

The new Butler Gallery at the Evans Home: A transformative project for Kilkenny.

The Butler Gallery at Evans Home was designed by McCullough Mulvin Architects under the supervision of Director Ruth O Herlihy. McCullough Mulvin are Ireland's foremost architects working to make a contemporary and culturally appropriate architecture of change to existing buildings.

To take on new uses, beautiful old buildings have to give of themselves, but somehow remain intact, their original character legible under the new one. That one sentence is characteristic of the whole idea of Kilkenny. The Evans Home- now the Butler Gallery- was an old almshouse standing in a walled garden-in one sense a typical green stony Irish place, a simple building which, on closer inspection, reveals a muted complexity typical of the city. Everything here was about continuities. The project became an essay in sustainability- in energy, but more particularly in its re-use of existing resources - and a form of cultural sustainability in agitating function in an old place, moving things on to make artspace in a monastery garden.

Making a place to exhibit art in architecture – one within or around the shell of the other- is a fluidly open process; to be successful, architects have to think like artists-open to possibility, in the realm of and/or; different ways of moving and looking came from the brief- and found a willing engine in the existing building. The architectural response encompassed -Russian doll-like- the interior, then the connection between inside and out, and the relationships between the almshouse and the walled garden. Spaces were excavated from cellular rooms in all three blocks, but not in a way that reflected the symmetry of the plan; the South wing became a double height temporary gallery; two rooms were connected in the central block to form a café space; two rooms in the North block made an education space and lecture room. Secondary linkages were formed by opening walls on one or the other side of the chimney breasts, creating new circulation routes within galleries.

The exterior is only slightly changed, but the gardens - a walled Paradise where art could be displayed - were developed to become a series of discrete spaces made by vegetation and walks like the early formal garden in Rothe House across the river. The small square rooms in the Evans echo the forms and shapes of the garden enclosures- they are without hierarchy- a chessboard of possible artspaces, some enclosed, some in the open air. The garden offered an opportunity to explore the archaeology of the site, but also to open it up and link the Butler back to the river and the city.

TEXT McCULLOUGH MULVIN ARCHITECTS ©

PROJECT TEAM	
Client	Kilkenny County Council
Architects	McCullough Mulvin Architects
Conservation	Carrig Conservation
Structural Engineers	O'Connor Sutton Cronin
M & E Consultants	Noel Lawlor Consulting Engineers
Quantity Surveyors	Brendan Merry & Partners
Archaeology	Archaeological Projects
PSDP	Linesight
Fire	Michael Slattery Associates

Landscape Architect	Stephen Diamond Associates
Main Contractor	Mythen Construction