



Casting Shadows

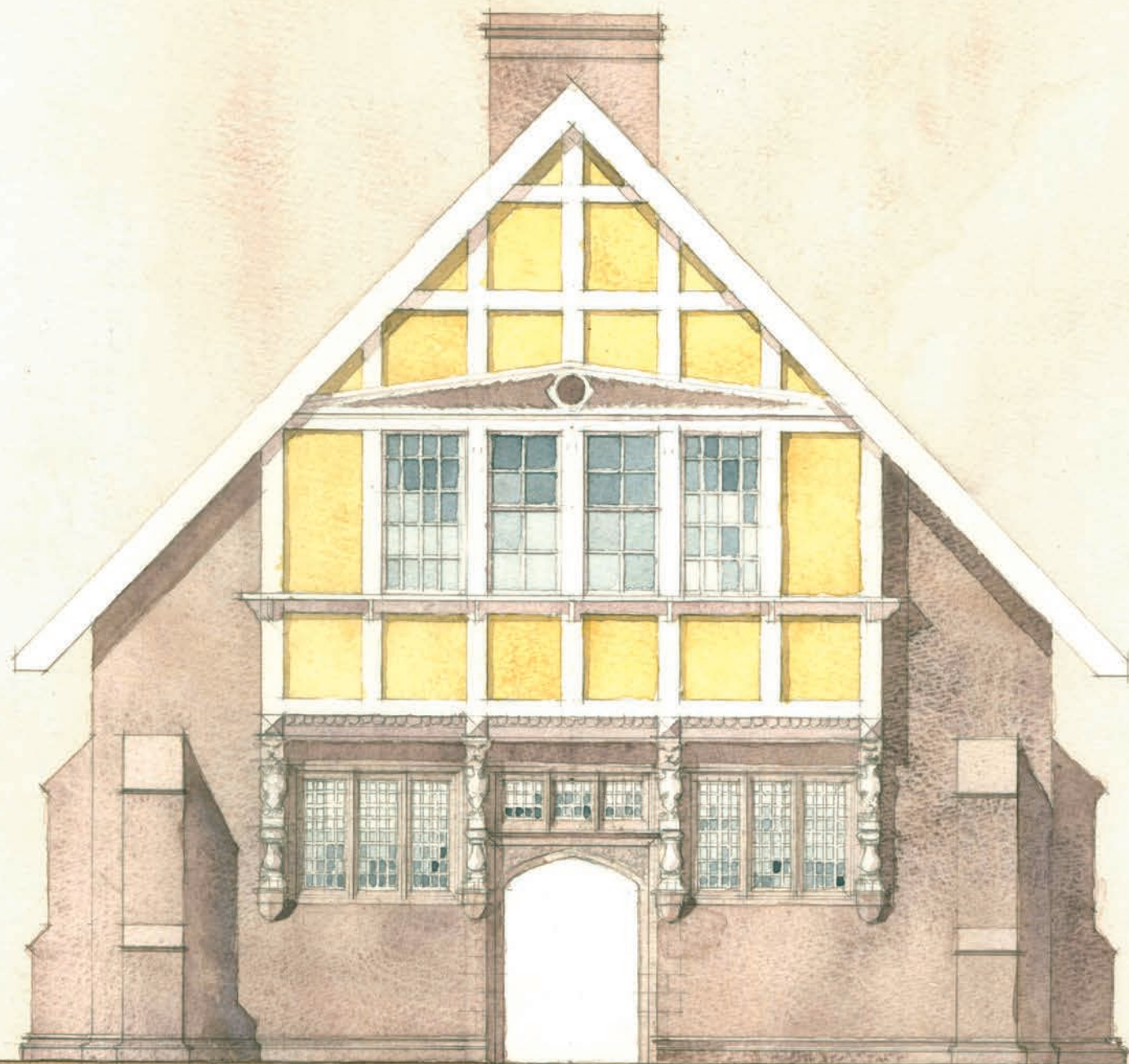
Architectural Drawing and
the Resurrection of the Capriccio

An Exhibition of the Drawings of Fergal MacCabe

Áras An Chontae, Tullamore
16-31 October 2014

Cover:
The house in High Street of Barrack Master Crawford,
Drawing: Fergal MacCabe

This Page:
Oxmantown Hall, Birr
Architect: J Franklin Fuller
Drawing: Fergal MacCabe



Architects draw to explore their designs, to convince their clients and to instruct their builders.

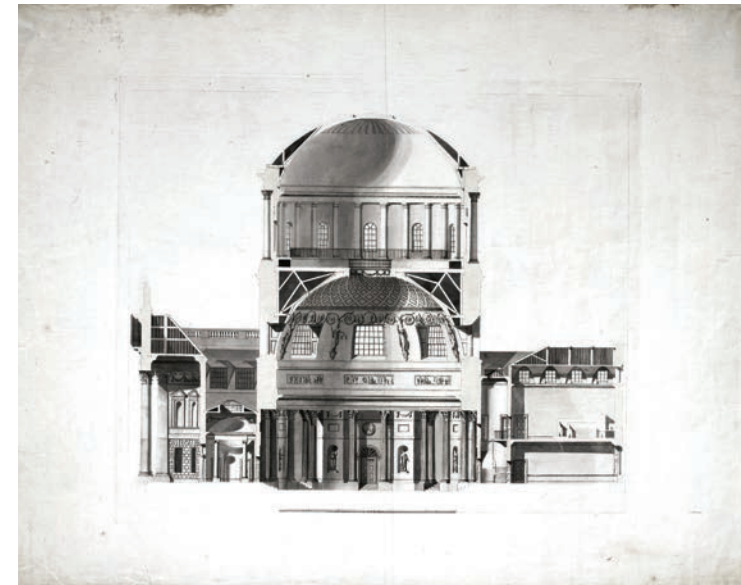
The floor plan of the Palace of Nur Adad in Babylon (illus.), incised on a clay tablet around 1850 BC, is the earliest known example of an architect conceptualising his creation by means of a scale drawing. From then until the Renaissance, architectural drawings were practical, two dimensional instructions and little more.

However, with the rediscovery of the Classical architecture of Greece and Rome and its popularisation by Palladio in 1540 in his four great books, the aristocracy of Europe wished to emulate this style in all its detail. This required the production of drawings which would not just set out floor plans and elevations, but which could illustrate a more rounded overview of the structure, particularly its ornamentation.

This demand led to the study of 'sciagraphy', or the art of representing cast shadows as realistically as possible in order to fully demonstrate the three dimensional character of the building and its detail. This technique became the stock in trade of every architect. Together, with a solid grounding in the canons of Classical architecture, these two disciplines laid the basis of all architectural training until the late 20th Century.

As skills improved, many of these wonderfully drawn and detailed studies became collectable for their own intrinsic quality. In Ireland, the elevational drawing of the Blue Coat School by Thomas Ivory, or the cross section of the Four Courts by James Gandon (illus.), are exquisite in their mixture of strength and delicacy but were matched by the work of many other Irish architects.

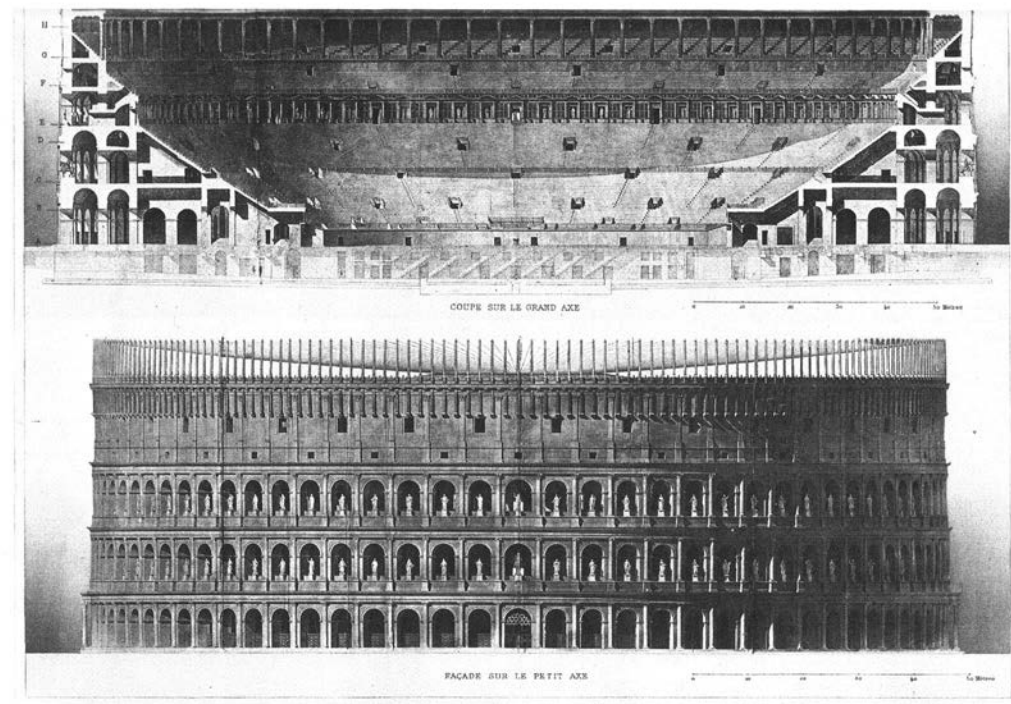
The floor plan of the Palace of Nur Adad in Babylon (illus.) incised on a clay tablet around 1850 BC



Cross Section of the Four Courts by James Gandon
© King's Inns Collection IAA

The finest drawings, however, were those produced by the students of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris in the late 19th Century. As part of their curriculum, it was obligatory to journey to Rome or Athens to study the great buildings of antiquity such as the Colosseum or the Parthenon and to produce a measured drawing, usually executed in pen and Chinese ink. The winner was awarded the "Grand Prix de Rome" and these magnificent drawings, particularly those of Louis Duc (illus.) go well beyond the mere recording of the structures to become works of art in their own right.

This emphasis on a grounded knowledge of drawing and the Classical tradition prevailed in Irish architectural schools also until about 1980, and the production of a well rendered Doric, Ionic or Corinthian facade in the Beaux Arts style was an essential rite of passage for every aspiring architect. The elevation of the façade of the temple of Fortuna Virilis in Rome, drawn in 1957, and included in the exhibition is a good example of what was expected of a student by the end of his or her first term.



THE COLISEUM
Cross-Section along Main Axis and Façade of Short Axis by Louis Duc



A DUBLIN CAPRICCIO

1. Bank of Ireland
2. Charlemont House

3. Nelson's Pillar
4. King's Inns

5. St. Paul's
6. Phoenix Column

7. St. George's
8. Dublin Castle

Fergal MacCabe studied at the School of Architecture, University College Dublin, from 1957 to 1963 and continues to practise his sciagraphic skills, draughtsmanship and watercolour technique to depict buildings in the Classical style, particularly those of his native Offaly. He is the winner of the Georgian Society's award for his elevational drawing of the south façade of Dublin Castle (illus.), which forms part of a series of privileged elevations of the great architectural assemblages of Dublin including Leinster Lawn, O'Connell Street and Trinity College.



Durrow Old Church, Fergal MacCabe



South façade of Dublin Castle, Fergal MacCabe



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|---|-------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| (a) KINNITY MAUSOLEUM | (b) DAINCEAN COURTHOUSE | (c) EARL OF ROSSE STATUE BIRR | (d) ST. BRIGID'S CLARA |
| (e) MARKET HOUSE TULLAMORE | (f) GLOSTER BALUSTRADE | (g) CUMBERLAND COLUMN BIRR | (h) ST. BRENDAN'S BIRR |
| (i) GLOSTER OBELISKS | (j) CLONMACNOISE | (k) KEEP AND MOAT BIRR CASTLE | (l) CHARLEVILLE CASTLE |
| (m) MARQUIS OF DOWNSHIRE STATUE EDENDERRY | (n) BUSERSTOWN TOWER | | |

Recently he has begun to explore the concept of the architectural capriccio which is a composition of imaginary or real architecture in a picturesque or dramatic setting. Sometimes familiar buildings are relocated to unfamiliar settings to allow a reappraisal of their qualities. He has won the Sullivan Graphics prize for his "*Dublin Capriccio*" (illus.) and his more recent "*Offaly Capriccio*" (illus.) and "*Buildings of Dun Laoghaire*" are included here also.



Saint Mella's Kell, Lemanaghan, Fergal MacCabe





Ambrogio Lorenzetti's *Effetti del Buon Governo*
The Bridgeman Art Gallery

In the Renaissance, the capriccio was a device used to promote or explore the concept of the ideal or Utopian city. An early example is the fresco of 1330 in the Palazzo Comunale in Siena by Ambrogio Lorenzetti (illus.) which depicts an idealised cityscape and is entitled *An Allegory of The Effects of Good Government in the City*. The best known example, however, is the depiction of the *Citta Ideale* (illus.) attributed to Luciano Laurana and dating from 1480-1490. Later, in the hands of Panini and Canaletto, the capriccio became a common device for the production of attractive compositions in the Classical manner - one of the finest examples being Panini's wonderful composition of *The Pantheon and other Monuments* (illus.).



Luciano Laurana's(?) *Citta Ideale*, The Bridgeman Art Gallery

Aristocrats on their Grand Tour wished to bring home souvenirs to display their familiarity with the Classical world. Paintings which displayed a range of familiar arches, obelisks, pediments or pyramids were much in demand and were provided by many Italian, particularly Venetian, painters of the 18th Century. However, it is also possible that artists of the time were concerned with the beautification of their cities and were attempting to stimulate debate and discussion by promoting ideas for civic improvements as Canaletto's *Capriccio Palladiano* (illus.) might suggest.



Panini's *The Pantheon and other Monuments*, The Bridgeman Art Library



Canaletto's *Capriccio Palladiano*, The Bridgeman Art Library

Many painters of the age, including Piranesi, Bellotto, Guardi and Marco Ricci, utilised the capriccio. Indeed, Ireland had its own practitioner in William Van der Hagen (active 1720-1745) whose *Capriccio with Pastoral Figures* is in our National Gallery and which displays an attractive scene of figures in a Classical setting.

In the 19th Century, France produced one of the most renowned practitioners, Hubert Robert (1733-1808), whose exercises in the depiction of decaying Classical buildings, usually in a rural setting (illus.), were very much attuned to the Romantic spirit of the age and were so popular that he earned the nickname “Robert des Ruines”.



Hubert Robert's *Architectural Capriccio with Figures*, ca.1750



John Martin's *The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah*

In Britain, Joseph Gandy (1771-1843) and John Martin (1789-1854) were skilled in the creation of vast architectural panoramas - Gandy in the assemblage of the buildings of Sir John Soane into a great unified composition, whilst Martin created enormous imaginary Babylonian cities to illustrate his apocalyptic religious visions of *Belshazzars Feast* or the *The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah* (Illus.).

The great Prussian architect, painter and city planner, Karl Friedrich Schinkel (1781-1841), also utilised the capriccio to explore his visions of an ideal urbanity by postulating images of cathedrals, similar in style to those of the Romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich or of the glories of Ancient Greek, and these studies influenced much of his built architectural work.

Latterly, the art of the capriccio has been revived by urban theorists such as Rob Krier and Leon Krier, Lucien Steil and others, both to explore architectural concepts and also as an artistic exercise in itself. However, one must suspect that the principal attraction of the capriccio, particularly for practising architects, is the freedom to create the world as they believe it should be, without all the complications and burdens of clients, town planners and public opinion. An ideal world indeed.



Portmeirion, North Wales, Sir Clough Williams-Ellis

There is, however, one outstanding example of a capriccio being realised as an actual project. The extraordinary village of Portmeirion (illus.) in North Wales, designed and developed by Sir Clough Williams-Ellis between 1925 and 1975, is an amazing confection of Baroque and Italian architecture created simply to provide delight and amusement and succeeds admirably.

Carl Laubin's *"Metiando Vivendum"*





The modern master of the capriccio genre is undoubtedly the American architectural illustrator, Carl Laubin (born New York 1947). His large paintings, particularly those which combine together the works of eminent architects such as Hawksmoor and Sir Christopher Wren, are much admired and sought after. His most recent major work *Vivendum* (by measure we live) (illus.) which depicts the entire canon of the works of Sir Edwin Lutyens (including those in Ireland), is produced here with his kind permission and represents the finest example of the resurrection of the capriccio in the present era.

The remainder of the exhibition features elevational renderings of Offaly buildings of architectural merit, drawings of the vernacular architecture of the County and capriccii of Dublin, Offaly and Dun Laoghaire.



Offaly County Council
Comhairle Chontae Uíbh Fhailí



Quaker Meeting House, Clara,
Drawing: Fergal MacCabe
Architect: John Skipton Mulvaney