



### **The History of the Model**

The building which today houses the Model Arts and Niland Gallery has played many roles in the growth and development of Sligo, from its completion in 1863 to the present day. In many ways, No.22, The Mall, has reflected the changing nature of Sligo itself, from small market town to the vibrant cultural capital of the North West.

The original function of the building was to provide a venue for a new Model School for Sligo. Model Schools were a national system of non-denominational primary school education, working on the principle of combined secular, and separate religious instruction. Architect, James H. Owen designed the building in an Italian-Romanesque style, with a central block and two wings. Perfectly sited, in an imposing south-facing position, the building stands fifteen feet above the roadway. The striking grandeur of the building was achieved by contrasting limestone blocks with pale Mount Charles sandstone ornamentation, and was further enhanced by the circular headed, deeply recessed windows. Internally the building provided residences for the teaching staff in the west wing, and bright and airy classrooms in the east. Local builders Keighron & Sons executed the design, and the Model School opened its doors in 1863.

From the outset the Model School was a product of its time. Ireland of the 1860s was a deeply sectarian society, and Catholic bishops called on Roman Catholic families to boycott the new school. Therefore, the Model School came to provide a predominantly Protestant education. A study of the roll at the end of 1888 shows that 296 boys were enrolled, this number comprised 163 Church of Ireland members, 34 Presbyterians, 83 other denominations, and 16 Roman Catholics. The average daily attendance was 158.

In the early years of the Free State, Church of Ireland children were joined by their Catholic counterparts. 1931 saw the allocation of two rooms to the Marist Brothers, and the foundation therein of St. Mary's Catholic Boy's School. In 1972, the Marist Brothers amalgamated with St. John's N.S., and in 1976 the Model School students moved across the Mall to the new Carbury National School. This was not quite the end of the building's long association with primary school education as the Sligo School Project spent some years in the prefabricated buildings on the site during the 1990s.

The Model building always seems to have lent itself to the needs of the day, and has been used variously since the 1950s, to house offices for the Post Office, the Library, the Bovine Tuberculosis Eradication Scheme, the Department of Forestry and the Department of Agriculture. It was eventually left vacant in 1988 and remained so for two years.

The early 1990s saw the gradual emergence of a more affluent Ireland, and with it an increased interest in, and appreciation for the arts. It was not long before a growing community of artists and art patrons saw the huge potential of the Model building as a much-needed venue for arts related events in the northwest. A public meeting saw the formation of a committee dedicated to the use of the building as a venue for the arts, thus the Model Arts Centre was born. Through the energy and dedication of the Model Arts Committee the centre gained a reputation as a valuable space for exhibitions, which would not previously have been shown outside Dublin. Over time the centre's brief was expanded to incorporate other art forms, and in the late 1990s a decision was taken to renovate the Model Arts Centre and to incorporate within it a permanent home for the Niland Art Collection.

Completed in 2000, the award-winning refurbishment and extension was carried out by McCullough Mulvin Architects. Opening as the Model Arts and Niland Gallery in 2001, the building is included in The Phaidon Atlas of Contemporary World Architecture.

The building was further extended by architects Sheridan Woods in 2010 and now boasts an environmentally controlled gallery circuit on the first floor, a purpose-built performance space, and a suite of artist studios on the top floor with panoramic views of Sligo town and County. The Model is one of the most envied cultural buildings in Ireland; a worldclass cultural centre and an unparalleled visitor experience, attracting almost 100,000 visitors a year, and putting Sligo on the international cultural map.