

Press Release, June 2015

## Drawn from the Antique: Artists & the Classical Ideal

Sir John Soane's Museum  
25 June – 26 September 2015



Federico Zuccaro, *Taddeo in the Belvedere Court in the Vatican Drawing the Laocoön*, c. 1595, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 99.GA.6.17

This June, Sir John Soane's Museum will open a new exhibition entitled ***Drawn from the Antique: Artists & the Classical Ideal*** – its largest international loan show to date. The display examines how antique sculpture, from ancient Greece and Rome, has been one of the most important sources of inspiration to Western artists for the past five centuries. Featuring both iconic and rarely seen artworks, the exhibition will offer visitors the chance to admire pieces by artists including Rubens, Fuseli, Turner and Zuccaro.

*Drawn from the Antique* provides the first overview of the practice of drawing from ancient sculpture and the influence this has had on visual arts, from the Renaissance through to the nineteenth century. It is a practice crucial to the understanding and appreciation of European art, stemming from the classical ideal of the body, used in artistic teaching for half a millennium. It is also a concept that lies at the heart of Sir John Soane's collection, with his Grand Tour of Europe having an enduring influence on his long career.

Following a hugely successful run at the Teylers Museum in the Netherlands, this major exhibition brings together works from ten leading museums in Europe and North America, including the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Rijksmuseum, the Kunsthaus, Zürich, the British Museum, the Royal Academy of Art, the Victoria & Albert Museum and the Courtauld Gallery.

*Drawn from the Antique* comprises thirty-four drawings, prints and paintings, many of which have never been exhibited in the UK before and include precious works by Baccio Bandinelli, Hendrick Goltzius, Michael Sweerts, Charles-Joseph Natoire and Hubert Robert. Fifteen of these are on loan from the private collection of art dealer Katrin Bellinger.

From the Renaissance, classical statues of male and female nudes offered aspiring artists idealised models from which they could learn to represent the poses, expressions and volumes

of the human figure, supplying at the same time perfected examples of anatomy and proportion. For established artists, the Antique provided a vast repertory of forms that served as inspiration for their own creations. Through the essential exercise of drawing, students were taught to copy 'flat' works first – drawings, prints and paintings – then three-dimensional sculpture, before finally turning to the live model. With its idealised versions of the human body, antique sculpture in particular was considered to be the ultimate archetype for students to emulate and from which to draw inspiration.



Charles-Joseph Natoire, *The Life Class at the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture*, 1746, The Courtauld Gallery, London, D.1952.RW.397

*Drawn from the Antique* begins by looking at images of early Italian academies in the sixteenth century, in which the Antique starts to appear in the form of statuettes or sculptural fragments. Following this is one of the standout pieces in the exhibition, Federico Zuccaro's *Taddeo in the Belvedere Court in the Vatican Drawing the Laocoön*, c. 1595. This is the earliest surviving image of a draughtsman sketching from celebrated statues in the Belvedere Courtyard, such as the *Apollo Belvedere* and the *Laocoön*, which served as models for artists for almost four hundred years.

The exhibition proceeds to trace the varied approaches of Northern artists to canonical sculptures in Rome, and how the Italian academic curriculum was exported to Northern Europe in the seventeenth century. This is followed by a selection of works that shows the embracing of classicism and the far-reaching diffusion of the academic curriculum in the eighteenth century – focusing particularly on Britain – one that would prove crucial to the dissemination of the classical ideal far beyond the borders of Europe.

*Drawn from the Antique* culminates in an exploration of the widespread use of plaster casts in nineteenth-century European academies and their frequent appearance in domestic interiors, signalling the commercialisation and further diffusion of the Antique. These latter works in the exhibition also explore how the Antique as a canonical model began to be challenged by the more dynamic and innovative forces of European art, which eventually led to its rapid decline.

The study of the Antique was something championed by Soane in his own teaching, and Sir John Soane's Museum provides the perfect context for *Drawn from the Antique*. The collection of plaster casts and original fragments still visible at the Museum today were assembled by Soane with a didactic purpose in mind: in the name of the union of the arts, the study of architecture was integrated with the copying of paintings, classical statues and plaster casts, to attain that mastery of drawing of human forms advocated by Vitruvius as a crucial element in the education of the young architect.



Henry Fuseli, *The Artist Moved by the Grandeur of Antique Fragments*, c. 1778–79, The Kunsthaus, Zürich

Abraham Thomas, Director of Sir John Soane's Museum, comments:

*'This exhibition examines the crucial role played by antique sculpture in artistic education and practice, a theme which lies at the heart of the conception of Sir John Soane's Museum. Soane created his own bespoke arrangements of classical sculpture and architectural fragments, providing educational tools which defined an informal curriculum for his Royal Academy students and pupils working in his architectural office. One could consider much of Soane's museum as an extended series of studio spaces, intended for academic improvement and personal inspiration.'*

***Drawn from the Antique: Artists & the Classical Ideal*** opens on 25 June 2015 and entry is free. Curator-led tours of the exhibition will take place on 3 July, 7 August and 4 September and are free of charge. The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue by Adriano Aymonino and Anne Varick Lauder which is available in the Museum Shop and online.

ENDS

#### Listings

Exhibition: Drawn from the Antique: Artists & the Classical Ideal  
Dates: 25 June – 26 September 2015  
Address: Sir John Soane's Museum: 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields, London WC2A 3BP  
Opening hours: Tuesday to Saturday 10am-5pm. Last entry 4:30pm  
Admission: Free

#### Drawn from the Antique Events Programme

A programme of events accompanies the exhibition. These include free curator-led lunchtime tours on the first Friday of each month during the run. The programme also features a Symposium, arranged by The Courtauld Institute of Art's Research Forum. There is also a vibrant programme of art workshops for adults, including a 3D modelling workshop, a monoprinting workshop and a day drawing the Cast Courts at the Victoria & Albert Museum. An exciting highlight of the workshop programme in September is the first-ever life-drawing workshop to take place within the historic spaces of the Museum.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

Sir John Soane's Museum

Sir John Soane's house, museum and library at No. 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields has been a public museum since the early nineteenth century. On his appointment as Professor of Architecture at the Royal Academy in 1806, Soane (1753-1837) began to arrange his books, classical antiquities, casts and models so that students of architecture might benefit from access to them. In 1833 he negotiated an Act of Parliament to preserve the house and collection after his death for the benefit of 'amateurs and students' in architecture, painting and sculpture. Today Sir John Soane's Museum is one of the country's most unusual and significant museums with a continuing and developing commitment to education and creative inspiration. The museum is open free: Tuesday to Saturday inclusive, 10am-5pm. It is also open on the first Tuesday evening of each month from 6-9pm. [www.soane.org](http://www.soane.org)

Sir John Soane's Museum is a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) whose prime sponsor is the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.