



Reports

Sean O'Casey Community Centre in Dublin

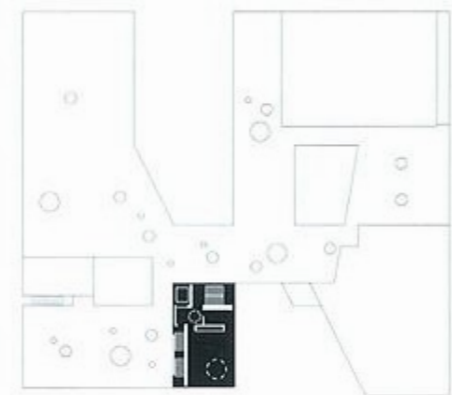
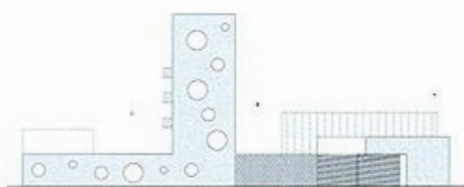
Aoibheann Ni Mhearáin

Architects: O'Donnell + Tuomey, Dublin

 DETAILplus: plans:
www.detail.de/0137

The Sean O'Casey Community Centre is a building of well-crafted, thoughtful toughness. The site, on the eastern edge of Dublin city known as the East Wall, is surrounded by dense, small-scale housing which is itself embedded within the grittier, larger grain of the docklands and the city. On the street side, the building's long, low-slung facade is contrasted by a slender, vertical tower. Rising four storeys above its concrete base, the tower at once proclaims the building to its wider, urban surroundings, while also anchoring it to its immediate locale. The corrugated surfaces of the concrete base and tower are occupied by circular timber-framed windows of three different sizes. Screens of timber and steel combine with the concrete wall to form a continuous street facade. At ground level the wall cantilevers, leading toward the entrance, where there is a garden enclosed by a sliding steel gate and wood screen. Glimpsed from the street, this entrance garden is the first indication of what is to come inside.

Elevation • Fifth-floor plan
scale 1:1000



Four independent needs are accommodated in the four quarters of the compact, almost square plan with a single tower rising from it. A day-care centre and a 156-seat theatre occupy the street side. To the rear and north are housed the crèche and sports facilities. The tower accommodates educational activities, with one principal room per floor. Visitors enter through the main entrance foyer, which extends internally to the diverse facilities. Generously proportioned and richly textured, with brick flooring and warm MDF-panelled walls, this extended foyer is tempered by the vertical rhythm of iroko-and-glass screens and punctuated by circular skylights above.

An introverted building that exhibits a consistently corrugated and concrete exterior, the community centre opens up in its interior to reveal four lushly planted gardens. Irregular cut-outs from the orthogonal plan, these gardens light and organize the ground floor, guiding and characterizing the main circulation route and enabling diagonal views

across spaces, connecting users and activities. The gardens tie the diverse functions of the building into a unified whole.

The circular windows appear in three sizes. These varying sizes register scales of occupation, located as they are in relation to internal activity and the body's dimensions. Positioned in three separate planes – in floor, wall and roof – some of these circular openings focus on the local, confined view – the houses outside, the soccer pitch, the pavement and its occupants – and some encompass the expanse of the city and the openness of the sky. Through the seemingly simple threefold variation in window sizes, this building repeatedly captures its surroundings.

On approaching from the city, what greets one first is the tower's profile, appearing periscope-like above the rooflines. From the very first a public building, this community centre also manages to be subtle, well-crafted and personal. It is at once an intimate and a public place.

