

# DRAWING ON LIFE: film review

**“My hand is the extension of the thinking process- the creative process”**

**Tadao Ando.**

Paul Clarke, course director of the Master of Architecture course in the University of Ulster, empathises with this assertion. His project “The Secret Laboratory” is testament to this belief.

The Secret Laboratory, initially a research study, first found physical form in the exhibition of the same name designed by Paul Clarke along with Niall O’Hare and mounted jointly with PLACE.

Central to the research and to the exhibition is the (surprisingly) continuing significance of the architect’s

time allows for brief, lyrical establishing sequences between “chapters”.

Each contributor has enough space to talk, to explain, to sketch; enough space to make a point and to illustrate it (sometimes literally).

The director’s hand is light, the directorial style minimal. This work is not a polemic on the part of Paul Clarke vigorously championing the art of drawing in a digital age: he merely affords skilful and eloquent practioners the time in which to describe the role of the sketchbook; of drawing and of model making in their own work.

If the directorial touch is light, then his interviewing voice is never heard. Contributors communicate with each other and

► now familiar form of the Lyric Theatre: a fleeting allusion to the time and rigour with which this design was refined.

Niall McCullough and Ruth O’Herlihy of McCullough Mulvin, characterise their design process “we do a sketch, we make a model, we do a sketch, we make a model”.

There are numerous other intriguing contributions including Nigel Murray and Michael Doherty. Nigel Peake’s drawings are wonderful, his youthful philosophy no less so.

But please, these contributions are not only verbal; all of these segments are highly visual with constant references to sketchbooks and models and some are lovingly enriched by the photography of the places in which the contribution is filmed.

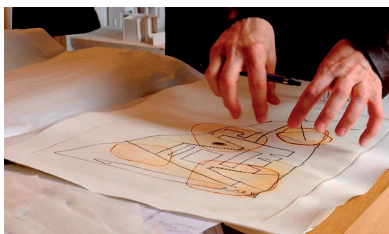
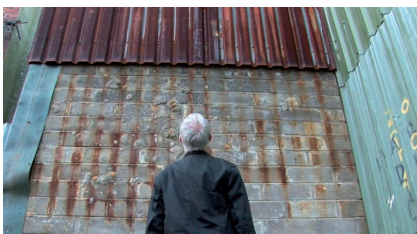
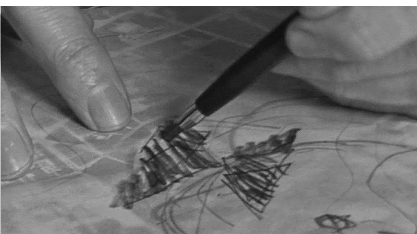
A study of the film’s credits reveals Paul Clarke as director, producer and co-editor with Conor McCafferty (the Creative

context and humanity to the benefit of the whole. These sequences with their musical accompaniment and stripped back graphics punctuate the film and absorb the adjustment in tone and pace between segments.

I have no doubt that the viewing and analysis of this film will become de rigueur for architecture students across these islands. I hope that it will reach a wider audience; the general public will find it enlightening and delightful. But it is to practising architects that I urge “go out of your way to watch this documentary”.

It will rekindle flagging enthusiasm for the art of drawing and for design and re-awaken self respect in those of us who have felt that the digital age has diminished our worth. ●

**Aidan McGrath**



sketchbook as an intimate record of inspiration and influence and as a design tool and journal of the design process in the face of the digital age.

The very well travelled exhibition was physically beautiful: the little sketchbooks displayed in bespoke and discretely lit cases like so many medieval illuminated “Books of Hours”.

The exhibition illustrated the essentially humane nature of architecture and re-enforced the concept of the skill or the craft of the architect.

Paul has taken the same themes and has now created the documentary film “Drawing on Life”. This film is not merely “the film of the exhibition”; it takes that subject matter but layers on context and personal experience and explanation. It comprises a sequence of conversations with and between the cream of contemporary Irish architecture.

At ninety minutes or so, this is a lengthy documentary. This

with the invisible interviewer but never directly to camera. This lends the piece great intimacy as does the nature of the settings in which many of the conversations take place. For example, as we rise in the old-fashioned lift into Grafton’s offices, we are the privileged visitors entering into the holy of holies.

We listen as Yvonne Farrell and Shelley MacNamara of Grafton Architects discuss, not always with a single voice, the role of drawing and developmental model making in relation to their project in Lima, Peru.

It is both humbling and inspiring to hear John Tuomey, explain in conversation with the silent Paul Clarke, the design of An Gaelaras succinctly and eloquently and in only a few minutes – the pencil in his hand never stops moving across the pages of a sketchbook. Equally enlightening in the O’Donnell and Tuomey sequence, is the fleeting shot, no more than a few seconds long, and on which nobody comments explicitly, of a table laden with card models (each subtly different) of the ►

Producer in PLACE). Conor was also responsible for the filming and the music (its composition, not merely its selection). Such a short credits list is often indicative of a tight budget obliging core personnel to turn their hands to unfamiliar roles ; be assured in this instance, it is evident that that these two film makers did not need the input of others: they had all bases covered.

The film is more than a record of conversations with a number of articulate and skilful architects; it is a stylish and beautiful thing in its own right. It is intimate and personal but it is not “small”, the thesis is huge: central to the achievement of quality in architecture is drawing!

The absence of a narrator simultaneously displays self confidence and selflessness on the part of the director.

The style is mostly minimal, the camera a neutral observer of eloquent conversation except in the brief, lyrical links between contributors. These artful compositions add a further layer of

## CREDITS

**Produced and Directed by Paul Clarke**  
**Edited by Conor McCafferty with Paul Clarke**  
**Camera, Sound and Music composed by**  
**Conor McCafferty**  
**Running time 86 mins**  
**Production Company: Lightbox Films Belfast**  
**Film Trailer Link:**  
**<http://drawingonlife.com>**

## SCREENINGS

**The film was shown recently at the Lisbon International Film Festival as part of ‘Arquitetu- There is no Cinema without Architecture’.**

**It will be screened as part of Irish Architecture Foundation’s ‘The Everyday Experience’ during the Eileen Gray exhibition at The Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin on 14th Dec at 2.00pm. This will be followed by a panel discussion on the film chaired Emmett Scanlon.**