

SIR JOHN SOANE'S
MUSEUM

ANNUAL REVIEW 2023 / 24

A W I D E R P E R S P E C T I V E

Sir John Soane's Museum

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Bruce Boucher



Will Gompertz on the staircase of 13 Lincoln's
Inn Fields. Photo: Sam Churchill

A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

I am sitting at my desk on the third floor of 14 Lincoln's Inn Fields writing this, my first Director's introduction for Sir John Soane's Museum's Annual Review. It is an enormous privilege to have such a beautiful space in which to work, a Georgian eyrie designed by Soane – a man for whom light and atmosphere were tools with which to build and design along with bricks and mortar.

I had always thought it a remarkable place. Now I know it is. My colleagues are exceptional: knowledgeable, dedicated, talented and public-spirited. They are also ambitious and creative, as anyone who visited the exquisite *Fanciful Figures* exhibition in spring 2024 will know.

Every day, I receive a written report from our excellent front of house team. It includes a section containing visitors' comments. After two weeks of relentlessly positive eulogies from the public, I began to suspect our marketing department was providing me with edited highlights. That was until I realised our small and perfectly formed Museum doesn't have a marketing department. The reports were verbatim.

The ever-growing queues of people lining up to enter 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields bear witness to the increasing popularity of our house-museum, as new generations discover the magic Soane created when devising a building and a collection as one immersive experience. It was his visionary insistence that the Museum be free to visit. There is a great deal of joy to be had in watching school groups being taken around the labyrinthine interior, their mouths open in wonder at the sheer magic of the light effects Soane conceived to animate the art and artefacts in his collection.

We welcomed a record number of visitors this year – 157,987 to be exact – which takes us very close to our capacity. The Museum's popularity is the result of the incredible work undertaken over recent decades by many brilliant colleagues, whose *Opening up the Soane* (OUTS) project has made all the difference. The result of their collective endeavours is an accurate and authentic presentation of Soane's collection as envisaged by the architect almost two centuries ago.

The first phase of OUTS is complete; the building and collection are in first-class order. We now move on to our second phase, which is to broaden and deepen the Museum's relationships to fulfil our central purpose to increase knowledge, understanding and appreciation of Sir John Soane and his 'academy of the arts'. The excellent programme run by the Learning team will be the starting point for developing formal connections with the education sector, from preschool to postgraduate. We will take a similarly collaborative approach to our relationships with the many talented individuals for whom the Museum is an inspiration and a platform for conversation – building on the success of The Soane Medal for architecture (won in 2023 by French practice Lacaton & Vassal) and the Artist at Soane residency programme.

We are limited by our capacity, not by our imaginations. Our talented curators have developed a magnificent online Soane Museum, which is now enjoyed by curious minds worldwide. We will invest more in this valuable public resource, and in adventurous and ambitious programming that brings the world to the Museum and takes the Museum out into the world.

There is much to do.

Will Gompertz
Deborah Loeb Brice Director



A view into Sir John Soane's private apartments. Photo: Richard Stapleton

CHAIR'S FOREWORD

A year of political upheaval at home, polarisation in the US and revolution in France – all in a decade of unprecedented technological advance. The 1830s, the decade in which John Soane added the finishing touches to his Museum, had many similarities with today.

In those years of political instability, but with great opportunity for social progress, Soane – the archetypal self-made man – created a public place of inspiration, learning and entertainment. As the supreme conjurer of magical interiors and a man with a heartfelt, if eccentric, view of the interconnectedness of humanity, Soane created a place unlike any other in the world.

So it is little surprise that, in similarly uncertain times, the Soane is attracting record numbers of visitors in search of wonder and enlightenment. Or that there continues to be a vital role for the Museum as a place of learning.

To fulfil Soane's vision requires three things: sustainable finances, a dedicated team and an outstanding Director. We continue to be blessed in all three respects and the Director's report pays proper tribute to our wonderful employees and volunteers.

On financial support, John Soane's personal legacy saw the Museum through the century from his death until the end of the Second World War. Since then, for almost 80 years, public grants have been our mainstay.

We remain hugely grateful to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport for its continued, vital support, but we have become increasingly reliant on private philanthropy and sponsorship as the real value of the public grant falls. The Museum has never charged for entry and, unique among national museums, is not configured to accommodate charging for temporary exhibitions.

So we are ever more dependent on the generosity of the individuals and institutions that keep the Museum thriving. Many of our individual supporters are also dear friends of the Museum. We are so grateful for the support and cherish the friendship of this passionate community.

The period covered by this review, 2023–24, was a year of two Directors. Bruce Boucher retired after nearly eight years, during which the award-winning restoration of 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields was completed, a succession of fine exhibitions was crowned by a show of Hogarth's series paintings, and the Museum saw record visitor numbers. We are enormously grateful to Bruce for this outstanding success.

That the Museum was able to attract a new Director of the calibre of Will Gompertz, someone who has spent many years in the museums sector but is nationally known and loved from his years at the BBC, says much about the standing of the Soane. The coming years will be ones in which John Soane's vision will flourish.

Finally, I thank the Museum's Trustees for their outstanding contributions – the most dedicated and hard-working trustees with whom I have ever worked, and, in particular, the recently retired Nichola Johnson, and Basil Postan who has also generously supported this Review.

James Sassoon

Chair of Trustees, Sir John Soane's Museum



COLOUR AND FEELING

How light artist Nayan Kulkarni echoed and subverted
the geometry of the Museum's front elevation

By Pamela Buxton

When multimedia artist Nayan Kulkarni embarked on a master's degree in fine art at London art school The Slade in 1995, one of his first course visits was to Sir John Soane's Museum. It feels fitting, then, that nearly 30 years later, the Museum was the venue for his first London light work, an exterior installation to accompany the 2023 exhibition *Georgian Illuminations*.

Entitled *A Drawing for John Soane*, the spectacular light piece used the elevation of the Museum as its backdrop, catching the eye of visitors and passersby alike. It was informed by Kulkarni's long interest in illumination in the public realm – his PhD *Night Moves: A Mise-en-Scene of a Luminous Economy* analysed the experience and meaning of artificial light in the city.

Light is just one medium used by Kulkarni, who also makes video, sound and architectural installations in work ranging from gallery shows to interventions in the public realm, as well as lighting design as part of multidisciplinary teams. Kulkarni initially considered studying architecture before opting for fine art instead and has forged a career as an artist and teacher ever since. He describes himself as exploring 'the production of place and atmosphere', often making bold statements that 'intervene and disrupt, invite questions and contemplation, and bring attention to place and community'. He is interested in 'the moments where light, people, structure and space work together', and also how particular experiences can change perception of time.

Common to all his practice is a deep analysis and engagement with the particular landscapes, histories and context of each site and project.

In Chester, the 2012 light artwork *Hryre (ruin)* projected fragments of medieval texts onto city ruins, a work that was something of a forerunner

to the Soane installation. In sharp contrast, for *Blade* (2017), Kulkarni installed a locally made industrial artefact – a 75m-long B75 turbine blade – as an artwork in Hull's Queen Victoria Square, an intervention seen by some 350,000 visitors as part of Hull UK City of Culture.

Another thread of his work explores questions of identity, colonialism and power in gallery installations. One of these works, *Maroon* (2017), was located on the site of the first Thomas Cook travel agency, in Leicester, and drew on Kulkarni's own family history – his father moved to England from India – to address themes of migration, tradition and identity in the diaspora.

His process for creating the recent Soane light work reveals the meticulous and complex nature of his practice. His starting point was the use of light in the watercolour renderings of Soane's designs by Joseph Michael Gandy, Soane's go-to visualiser. Kulkarni was drawn to the atmospheric light effects depicted, and Gandy's use of soft colour. He then spent time observing the street outside the Museum and considering how passersby might be addressed, before opting to focus on three arched first-floor windows that form a focal point on the Museum's front elevation. Kulkarni had 11 of his drawings of the windows etched as 60mm images on dichroic glass. They were then sequenced in a composition of colour and movement, with overlays of off-kilter 'doubles' playing on the difference between the drawings and the geometrical distortion required to make them conform to the elevation. The results were projected onto the full height of the building, using 12 light instruments positioned in Lincoln's Inn Fields, across from the Museum.

'Soane's use of colour grants me a very extended palette,' says Kulkarni, who used the

‘[Kulkarni] is interested in “the moments where light, people, structure and space work together”’



Kulkarni's use of a Greek key motif echoes objects in Soane's collection. Photos: Gareth Gardner

structure of George Frideric Handel's *Music for the Royal Fireworks* (third movement) to inform the transitions between the colour arrangements in the sequencing of the light piece.

A visit to his home studio in southeast London gives an insight into the tools of the trade for his current projects – screens, keyboards, camera tripods and speakers abound. Music is clearly an important part of his practice; he is currently working with musicians and composers after receiving an Arts Council Developing Your Creative Practice grant. He has been learning about musical syntax and is creating an immersive sound piece for multiple instruments.

Two ongoing projects reflect his diverse practice. For Bradford's National Science and Media Museum, Kulkarni is immersing himself in the history of broadcasting technology to create *Circus*, which will explore different image-capturing techniques, from early television to the moment before AI, in an interactive gallery installation at the museum in 2025.

'I'm interested in, as a non-digital native, how image and identity and technology have increasingly folded into each other,' he says.

In contrast, *A Room That Sings in Dalby Forest*, which opened in 2024, in North Yorkshire is an immersive soundscape of the surrounding forest in a specially designed solar-powered room. This is created from audio field recordings that capture not just the dawn chorus and the call of red deer, but also noises from the peat bogs, the inside of a tree, the sound of rain on a fence, even sounds from below the ground of the room. The compositional framework is due to be in place until 2045, hopefully involving residencies with other collaborators.

Meanwhile, as Kulkarni explores new musical territory in his diverse artistic practice, he is also on the cusp of a significant relocation. There are plans afoot to move out of London nearly three decades after arriving in the capital as a student, and his first, memorable encounter with Sir John Soane's Museum.



Kulkarni used a piece by composer George Frideric Handel to inform the sequencing of the Museum's light piece. Photos: Nayan Kulkarni, Gareth Gardner





PERSONAL PORTRAIT

Uncovering the professional and personal
networks that lie behind the hidden treasures
of Soane's 200-year-old Picture Room

By Verónica Simpson



Sir John Soane's Picture Room is so much more than an ingenious way to display 118 paintings within a space the size of an average double bedroom. The more one looks into its history, the greater the complexity and richness of the narratives and connections between this room, its contents and Soane's friendships and allegiances.

Key to the magic of this room is the surprise: at first sight, there is no hint of the multiplicity of planes behind what appear to be solid walls. But then, one by one, these layers are opened up for exploration, revealing a treasure trove of works. The collection includes paintings by some of the

greatest names in art: some outstanding Hogarths, a Turner, three Canaletto views of Venice, a Watteau and etchings and drawings by Piranesi.

Joanna Tinworth, Curator (Collections), says that this was a most unusual display for its time: 'What Soane hangs in here, like the collection in the rest of the house, is really, really personal. While there was an established hierarchy of types of paintings in Soane's day, from best to worst, he is not adhering to those rules by collecting "elevated" works, shall we say. He doesn't favour history paintings for example. What you're seeing are paintings that reflect his interest in architecture,

The folding planes of the Picture Room, Soane's ingenious device for layering his collection.
Photos: Gareth Gardner



in theatre, in literature.’ Most interestingly, she says, almost every picture is by a contemporary or a near contemporary of Soane’s, ‘which demonstrates Soane’s commitment to collecting contemporary art’.

The connection between the contemporary works is the dominance of paintings by fellow Royal Academicians. The Royal Academy (RA) was incredibly important to Soane, says Tinworth. He received his architectural education at the RA schools, where he won the King’s travelling scholarship. This grant of £60 a year for three years meant that Soane, the son of a bricklayer,

was able to follow the tradition of the English aristocracy and go to Italy, on the ‘grand tour’, gathering inspiration as well as clients.

One of the common misconceptions about Soane’s collection is that some of it was acquired on his travels. ‘He came back with a scrap of plaster from Pompeii, four etchings given to him by Piranesi, and a piece of pumice from Mount Vesuvius,’ says Tinworth.

There are two striking portraits of Soane and his wife, commissioned in 1828–29 from John Jackson RA. Sir John Soane, on the left of the doorway, is shown in full Masonic regalia, to





The Picture Room opens out to a recess, with Soane's Monk's Parlour below. Photo: Gareth Gardner

‘Soane’s whole house was his showroom and one that acknowledges his standing, skills and abilities’

commemorate his role as Grand Superintendent and President of the Board of Works.

His beloved wife Eliza appears beside him, to the right of the door. When this work was painted, Eliza had been dead nearly 15 years. Jackson had to work from sketches, including some from the early 1800s by John Flaxman RA – one of which hangs upstairs in the South Drawing Room. It is perhaps because Flaxman had only roughly sketched her hands that Jackson hid them behind the beloved family dog, Fanny, sitting on her lap.

The four large works in Hogarth’s *An Election* series, which take pride of place in the Picture Room, were acquired in 1823 from actor and theatre impresario David Garrick (who acquired them directly from Hogarth), and are believed to have provided the impetus for the construction of the Picture Room. It was a few months after their purchase that Soane acquired 14 Lincoln’s Inn Fields and, as with 12 and 13, knocked down the existing structure and rebuilt it, creating the Picture Room at the back of the site.

The Museum’s Deputy Director and Inspectress Helen Dorey says: ‘He probably admired Hogarth as a self-made man from a poor background, like himself. Hogarth’s commentary on the nature of society perhaps appealed to Soane as he had experienced a rise from poverty to become the friend of royalty and aristocracy.’

Painted in 1754–55, these pictures were inspired by the 1754 Oxfordshire by-election, part of the British general election that took place that year. ‘Contemporary newspapers reported the election as being an absolute travesty of corruption and venality,’ says Tinworth. ‘This is Hogarth painting from real life, about real life.’

Just as impactful, in its own way, is the entire wall of depictions of Sir John Soane’s own architectural schemes, which is revealed when the first layer of planes are opened on the south side of the room: buildings both realised and unrealised, conjured in intricate watercolours by Soane’s master draughtsman Joseph Michael Gandy ARA. ‘Here, Soane is really bringing his architecture into the room,’ says Tinworth. ‘It reinforces the way in which the whole building is an expression of the union of architecture, sculpture and painting.’

Was the Picture Room used as a showcase for Soane’s prospective clients? ‘His whole house was his showroom and one that acknowledges his standing, skills and abilities,’ says Dorey. ‘We know his clients visited him here. We don’t know exactly what they looked at or what they discussed, but we do know that it helped to influence their decisions because many of their houses contain similar features and settings.’ None, surely, quite as remarkable as the Picture Room.



A crowd views Richard Westmacott's figure of a nymph, which Soane placed in the recess on the completion of the Picture Room in 1824.
Photo: John Stead



DRAWING INSPIRATION

A performance artist and a political cartoonist have spent a year observing the Museum from a 'secret' vantage point – and made work influenced by Soane's collection

By Deniz Nazım-Englund

In the 187 years since Sir John Soane's death, very few people have worked in the room where he once trained his pupils. With the Drawing Office now fully restored, two people have joined this select group: the Museum's inaugural artists-in-residence, who each spent months in the office, beginning in April 2023. 'It's such an unusual, but magical, in-between space, floating on pillars. You can see the whole Museum but no one can see you,' says Ella Baron, a political cartoonist who was the second participant in the Artist at Soane Residency from September 2023 to April 2024.



Baron's work has appeared in national newspapers such as *The Guardian*, *The Times* and *The Sunday Times*. 'I always liked telling stories but I wanted to communicate them visually,' she says. 'Political cartoons are an interesting cross-section between journalism, political analysis and visual art.' An encounter with William Hogarth's engraving *Gin Lane* (1751) when she was younger sticks out in her memory. 'It was one of the first political drawings I remember being inspired by. I found the social themes really relevant and touching.'

While at the Museum, Baron drew digital sketches with a tablet and stylus for her soon-to-be-published graphic novel, *Interface* – a science fiction romance that follows two characters from opposite ends of the class spectrum crossing paths in a dystopian near-future. The comic artist took inspiration from Soane's architectural sketches while creating the cityscape for her novel and enjoyed the opportunity to closely study engravings by Hogarth and fellow satirist James Gillray.

During a Soane Late evening event in January 2024, Baron spoke with author, comedy scriptwriter and political campaigner John O'Farrell about creating comic works inspired by the news. She also previewed pages from *Interface* and invited attendees to create their own storyboards with deconstructed frames from the novel.

'Comics are never taken seriously as art. People think they're immature. They fall through the cracks – journalists and crafts people reject them,' says Baron. Her residency at the Museum was an invaluable experience. 'If a respected art institution like the Soane takes you seriously, it helps you to take yourself seriously,' she says. 'It definitely gave me some confidence.'

Sam Belinfante is a performance and film artist who explores light, sound and theatre in





Actress Elizabeth Chan plays the moon in Sam Belinfante's performance piece
... to bring the moonlight into a chamber. Photo: Thierry Bal

his practice. He undertook the first Residency. Like Baron, he found himself drawn to collection objects by Hogarth, as well as the dramatic nature of Sir John Soane's curation and design of his house. He describes the hang of *A Rake's Progress*, 1734, on Soane's moving picture planes (like large cupboard doors) in the Picture Room as 'very theatrical. It would be opened a couple of times a day. Unfolding the Museum and closing it back up became an important part of my work.'

Belinfante completed his residency between April and September 2023, concluding with a

candlelit production staged at the Museum.

Visitors stood on the ground floor while actors and musicians moved around the floors above, and 100 metronomes placed around the sarcophagus in the basement ticked in unison. 'The whole museum came alive sonically,' he says.

This performance, titled *... to bring moonlight into a chamber*, was inspired by Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and made reference to the Mechanicals, the group of amateur performers in Shakespeare's work who perform a play-within-a-play, with one adopting the role of



The candlelit production was based on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and featured musical arrangements by Belinfante and Scott McLaughlin. Photos: Thierry Bal

the moon. In Belinfante's production, actress Elizabeth Chan played this part, wandering around the Museum, declaring herself to be the moon. 'At first people thought she was just somebody who had gotten lost,' says Belinfante. 'This tiny voice slowly became empowering and took over the space. It was really beautiful.'

For Belinfante, his residency made a significant mark on his subsequent projects. 'I've often used lighting as part of my exhibitions,' he explains. 'But the Soane has completely catalysed that. My work has become fundamentally about light.' He is

currently working on a film that follows on from *... to bring moonlight into a chamber*, which he hopes to eventually screen at the Museum.

Meanwhile, the Drawing Office has welcomed two new residents into the fold. Sculptor Nika Neelova started her term in May 2024, and draughtsman Paul Noble has now taken over for the autumn. Baron and Belinfante hope to share the insights they have gained from the experience with future participants. 'I can see this becoming a community,' says Baron. 'It's just the beginning of that.'



A NEW LIGHT

By sharing queer perspectives on Soane's collection,
the Museum is joining other cultural institutions
bringing hidden histories to the fore

By Amelia Abraham

On a chilly February evening, a candlelit tour made its way through Sir John Soane's Museum for an eclectic and unexpected look at the collection. The occasion? *Queer Revelations*, a part of the Museum's LGBTQ+ programming, which began in early 2022. The host of the tour was artist and performer Ms Timberlina, resplendent in drag with beard on show, and animated by the notion of unlocking lesser-known queer histories with the help of the objects before her.

Those on the tour heard about classical figures – represented in Soane's collection through portrait busts – such as Emperor Hadrian's male lover Antinous, and the poet Sappho, who wrote about desire and love between women. Also

discussed was Soane's contemporary, the wealthy novelist and politician William Beckford, the previous owner of items in the collection, who was described by one biographer as 'the most scandalous connoisseur of hedonism in the modern world'. As for curatorial input, the Museum's expert staff were on hand to select LGBTQ+ objects of particular personal interest to them as part of this journey of discovery.

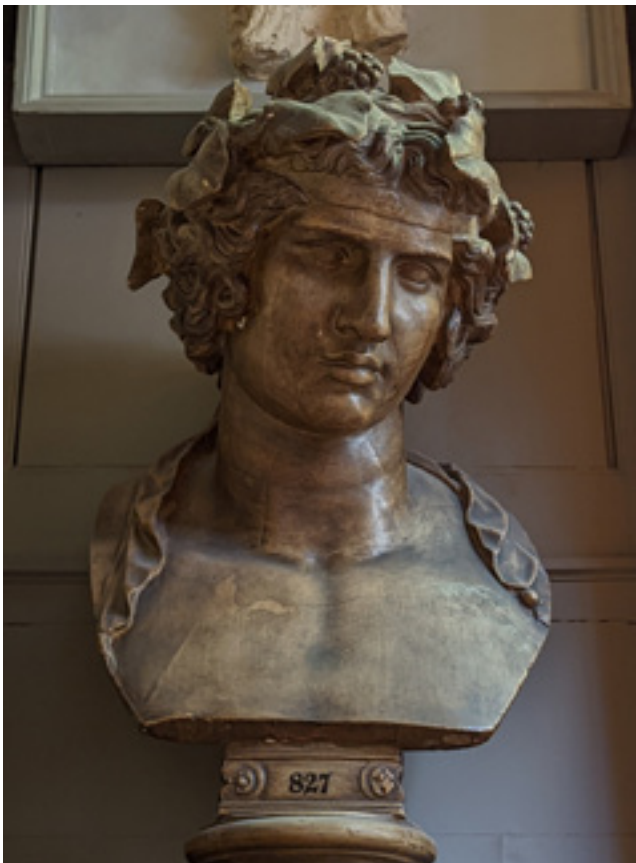
One of Visitor Assistant Jonty Stern's favourite stories is about the portrait bust of Polydeukes (AD138–192), a character from the Roman period and Athenian aristocrat Herodes Atticus's favourite pupil. When Polydeukes died, Atticus fell into a state of despair, commissioning statues in tribute to his young lover. The Soane bust is a rare survivor.

Learning Officer Tallulah Smart drew visitors' attention to the story of Chevalier d'Éon, the 18th-century French diplomat. Born Charles, and later named Charlotte, the French swordfighter and spy lived as a man and as a woman. 'King Louis XV secretly tasked her with planning an invasion of Britain by sea,' says Smart. 'Chevalier threatened to reveal this secret after being demoted for running up a huge wine bill, leading to her exile from France.'

Smart adds: 'In today's terms, we might think of her as a trans woman; she requested to be legally proclaimed female when agreeing terms with Louis XVI for repealing her exile. Once those terms had been agreed, she lived as a woman from 1777 until her death in 1810.' D'Éon is buried near Soane at St Pancras Old Church, north London.

The evening itself had an anarchic and playful feel. 'My drag lady character is disarming and funny,' explains Ms Timberlina, also known as Tim Redfern, who has been queering museum spaces for the best part of two decades through public events such as these. 'I like to use irreverence to challenge assumptions and preconceptions.'

A portrait bust of Roman Emperor Hadrian's male lover Antinous





The Museum was illuminated for Queer Revelations by Candlelight with Ms Timberlina, which was held to celebrate LGBT+ History Month in February 2024. Photo: Sam Churchill



A 1792 portrait by Thomas Stewart of Chevalier d'Éon, who lived as a woman.
Photo: Active Museum/Active Art/Alamy

Still, her matronly side ensured guests were shepherded through the collection with enough time for a drink in the South Drawing Room at the evening's close.

'For me, museums are great places to establish a sense of journey and heritage for oneself as a queer person, while engaging wider audiences with LGBTQ+ history and themes,' explains Redfern. 'While the Soane might not immediately come to mind as a locus of queer history, we might consider Soane himself as someone who challenged convention,' Redfern adds. 'He was a bon viveur, interested

in spirituality, the underworld and other subjects that were controversial in his day.'

Although there is now a dedicated museum in London, Queer Britain, Redfern thinks it is crucial that other cultural spaces engage with these themes, too. 'People should be able to visit local heritage sites and find themselves in the content.' Stern agrees: 'I am 53, so I remember a lot of homophobia when I was younger. The idea that, with these tours, I could be doing something I love for an interested audience, alongside my wonderful colleagues, is incredible. I cried after we held the first LGBTQ+ event at the Soane. I couldn't believe the world had changed enough for this to be possible.'

Reaching a point where such events can happen has been a journey, with Redfern seeing the changes unfold first-hand. 'The Equality Act 2006 provided some legal framework to look at these histories in a new and inclusive way,' he remembers, of the law that created a public duty to promote equality around gender, sexuality, race and disability. Around this time, he began working with the V&A, where the museum's LGBTQ+ working group 'met sporadically in the bowels of the building in South Kensington, discussing their love of the collection as queer curators and staff'. They catalysed the push for more queer events, leading to the first queer after-hours event curated by Redfern in 2009 entitled Making a Scene – a night of performance and conversations around the V&A's collection. Soon, Redfern was working with the National Portrait Gallery and discussing the Tate collection through a queer lens as part of a regular series of events.

In 2017, a swell of cultural institutions around the UK celebrated the 50th anniversary of the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in England and Wales with focused exhibitions, the popularity of which proved that audiences of all orientations are keen to engage with the subject

Drag artist Arkem performs
as Lady Pineapple Mary in the
South Drawing Room during Pride
Month 2023. Photo: Ray Malone



‘Museums and galleries have a role to play in shaping community and culture and in opening doors for people’



Audiences heard about William Beckford, described by a biographer as 'the most scandalous connoisseur of hedonism in the modern world'. Photo: Ray Malone

matter. However, as Redfern points out, while landmark anniversaries – LGBT+ History Month in February and Pride Month in June – are useful prompts to celebrate the community, institutions could be undertaking this project all year round, particularly as a way to avoid a sense of tokenism. ‘When you’re queer or othered, it is something you live with constantly; it doesn’t disappear. Museums can work to offer safe spaces to be yourself, and a sense of place and lineage.’

Dan Vo, a consultant for museums looking to diversify their programming, and whose work inspired the LGBTQ+ programme at the Soane, echoes Redfern on the importance of queer events for staff and visitors. ‘I do this work because I didn’t have such a space myself growing up,’ he says. ‘It’s about recognising the many groups within the wider queer community, the many facets of ourselves and the many types of groups that may want to come and engage. In turn, creating these events for people to share their stories and interests helps to inform what goes into the exhibitions.’ In other words, this programming is not only a chance for visitors to find out about an organisation’s ethos, but for museums to learn from their audiences, asking: What does this mean to you? Which stories would you like to see preserved or celebrated?

Queering the museum is a careful process, suggests Vo, and one that is most successful when LGBTQ+ staff are involved. ‘We’ve come to understand that institutions should work with the relevant community to establish the right key terms or correct way to tell a story,’ he says. ‘That so many museums feel comfortable to say “we don’t necessarily have the authority to speak on this so we will collaborate” is a huge positive shift in this sector.’ At the same time, it is equally important to take all museum staff, board members and audiences on that journey. ‘In some cases, it’s local council or taxpayer money

supporting these events, which is why it is great to share what allyship means to your institution and how your programming embodies it. Usually, people want to support it, once they understand.’

As for presenting the collections, Vo points out there is often the tricky business of the burden of proof when dealing with past figures or artefacts; we don’t always have the contextual information to decide whether a person or story is queer, especially in today’s terms. ‘There must be caution around taking our ethics today and anachronistically dropping them on to ancient cultures and vice versa,’ he says. ‘But by exploring the limitations and possibilities of this process we might better understand where we came from and reflect on where we are.’ Leaning into historical complexities, and even less positive stories, such as relationships between male figures from antiquity and teenage boys, can aid this process. ‘Not so long ago, there was a fight for the right to be seen among the LGBTQ+ community, then a fight to be heard,’ Vo says. ‘Now we are questioning how to be self-critical or nuanced, too. It’s a maturation.’

Ultimately, concludes Vo, there is ‘an ethical moral purpose’ to queer programming ‘because it falls back on the idea that museums and galleries have a role to play in shaping community and culture, participating in the evolution of language and in opening doors for people’. At the Soane, comments Stern, there is no shortage of material through which to continue undergoing this process. ‘When we began the research into the collection’s queer histories, we quickly realised that we didn’t need to shoehorn; there were starting points to explore different pockets of LGBTQ+ history almost everywhere.’ With curiosity leading the way then, Sir John Soane’s Museum will continue to hold these thematic tours to encourage new and longstanding visitors alike through its doors, to discover something novel or surprising that will inspire them.

WALL TO WALL

Decades of detective work by Deputy Director
Helen Dorey – and a lot of luck – has helped
to complete the Drawing Office

By Helen Dorey



The Museum has been working on a complete inventory of Sir John Soane's collection for many years. This includes gathering as much information as possible on 'missing objects' – in particular those that appear in the earliest inventories of 1837, the year Soane died, but were missing by the time the revised inventory was made in 1906.

One such 'missing' object was number M1340, from the south wall of the Drawing Office, recorded as 'A Scarabeus (Intaglio) plaster' in 1837. A note subsequently added by the Egyptologist Joseph Bonomi – the Museum's Curator from 1861 to 1878 – identified it as a cast of a scarab (beetle) hieroglyph from the top of the Obelisk of Montecitorio, dedicated to the sun god. Originally erected in Heliopolis (now Cairo) in the sixth century BC, the obelisk was brought to Rome by Emperor Augustus in 10BC.

The obelisk was partially reconstructed in 1792, after falling and becoming damaged centuries earlier, meaning that the cast Soane acquired in 1834 was made around 1790, when the obelisk was still on the ground. Today, it stands in Rome's Piazza Montecitorio, and photos gave me clues as to the missing scarab's appearance. Then, by chance, a 2012 holiday to Copenhagen provided the missing link. I visited the Thorvaldsens Museum, dedicated to the work of Neo-Classical Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen, in the company of Jan Zahle, a Thorvaldsen scholar and former

A watercolour by Joseph Michael Gandy that helped identify the scarab's position in the Drawing Office

With thanks to Jan Zahle, Kristine Bøggild Johannsen and Annette Johansen, Director of the Thorvaldsens Museum

Head of Denmark's Royal Cast Collection. There, in a store stacked with casts, I saw a scarab: a cast of a hieroglyph from the top of the Obelisk of Montecitorio, according to Jan.

I could not believe my luck. Although the two did not know one another, Thorvaldsen was a contemporary of Soane's, and many of the casts in the Copenhagen collection match casts in the Museum. It would not surprise me at all if Soane's cast was from the same mould as Thorvaldsen's.

It was a pleasing discovery, but its significance grew 10 years later, during the restoration of the Drawing Office. We only had one view of the office from Soane's lifetime – a beautiful 1822 watercolour (pictured left) by Joseph Michael Gandy, his master draughtsman. By another stroke of luck, the scarab was visible. If we could create a replica of the Thorvaldsen cast, we could return the south wall to its original composition.

What happened next is testament to the generosity of our colleagues in Denmark. Kristine Bøggild Johannsen, Curator of the Thorvaldsens Museum, with the support of the Director Annette Johansen, commissioned a 3D scan of the scarab from Danish company Rigsters. The data was sent to ScanLab in the UK, who worked on the *Explore Soane* virtual space. From the digital model, ScanLab used stereolithography – a form of 3D printing – to create a replica of the scarab out of layers of resin.



The replica is placed on the wall in November 2023.
Photos: Justin Piperger (top) and Matt Tidby (bottom)

This was shipped to specialist conservation studio Taylor Pearce, who took a mould in silicone rubber and created a traditional cast from liquid plaster mixed with hessian scrim for strength. Tracey Sweek, an experienced Conservator (formerly of the British Museum), then applied acrylic paint to mimic the finish of the existing Drawing Office casts.

The moment when the copper wire fixing loop went over the original nail, still in the wall, was fantastic. Visitors will step into that room and think: 'that's a nice cast', but what is so wonderful for those involved is to know the time and effort that went into placing this replica in position to complete one of Soane's magical arrangements.



DESIGNING FUTURES

The Young Architects and New Architects clubs
are supporting the next generation of budding
designers – with inspiration from Sir John Soane

By Francesca Perry

Sir John Soane's father was a bricklayer, whose links to the building trade helped the young Soane secure the opportunity to train as an architect. Today, in lieu of family connections, education plays a crucial role in accessing the profession; in the UK, the chances that children will encounter the discipline of architecture at school are becoming slimmer.

Without a focus on architecture in the national curriculum, students are only likely to engage with it through art and design, or design and technology (D&T). Research from the Design and Technology Association in 2023 showed that the number of students studying D&T at GCSE has decreased by more than 80% in 20 years, with the number of D&T teachers in secondary schools also declining. The Creative Industry Alliance, a group of leaders from the UK creative sector, has voiced concern over the reduction in funding of art, design and technology subjects in state schools since 2010.

'Schools only have limited access to any sort of architectural content,' says Sir John Soane's Museum Learning Manager Morag Calderbank. 'It's up to the art and design teacher to decide if they're going to focus on architecture. It's really important for us at the Soane to embed that learning among children.'

The Museum established the Young Architects Club (YAC) in 2007 to introduce children to the discipline's creative potential. The long-running series of monthly Saturday workshops gives children the space, guidance and tools to discover architecture – from understanding how buildings work to constructing experimental creations, all while developing their drawing and designing skills.

While YAC was initially aimed at 7–13-year-olds, the programme formed two separate strands in 2010 to enable more targeted, age group-specific learning. YAC now caters for 7–10-year-olds, while the New Architects Club (NAC) engages 11–14-year-olds, opening up conversations around

pathways to an architectural career. The clubs take place at the Museum, drawing on the lessons that Soane and his architecture provide, while also offering site visits to buildings in London, including Spitalfields Market, UCL Library and the Wellington Arch.

To date, almost 600 children have participated in the programmes, building a budding new generation of architecture lovers. 'The Young Architects Club has sparked my eight-year-old's curiosity for learning about architecture, the importance of sound structures and creative designs,' one parent said this past year. 'The site trips have also been a great highlight, seeing the architectural theory come to life.'

The impact can even shape entire careers. Former NAC participant Warren D'Souza is now at architecture school, and in 2023 won the national 3DReid Student Prize for his work.

YAC is currently led by archaeologist and long-time Museum Learning freelancer Rosie Fuller, while NAC is led by artist and educator Wilson Yau. 'Sir John Soane's home, life story, collection and the local area inspire young people and make our activities exciting and educational,' says Yau. Some children enjoy the experience of YAC so much that they continue into NAC when older, he adds. 'There's a lovely continuum where our young people go on a learning journey with the Museum as they grow up.'

And it doesn't stop with NAC. The Museum also runs the Architectural Drawing Course for 15 to 18-year-olds, to help develop a portfolio of drawings in preparation for future study at architecture school. Through these sessions, which began in 2009 and are now led by architect Benedict O'Looney, young people from all backgrounds become equipped with the kind of draughtsmanship skills helpful for accessing the architectural profession – and for which Soane's office was renowned.



THE MASTER MAXIMALIST

The elaborate rooms that Sir John Soane created at Lincoln's Inn Fields are inspiring a bold, eclectic approach to design among young creatives

By Amy Frearson

When a friend asked LA-based interior designer Alexandra Loew to bring order to his cluttered New York home, she immediately looked to Sir John Soane for inspiration. The client had amassed such a vast collection of artworks, books and antiquities that he had run out of space to showcase everything within the confines of an 80 sq m Gramercy Park apartment.

Drawing on the imaginative display techniques employed by Soane at 12–13 Lincoln's Inn Fields, Loew devised a system that allowed framed paintings and drawings to be hung from steel chains that trailed down the walls, themselves supported by a series of ceiling-mounted copper pipes. This meant the client could switch things up, highlighting different works as his collection grew. The same thinking extended elsewhere, with deep, floor-to-ceiling shelving and object-laden furniture offering endless possibilities for new displays. The home became a feast for the eyes, both a treasure trove and an expression of its owner's character and tastes.

Loew is among a growing number of contemporary designers taking cues from Soane to produce objects and spaces that are 'maximalist'. This term – broadly understood as the aesthetic of excess – refers to designs where multiple colours, patterns, styles and/or forms are artfully brought together so that, rather than clashing, they create a complete and balanced experience. It's not just about more 'stuff'; it's an approach that only works with clever curation.

Soane could be described as the godfather of maximalism, particularly in the context of his former home and workplace. Just as the maximalist style as we know it first emerged as a reaction against the stark minimalism of the early 20th-century Modernists, the Soane is precisely the opposite of the 'white cube' gallery, the ultimate archetype of the minimalist style. While the latter demands visual purity, with

nothing to distract from the exhibits, Soane's highly elaborate interiors ensure there is always a new angle or juxtaposition to discover. Every exhibit is understood by its relationship with other pieces displayed alongside, framed by architectural details designed to emphasise and exaggerate.

Loew says that Soane reinforced her understanding of how to layer a space so that significant works can sit side-by-side with secondary pieces and personal possessions. Soane's collection mixes ancient artefacts with plaster casts and facsimiles. 'Collectors are inherently undisciplined; they have an insatiable curiosity and appetite for acquiring things,' Loew says. 'It was meaningful to look at how Soane organised and aggregated. I understood that my client's collection would never stabilise; it would always expand and I needed to allow for that.'

A Soane-esque approach to layering is equally visible in the work of Spanish designer Amaro Sánchez de Moya, whose design for a pair of interlinked townhouses in Seville includes a courtyard filled with classical sculptures, reliefs and *trompe l'oeil* columns topped with antique vases. The same goes for Swedish designer Martin Brudnizki, the poster boy of maximalism ever since his Garden of Eden-inspired interiors for exclusive London members' club Annabel's – and particularly the toilets lined in silk flowers – became an internet sensation.

For Brudnizki, though, the influence goes deeper. He points to Soane's architectural detailing as a lesson in how precision can bring an important feeling of lightness to a maximalist interior. In a talk for the Museum's *By Design* podcast series, recorded in October 2022, he noted how many rooms designed by Soane are outlined by delicate beading rather than oversized mouldings. The handkerchief dome ceiling in the Breakfast Room is one such example. 'I think he was a pioneer,' says Brudnizki. 'Normally you have





The drawing room of designer Martin Brudnizki's apartment in Binderton House, Sussex, that he shares with his partner and their dog Zenon (pictured here). Photo: Henry Bourne

a skirting, an architrave or a cornice to hide a joint between two surfaces. But these [beading] details weren't there to hide anything; they were just there as a soft transition from one surface to another.' The result, he explained, is a completely modern way of embracing traditional decoration. 'It is classical by design, but he did it differently.'

The Swedish designer has applied the same logic to many of his interiors, including the renovated 17th-century Sussex apartment where he lives with his partner Jonathan Brook. Here, existing cornice and skirting details are played down through the use of colour-blocking, while beading lines are picked out in gold leaf. The effect is particularly striking in the living room, painted yellow in direct tribute to Soane's Drawing Room. There is a sense of exactitude – no mean feat in a room bursting with patterned textiles, antique furnishings and all-round exuberance.

Another reading of Soane underlies the interiors and installations of London-based artist and designer Adam Nathaniel Furman, who uses references from across architectural history to explore themes of identity. Furman describes their first visit to the Museum, as a young queer architecture student in the early 2000s, as a career turning point. 'What really got to me was that this irreverent mixing – of high and low, Chinese and Egyptian, Greek and Arabic – wasn't just in the service of a beautiful space. It was the idea that a rich and complex personality can be represented through an ever-changing series of artefacts,' they explain. 'It was a library of the mind, a register of what was going on in Soane's head.'

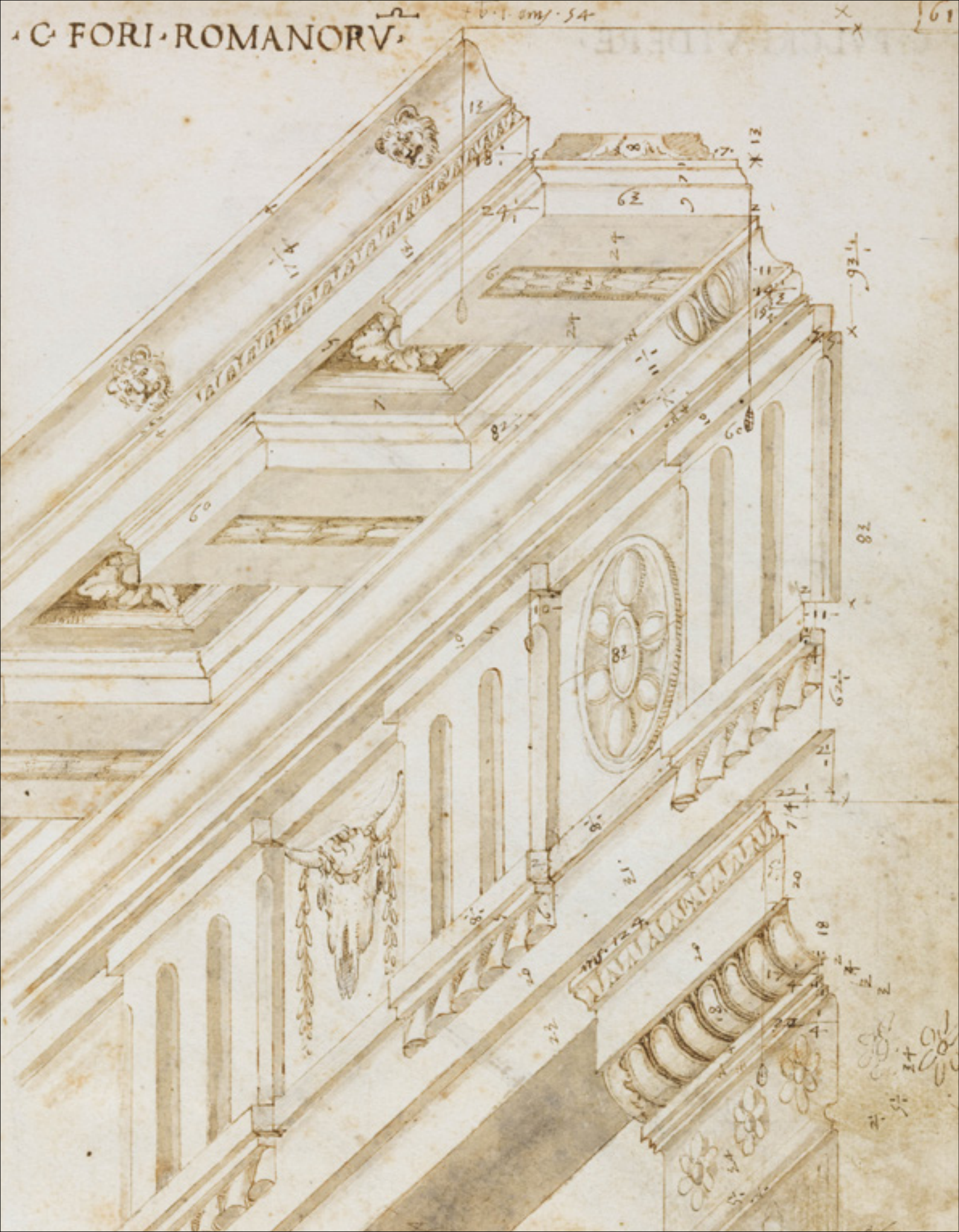
For Furman, Soane's careful way of collaging wide-ranging architectural forms and fragments offered a form of self-expression beyond the limited aesthetic promoted by their tutors at the Architectural Association. 'He disobeyed rules of boundaries, chronology and scale; to me, that was extremely liberating,' the artist and designer says.



Objects from Furman's *The Roman Singularity* series. Photo: Veerle Evens

Furman's breakthrough project – *The Roman Singularity*, exhibited at the Museum in 2017 – took classical Roman architectural elements and turned them into ceramic objects in vivid colours. More recent explorations, such as the *Queer de Triompf* proposal, take this idea even further. A collage of architectural references, it offers a monument to gender expression.

Furman doesn't like the maximalist label, in part because they see its perceived scope – encompassing almost anything that doesn't fit into the category of minimalism – as too reductive. But they suggest that, at a time when the pared-back aesthetic is still just as popular with the design mainstream, the Soane legacy can offer an alternative approach to creating objects and spaces that relate to ideas of place and history. 'The Soane is a triumph of that type of space, pungent with memory, that screams: I have a story,' Furman says. The door is open for more designers to offer their own interpretations.



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RECORDING ROME

Delving into Sir John Soane's most remarkable –
and radical – collection of Renaissance drawings

Interview by Alex McFadyen

In the early 16th century, a well-connected draughtsman in Rome was commissioned to create one of the earliest, most accurate and influential bodies of drawings of Classical buildings. It is a key document in the Renaissance's rediscovery and reappraisal of antiquity, and the drawings were often copied by some of the greatest figures of the era – Michelangelo used it as an architectural training manual. Centuries later, it was sold to John Soane at auction. Now, the architectural historians Paul Davies and David Hemsoll have catalogued this unique document. They explain why it's a masterfully prepared study of Rome's classical architecture – and a vital record of the city during the Renaissance.

What is the Codex Coner?

Paul Davies It is an album of very refined annotated drawings produced on paper between 1513 and 1515. Mostly of antiquities, but also of some buildings in an antique style by the great architects of the day, such as

[Donato] Bramante and Antonio da Sangallo the Younger. These are often the first representations known. We don't know a lot about its subsequent history, until it pops up again around 1630 in the hands of Cassiano dal Pozzo, a collector who was creating the Paper Museum [in Rome]. The original Codex was a series of double-page spreads but he put each drawing into a nice mount, and bound it in a monumental, fantastic-looking album. It was one of his prize objects.

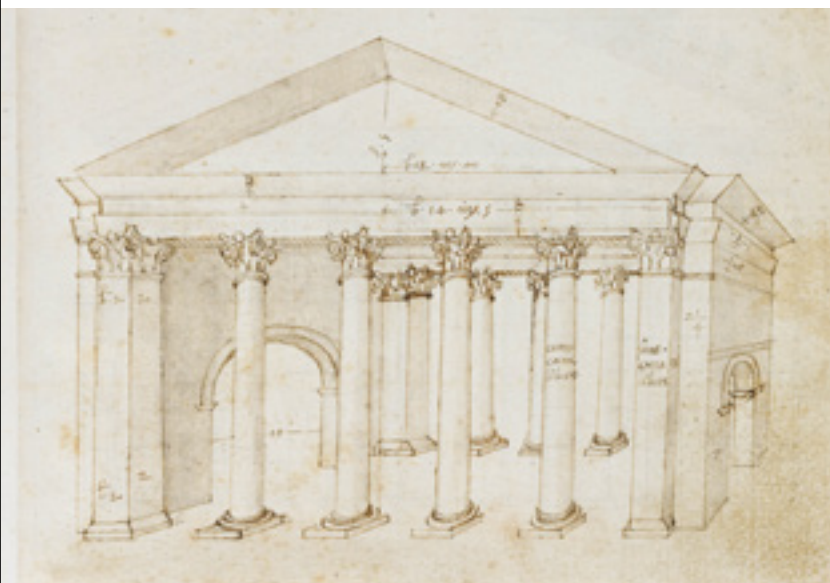
Who created the drawings?

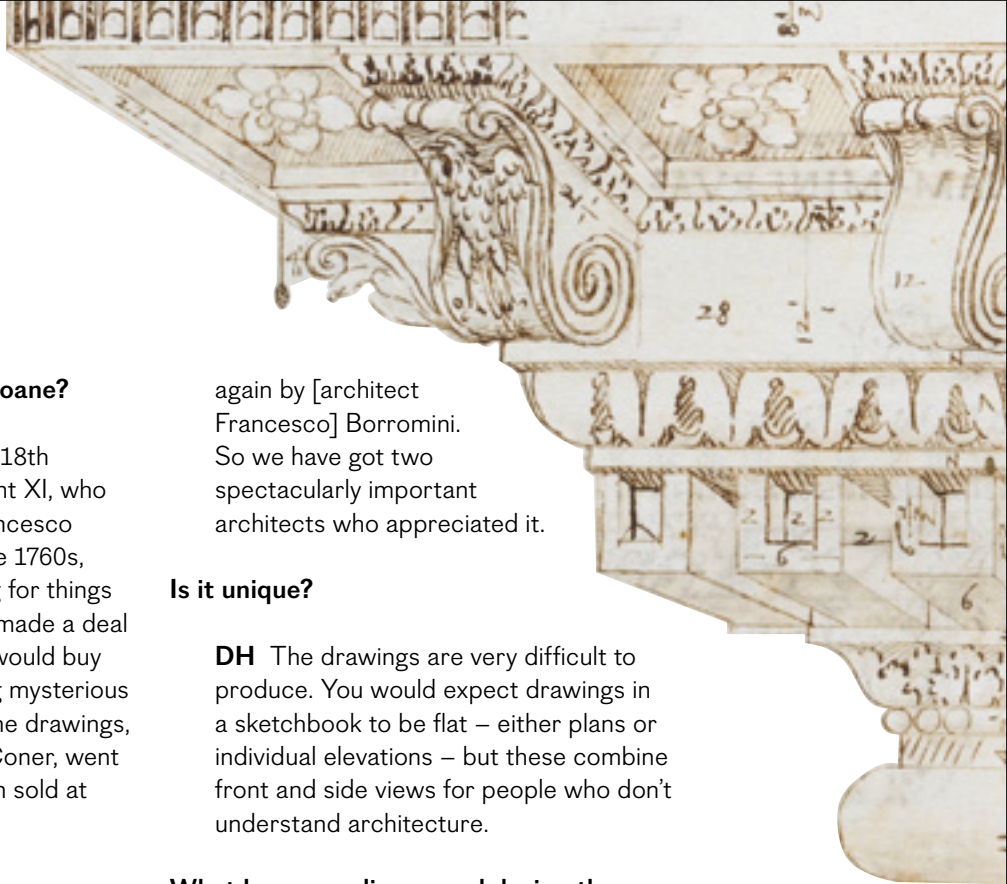
PD In 1975 Tilmann Buddensieg, a German scholar, identified the hand of Bernardo della Volpaia. He's not well known, but he was a wonderful draughtsman and surveyor, and was well connected – one of his relatives was a chum of Michelangelo's. The sketchbook was produced in a short time and there are about 400 drawings in it – all meticulous – which suggests that it was a commission.

Who commissioned it?

PD There's a letter in the book written by Andreas Coner, so Cassiano dal Pozzo put Coner's name on the binding. But Coner was just a conduit – the letter was addressed to a man called Bernardo Rucellai, who was one of the great Florentine intellectuals of the day. He was the brother-in-law of Lorenzo the Magnificent [the Medici ruler of Florence]. Rucellai was absolutely fascinated by ancient architecture. He's just the sort of person who would have commissioned [the book] – it certainly seems to have been written for a humanistic intellectual interested in antiquities. All the annotations are in Latin which, by and large, architects couldn't read.

A drawing of the Pantheon. Photo: Ardon Bar-Hama





When and how was it acquired by Soane?

David Hemsoll At the turn of the 18th century it was sold to Pope Clement XI, who sold it to his nephew, Cardinal Francesco Albani, a prominent collector. In the 1760s, architect James Adam was looking for things to acquire for King George III and made a deal with Cardinal Albani that the king would buy all of his drawings. Then something mysterious happened: the King got nearly all the drawings, but six volumes, including Codex Coner, went into Adam's own library. It was then sold at auction to John Soane in 1818.

What do the drawings show?

DH The drawings of the Colosseum are the most accurate plans to survive from the Renaissance. They got the shape of the oval correct. You have to have skilled surveyors and measurers and a careful understanding of geometric construction to do that.

PD The Arch of Titus drawing is very detailed in the centre but fizzles out towards the edges. The draughtsman is doing something quite radical by avoiding reconstruction [of lost elements] – a theme throughout the Codex. That was a watershed moment in terms of recording antiquity.

Was it of interest to other architects besides Soane?

PD More than 100 of the drawings were copied by Michelangelo. He was asked to work on a big commission – the facade of the Basilica di San Lorenzo in Florence – and that was his way of getting into the subject. In the 17th century, it was copied

again by [architect Francesco] Borromini. So we have got two spectacularly important architects who appreciated it.

Is it unique?

DH The drawings are very difficult to produce. You would expect drawings in a sketchbook to be flat – either plans or individual elevations – but these combine front and side views for people who don't understand architecture.

What have you discovered during the course of the project?

DH We learned a lot about how it was conceived and executed. As well as establishing the possible patron [Rucellai], we can be pretty sure that the vast majority of the drawings were made before the death of Bramante, in May 1514. That shows how much Renaissance architects knew about classical antiquity. We were also able to reconstruct the original sequence [of the drawings].

PD We adopted a forensic approach to match the halves of paper up, using backlighting to see the structure of the paper and the watermarks.

Will you be publishing your research?

DH The catalogue will be on Sir John Soane's Museum's collections website, with detailed entries on all the drawings and a summary of the other findings that have been made. The 'full monty' of the Codex Coner book will, we hope, come out in print in 2025.



QUIET CORNERS

Architectural drawings' characterful details came into focus in the 2024 exhibition *Fanciful Figures* – here, a specially commissioned photo essay finds intriguing stories in the Museum's easily overlooked places

Photography by Richard Stapleton

Soane invested in the maintenance of his picture frames: in 1833–34 alone he purchased 784 books of gold leaf for regilding. Here, the corner of the frame for Augustus Wall Callcott's *River Thames below Greenwich* features a Grecian-inspired ornament echoing the wallpaper pattern behind.



Changing light effects by hour, weather and season were fundamental to Soane's architectural vision. While it was customary for Georgian staircases to be lit from above, here Soane manipulates daylight to spill down and create a variety of shadow and reflection, and to highlight the beauty of his half-cantilevered stairs.

The extraordinary aperture between the Catacombs and the Lobby to the Breakfast Room. Standing among Roman cinerary urns, which once contained the ashes of the deceased, it is as if the visitor has descended from the world of light and life to a place of sombre reflection and remembrance.



Small pendant details appear throughout the Museum in a variety of sizes and forms, and are a characteristic feature of many Soane designs. Here, above a bookcase in the South Drawing Room loggia, they are circular and used as ceiling ornaments.





Soane's last act of curation, 10 days before his death, was to position this figure of *Nike* (victory) in front of a watercolour of his wife Eliza's tomb. Placing it here suggests he was contemplating both his enduring love for her, and his own mortality and legacy.

There are more than 100 mirrors in the Breakfast Room, many bejewelling Soane's familiar hanging pendentive dome. Originally, each of the dome's four corners had an open aperture to allow light in, but in the late 1820s Soane covered them with these convex mirrors – advanced glass making at the time – offering a fascinatingly distorted reflection of the space.





Electricity – and these elegant pine cone-inspired bulbs – arrived in the Museum in 1897. Curator George Birch was delighted that visitors would enjoy the space better during winter, but fretted about the new technology's cost: after accidentally leaving one on for days, he went to bed in the dark for a week.

Soane was probably partly inspired to paint the Library-Dining Room in a 'Pompeian' red by his Grand Tour. A fragment of red plaster from Pompeii was one of the few things he brought back, and could be considered the starting point of his collection.





A view of the Monk's Parlour through the only surviving, intact coloured glass door in the Museum, with its exquisite Regency Greek key border. The extravagantly ornamented ceilings include full-scale replicas of casts in Soane's other London landmarks, such as depictions of winged angels used at Pitzhanger Manor in Ealing.



SETTING THE SCENE

Aynho Park has been transformed into a gallery
and dining venue by interior design brand RH
– following in the footsteps of Sir John Soane,
who remodelled the property in 1798

By Deniz Nazım-Englund

Since 2013, the US interiors brand RH has been purchasing historic properties – such as the former Museum of Natural History in Boston, its first project, and the Post Office in Greenwich, Connecticut, a 1917 example of the Classical Revival architectural style – and transforming them into luxury retail and hospitality centres.

In June 2023, it opened its first British property, Aynho Park, a 17th-century estate in Northamptonshire that was embellished by Sir John Soane at the turn of the 19th century. He added a first floor to the library and orangery, created an enfilade and magnificent interiors, and remodelled the exterior with now famous triumphal arches.

Upon hearing that RH had bought the estate, the team at Sir John Soane's Museum was relieved. 'RH has a track record of taking on historic buildings in the US and doing admirable things with them, so we knew that they were going to take good care of Aynho,' says Frances Sands, Curator of Drawings and Books.

RH approached the Museum to consult on the project and to learn more about the history of the stately home. This resulted in a collaboration between the two organisations, culminating in an exhibition on Sir John Soane, curated by Sands, which is on show at the newly titled RH England – The Gallery at the Historic Aynho Park.

'I love anything that breathes new life into a Soane building,' says Rebecca Hossain, Director of Commercial and Operations at the Soane. 'It tells our story to different people and keeps Soane's legacy alive.'

The Sir John Soane Exhibition

The exhibition is located in an antechamber in the newly renovated house. Four key aspects of Soane's life and career – the scholar, the educator, the collector and the architect – are told through facsimile drawings, including his Royal Academy lecture drawings and an interior view of his design for the Bank of England. Drawings and elevations of Aynho Park are also on display and a copy of Joseph Michael Gandy's sunset view of Tynningham Hall sits in the centre of the space.

'It's a wonderful opportunity to teach people, who otherwise might not have an interest in architectural history, about Soane and the importance of the country house within our shared national heritage,' says Sands.

The drawings are accompanied by contemporary reproductions of architectural models from Soane's collection, originally created by Parisian model-maker François Fouquet. There is also an 1830 bust of the architect by Sir Francis Leggatt Chantrey and a new model of the Museum's facade.

The display was designed by Charles Marsden-Smedley, whose previous work for the Museum includes a lighting scheme in the renovated Model Room. At Aynho Park, he also created gallery wall cases and vitrines to evoke those found at Lincoln's Inn Fields.

Facsimile production

On the Museum's recommendation, RH worked on the exhibition's models with the Factum Foundation for Digital Technology in Preservation. The Madrid-based organisation specialises in the digital scanning and physical recreations of important historic works, ranging from Claude Monet's *Water Lilies* (1916) to a 1:1 replica of the Tomb of Tutankhamun.



The renovated library with a collection of antiquarian books, including a first edition of Roman architect Vitruvius' *De Architectura Libri Dece* in a display case. Photo: Courtesy of RH

The Factum Foundation travelled to London in April 2023 to scan and carry out close-range photogrammetry (recording accurate measurements through photographic imagery) of the objects for the Aynho Park exhibition. Back at its workshop in Madrid, the Foundation generated digital models, which were 3D printed, moulded, cast and hand finished to capture fine details such as the marble veining in Chantrey's bust of Soane. The model of the Museum's facade was created from pre-existing data recorded by Scanlab and then 3D printed by the Factum Foundation.

'Seldom has a small project brought so much satisfaction and motivated so many,' says Adam Lowe, Factum Foundation's founder. 'From the elevated brickwork of the house, the recreation of the figures, the attention to detail on the classical models and the innovative manipulation of technology, this work became an inspiring creative challenge.'

The Renovation of Aynho Park

'We are both proud and humbled to introduce RH to the UK and to fully open Aynho Park to the public for the first time in its history,' says Gary Friedman, RH's Chief Executive, who adds that the property is the company's 'greatest work to date'.

While the exterior of the home remains the same, the interior has been transformed. Alongside rooms decorated with the brand's products, there is an interior design studio offering consultancy, five dining spaces and a library with an impressive collection of antiquarian books on architectural history. A first edition of Roman architect Vitruvius' *De Architectura Libri Dece* (*The Ten Books on Architecture*), printed in modern Italian in 1521, sits in a display case in the centre of the room.

'RH is to be lauded for the quality of its work,' says Sands. 'It has secured the house for centuries to come and has done so beautifully.'



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EXHIBITIONS

This year Sir John Soane's Museum organised a total of six exhibitions. The first-floor gallery cases underwent essential maintenance and repair work in March 2024.

The Architecture Drawing Prize 2022

8 February – 8 May 2023
Foyle Space

This exhibition displayed the winning and commended entries of the sixth annual Architecture Drawing Prize. Launched in 2017, in partnership with Make Architects and the World Architecture Festival, the prize celebrates drawing's significance as a tool in capturing and communicating architectural ideas. The hand-drawn, digital and hybrid entries were evaluated for their technical skill, originality in approach and ability to convey an architectural idea. In order to highlight the restoration of the Drawing Office, this iteration of the Prize exhibition was accompanied by a presentation of drawings and drawing instruments from the Museum's collections which linked the importance of drawing in Soane's day to the ambition and craft that continue to underpin architectural drawing practice. The prize and the exhibition were generously supported by MAKE Architects, World Architecture Festival and Iris Ceramica Group.

Architects' Houses

7 June – 3 September 2023
Soane Gallery, Foyle Space

Through five case studies dating from the 19th century to the present, this exhibition examined how architects and designers since Soane's time have explored ideas about architecture by creating their own homes. The houses featured in the exhibition included Red House (1860) by William Morris and Philip Webb; 2 Willow Road (1939) by Ernő Goldfinger; Hopkins House (1976) by Michael and Patty Hopkins; The Cosmic House (1983) by Charles Jencks, Maggie Jencks and Terry Farrell Partnership; and 9/10 Stock Orchard Street (2000) by Sarah Wigglesworth and Jeremy Till. The exhibition included a combination of drawings, objects and new pictures by architectural photographer Gareth Gardner to reveal how each house corresponded clearly to styles and concepts present in their moment, ranging from Victorian design reform to 21st-century sustainability. *Architects' Houses* was generously supported by the Christina Smith Foundation, Basil and Maria Postan, and Lord and Lady Sassoon.

Visions in Porcelain: A Rake's Progress

7 June – 10 September 2023
Foyle Space

Inspired by William Hogarth's *A Rake's Progress*, artist Bouke de Vries presented a newly created series of eight porcelain vessels. Using processes honed by de Vries in his work as a ceramics restorer, the exhibition subverted a variety of restoration techniques to explore instead the degradation and decline of Hogarth's anti-hero, Tom Rakewell, through the increasingly fractured, slumped and broken vessels. *Visions in Porcelain* was accompanied by a specially commissioned film, featuring an interview with de Vries and independent curator and writer Kathleen Soriano, as well as insights from the Soane curatorial team's research on Hogarth's series. The exhibition was made possible as a result of the generous support of Adrian Sassoon, London.

Our exhibitions programme is possible due to the Government Indemnity Scheme. The Museum gratefully acknowledges HM Government for providing the indemnity and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and Arts Council England for arranging the indemnity.

Georgian Illuminations

4 October 2023 – 7 January 2024
Soane Gallery, Foyle Space

This exhibition centred on the popular light shows that illuminated Georgian-era cities, bringing dimly lit streets, parks and buildings to life. Illuminations often relied on temporary architecture, multi-coloured oil lamps, glowing transparent paintings and fireworks, and leading artists and architects were commissioned to design them, including Sir John Soane. The exhibition brought these illuminations to life by showing surviving design drawings, prints and material culture, including original lamps and two surviving transparent paintings. This was accompanied by a commission by light artist Nayan Kulkarni. His work, *A Drawing for John Soane*, lit up the facade of the Museum throughout the exhibition's run. An online exhibition on the history of fireworks supported the physical display. *Georgian Illuminations* was generously supported by Lord and Lady Sassoon, Kathryn Uhde, the Ampersand Foundation, Jacqueline and Jonathan Gestetner, Christian Levett, Webb Yates Engineers and those who wish to remain anonymous.

The Architecture Drawing Prize 2023

31 January – 17 March 2024
Foyle Space

The winning and commended entries of the seventh annual Architecture Drawing Prize were shown in the Foyle Space. Presented as a dense, salon-style hang, this year's shortlist focused on some of the themes that have been present in past iterations of the Prize exhibition. In particular, several drawings took nature as their point of departure, focusing on architecture's ability to protect or aid in the recovery of nature. Drawings also celebrated architecture of the past, by exploring existing landscapes and historic modes of representation. Finally, this year's Prize saw the first entries related to AI, with one commended drawing curating a new version of The National Gallery using an algorithm designed by the artist. The Architecture Drawing Prize and its exhibition were again generously supported by MAKE Architects, World Architecture Festival and Iris Ceramica Group.

Fanciful Figures: People in Architectural Drawings

22 March – 9 June 2024
Soane Gallery, Foyle Space

Fanciful Figures examined 'staffage' – the small human and animal figures that lend a sense of scale, function and narrative to architectural drawings. Through Soane Collection drawings by architects such as Robert Adam, George Dance and Sir John Soane, this exhibition traced their use and development in British architecture from their beginnings in the 1690s up to their widespread use in the 1800s. Accompanying the drawings, which were shown in the Museum's first-floor galleries, a film in the Foyle Space looked at their use today through interviews with four London-based architecture practices: Muf Architecture/Art, Nimtim Architects, Office S&M and OMMX. This show was the first Museum exhibition to include significant written and audio interpretation specially for children, helping them to identify figures in the drawings and encouraging them to imagine their lives.

LOANS

Pitzhanger Manor and Gallery, Ealing

Anthony Caro: The Inspiration of Architecture
24 May – 21 November 2023

Model for a Villa at Acton (SM M1146)

The Royal Academy of Arts, London

Entangled Pasts 1776–now:
Art, Colonialism and Change
3 February – 28 April 2024

*Sir William Chambers, ground floor plan of
Somerset House (SM 41/1/24) and Thomas
Banks, plaster of The Hindu Deity Camadeva
with his mistress on a crocodile (SM A12)*

AWARDS

Recipients of the 2023 Soane Medal

Anne Lacaton and Jean-Philippe Vassal

*The Museum would like to thank Hamish
and Sophie Forsyth for their generous
support for the Soane Medal Lecture*



*Soane office and Antonio Van Assen, Lothbury Court,
Bank of England, c.1797–1801*

THANKING OUR SUPPORTERS

It is with enormous gratitude that we thank the many individuals, sponsors, trusts, foundations, volunteers and the Department for Culture Media and Sport, for their generous and continued support of Sir John Soane's Museum. Without it, we would not be able to fulfil our mission of caring for our remarkable collections and sharing them with the widest possible public.

This year, we delivered a free and diverse programme of exhibitions, both on site and online. Our ambitious learning and outreach activities were at capacity, engaging children, young adults and community groups. Our digital programme continued to expand. And we brought to a successful conclusion the restoration of the Drawing Office, while enjoying a record number of visitors.

The unrestricted commitment of our Inspectress Fund members and Patrons aids the vital work we undertake as custodians of the Museum's Grade I-listed buildings and collection.

Among our major supporters, we would particularly like to thank the Deborah Loeb Brice Foundation for its generous and long-standing commitment. We are also hugely grateful to the trusts and individuals who contributed to the Drawing Office, as well as to the Julia and Hans Rausing Trust for supporting our vibrant volunteer programme.

The Soane is a very special place. It has been an inspiration and a joy for many people, some of whom kindly choose to leave a charitable legacy to the Museum. Carol Kolanko was one such person, who, in 2022 left a significant bequest, for which we are extremely grateful.

The unrestricted support of The Soane Foundation in America and Sir John Soane's Museum Trust in the UK are also greatly appreciated. We express our thanks to their Boards of Trustees.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport is not only a major funder of the Museum, but is also supportive in many other ways, not least with its guidance and encouragement. We thank all those in the Department, particularly the Museums team with whom we work closely.

We are now entering the next phase of *Opening Up The Soane*, which will see us turning outwards to share the Museum's intriguing, inspiring, incredible 'academy of the arts' with as many people as possible, both at 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields, and virtually with audiences across the globe. This is our purpose, which, as a free museum, requires generous, committed support to achieve. We are grateful to each and every person who helps us fulfil our mission.

Ursola Rimbotti
Director of Development

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

	2023–24 Draft – not audited ²	2022–23
Total charitable giving ¹	£1,635,443	£1,482,740
Ratio of charitable giving to DCMS grant-in-aid	107%	96%
Number of visits to the Museum (excluding virtual visits)	157,938	133,785
Number of unique website visits ³	263,348	193,514
Number of visits by children under 16	7,897	5,351
Number of overseas visits	72,651	61,541
Number of facilitated and self-directed visits to the Museum by visitors under 18 in formal education	1,458	1,356
Number of instances of visitors under 18 participating in on-site organised activities ⁴	2,788	2,954
% of visitors who would recommend a visit	86%	87%
Admissions income (gross income)	£96,424	£95,892
Trading income (net profit/loss)	£237,860	£217,572
Number of UK loan venues	2	2

Notes

1. The figures for 2023-24 above are the draft results for the year ending 31 March 2024, which had not yet been finalised as at the time of publication. These figures have not been audited.
2. Charitable giving is calculated as the combined total of donations, legacies and grants, excluding grant-in-aid, as shown in the Consolidated Statement of Financial Activities.
3. This is an average based on accurate reporting figures from Q4 2023–24, after the implementation of Google Analytics 4 across the Museum's website.
4. Includes online organised activities.

FINANCES

	2024 Draft – not audited ¹		2023 ²	
	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted funds £	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted funds £
Charitable Income				
Grant-in-aid from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport	1,301,000	227,000	1,372,552	165,000
Other grants and donations	1,090,114	545,329	865,459	617,281
Visitors	80,322	16,102	85,333	10,559
Trading activities				
Retail sales	409,939	–	367,145	–
Room hire	203,630	–	248,460	–
Other trading activities	128,203	–	80,177	–
Other income	59,093	–	131,702	–
TOTAL INCOME	3,272,301	788,431	3,150,828	792,840
Expenditure				
Development and fundraising	252,863	35,430	220,833	27,741
Trading and communications	635,713	58,424	684,385	53,295
Charitable activities	2,004,769	595,639	1,816,648	672,407
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	2,893,345	689,493	2,721,866	753,443
Transfers between funds	(10,267)	10,267	22,350	(22,350)
NET INCOME/(EXPENDITURE)	368,689	109,205	451,312	17,047

Notes

1. The figures for 2024 above are the draft results for the year ending 31 March 2024, which had not yet been finalised as at the time of publication. These figures have not been audited.
2. Charitable giving is calculated as the combined total of donations, legacies and grants, excluding grant-in-aid, as shown in the Consolidated Statement of Financial Activities.



View of the Dome area at 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields by night,
looking east, by Joseph Michael Gandy, 1811

LETTER TO THE SOANE

When I joined the Museum as Director in 2016, I knew something about Sir John Soane the architect – but very little about Soane the collector. I had marvelled at the Dome Area, which seemed like stepping into Soane’s mind, and I was overwhelmed by the empire of ‘things’ he had acquired throughout his career. However, the density of the display, the juxtapositions of Greek, Roman, medieval and non-Western items seemed puzzling. So I made it my goal to delve into the strategy beneath the surface clutter, which led to the writing of my new book, *John Soane’s Cabinet of Curiosities*.

Of course, Sir John Soane’s Museum is much more than the sum of its parts. It is one of the most intensely autobiographical statements conceived in three-dimensional terms. Still, there is a paradox here; for while the architect appears both directly and indirectly throughout, he remains an elusive presence – rather like the reflections in the convex mirrors that adorn so many corners of the building. In the opening of his privately printed guide to his house and collection from 1835, Soane famously said that the works were arranged ‘as studies for my own mind’, but he never explained what he meant by that phrase. We know that Soane wanted to direct the visitor’s attention to individual objects as well as to clusters, but he withheld the key, being content to scatter clues for later generations to follow.

A salient aspect of Soane’s displays is the avoidance of chronology, or the segregation of objects according to conventional chronological typology. Soane’s written comments refer primarily to the ‘striking effects of light and shade’ as well as the sources of the works purchased or donated to the collection. The whole ensemble could be described as variations upon a theme: the overriding logic seems one of visual association – even opportunism – rather than coming from a purely antiquarian impulse. Soane orchestrates the visitor’s experience through the manipulation of light and shade as well as a journey from larger to smaller spaces. The strategic deployment of mirrors amplifies the sense of space and provides what Soane would have described as ‘picturesque’ vistas.

Soane’s collection gradually became a celebration of what he considered the best of art, both historical and contemporary British. He partly fashioned his collection as a temple of British worthies, chief among them William Shakespeare and Hogarth. One of my greatest pleasures during the latter part of my time as Director was to set in motion the conservation of Hogarth’s *A Rake’s Progress*, 1734. It amazes me to think that such a well-known jewel of the collection can still yield new information about its genesis, and the coming years should bear this out.

Most people today would agree that it is fortunate the Museum was not reorganised along conventional lines, or according to chronological genres, as was discussed by parliamentary committee in the 1930s. We can recognise now that the 19th-century concept of the museum as a systematically organised presentation of objects is only one way of looking at history. Our renewed interest in earlier museums and in cabinets of curiosities reflects a desire to pursue diverse epistemological paths and to reconsider the museum as an archaeological site worthy of exploration. In this way, one can say that the 21st century has caught up with Sir John Soane.

*Bruce Boucher was Director of the Sir John Soane’s Museum from 2016–23.
John Soane’s Cabinet of Curiosities (Yale University Press) is out now*

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Editor

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Project Manager, Exhibitions
UNTIL AUGUST 2023

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A Wider Perspective