

Meeting House Square: Group 91 / Paul Keogh Architects

Designed by Paul Keogh Architects, Meeting House Square lies at the confluence of several pedestrian routes through Temple Bar. It forms the heart of the secondary meandering path, running from the new Curved Street through the quarter's maze, that supports the main East-West axis of Fleet Street and East Essex Street.

It was built on a previously derelict plot of land, most recently used as a surface car park and takes its name from buildings which form two of its four sides - the Presbyterian Meeting House (1728), now the Ark and the nineteenth century Quaker Meeting House, transformed into the Irish Film Centre in 1992.

More of an outdoor room than a square, it was designed primarily as a space for cultural activities and open-air performance, including film screenings and theatre productions. Originally MHS should have opened out further onto East Essex street and would have been supported by the linear pedestrian throughway that the Poddle Bridge promised but these plans had to be revised owing to the protection of two listed buildings at the Essex street end and the refusal of planning permission respectively. It is bounded on all four sides by cultural facilities - the Ark to the east, the Gallery of Photography and the Irish Film Centre to the south, a mixed-use building housing a restaurant and the Gaiety School of Acting to the west and the DIT School of Photography / National Photography Archive to the north.

The Ark: Group 91 / Shane O'Toole and Michael Kelly Architects

The Ark first opened in September 1995 and was Europe's first purpose built cultural centre for children. The brief for the architects was a children's centre with a dual function: the provision of theatre, workshop and additional spaces for the Ark itself and the capacity for a theatre that opened out onto MHS.

Originally a Presbyterian Meeting House, the site for the Ark was also used as a printing works and a warehouse. Although listed, its entire interior had been gutted years before. All that remained was the attractive six-bay façade and the plan outline of the original building. The latter became the model for the new design and extensive conservation work, including wiggling and tuck-pointing the façade, was carried out during reconstruction.

The Ark's façade to MHS is even more impressive than its original on Eustace Street. Faced in brick and stone, it is suspended and hovers over the paving of the square. The attic workshop becomes the theatre's 'crown' and the Santiago Calatrava designed metal cantilevered curtains complete its magnificence.

The Gallery of Photography: O'Donnell and Tuomey Architects

The Gallery of Photography is a wafer thin building grafted onto a blank brick wall of the Irish Film Centre. Its reflective façade is of Portland stone, a material used in many

historic buildings in Dublin. The façade itself forms an abstract image of a camera with the large central window symbolising the camera lens and operating as a screen for films and photographs projected from the National Photography Archive opposite.

The different materials used in the windows create a lively mix of visual effects between transparency and opaqueness, which have associations with the nature of photography. The basement houses the darkrooms, the ground floor contains a reception and office space while the upper floors of the gallery can be sectioned off with sliding screens, which double the exhibition space for larger exhibitions.

The Irish Film Centre: O'Donnell and Tuomey Architects

Although not directly facing out onto MHS, the Irish Film Centre's presence is felt through its discreet entrance beside the Gallery of Photography. It was formerly the Quaker Meeting House and consists of buildings varying in age, condition and architectural quality organised around a covered yard. The building accommodates all aspects of film culture with two cinemas, the national film archive, a restaurant / bar and classrooms and offices for various functions.

The brief was in large part determined by the existing Quaker buildings and the budget did not allow for a complete restoration. The result was that decorative work was only conducted in some parts of the buildings while other parts were restored with great care. Both cinemas were housed within the walls of existing rooms. New elements such as the maple cabinet containing the acoustic insulation in cinema one were added to these rooms. The principal areas of new building were the foyer, the projection room and the archive.

The main entrance from Eustace Street leads one down a long, tunnel-like and floor-lit corridor towards the glass-covered yard of the foyer. The floor of the foyer is limestone in concentric circles separated by steel bands. A new building made of smooth red brick on Sycamore Street contained the archive. The limestone-clad projection box is at a high level between the two cinemas and its slender supporting columns form an informal portico leading to MHS.

The Gaiety School of Acting: Group 91 / Paul Keogh Architects

This mixed-use building forms the west side of MHS and in addition to the school houses the Eden restaurant on the ground floor. It was designed in response to the new enclosure of the square itself, including the preservation of the brick building on East Essex Street and its aim was to further animate to urban space before it.

The School of Acting occupies the top two floors in which the large rehearsal studios address the street, while the offices are smaller and address the street. Changing rooms and showers are accommodated in the stone service tower.

Photography Centre: Group 91 / O'Donnell and Tuomey Architects

The building complex of MHS brings together varied but related aspects of photographic culture - two buildings with a mixture of photography uses face each other across the space and are linked by images projected from the archive onto the screen window of

the gallery. A logical interdependent relationship of function and use is established and maintained across this public room.

Completed in June 1996, the archive and school are housed in a five-storey-over-basement red brick building on the north side of MHS. Small repetitive elements such as box-hole windows punctuate the façade lending a visual rhythm to its public face. The arched form of the building mark a formal entrance as well as 'bridging the gap' between MHS and Essex Street East.