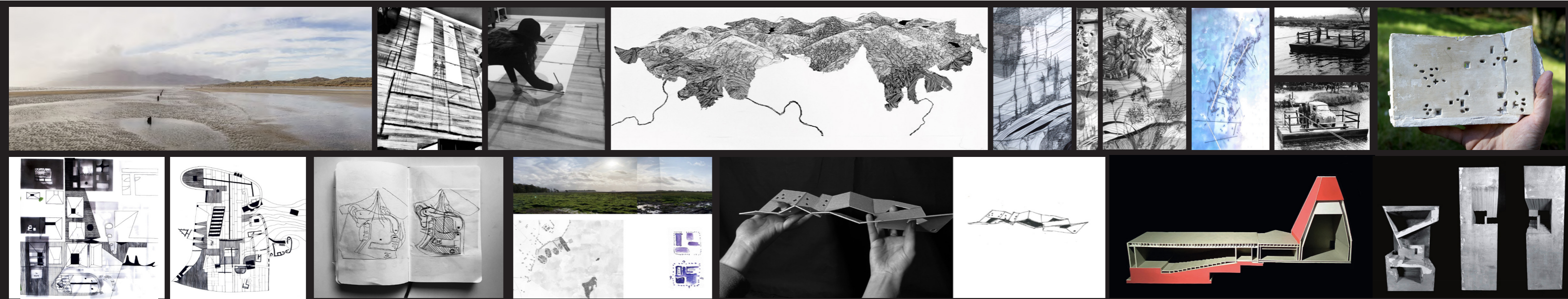


WaterLands III



Our studio has explored the remarkable aqueous landscapes of Northern Ireland over the last three years: the rivers, loughs, reservoirs, coastlines, estuaries and boglands. We have traced the complete coastline facing the Atlantic in a twelve-meter drawing, charted the inner space of Lough Neagh in a large cathedral window-like mosaic of watercolours, and mapped the contours of the Mourne Mountains with their hidden pockets of water in a series of vertical Japanese scroll drawings. Through this we have aimed to explore what is a complex physical and associative landscape: rich in potential, but often overlooked and relatively unseen.

This year we began at the source of the Bann, in the Mourne Mountains, which we followed as it flows towards Lough Neagh, and beyond to the swan haven of Lough Beg. We later circled back to consider the overall relationship of Newcastle, the Mournes and the sea. The different communities, ecologies and narratives of these unique places have become slowly revealed to us in our journey across these extraordinary landscapes.

We take inspiration from the cartographer, writer and artist Tim Robinson who explored and documented the west coast of Ireland in over four decades of work. Through continually walking the landscape, writing about it in forensic detail in his notebooks, and gathering the knowledge implicit in the Irish

placenames and the memories of the people living there, he made a remarkable set of hand-drawn maps and beautifully evocative books. In drawing with words, as well as with line, and working within the space of language, seen as a terrain, he offers great inspiration to anyone seeking to get to know a landscape.

Our studio is named after a glossary in Robert Macfarlane's book *LANDMARKS*, in which he gleaned words from his travels that describe water through different languages and local dialects. He cites Robinson's remarkable abilities in uncovering and understanding landscapes, in what he calls his ability to 'deep-map'. "Language is fossil poetry", he quotes from Emerson. Stone was once water, and alive with organisms, when we begin to think through a different register of time, such as geology.

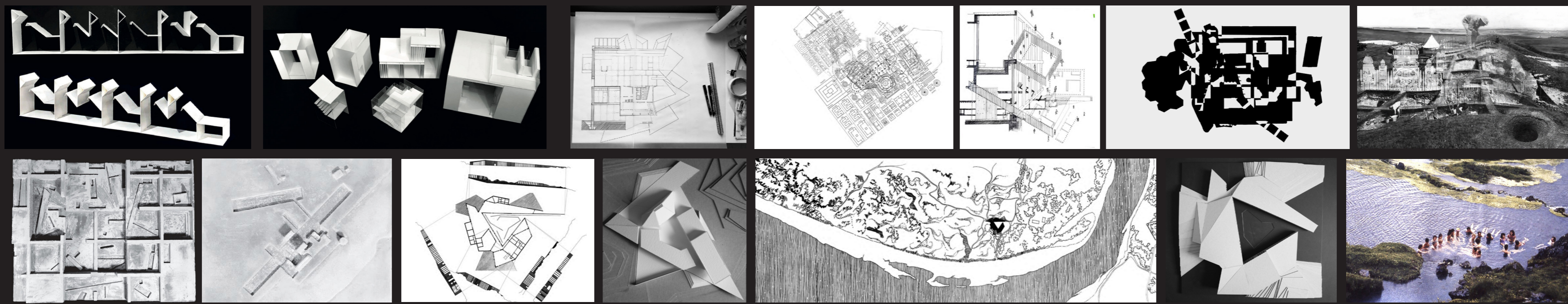
Water is present in all aspects of our studio. The hydrological cycle as the continuous process of the homeostasis of water is akin to that of the nature of design: the circling in of ideas like clouds forming, the constant return to beginnings, and the interdependency of things that shape an ecology. Patrick Geddes' valley section, and his approach - that was to later contribute to initiating the basis of landscape and planning as disciplines - is never far from our thoughts. For Geddes everything begins in 'the survey': the careful understanding of what already exists in a place, through engaging all of our senses.

To think climatically, biologically, socially, environmentally, as well as through narrative - an aspect of his work which is often overlooked.

Students work through a series of initial projects which set out the basis of an evolving conversation. In semester one we started by looking at a 15th century painting, reinterpreted as a form of social distancing, in order to propose a LookOut/LookIn space. Then the chapter titles of the book *Living Mountain* by Nan Shepherd became the organisational structure for a series of long scroll drawings (redeployed from the Cairngorms) to make a collective abstracted map of the Mourne Mountains. All of these projects searched for a translation of ideas, across different historical periods, and using different media. Visitors to provoke and stimulate our studio conversation this year included: Marc McGowan from Berlin, talking to us about his work and about Shinohara's houses in Japan; Professor Elizabeth Hatz from Sweden about the nature of designing for the shifting patterns of light manifest in a plan, and the beauty of all of its hidden colours and shadows; and Nigel Peake from Ballytristan on everything from how Hemingway placed a table in a room, to the importance of how the edges of a drawing should be seen as a particular landscape. A wide and wonderful window of ideas and inspiration for us to look through, amidst our continuing lockdown world.

We explored Le Corbusier's church at Ronchamp as a landscape (rather than seen through the limitations of a prescriptive linear history); as both a hollowed-out mountain and as water gatherer. Taking the fragment of a plaster model of the church made in Le Corbusier's studio in Paris as a starting point (which is now in the Drawing Matter collection), it opened up a whole set of new readings and interpretations by the students. Inspired in part by *Drawing Matter's Alternative Histories*, Ronchamp was brought into our studio conversation in unpredictable and unexpected ways. The more we let the drawings explore it, the more we discovered. The plan could be read at different scales, and as different figures immersing from the drawings. We followed this by redrawing and rethinking key contemporary buildings. To get to know them beyond the obsession of architecture seen only as images, and to act as possible antecedents for the projects that would follow.

Our working method is essentially thinking through drawing. To explore the possibilities of a method of drawing that can combine different scales, different tactics and layers of abstractions. Not as an end in itself, but to search for buildings as poetic and enriching enablers of social space; as culturally and intellectually situated in ideas; which celebrate the materials and structures with which they are made; and which are responsive to the specifics of climate and place. We



see models as a form of drawing. While we are interested in the unique nature of the hand-drawn, and of capturing all of its tacit knowledge, all types of digital and analogue tools are used in the studio. These we see as both mutually supportive, and necessarily interdependent.

After the initial series of introductory projects, the students set off on their own unique trajectories across WaterLands, in which project briefs and ideas develop, as they attune with the research on the nature of each unique location and community we are studying.

The first year students celebrated the presence and qualities of the Upper Bann, as it winds (often ignored) through a series of small towns and different locations, making stepping stones of their individual water pavilions, before moving to the Silent Valley, deep in the mountains, to make a new educational and ecology centre. The second years explored a matryoshka-like range of scales in their projects, which dealt with the making of Art. They were introduced to artists teaching and working in the Belfast School of Art, for whom they had to design a studio on the southern edge of Lough Neagh. After this they moved up through increasing scales, to make an artist's and poet's collective in Lough Beg, and finally a gallery of Modern Art in Newcastle, facing the horizon of the sea.

The third and fifth year students worked together in what essentially were thesis primer proposals, developed through their own research, and the locations they identified on our journey. All the time they were collecting information and ideas, like Tim Robinson on his walks, and collaborating on strategic drawings. This dynamic, we called our 'socially distanced tango'. It short circuits the undergraduate to postgraduate gap which exists in most schools of architecture, disconnecting the first two parts of an architect's education. This is now bridged in our school's vertical teaching approach.

The final year students bookend the studio's demographic reach: all the way from a first year student, and across each of the individual year groups between this. Teaching in this way seeks to harness the expertise of the established postgraduate student in nurturing, mentoring and inspiring the intuitive and raw energy of a novice first year, and in turn that of the whole studio working together, in shaping one creative laboratory of practice.

Water was seen historically as a means of connection and communication. What to us today may seem distant or remote, was once well-connected, and well-travelled, through the now invisible infrastructure of the sea roads. Islands are connected both physically and philosophically by water, not disconnected

by water. The subtext of this year's studio was, Islands that are not Islands. Like the giant pools of water set amidst the massif of the Mourne Mountains - each one distinctively and individually shaped, but which form part of a much larger ecology - so too are our students connected through the creative ecology of our WaterLands studio. ○

Paul Clarke
Professor of Architecture
Ulster University

**'Running water never disappointed.
Crossing water always furthered something.
Stepping stones were stations of the soul.'**

Seamus Heaney

WaterLands III Studio

Professor Paul Clarke
Peter McNie

**Studio Lead
Lecturer**

Tiernan Allen
Keelan Brown
Aaron Cardwell
Hannah Douglas
Alannah Ferry
Zoe Gibson
Ella Herbison
Lauren Kane
Scott Kennedy
Ryan McBride
Mark McKerr
Rian McMahon
Natalia Mokras
Alvin Peniero
Daniel Reynolds

Students