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IMMA groundwork
the art museum as
site for research

The Place
Project

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Research (v.)

1590s... from Old French *rechercher* “seek out, search closely,” from *re-*...+ *chercher* “to seek for,” from Latin *circare* “go about, wander, traverse,” in Late Latin “to wander hither and thither,” from *circus* “circle”...¹

Introduction

This publication *Groundwork* is a series of case studies to show examples of how the Irish Museum of Modern Art can be a site for research.

Research in an art museum happens all the time. For example, exhibition curators undertake research in the development and installation of exhibitions; collection curators undertake and commission research into the artworks and artists in IMMA’s collections; engagement and learning curators research ways to engage the public with the museum’s programmes; the technical crew and production team research ways of installing art works; invited artists, writers, curators and others undertake research in the presentation of their public talks in IMMA; members of the Visitor Engagement Team undertake research in the preparation of guided tours and public programmes; artists in residence undertake research in the development of their work.

All those curious about what makes art, circle around things that call out their attention and wander “hither and thither” between different options. In this way research provides a foundation for art thinking and making – the *groundwork*.

1. https://www.etymonline.com/word/research#etymonline_v_12882

IMMA, the Irish Museum of Modern Art

Located in Dublin city, IMMA is fortunate to be housed in one of the most historically significant buildings in Ireland, surrounded by large grounds and meadows. This unusual setting allows for plenty of space for exploration and experimentation. The combination of artists' and workshop studios provides a unique opportunity for third level college students and tutors to engage in long-term and in-depth research projects in response to the museum, its programmes and its site.

IMMA works with students and tutors from a range of national and international third-level colleges to ensure they can engage with the museum's programmes, people, materials, spaces and resources. This might involve supporting student visits, guided tours, research projects, work experience placements or collaborative initiatives.

The Place Project

The Place Project is the first in a series of examples of research projects in IMMA. It is a unique long-term collaboration between IMMA and IADT (the Institute of Art, Design and Technology) BA Art programme. What started off as a one-off site visit has grown into an ongoing, museum-based student research programme that informs how IMMA engages with third-level groups.

IMMA has been working with tutors and first-year students from IADT's BA Art programme since 2008 and the learning from this collaboration has informed the way in which IMMA engages with and supports other third-level college groups.





Image: student art project installed in IMMA courtyard, 2015



Image: a student in IMMA courtyard, 2020

About

The Place Project is a student-directed research project that offers students in the first year of their BA in Art at IADT a truly unique, immersive and active learning experience. For an entire semester the students are based on the site of the museum, responding to its environs.

This project began as a site-specific project focusing on IMMA as the place. The term place offers latitude for students to approach IMMA in many ways, as museum, gallery, institution, public space, historical site, architectural structure, environment, destination, cartographical point, atmosphere, etc. Over ten years working in close collaboration with IMMA's Engagement and Learning department, *The Place Project* has developed into a comprehensive self-directed research project, incorporating peer and professional-led learning, professional mentoring and public presentations of active research on site. The students engage with many different people, working in various professional roles in IMMA such as curators, visitor engagement staff, security, technical crew, OPW (Office of Public Works) gardeners as well as the museum's visiting public. They also cross paths with the national and international artists undertaking the IMMA Artists' Residency Programme.

Using IMMA as 'place', students have developed their research projects, creating public outcomes within the workshop studios, the Museum building and the grounds. After ten years there is a substantial visual archive of student research projects in response to the site of IMMA.

Assemble

Assembling material through processes of construction, fabrication and installation brings many diverse things together. Students and staff from IADT and IMMA congregate and convene to share ideas, formulate thought, discuss, argue and create work. The iterative aspect of the project (that it happens every year in the same place but with a new cohort of students) allows for a coming together that opens up a dynamic and responsive engagement with material environments, publics and situations. Allowing this project to develop over time has made space to explore and plan for future possibilities, a process of 'slow research'.

In January each year approximately 40 students arrive on site and gather in the workshop studios for an introduction to the Museum's programmes and site. This involves meeting staff, learning about aspects of the Museum's programmes and becoming familiar with guidelines on health and safety and the specific issues arising from working in an architecturally significant heritage site and busy public space. This learning is an opportunity for art students to test their studio-based concerns in the context of the variety of practical constraints that engaging with a public institution demands.

When the institution and its public come in contact with *The Place Project* they, in turn, encounter how art students work and develop their ideas. In this way there is a joint 'behind-the-scenes' aspect at work.



Image: students meeting artist-in-residence Albert Weis, 2014



Image: student installing a research project in IMMA's temporary site at Earlsfort Terrace, 2013



Image: student installing a research project in IMMA's courtyard, 2014



Image: students' "base" in IMMA workshop studio 8



Image: students working in IMMA's workshop studios

Site

IMMA is a hybrid space, a place to engage with both modern and contemporary art, a tourist destination, a site where architectural grandeur collides with the natural environment, a green space for dog walkers, a pleasant short cut for office workers, living quarters and workspace for artists, a research hub for engagement and thought. A threshold, a place to enter.

Students are based in IMMA's workshop studios for the twelve weeks of the research project. The studios provide a base out of which the students conduct their research, exploring the site and returning to discuss and test out their ideas. Students explore the museum buildings – galleries, courtyard, café, banqueting hall, chapel, artists' residency – and environs – formal gardens, graveyard, meadows, woodland – becoming familiar with its structure, content, spaces, people, rules, constraints and possibilities, all of which inform their unique research projects.



Image: students developing their research projects in IMMA's meadows, 2016



Image: student developing a research project in IMMA's courtyard, 2014





Image: student project in the meadows at IMMA, 2016



Image: students developing their research project in the stairwell leading to the basement in IMMA, 2013

Things

There is a history connecting place and things. The Greek term *topos* (related to topic), and the history of the Germanic term *Thing*, evoke common places of assembly and gathering where matters and issues of concern are interrogated and worked over. Bringing things into the open and making things visible creates a transparent space for images and events to unfold and emerge.

Students become aware of the Museum as a resource and subject for research and enquiry. Its buildings, programmes, staff, materials, art works and environs all become available as topics and material to respond to. At the mid-point of *The Place Project* students make presentations of their research ideas and receive feedback from IMMA staff, where considerations include any health and safety, public access, or technical issues so that these can be addressed in the final presentation of research projects in IMMA's studios and grounds.



Image: student working on a research project in IMMA's workshop studios

Wander

Art research is the practice of being lost in 'thinking through making'. Being lost is located as a something or some-where of inbetweenness - the place where the hidden is discerned and detected. The unknown is discovered through experimental knowledge. To wander is not aimless, it is dynamic, a skilled intuitive response to what is found.

Through their explorations of the Museum's buildings and grounds, by meeting staff and resident artists, students develop their research ideas reflecting their own interests, curiosity, and particular observations. Over the course of the twelve weeks students can be seen in various sites around the museum and grounds drawing, filming, measuring, observing, photographing, interviewing, taking samples, experimenting, and sometimes just sitting chatting! Visitors to the museum see students activating the site of the museum as a dynamic and live space for research.



Image: students presenting their research project in IMMA's courtyard, 2017



Image: student working in IMMA's workshop studios

To wander is to wonder.

Image: student installing a research project in IMMA's temporary space in Earlsfort Terrace, 2013





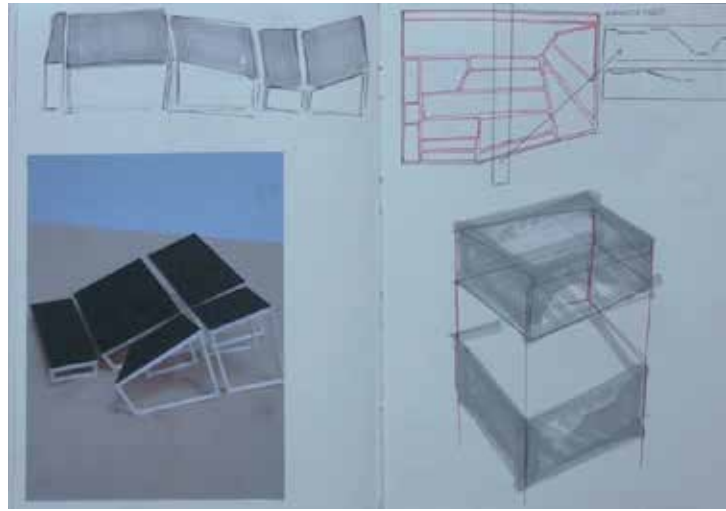


Image: student notebook



Image: students installing research project in IMMA courtyard, 2014

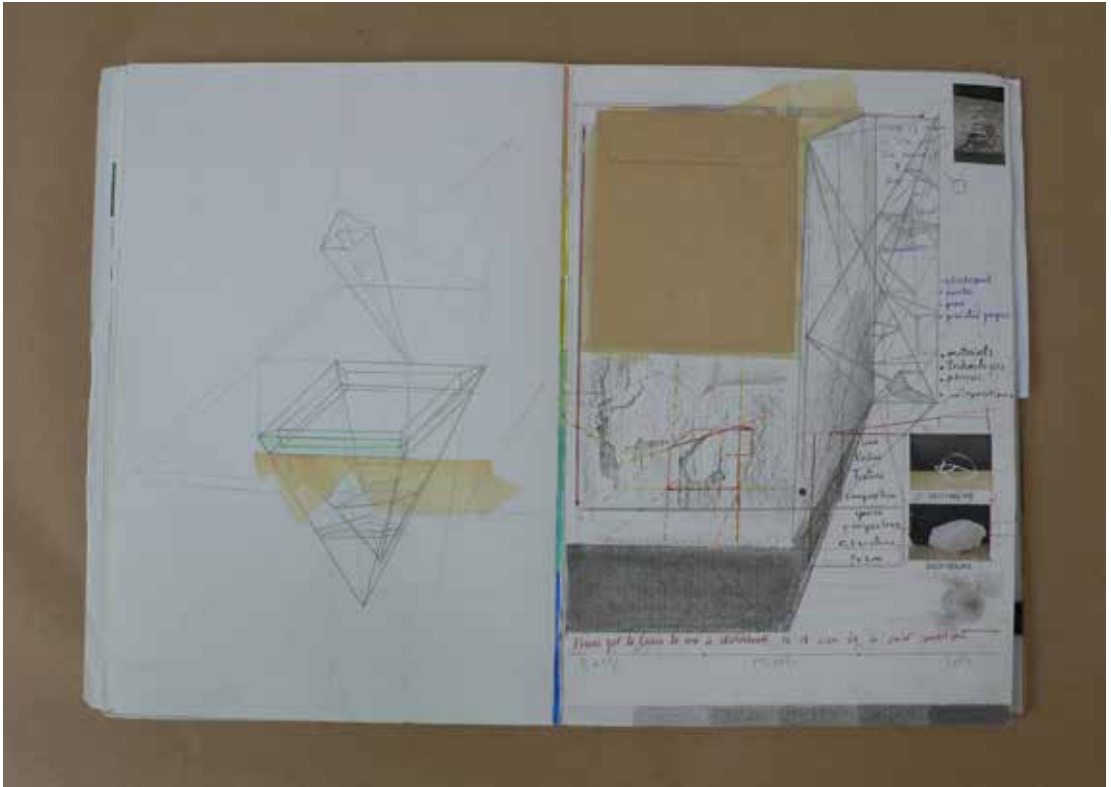


Image: student notebook

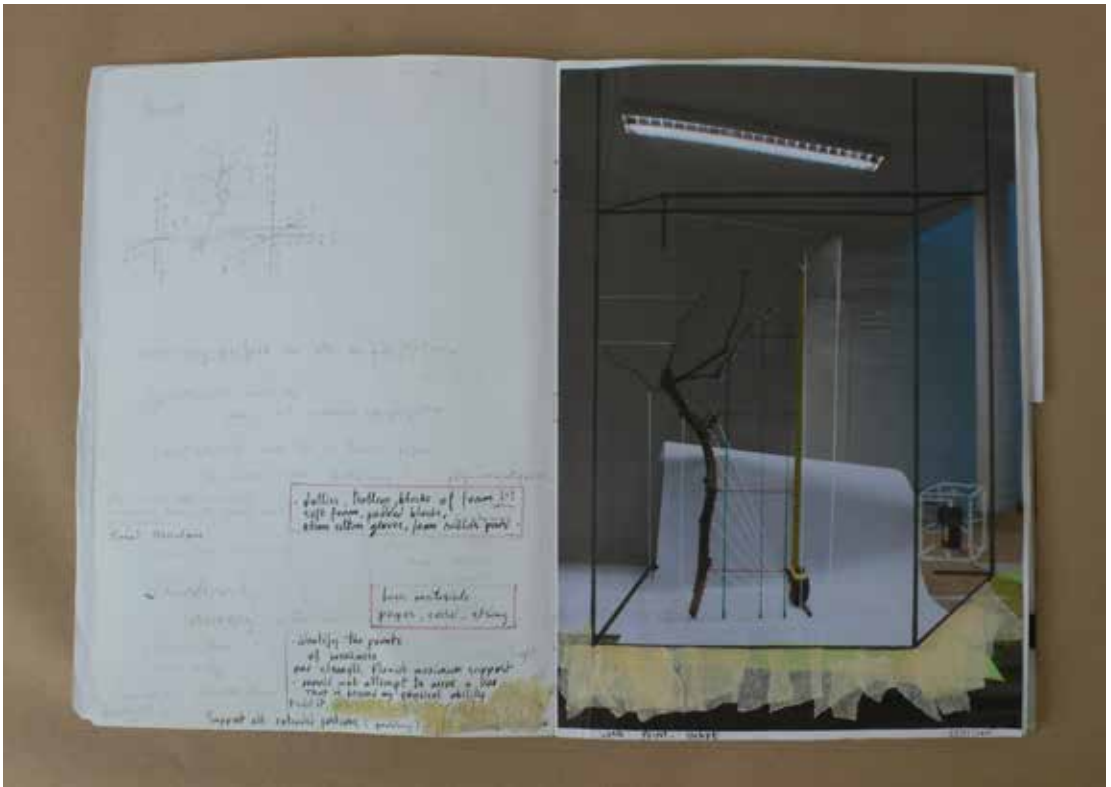


Image: student notebook



Image: student research project installed in IMMA courtyard, 2017

Event

The end/goal of the project is a place to gather, re-member and re-collect the work publicly. The final event is a place of display for the manifold pathways of the project. It points towards possible directions and regions of thinking, reached through the taking place of the project.

At the end of the twelve-week research project students present the outcomes of their research projects to each other, to museum and IADT staff, and to the visiting public and family and friends. These outcomes can take many forms, ranging from displays of research material, ideas and art works to performances, temporary interventions and happenings in the studio spaces or on site in the buildings and grounds of IMMA. Family and friends join the students to see the results of their research projects and to celebrate the end of the project.

Outcomes

This project could be described as a 'blue-sky' research initiative (maybe because it arose in response to the need to get students in out of the rain!). It is open-ended, exploratory and mutually beneficial, a collaboration that enables a third-level BA in Art programme to explore the possibilities of developing an 'on-location' teaching environment and it enables IMMA as a 'museum' to explore diverse ways in which the museum can be activated as a site of research and learning; constantly and mutually redefining what both 'museum' and 'education' might mean.

The long-standing relationships and commitment to *The Place Project*, by IMMA and IADT, has allowed multiple conversations, resourcefulness and trusts to build over ten years. This has helped both institutions to mutually develop, grow and cultivate what has become a unique model of collaboration between an art museum and a third-level education institution.

The BA in Art programme at IADT has been enhanced through *The Place Project* as it enables first year students to understand how the museum and its resources can be a foundation for research and a model of off-campus, museum-based learning.

Reciprocally some of the learning outcomes of *The Place Project* have informed the way in which IMMA understands its role as a site for research and how it engages with other student groups.

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IMMA
www.imma.ie

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www.facebook.com/iadt.art

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events/428945904519053/](http://www.facebook.com/events/428945904519053/)

IADT BA Art info
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Des Ward 'The Notebook:
a place for thinking' video
[www.youtube.com/
watch?v=K0IS4UXg1kQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K0IS4UXg1kQ)

IADT 1st Year BA Art in IMMA
[https://imma.ie/projects/iadt-
institute-of-art-design-and-
technology-ba-art-course](https://imma.ie/projects/iadt-institute-of-art-design-and-technology-ba-art-course)
[https://imma.ie/magazine/on-
location-at-imma-the-iadt-first-
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Uninstall by Niall Keville
<https://vimeo.com/101409137>

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