement with complex urban situations and sensitive landscapes. They have completed schools and university buildings, including award-winning work at University College Cork, theatres and cinemas, community centres and social housing, art galleries and libraries in Ireland, the UK and throughout Europe.

Winners of more than 120 awards, completed schemes include The Glucksman Gallery in Cork, the regeneration of Dublin's Temple Bar (with Group 91) and its Irish Film Institute and National Photography Centre, Irish Language Cultural Centre in Derry, Lyric Theatre in Belfast, Photographers' Gallery and LSE Student Centre in London.

O'Donnell + Tuomey has exhibited six times at the Venice Architecture Biennale. They are working on a new cultural quarter under construction at the Olympic Park in East London, including new buildings for V&A East Museum and Sadler's Well Dance Theatre, and a number of social housing projects for Dublin City Council.

Current projects include an Academic Hub and Library for TU Dublin at Grangegorman campus, the Swords Cultural Quarter, and a new School of Architecture for the University of Liverpool.

www.odonnell-tuomey.ie