

SIR JOHN SOANE'S  
MUSEUM

# A YEAR OF CHANGE

*Sir John Soane's Museum*

ANNUAL REVIEW 2020 / 21

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## CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD

The strength and quality of an institution is sometimes most evident when it is under great pressure. This seems to me to be true for the Soane, over the period during which lockdown and other restrictions have severely curtailed normal activity. In this review, you will read how our staff have accelerated change in response to the difficult conditions and also how, greatly assisted by the government, the financial security of the Museum has been sustained. These achievements are not universal in the museum sector, which has been ravaged by the pandemic and its side-effects. So it is a source of pride to me that the Soane has not only come through this phase of the pandemic largely unscathed, but also that it has used the downtime to consider its future and to embark on the final phase of its restoration. We have adapted rapidly, and will continue to do so, as this review shows.

The pandemic in one form or another is likely to be with us for years, and earlier ways of doing things are being changed. I have been most impressed by the buoyant response of staff and Trustees faced with these challenges – all concerned have adapted with high levels of collaboration and good humour. Most communication over the past year has been in a virtual setting. These circumstances have increased our focus on giving access to and promoting the Museum in all its aspects via digitisation, and this includes our commercial activity. Our digital journey is only in its early steps but it will be a vital part of our future. So my first thanks go to Bruce Boucher and all the Soane Trustees, staff and volunteers for their exceptional efforts in this most demanding time.

In the review, Stephen Gosztony explains how the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the Sir John Soane's Museum Foundation and the Sir John Soane's Museum Trust each occupy an essential position in sustaining the finances of the Museum. The government, despite all the great pressures that it is under, has found the means to support our sector, and the Museum and our staff have been major beneficiaries. Our supporters, especially those in the United States, have also been most important: none more so than our long-standing benefactor, Deborah Loeb Brice. The Rothschild Foundation and Basil Postan have again been kind enough to enable the production of this review. Like many other supporters, they remain loyal and committed to this great institution. To them and to all who have supported the Museum generally in a time of such acute need, I extend our warmest thanks.

I finish by referring to the strategic plan that Bruce discusses in his piece in this review. The Trustees were closely involved in this important piece of work. At its heart is a focus on turning outwards. Of course, our first responsibility is the conservation of this preeminent house-museum, itself a work of art. But alongside that our aim will be to articulate the Soane's significance, to promote access to the Museum and to illustrate its contemporary relevance for today's audiences and today's world. Emerging from the crisis, I am confident that we are well equipped to to make a success of this strategy.

Guy Elliott  
*Chairman of Trustees, Sir John Soane's Museum*

Original ivory chairs were reintroduced to the Picture Room during the pandemic. Photo: Matt Clayton



## A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

In years past, I would always travel to New York in the autumn to participate in the gala organised by the Sir John Soane's Museum Foundation, an independent charity based in the US, which has been a great source of support to the Museum since its founding in 1991. It always impressed me that several hundred people would gather together to celebrate the achievements of Sir John Soane and his finest creation on the other side of the Atlantic. This past year has shown how close that friendship is, and that although we have laboured under lockdowns and restricted access, the Soane still casts a wide net, drawing generous support from our Friends and Patrons here and abroad. Like all institutions in the cultural sector this year, Sir John Soane's Museum has had to reinvent its public face while maintaining essential responsibilities for the wellbeing of its buildings, collections and staff. Beyond that, we have also grappled with the upside of a complex situation. This issue of the *Annual Review* tells the story of a remarkable year and how admirably my colleagues in the Museum rose to the challenges posed by the pandemic.

When the Soane closed on 18 March last year, it entered its first period of lockdown that extended until mid-October. During that long, 'dark' period of six months, we established a rota of staff to come in daily and monitor the security of our three Georgian houses and more than 40,000 objects. Conservation and essential repairs continued throughout; notably, our façades were repainted and the restoration of the watercolours in the Picture Room Recess went on throughout this period. Meanwhile, our Director of Commercial and Operations, Rebecca Hossain, had the brilliant idea to post online a series of weekly 'postcards from the Soane' as a way for all staff – both those sequestering at home and those required to come in periodically – to keep in touch. Staff participated enthusiastically, sharing personal reflections and recommendations, as did our team of volunteers. The idea was revived as we entered subsequent periods of closure. It seems ironic that although we were scattered, the experience drew us closer together, forging new bonds based upon our affection for the Soane and for each other.

Inevitably, digital communication became an essential way of keeping in touch with our Patrons and the public at large. Outstanding exhibitions such as *Langlands & Bell: Degrees of Truth*, which ran between 3 March 2020 and 3 January 2021, were experienced largely online, and we converted our learning programmes almost exclusively to a digital format. Our Soane Medal pages were enhanced with content from international contributors, and the digital format for the Architecture Drawing Prize gave the event an enhanced focus as well as an international audience. As part of this trend, we are proud to have been asked to join a select group of cultural organisations from around the world on the Bloomberg Connects app. The Museum's guide includes audio commentary and video highlights of the collection, podcasts such as our *By Design* talks series, and links to the Museum Shop. Going forward, we shall include an element of hybridity, both virtual and in-person, in all of our programmes. In pursuing these initiatives, we believe that we are following the example of John Soane, who embraced new technology in his work and in his private life.



The senior management team and I took advantage of the enforced closure during the summer to think about the future in the shape of a new three-year strategic plan, implemented from April 2021. Anticipating a post-Covid climate of some duration, our aim is to reconcile ambition with financially sustainable funding. Whereas the dominant achievement of the previous decade was the physical renewal and restoration of the Museum through the *Opening up the Soane* project, we want to ensure that our focus is on how we articulate, communicate and promote access to the Museum and its contemporary relevance for today's audiences and today's world. This is not only in light of the impact of the pandemic, but also in response to the international Black Lives Matter movement and corresponding issues associated with inequality and diversity. Events in the past year have made us aware of the need to recognise cultural sensitivities in terms of our collection and how it is presented to the public.

Consequently, the Museum today aspires to encourage access to Soane's legacy in its broadest sense: architecture, design and creative originality, collections and a commitment to learning and enquiry, and the connections between past and present that the Museum reveals. Of course, digital will be a crucial strand in all that we do, underpinning our public-facing priorities, namely: buildings and collections, programmes, and learning. These will be enabled by organisational development and financial stability. But a museum is more than what lies in the columns of a balance sheet or a series of bullet points; neither, for that matter, should it ever be considered 'finished', which is another way of saying 'inert'. The heart of Sir John Soane's Museum beats strong and steady as we contemplate our post-pandemic renewal, and projects such as the restoration and renewal of the Drawing Office will continue to build connections with our visitors and contemporary creative practices.

Bruce Boucher  
*Deborah Loeb Brice Director*



# THE UNTOUCHED GLOBE

The year's major exhibition may have been shuttered by the pandemic, but a 40-year survey of work by Langlands & Bell took on a life online, and spoke acutely to the moment.

*By Ashley Hicks*

'A symbol of what happened to the world': Langlands & Bell's *Globe Table*, 2020, in the Breakfast Room. Photo: Gareth Gardner



The artists among works installed for *Degrees of Truth*. Photo: Gareth Gardner

The exhibition *Langlands & Bell: Degrees of Truth* opened in the Museum on Monday 2 March 2020. The mood at the evening opening was tinged with unease at the approach of Covid-19, with some guests wary while others nonchalantly hugged. The dinner afterwards was a boisterous affair, with no real hint that it would be the last such evening for a very long time. Two short weeks later, the Museum had closed, along with everything else. The artists had spent more than two years preparing the show, a retrospective of their work installed throughout the Museum's spaces, with new pieces specially made for the Kitchen, Library and Breakfast Room.

The Soane was the perfect setting for it. Langlands & Bell's work has focused on domestic life and architecture since their first collaboration in 1978, consisting of an installation of twin kitchens: an old one that visitors could enter, made from detritus the artists collected in London's East End, stinking and filthy, and a gleaming new one of white perfection, seen only through a window, an inaccessible dream. When we first met in 1985 they were starting to work with architectural plans and models, putting the Round Reading Room of the British Library into a book sculpture and the basement of the National Gallery into a chair seat, while making immaculate vitrines to hold found objects or what they called *Traces of Living*.

Their work has gone on to examine global power structures and systems through the lens of architecture and branding, embracing virtual reality to give viewers access to secret spaces like Osama bin Laden's hideout in Afghanistan and J M W Turner's studio at Petworth. They suggest parallels between enlightenment thought and corporate globalism, while reflecting on the surprising similarities of prisons and art museums, sparked by the original Tate Gallery's being built on the site of the old Millbank Penitentiary. Travel fascinates them, with its representation in air route maps and airport acronyms, which they made flash in neon clock faces flanking the entrance to Heathrow Terminal 5.

*Degrees of Truth* was intended to run for three months. Instead, it remained up for 10. After the initial two weeks, however, it lay hidden behind closed doors, until October 2020, when the Soane was able to reopen briefly to the small number of visitors permitted to book places and to then follow a one-way route through the spaces, masked and without touching the exhibition's interactive works. The Museum put up an online version of the show on its website, with beautiful and detailed photography of all the work *in*

*situ*, together with Instagram posts (including a 'takeover' by the artists) and the sound recording of a talk at Lincoln's Inn Fields between them and Tony Chambers just before the initial closure.

There is something especially poignant about *Degrees of Truth* being forcibly made virtual in this way, accidentally censored by events. The artists' work often deals with power structures and notions of access and control. They are fascinated by the roles that architectural forms play in our lives and in societal relations, just as they obsess over context and texture of one kind or another. That their installation, so intricately embroidered into the existing fabric of Soane's spaces and poised against his collections, should have been blocked to almost all visitors immediately as it opened, seems a harsh fate, but one sharply expressive of this peculiar moment in all our lives.

The online version of the show is still there, as is the handsome yellow book of the exhibition, published by the Museum and designed by the artists with Herman Lelie. A work in itself, its cover features a linear graphic, drawn from one of Soane's 'starfish' vaults, printed in white on cloth the yellow of his Drawing Room walls. The text, a conversation between curator Owen Hopkins and Langlands & Bell, tells the story of the small Georgian house in Myrdle Street, Whitechapel, that they bought at auction in the early 1980s, a war-damaged and windowless ruin, and restored as home and studio. The endpapers show the grimy London brickwork of both this house and Soane's in Lincoln's Inn Fields.

The book also describes the chequered history of the derelict east London warehouse that the artists and I restored together as a studio in 1989, with the lovingly told, deliciously unsavoury tale of its Victorian owner and the unfortunate mistress for whose inept murder he was hanged at Newgate Prison, the masterpiece of George Dance Jr who gave young Soane his

start. Finally comes 'Untitled', the house that the artists designed and built for themselves from 2006 in a field in Kent, a rural idyll in which to work and rest, a minimal box to hold their own lives. Outside, it is all oak boarding and glass; inside, a white box with oak floor and doors covered in mirror so that they disappear. Points of similarity with the Museum crop up unexpectedly, in this use of mirror, in the integration of workplace and home, in the simplicity of concept and elimination of fussy detail.

There are many parallels between the Museum and the artists' oeuvre, between Soane and themselves. The desiccated body of an East End racing whippet that they found at a market faces the mummified cats that Soane found while demolishing a house on Lothbury for an extension to his Bank of England and placed reverently in a glass vitrine. In his Model Room, recently restored to its rightful place in his dead wife's bedroom next to his own, as if to declare that he was wedded, in truth, to architecture, Domenico Padiglione's huge cork model of Pompeii lies prone on his elaborate model stand like a bride on a marriage bed. In Langlands & Bell's work, architectural models have similarly taken centre stage for the last 35 years, used for entirely different reasons, but touching similar sentiments.

Soane conceived his Museum as a celebration of architecture and of his own spectacular progress from humble bricklayer's son to wealthy and famous architect. In it are several actual memorials. One is to his first master Dance, whose drawings, in his own plan-chest, Soane placed in the centre of the North Drawing Room a year before his death, calling it 'the shrine'. Another is his tiny study where he would write letters, entirely surrounded by the books and marbles collected by his second master Henry Holland, looking out at the 'Pasticcio', which he described as a monument to Padre Giovanni (his alter ego, the embodiment



of his youthful Roman dreams and hopes) but which marks the actual grave of his wife's lapdog.

As well as these specific memorials, the rooms are crowded with architectural fragments acquired by Soane for study and inspiration but also as memorials in themselves, relics of both great architecture and simple building, of both recent and distant past. These had practical purpose as examples for his students to draw from, but they also spun historical narratives that we can imagine him holding forth upon, in simplified terms for visitors and in full, deep and rambling complexity in his own mind. The experience of visiting the Museum, indeed, often feels like wandering about inside his old man's head, with its endless memories crowding in, its sudden vistas through to brighter parts, and its pools of golden, Roman light achieved with hidden, yellow-tinted glazing. It is a memory theatre in built form.

The coat of arms of South Sea millionaire Sir Gregory Page is engraved in mother-of-pearl on eight hall chairs, made in Canton, China about 1730, which Soane bought and placed in his Library-Dining Room a century later. Langlands & Bell replaced the set with seven of their own chairs, each with a matching starfish ceiling motif as its back and a different architectural model in its glass seat. Titled 'The Grand Tour' – although Soane travelled to Italy as a working student, very different from the Milordi he met on their own genuinely Grand Tours – this set of seven models represent buildings he visited and modern ones one might see on the same journey today, like Zaha Hadid's Generali Tower in Milan.

Replacing Soane's set of Chinese chairs with their own ghost versions, their memorial to the Italian journey that began Soane's career and was foremost in his thoughts for his whole life, was a genuinely retrospective gesture on the artists' part, one echoed in their substituting two tables

elsewhere in the Museum. The first was in a space that was never, until quite recently, part of the 'visit' and certainly would not have been much seen by Soane himself: the Kitchen. Recent exhibitions have used the space, now part of the visitor route, but the artists were also thinking back to their first collaborative work four decades earlier, an impulse only too reminiscent of the architect who, late in life, had J M Gandy paint grandiose watercolours of his own earliest projects.

The artists removed the kitchen table, replacing it with one of exactly the same size, white lacquered and glass-topped, holding some of the found objects from their 1986 *Traces of Living*. They included a humble brick as a nod to Soane's father, and his own earliest employment as a reluctant hod-carrier, forever reading books by the ladder of his older brother William Soan, another bricklayer. Langlands & Bell here paired their original chair seat model of the basement of the National Gallery with one of the basement of the Museum itself. The whole installation, with their gleaming white art amid the workaday antiquity of the old kitchen, recalled very clearly their twin kitchens of all those years before, except that now the white modernity was not inaccessible, glimpsed through glass, but happily sitting centre stage.

Their last new work was in the Breakfast Room, considered the Museum's most perfect space by so many of its devotees, with its handkerchief dome, its yellow glass and its many convex mirrors. Here they were fascinated by the void left in 1969 when someone stole one of Soane's prized relics, the pistol taken by Peter the Great from his Turkish enemy and later given by Tsar Alexander to Napoleon at Tilsit, whose empty case, its provenance proudly inscribed, yearned to be filled. The artists saw this vacant reliquary, so evocative of global power struggles of the past, as the perfect spot for the 'Medal of Dishonour'



*The Grand Tour*, 2020, by Langlands & Bell, replaced a set of 18th century chairs from China in Soane's Library-Dining Room. Photo: Gareth Gardner

they made for the British Museum in 2009, with concentric rings of acronyms, first of airports, then of NGOs and finally, in an innermost circle of hell, terrorists and security outfits jumbled up.

In the centre of the perfect, domed space, Soane's round breakfast table was replaced by one of exactly the same size, white and uncompromisingly plain and simple, but with an inset globe of white resin on which world air routes were carefully mapped in black lines. 'Visitors to the Museum', as the online caption explained, 'can

move the globe in all directions to reveal different views.' They could, of course, for two heady weeks in March 2020, before everything came grinding to a halt, most of the aircraft stopped flying, and no one came to turn the globe. Even when the Museum was allowed to reopen months later, the lucky few to get in were strictly forbidden to touch anything. As a symbol of what happened to the world, the untouched, unturning globe in Soane's Breakfast Room could scarcely be bettered.

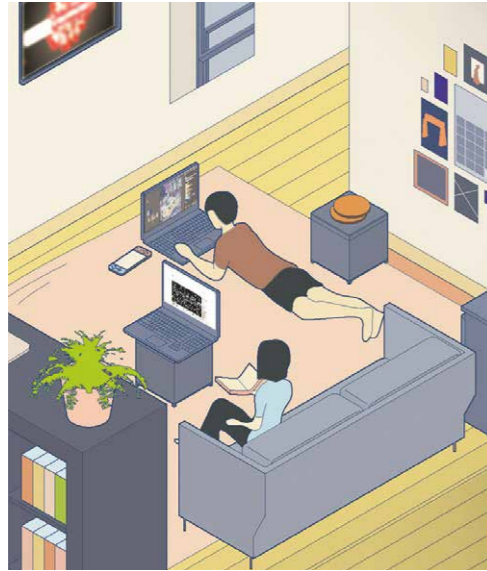


# EXHIBITS OF A REMARKABLE YEAR

The Soane's new Curator of Exhibitions  
looks at transformations in programming  
during the pandemic, and beyond.

*By Anna Winston*

*Here Everywhere: Orchard,  
2020, by Hans Villamayor,  
shortlisted in the Digital  
category of the Architecture  
Drawing Prize 2020*



‘We’ve been catapulted into the 21st century’, says the new Curator of Exhibitions Louise Stewart, who joined the Soane in March 2020, and worked three days on the premises before the Museum closed. Among her earliest tasks was to take a major retrospective for the British artists Langlands & Bell virtual, two weeks after its opening. Expanding on the Museum’s habitual web presence for an exhibition, the online version of *Langlands & Bell: Degrees of Truth* found engaged audiences and significant press coverage. ‘We didn’t realise the impact that it would have,’ Stewart says.

Drawing on this experience, she went on to help create a new online exhibitions platform, a legacy of the health crisis that will put all Soane’s exhibitions online in future, increasing not just their accessibility. ‘It’s funny to think of exhibitions as a kind of ephemeral thing... you experienced it and it’s gone,’ says Stewart. ‘Something like the Hogarth exhibition from 2019 which obviously had

a really big impact, and there was a lot of original research produced, the publication is the only legacy.’ The new platform will provide a free online archive for future exhibitions, featuring works and their labels alongside complementary film and audio, an invaluable resource for the public and researchers.

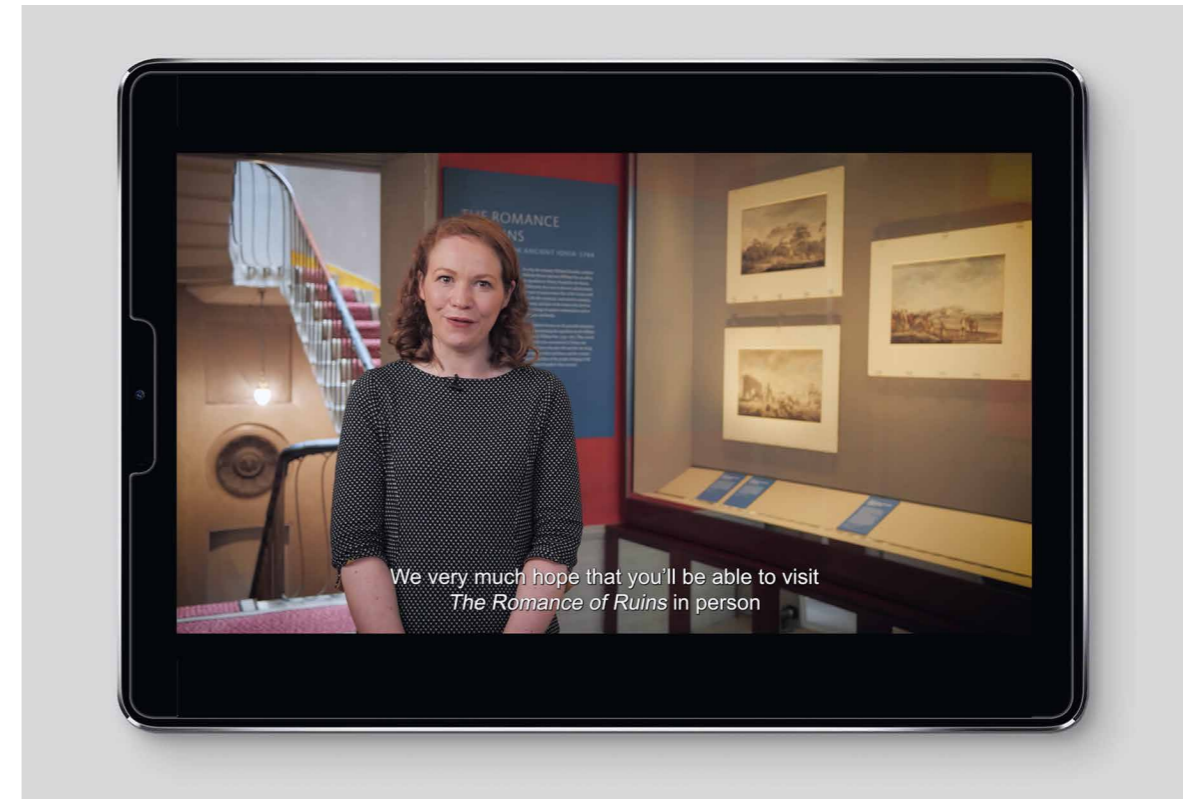
The thinking behind the Soane’s online platform was also shaped by a collaboration with Make Architects, who co-host the annual Architecture Drawing Prize, and in 2020 designed a bespoke virtual exhibition space to display the shortlisted works. ‘They call it the vault of contemporary art,’ says Stewart, ‘and they have come at it properly as architects.’

Daire Hearne of Make Architects agrees. ‘We’ve applied traditional placemaking and architectural skills to the spaces within the [vault] ... considering light, materials, views and orientation as you usually would.’ The team used 3D printed models and PowerPoint ‘to communicate and “hang” the artwork, picking up on the sense of light and shadow and how the spaces inspire, frame and draw you in.’

Budgetary constraints made something similar difficult for the Museum’s own online exhibitions platform, but what has been created ‘still [has] that sense of narrative,’ says Stewart. ‘The way that the galleries are laid out informs the way that you move through the online space.’ This is key for an exhibition programme that aims, like the Langlands & Bell show, to always be in dialogue with Soane’s home and demonstrate his continuing relevance.

The 2021 show *The Romance of Ruins: The Search for Ancient Ionia, 1764* was scheduled to open 3 March, finally appearing online on 12 May – though restrictions lifting in summer 2021 allowed the exhibition to be hung in the Museum and visited physically. It gathers together 18th-century watercolours by William Pars depicting

Detail of *Here Everywhere: Orchard*, 2020, by Hans Villamayor; Louise Stewart in an online film produced for the exhibition, *The Romance of Ruins*



ancient ruins of Greece and Turkey. High quality images of the works are joined by extracts of poetry and a timeline in the online ‘gallery’, in addition to videos about the exhibition featuring Kim Sloane, a curator of Prints & Drawings at the British Museum, which lent many of the works, and other scholars who contributed to the catalogue.

The show’s initial launch underscored the benefits of the digital sphere for Stewart. ‘What’s exciting is that we had speakers who we probably couldn’t have brought to the Museum.’ These included Susan Stewart, a poet and Professor at Princeton University, and discussing his walks across Afghanistan, the former Conservative MP and now Yale Senior Fellow, Rory Stewart.

The Soane’s Stewart also sees a way for the Museum to reach beyond exhibitions online, for instance to mark or collaborate with independent events such as London’s design and architecture festivals, and build on current Instagram takeovers

by artists and thinkers. ‘It might be a way that we expand our public programmes,’ she says.

Has the online realm become more important to Stewart as a curator this year? ‘I think what’s at the heart of curatorial practice is always reaching audiences,’ she says, ‘so my eyes have been opened to different ways of doing that. I’ve always felt that the digital is never going to replace standing in front of an object in real life, but it’s a really useful way of layering the experience.’

One example of this in action is the Soane’s partnership with Bloomberg Connects, enabling visitors in the Museum to use an app to access digital content. They can also potentially create their own – a big shift for an institution that pre-pandemic did not allow photography or the use of personal devices. ‘I think that will be a real positive,’ says Stewart.



# THE WORK CONTINUES

Despite the challenges of Covid-19, the Soane's activities have continued to flourish – from important conservation work to vital digitisation.

*By Holly Black*

Ahead of reopening, the conservation team works in the Dome Area.  
Photo: Jack Hill / *The Times*

Last November, when news of another lockdown broke, Jane Wilkinson had to make a lightning-fast decision. As the Soane's Head of Conservation, she knew that it could be some time before the Museum opened its doors again, and that vital work stabilising light-damaged pieces in the Picture Room Recess would be impeded. 'I identified two frames that needed quite a lot of attention, so I brought them to my home studio for treatment,' she explains. While under normal circumstances the Museum's conservation team would always try to conserve pieces in the collection on site, it was decided that these unprecedented times called for exceptional action.

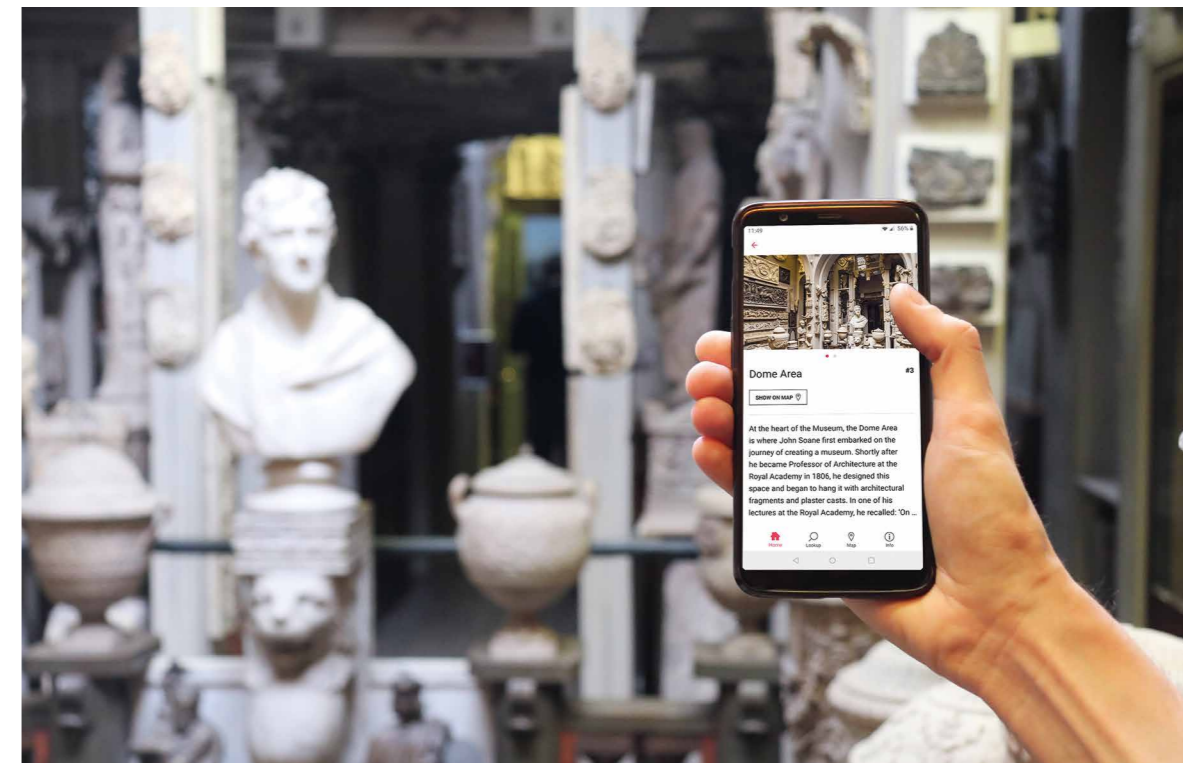
While the works of art remained within the Museum walls, where they would have to wait until the Paper Conservator returned, a quick risk assessment concluded that Wilkinson would be able to complete two of the frames' restoration in her own studio. 'It's quite a slow process,' she explains, 'so this time has been a really good opportunity to get on with the work.'

This is just one example of creative problem-solving at the Soane, which has been vital during this period of unparalleled upheaval. While institutions throughout the country have struggled to reach their audiences and share knowledge of their collections among staff and the wider public while they are closed, the Soane has been able to continue its work, not least because digital communication and infrastructure has been prioritised in recent years. 'The pandemic has really transformed our organisational stance in terms of digital – it has become much more of a priority,' says Tom Ryley, Communications Manager. 'However, projects such as our partnership with Bloomberg Connects would have gone ahead regardless – lockdown just catalysed them.'

In the case of the former, renewed exposure during lockdown and a digital-focused grant from the Museums Association allowed the Soane to approach digital agency ScanLAB to enrich the digital tour. The advanced virtual tours of the Sepulchral Chamber and Model Room (complete with downloadable three-dimensional scans of key objects) will soon expand to include a digital rendering of the Picture Room. 'We won't simply be creating a scanned copy of the space,' says Ryley. 'We will have a series of specialist tours of the space that reveal different levels and layers. It gives people the chance to experience something unique, both in-person and online.'

While plenty of us are becoming used to immersive online experiences, the value of film, complete with expert, in-depth knowledge and behind-the-scenes access has also been championed. Rather serendipitously, a three-part documentary series *Opening up the Soane*, charting six years of restoration, premiered on the London Live TV channel in spring 2020 and is now available on YouTube. At a moment where we all turned to our screens in search of cultural enrichment, over 100,000 people tuned in from across the globe, which is tantamount to a year's worth of in-person visitors. Furthermore, a special *Highlights Tour* film, made in direct response to lockdown, is being sold through the Museum website for £8. It proved to be an important source of revenue when most other avenues were closed off. The film offers an even closer look at the life and work of Soane himself, complete with exclusive archival material.

This interconnected thinking, in which digital experiences can complement future in-person visits, is at the core of the vision for Bloomberg Connects. The phone app, conceived by Bloomberg Philanthropies, hosts institutions from around the world, allowing them to share podcasts, video tours, audio guides, expert



Using the Bloomberg Connects app in the Dome Area. Photo: Tom Ryley

information and more. According to Ryley, 'It is both a complement to, and a separate entity from, an in-person visit.' From anywhere in the world, people are able to enjoy expert testimony concerning the most important objects found throughout the house, and listen to the Soane's *By Design* podcast, featuring conversations with design giants such as David Adjaye, Es Devlin and Edmund de Waal. Meanwhile, on site, visitors will be able to follow an audio tour through their phones, which sees an end to previous rules forbidding mobile devices. As Ryley explains, 'The physical space of the Museum isn't compatible with traditional labelling. Digital interpretation is a great way to share those layers of history, without altering the fabric of the building.'

One major concern was the need for upgraded wi-fi throughout the building so that these new assets could be easily accessed. Thanks to an accompanying Bloomberg grant, the necessary cabling was installed, which was certainly an easier undertaking without the need

to work around visitor opening hours – a small upside of the lockdown experience.

Helen Dorey, Deputy Director and Inspectress, has also found silver linings, the main one being that the drastic drop in visitor numbers over the last 12 months has allowed the building to 'have a good rest'. With up to 130,000 people coming every year, she admits that 'there will always be risk', and huge demand to access the house has often proved a challenge. This forced respite has, therefore, posed an opportunity to consider how visitor experience and appropriate care can be managed even better in the future. 'With the physical limitations on capacity, visitor numbers won't be able to just increase forever,' she says. 'Which is why digitisation is so important. Even before the pandemic we felt very strongly that we wanted to make everything available to researchers and students and members of the public across the world.'

While even major national museums struggle to make collection information such



The conserved bookcases in the South Drawing Room. Photo: Tom Ryley

as expert testimony, provenance and high-resolution images readily available, the Soane's provisions are outstanding. Online collection records are filled with curatorial notes and further reference points, and three-dimensional object renderings accessible through *Explore Soane* can be downloaded and distributed under a creative commons licence, meaning no fee is ever charged. For Dorey, the reason behind spearheading such an initiative is simple: 'We hold these collections in trust, on behalf of the nation, and they must be shared as widely as possible. I'm very proud of what we have done as such a small institution.'

In prioritising digitisation, Dorey and her team were also primed to work from home. 'We have really reaped the benefits during lockdown,' she says. 'If we hadn't completed the digitisation of key series from the Soane archive, such as his office Day Books, his journals and the Museum's precious early inventories, we would not have been able to work remotely. With all this information to hand, we have been able to use this time to enhance our records online.'

In fact, during this period some 1,857 new images have been uploaded to the Museum's database, along with the editing of 1,751 object records and 1,010 drawings records. This mammoth task, accompanied by the resolution of a plethora of checks and queries stemming from over 10 years' of restoration, simply would not have been possible at such a rate when the Soane is open to the public, as staff are taken up with the day-to-day running of a house-museum. Wilkinson shares this sentiment: 'When we work in the Museum, the Conservation Studio has an open-door policy. We are really happy for our colleagues to come in all the time. But it does mean that sometimes you're right in the middle of something and someone says, "Oh, we're a bit worried about



Jane Wilkinson works on a frame in the conservation studio. Photo: Tom Ryley

something in the Breakfast Room, could you come and have a look?" Working from home gives you the opportunity to focus in a very concentrated way.'

Other restoration projects that would usually need to be fitted in around visiting hours have also been able to go ahead on site. A prime example is the restoration of the South Drawing Room bookcases. According to Peter Holmes – a specialist conservator who completed the work and who has decades of experience working with the Soane – these mahogany bookcases located within the loggia were largely untouched since



Day-to-day care routines continued during the Museum's closure. Photo: Jack Hill / *The Times*

they had first been installed. 'The timber fades and the shellac and wax surfaces on top of the mahogany degrade in the sunlight, and it had become very opaque, very milky and bleached out,' he explains. 'A nuanced approach needs to be taken to treatment – the trick is to just feel your way into it, because you don't want to take off that surface and refinish it. Then it would look like new, when really you need to keep the history of the object, and just make it look as if it has been cared for.'

While Holmes would usually work on pieces off-site, where specialist lighting and equipment is readily available, the Soane often calls for a different approach, where the particular light and all-encompassing atmosphere is a key concern. 'It was great doing this work when the Museum

was closed,' he adds. 'It was a golden opportunity with absolutely no distractions. You really do have to concentrate, and continually stand back and consider the whole space, which isn't easy if you're cordoned off during visitor hours.'

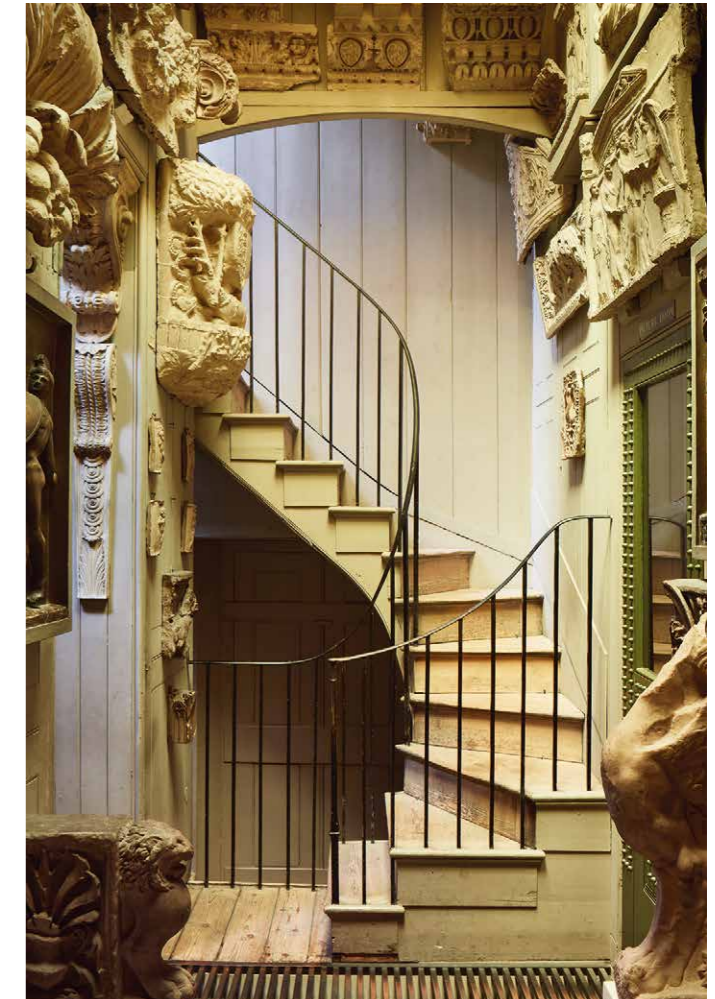
Alongside major restoration work, it has also been important to maintain the building on a day-to-day level. Assistant Conservator Christian Kile has been on site throughout the pandemic, managing vital collections care regimes such as environmental monitoring, pest control and regular cleaning – yet another series of tasks made much easier when no one else is around. 'When you're in conservation, a particular concern is just how much wear and tear is happening to your collections, particularly in a house-museum,' says

Wilkinson, 'which is why it has been so vital that Christian continues this work.'

Elsewhere, fundraising to restore and repurpose the Drawing Office has begun, to mark the 200th anniversary of its installation. This extraordinary space, akin to a floating platform, is where Soane's assistants worked every day. During lockdown, painstaking research continued into the sequence of objects that existed in the office at the time of Soane's death, listed building consent has been obtained and specialist historic paint analysis carried out. Though the refurbishment is expected to begin next year, the area will not be accessible to every visitor even when social distancing ceases, owing to the narrow staircase and fragility concerns.

'We will have to provide access in other creative ways,' says Dorey. 'We are going to do a 3D scan of the room, as well as some of the casts, and install a live webcam feed.' To enliven the space further, a new programme of artist residencies will be introduced, with creatives from all over the world invited to engage specifically with Soane's drawing practice. The Museum is keen to attract as wide a pool of applicants as possible, spanning different ages, disciplines and backgrounds – and geographical locations, facilitated by working remotely.

Whether online, *in situ*, or somewhere in between, it is clear that the Soane's activities have continued to flourish despite the hardships of the pandemic period. The care and scholarly attention that this unique house-museum requires is undoubtedly an ongoing enterprise, and yet the progress that has been made over the past year is nothing short of a triumph. Furthermore, the public engagement that has not only been maintained, but grown, is a testament to the initiatives that have taken shape through digital channels, as well as serving as proof that Soane's home will always inspire people's imaginations,



Stairs lead up to the Students' Drawing Office. Photo: Matt Clayton

whether they consider 13 Lincoln's Fields a neighbour, or a far-flung destination. For Holmes, the enduring appeal is clear: 'The wonder that the Soane creates is the same as it ever was. Despite all of mankind's great achievements since the early 19th century, you still go in there to be overawed.'



# VIRTUAL REALITY

In response to the pandemic, the Soane has embraced the innovations of the digital sphere, making the Museum more accessible and opening up a global future.

*By Eleanor Beaumont*

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The virtual entrance to the 2020 Architecture Drawing Prize gallery, designed by Make



Sir John Soane's Museum is bound by law to preserve Soane's house and the objects within it exactly as it was the day he died in 1837, and to keep it open and free to visit. London, and the world around it, has changed almost unrecognisably since, and though the beautiful rooms of Soane's house, crowded with treasures and filled with liquid light, appear frozen in time, the Museum has evolved and grown, inviting conversation with voices and influences from far outside its walls.

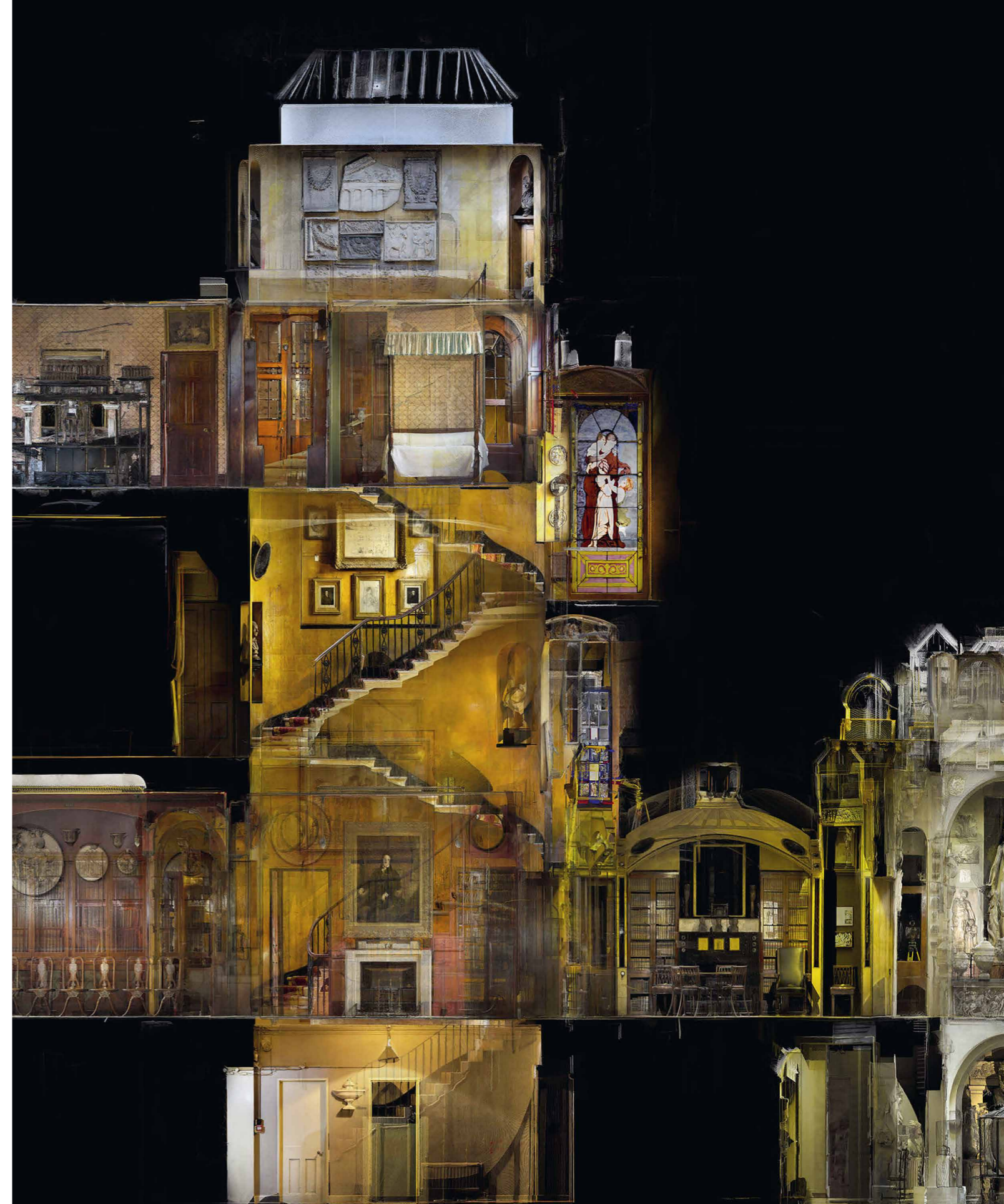
The idea of operating at two scales – one confined within a physical building, and another far more elastic, and largely digital, collapsing distance and expanding around the world – has become indispensable and critically urgent for most organisations and museums since the pandemic shut their doors in March last year. But while many museums scrambled to build virtual versions of their programmes and collections, the Soane had already begun its ambitious project to digitally recreate the Museum's rooms and the objects within them. The ongoing *Explore Soane* project currently includes a partial reconstruction of the Model Room and the phantasmagorical Sepulchral Chamber, which are entered via a sweeping flythrough from the street into the building's heart, the walls dissolving and shimmering like ghosts. Hovering ethereally at a raised height, this digital reconstruction doesn't attempt to emulate the physical experience of entering and walking through the Soane, but offers something else instead. A small selection of objects in both rooms can be rotated 360 degrees in your virtual hands; in this way, you are brought closer to King Seti I's sarcophagus and the three cork models found in the Model Room than you ever could in real life.

While *Explore Soane* is by no means a substitute for experiencing the rooms and artefacts first-hand, this digital space has the potential to reach an audience that might never

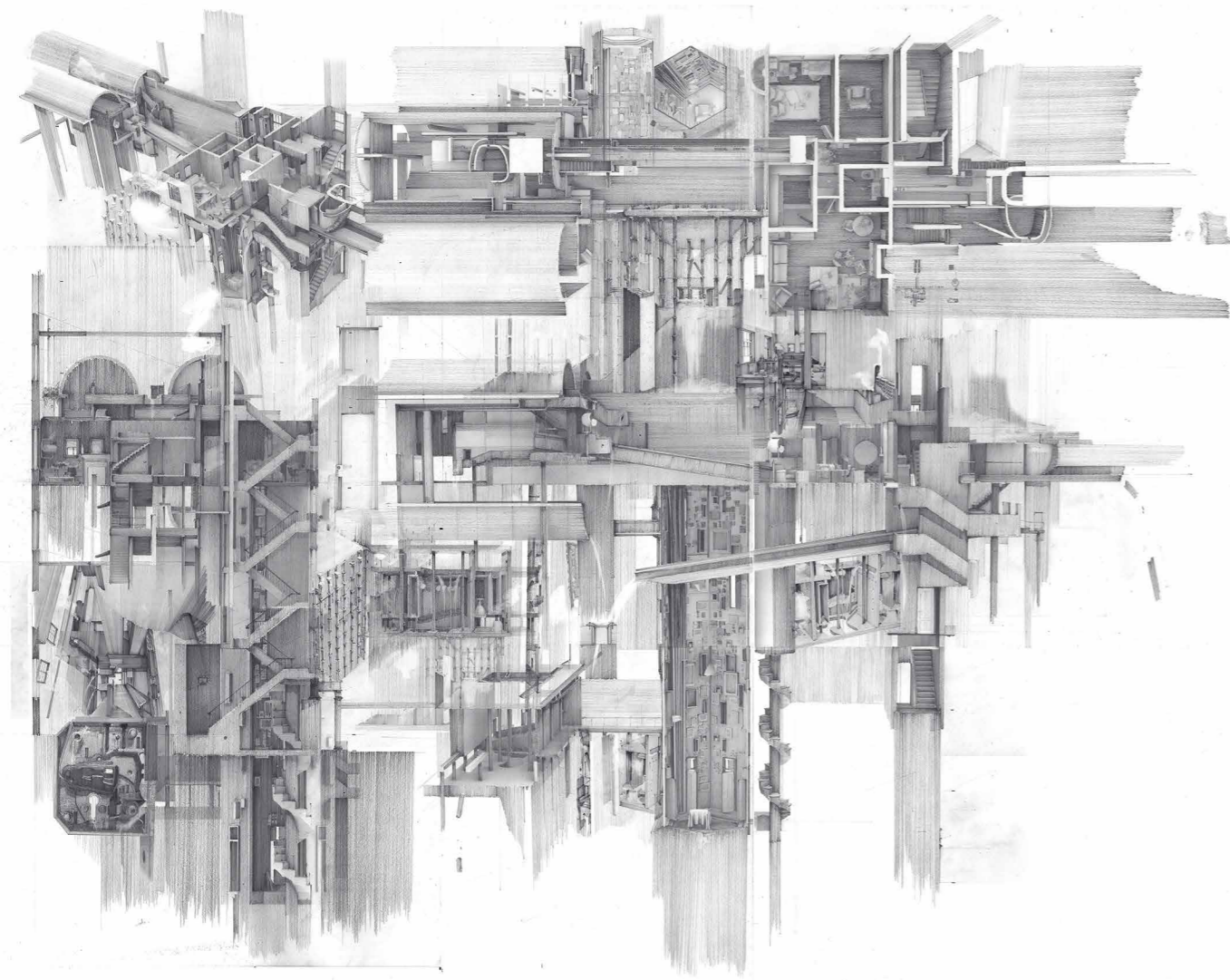
otherwise experience it, and could offer a multi-layered, hyperlinked richness that is impossible to achieve in person. The digital factsheets that would otherwise crowd the physical space can offer multiple readings of objects online. There is space, for example, for both the ancient Egyptian history told in the hieroglyphics engraved on King Seti I's sarcophagus, and the more recent history of the object's excavation by the Italian 19th-century 'Egyptologist' Giovanni Battista Belzoni, who scratched letters spelling out 'Belzoni' into its rim.

Though commissioned and launched before March 2020, the project received much more exposure in the months after the pandemic struck. As physical public spaces were closed all around the world, virtual spaces became vitally important for the continuation of cultural production. The project was highlighted in digital top picks by national media such as the *Telegraph*, as well as by US media such as the *Washington Post* and *CNN*, whose audiences could now experience aspects of the Soane without even getting on a plane.

The Soane's 2020 exhibition, Langlands and Bell's *Degrees of Truth*, also reached expanded audiences after it was forced to close just two weeks after it opened on 3 March 2020. Opening briefly again in October, the intriguing assimilation of architectural models, furniture and surreal found objects has been translated online, organised by floor and captured in photographs of the works *in situ* in the Museum. The sensory experience of the artworks carefully and deliberately nestled alongside the bookshelves and artefacts of the collection, melding almost seamlessly with the existing museum, is depicted evocatively in these photographs. It is interesting to observe the contrast between the hyper-contextual specificity of the physical exhibition and the experience of the images on screen, more closely resembling that of a white-box gallery.



Screenshot from *Explore Soane*



The overall winner of the fourth annual Architecture Drawing Prize, *Apartment #5, a Labyrinth and Repository of Spatial Memories* by Clement Laurencio (from the Hybrid category)

Another exhibition usually displayed each year at the Soane is the Architecture Drawing Prize, launched in 2017 and a collaboration between the Soane Museum, the World Architecture Festival and Make Architects. The 2020 edition moved online, curated and displayed in a virtual marble six-roomed enfilade designed by Make. The digital exhibition brings together drawings from students and practitioners around the world, from the US, Australia, Singapore and France, as well as the UK. The winning drawing, by Bartlett student

Clement Laurencio, is itself located in the soft pliable in-between: a disorienting and magically detailed labyrinth of rooms anchored in London, but reverberating with memories of spaces from a journey to India. In the collision of real and virtual, the medium of drawing – here organised between those digitally made, those hand-drawn, and those that are a combination of the two – assumes a new poignancy and importance in the pixels of a screen that would dissolve if physically presented on paper.



*Here Everywhere: Orchard* by Hans Villamayor (shortlisted in the Digital category) shown in the virtual Architecture Drawing Prize gallery space

The exhibition's digital launch event in January this year included a walkthrough of the virtual gallery building with Make Architects' founder Ken Shuttleworth, a 'guided tour' of the exhibited drawings by the Soane Museum's Curator of Exhibitions Louise Stewart, as well as short talks by each of the winners and panel conversations between judges and practitioners. In many ways, events like this are of far greater value than a glass of sparkling wine in a crowded gallery with a few words of introduction you may or may not be able to hear. The launch was packed with interesting conversation, images and video, was available to an international audience, and is easily archived and stored for future reference – and nothing stopped viewers pouring themselves a computer-side prosecco as they watched.

As well as being available around the globe, the online space is also vastly accessible for digitally literate young people. The Soane's Youth Panel of 16- to 24-year-olds has had a greater role in the Drawing Prize this year than any other,

creating a short film of the shortlisted work, conducting interviews with their authors, and recording some quite beautiful written responses to some of the works.

The digital realm provides the room for a rich counterpart to a physical moment to which these exhibitions and events attest. After the pandemic hit, the announcement of the 2020 winner of the Soane Medal, awarded to an architectural thinker, critic or educator, was postponed. In its place, Sarah Handelman was commissioned to edit the *Five Voices* project, which revisits the lives and work of the three previous winners: British critic Kenneth Frampton, US-based architect and educator Denise Scott Brown and Spanish architect Rafael Moneo. Contributors from around the world were invited to share their thoughts about each winner; the resulting pieces, by critics and architects including Finnish theorist Juhani Pallasmaa, Spanish architects Flores & Prats and British practitioner Sam Jacob, unravel the complex international mesh of influences and



*By Design* speakers (left to right): Dan Pearson, Ilse Crawford, Amanda Levete, Phyllida Barlow and Erdem Moraloğlu

references in which architecture sits. As Shelley McNamara comments on Kenneth Frampton's attitude to handrails in her short text, 'you knew that he was measuring what he saw against all the handrails in all the world in all the great buildings he knew so intimately.'

As an educator and multi-disciplinary collector, Soane was interested in a vast array of different forms of the arts and sciences outside architecture, from paintings and furniture to antiquities from Egypt and elsewhere. In the *By Design* talk series, the Soane Museum expands outside the disciplinary walls of architecture, reflecting the breadth of Soane's collection and interests. The 2020 series, postponed owing to the pandemic, invited practitioners in garden design, fashion, and furniture design, as well as art and architecture, to discuss their practice through just a single object.

While the talk with garden designer Dan Pearson, co-hosted by arts editor Will Gompertz, and writer Alice Rawsthorn, went ahead in

February 2020, the subsequent talks with furniture designer Ilse Crawford, fashion designer Erdem Moraloğlu, architect Amanda Levete and artist Phyllida Barlow appeared in a digital form in 2021, and were free to watch around the world. In contrast, the first series of talks in late 2018 and early 2019 were open to just the 60 people who could fit in the Museum's lavish Library-Dining Room. The digital events will be accessible to more people in more places, though sadly the warm intimacy of the red-toned walls and air thick with history is all but impossible to recreate.

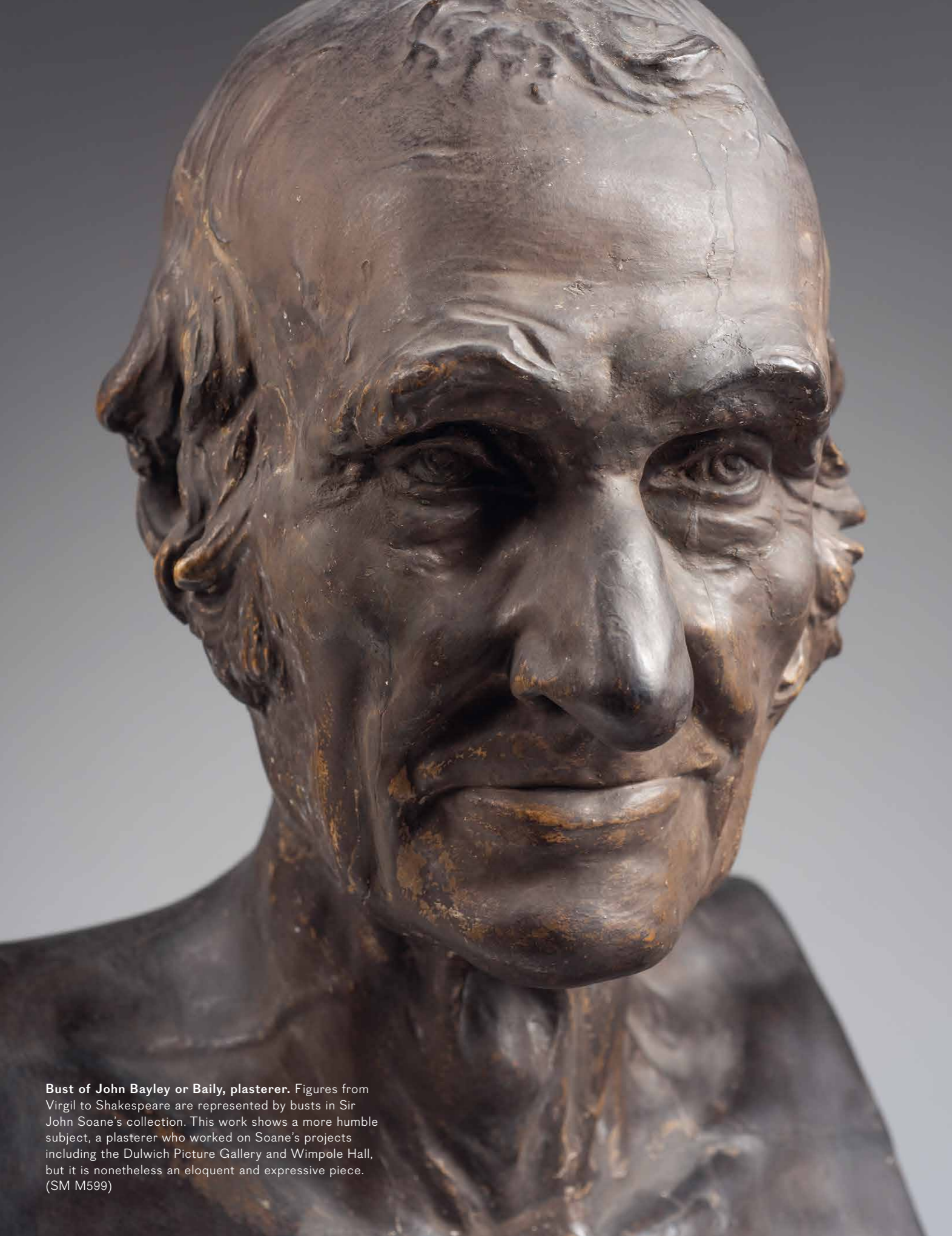
The Museum's programme of talks and learning activities continues John Soane's commitment to education. Soane was professor of architecture at the Royal Academy for over 30 years, and his house itself was designed to educate all who visited. 'We learn the most from those who keep learning,' Beatriz Colomina writes in her *Five Voices* piece about Denise Scott Brown, winner of the Soane Medal in 2018. 'In that sense, there is a shortage of teachers in architecture... the exceptions are rare and precious.'



The stage is set for a video recording of a *By Design* talk. Digital broadcasts increase capacity far beyond the Library-Dining Room. Photo: Tom Ryley

We have all learned and adapted a great deal over the last year, and museums and cultural institutions are no exception. Some changes will be permanent; Director of Development and Communications at the Soane, Willa Beckett, explains that hybrid events and exhibitions are likely to be a permanent fixture, with digital components adding richness and allowing access and availability to many more people than before. 'We have taken a leap in one year that would otherwise have taken five,' Beckett says. To some extent, the pandemic has pushed museums like the Soane to take vital steps to imaginatively reconsider the landscape, physical and digital, in which they operate.

The Soane's cultural production of talks, exhibitions, film, text and much more weaves a rich mesh that far expands beyond its walls in Lincoln's Inn Fields, drawing in voices and contributions from around the globe. Though in many respects our worlds shrank dramatically during the pandemic, they also simultaneously expanded in extraordinary and unexpected ways.



## READY FOR THEIR CLOSE-UPS

Lesser-known sculptures at Sir John Soane's Museum have been given their chance to shine in new photography created as part of Art UK Sculpture, an initiative to bring together digital catalogue entries for all sculptures in UK public collections dating from 1100 AD onwards. Fundamental to the ability to share Sir John Soane's collection with the widest possible audience is the availability of photographs of the works that he collected, and the Museum's partnership with Art UK means more than 450 new images of 88 Soane objects, previously with poor or no images, are now online.

**Bust of John Bayley or Baily, plasterer.** Figures from Virgil to Shakespeare are represented by busts in Sir John Soane's collection. This work shows a more humble subject, a plasterer who worked on Soane's projects including the Dulwich Picture Gallery and Wimpole Hall, but it is nonetheless an eloquent and expressive piece. (SM M599)

**Model for the statue of James Craggs, Secretary of State, on his tomb in Westminster Abbey.** This is the first statue in 18th-century England to derive directly from classical Roman sources, and one of only two known terracotta models by the sculptor Giovanni Battista Guelfi (c.1690–1734). He never met Craggs, working instead from 'two paintings and a print'. Disputes over the likeness probably led to replacement of the face with this wooden detachable version.



Guelfi specialist Cristiano Giometti writes: 'The exquisite formation of the hands and feet... the softness of the drapery, where the spiral-shape folds are wrapped delicately round the left leg, and the left sleeve gently hanging over the lid of the urn, all show the masterly skill that Guelfi had acquired in the handling of clay.' (SM MP190)





Roundel depicting 'A Vintage' (the grape harvest).  
Fine details and a charming subject characterise this  
roundel, hung in the hallway of No. 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields.  
(SM H14)



Casts of an unidentified king and queen's heads.  
(SM SDR3 and SDR4)

**(Opposite) John Flaxman, Model 'Cupid',**  
c.1824. Tucked into the Tivoli Recess, this is a  
model for a marble work made for the Romantic  
poet Samuel Rogers. Flaxman was considered the  
greatest neo-classical sculptor of his day, was a  
friend of Soane's and shared his interest in ancient  
art. Its pair, 'Psyche', sits opposite. (SM SC33)





**A beaver.** Little is known about this simple plaster cast in the Sepulchral Chamber, which may be a work in its own right or cast from an as-yet-unidentified monument. What is certain is that the native European beaver was extinct at the time of its execution, with the last known reference to wild beavers in Britain dating from the 1520s. (SM M1105)

**Roundel depicting 'A Vintage' (the grape harvest).** This cast was made in the 1830s from plaster and painted to mimic Roman marble. (SM H14)







**Arnold Quellin, sculptor, Statuette of King Charles II wearing the robes of the Order of the Garter.** Offering a snapshot of Restoration London, this is the terracotta model for a statue commissioned in 1684 for the Royal Exchange in the City of London, by The Grocers' Company 'as a testimonial of their grateful respect and attachment to his Royal person'. On the throne since 1660, following the Commonwealth, Charles II celebrated his Restoration with monuments like this, intending to shore up his power in the City of London. The finished statue was destroyed by fire in 1838. (SM MP211)

**A figure, perhaps 'Europe' or St Barbara.** In carved alabaster, this statuette appears medieval but is in fact 17th century, and shows a woman with a crown, stole and ermine mantle holding a model of a domed building and a sceptre. The 1644 *Iconologia* by Cesare Ripa, a guide to the symbolism in emblem books, contains a similar (though seated) figure representing Europe. This stands on a separate capital adorned with lotus leaves, which may be of Indian origin. (SM M624)

*View new images online at [collections.soane.org/home](http://collections.soane.org/home), and find out more about Art UK Sculpture at [artuk.org/about/sculpture-project](http://artuk.org/about/sculpture-project)*





## YOUNG VOICES

The Soane Youth Panel is a group of 15- to 24-year-olds who help the Museum shape the activities, events and opportunities it offers young people. Rachel Potts talks to two current members, Lucy Dabbs and Viola Turrell, and Learning Officer, Rhiannon Litterick, about what the panel offers to participants, and the museum it serves.

Soane Youth Panel members at *On the Fence*, an event they organised in 2019 that explored the meaning of boundaries.  
Photo: Soane Youth Panel

**Lucy and Viola, how and why did you want to get involved in the Youth Panel?**

**Lucy Dabbs:** I joined in August 2019 when I moved to London to study History of Art at the Courtauld. I knew the Soane fairly well as before doing a foundation course in Leeds, I had volunteered at the Museum, in 2016 and 2018. That experience made me want to have more of an active role in curating and organising events with other people my own age.

**Viola Turrell:** I joined during sixth form, when I'd finalised my decision to take up Art History at university, but it was not just to benefit my degree. It really appealed to me to join a group that drew together like-minded individuals wanting to make an impact and encourage youth participation in museums and galleries. I never really imagined that the panel would offer quite so many opportunities to get involved in the planning of exhibitions and events. It exceeded my expectations.

**Rhiannon Litterick:** I think our Youth Panel is an opportunity for people aged 15 to 24 to be involved in a different way to a more traditional work experience or student placement. It's about being really immersed in museum life.

**What have your highlights been this year? What have you most enjoyed or found most valuable?**

**Lucy:** We were unable to stage the *Gods, Myths and Rituals* Late event that we planned, but I had the responsibility of looking at the Breakfast Room to discover themes

and fascinating elements there that I could incorporate into the event. Creating a poem in response to the Architecture Drawing Prize entrant Yew Yong Kyra Swee's *Entombment of Fear* was an amazing opportunity, and to have it presented online was just insane.

**Viola:** The most enjoyable part for me was conducting interviews with the Architecture Drawing Prize entrants, also published online. It made the prize a lot more personal. I'm more drawn to paintings and sculpture than architecture, but just being able to communicate with the creators of these artworks opened my eyes and made me see, I suppose, the art in the architecture as well.

**How did your project for the Architecture Drawing Prize project come about and how did it work logistically?**

**Rhiannon:** The initial idea was for the Youth Panel to do an intervention in the Museum's Foyle Space. The second lockdown then happened and they decided to merge together elements from different prize entrants into a video with a soundscape instead, which they created and edited, all working with our Exhibitions department and externally with the prize entrants. Being interested in getting to know more about the entrants, they came up with questions together and Viola conducted interviews via email. There were also Youth Panel Picks where panel members responded to individual artworks: Viola opted for a written piece and Lucy wrote a poem.



An installation for the Soane Youth Panel's *On the Fence* event. Photo: Soane Youth Panel

**Lucy:** I'm always stunned by how efficient we are as a team, especially with that project. The transition to the online space was challenging but despite having such little time and a small team we put content together.

**Viola:** To me, the most surprising thing was that we had consistent meetings when it felt like life itself was put on pause.

**Rhiannon:** In March last year, you all just took the absolutely mad pivot to digital in your stride. And now that your Late has been written up to such a high quality, it can be picked up and put on hopefully next year.

**Lucy:** The fact that we could produce multimedia works for the Architecture Drawing Prize also really exemplifies how each of us brought our individual strengths. It was lovely to see how Ibrahim, for instance, who was interested in technology, brought forward ideas to do with sound and audio production. And Katrina was interested in Classics, so she brought a lot of her expertise to the narrative that our Classics-themed Late should take.

**Rhiannon:** I have always wanted the Youth Panel to consist of people who aren't necessarily the finished product – we don't expect the young people to be experienced museum professionals already! We have allocated spaces in our recent inclusive recruitment drive to people who will get the most out of joining the panel, whether that's knowledge or people skills, or helping somebody who's not sure what they want to do, but knows that they love museums, to learn more about the myriad roles and opportunities on offer.

**What has being on the panel meant to you?**

**Viola:** During lockdown, I was on my gap year and had so little to do; it was such a rewarding opportunity to be able to join in and collaborate and try new things. I feel like we naturally find a dynamic that seems to work magically, even under time pressure. We all communicate very effectively and support one another in attempting things outside our comfort zone.

**Lucy:** By definition, the Youth Panel is a team, and we do share our roles equally and fairly. I think for that to be fully realised in something like the panel is really gratifying; that something like this does exist and can work well. And Rhiannon, Emma [Miles, Learning Manager] and Katie [Weston, Volunteer Manager] have offered amazing support – they're so organised and open. Our views or ideas have never been shut down. I do feel like I'm part of some sort of second family. If you feel like you're in a comfortable and open space, you're going to create quality content.

**Rhiannon:** That is really nice for me to hear. We've always wanted the Youth Panel to be an inclusive space where amazing things can happen, where people don't dominate, even as new people come in. The last thing I wanted when I started facilitating the panel in 2017 was for it to have a top-down hierarchy, and we've worked really hard to integrate the panel. I've always tried to bring a Youth Panel member with me to meetings with Soane staff about anything Youth Panel-related.



**Lucy and Viola, what do you think you have gained and how do you think being a member of the Soane Youth Panel will help you in the future?**

**Lucy:** Being able to orchestrate events and having to work as a team is always going to be important for future jobs or opportunities. Learning about how a museum is structured will be beneficial if I was to – and hopefully will – work in a museum or gallery space in the future.

**Viola:** I also have an interest in the heritage sector and this has opened my eyes to the various roles within a museum. I feel like when I approached art history, all I knew about was curating. The Youth Panel has people from different roles joining us for monthly meetings, which is incredibly enlightening, and I've appreciated being able to sit in on things like the quarterly Exhibitions meeting and proposing the plans for our Late event to the Soane Lates Committee. Learning about the technical aspects of planning events, beyond the creative side, was quite illuminating to me.

**What do you all feel that the Youth Panel gives back to the Soane?**

**Lucy:** The Exhibitions team wanting to carry on working more intimately with us completely confirms the value of the panel to the Museum. Something that we've given the Museum is this space to increase accessibility, which is a big part of why the panel exists.

**Viola:** Being there as a window to what younger audiences would be interested in, especially when planning events. We wanted to offer something a little different from previous events in terms of creating more immersive experiences.

**Rhiannon:** The panel gives us fresh perspectives but also, to some extent, holds us accountable through making us think about our practice as an organisation. The panel suggested offering cheaper youth tickets

for the *Gods, Myths and Rituals* Late, and so for the first time ever that happened, and they sold out – which was amazing and has changed how we think about the audience the Museum is targeting for events, and about accessibility. Three years ago, Ibrahim suggested QR codes on exhibition labelling, and now that's happening; it's part of our practice.

**Lucy and Viola, do you have a favourite area or object in the Museum?**

**Lucy:** I love the portrait of Fanny the dog in the Breakfast Room, and the fact that the Soanes memorialised their pet in such an intimate, sweet and kind of harrowing manner. I also really like the case that used to hold a Napoleonic pistol that was stolen in 1969. I'm fascinated by the portrayals of absence and how they're curated in the spaces.

**Viola:** My favourite area is probably the Monk's Parlour because it captures Soane's idiosyncrasies, and I like how this small space plunges you into an entirely different atmosphere in contrast to the neo-classical surroundings; this tight, Gothic-themed room. I find it quite absurd and endearing in a way.

**Rhiannon:** What are you most proud of, out of everything you've done with the Youth Panel over the last two years?

**Lucy:** I was very proud of my contributions to the Late event and it was really gratifying to see the results from that in the template that we managed to put together. Also, having our work presented online and officially for the Architecture Drawing Prize project.

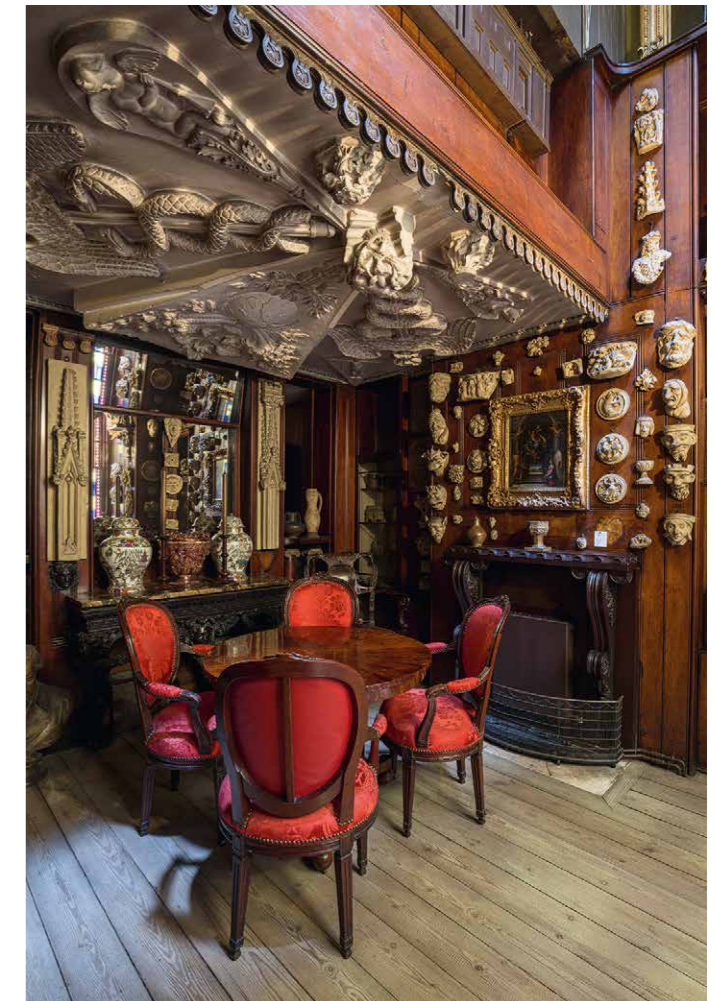
**Viola:** I felt very proud when the Director of the Soane mentioned us during the Architecture Drawing Prize awards ceremony. Keeping morale high and continuing with our planning despite time constraints and being plunged into online working was really rewarding.

**Rhiannon, have you got anything particular that you are proud of on their behalf?**

**Rhiannon:** The panel are such ambassadors for the Museum and for what young people can achieve in these institutions. I've been approached by other museums saying, 'We've seen this amazing project your Youth Panel worked on. How can we set one up that can do that?' So I'm proud that the panel's achievements are inspiring other people to go and work with young people. And how many 17-year-olds can say that they've worked on an exhibition with a national museum?

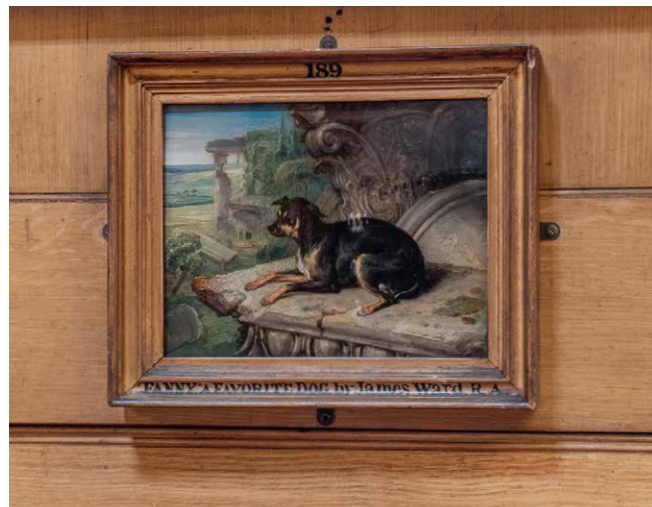
**Lucy and Viola, what are your future career plans?**

**Lucy:** I would like to stay on at the gallery space that I work in now part-time, as I've really enjoyed it. But I'm fascinated by public spaces, museum spaces, and the successful way the Youth Panel has been trying to improve the accessibility of museums for young people; that's important to me. Coming from Leeds, there are obviously amazing opportunities there but I think the contrast is inevitable moving to London, that places here are seemingly far more accessible than what I'm used to. To be able to emulate that in places that I feel need the assistance would be important and fulfilling to me.



The Monk's Parlour. Photo: Gareth Gardner

**Viola:** I've been interested in going into art publishing for a while but working on the panel made me realise that there is a lot of fulfilment to be gained from engaging with people and artworks in person. So maybe somewhere like the Soane or another museum or gallery, working as a team and increasing participation.



James Ward's 1822 painting of Fanny the dog pictures the Soanes' pet among ruins



# TEAM SPIRIT

In a difficult year, Soane's voluntary contingent has remained strong – and gained new recruits. Their manager, Katie Weston, explains why.

Katie Weston in the Private Apartments.  
Photo: Tom Ryley

Volunteer Manager Katie Weston remembers sending the email in March 2020 that informed her team that the Museum would shut. This would be the first of many interactions that kept the Soane's volunteer community together last year, and meant that it mostly returned to work intact after a 14-month period in which the Museum was only open for 25 days.

Volunteers assist across retail, learning and collections management, carrying out crucial work for the Museum. The core of the programme are the Visitor Assistant Volunteers, who help people navigate and understand the Museum spaces – including in the Crypt and Colonnade – and safeguard the collections. In a museum with no labels or wall texts, says Weston, 'having someone spending their time learning about the Sarcophagus of Seti I and then interpreting that to visitors is a huge benefit.' Spanning aspiring architects and curators as well as those with careers behind them, volunteers bring a broad range of skills – for two hours on a Friday, 'we have someone who can talk you through the entire story of the *Book of the Gates*.'

As part of her day-to-day management pre-pandemic, Weston had begun weekly phone calls with volunteers. When the Museum closed, 'A big part of my team still wanted to keep in contact, so I said, "Yes, call me."' She also began group Zoom catch-ups, and more formal online presentations given by volunteers to each other about parts of Soane's collection they most loved. The team dressed up for a virtual raffle to celebrate Christmas.

This was about more than keeping social ties alive. 'Volunteers are donating their time, they are ambassadors for the Museum, and they deserve clear information,' Weston says. During the first lockdown she used surveys to gauge volunteers' concerns about returning to the Soane and was pleasantly surprised that most of the over-60s



Volunteer Xinning Li in the Sepulchral Chamber. Photo: Tom Ryley

in her team resumed their posts in autumn 2020. 'The feedback we had was that the clarity of our official communication all the way through lockdown made them feel comfortable to come back,' she says.

Under normal Museum operation, the volunteer team numbers between 60 and 110 at any given time. Its members speak 15 different languages, range in age from 17 to 85, and include people with disabilities. With roughly 60 paid staff members, the Soane is the UK's smallest national museum and so, Weston says, 'by involving volunteers, we help broaden our viewpoint.'

Volunteer Allan Hart in the Kitchen. Photo: Tom Ryley

Part of making sure this volunteer commitment is valued and rewarded is recognising what people receive in return. 'We really focus on employability,' Weston says, with volunteers offered quarterly talks from paid staff that shine a light on museum professions (these were continued by Deputy Director and Inspectress Helen Dorey during lockdown). Weston works to ensure the team gain skills that they could use in any place of work, not only in heritage, 'and to understand what they've gained,' she says. 'And I'm always here to proofread people's job applications.'

She and her team have seen through major projects including the end of the extensive *Opening up the Soane* refurbishments; the

Soane's nomination as Museum of the Year finalist and subsequent uptick in visitors; the launch of Sunday openings; and the Museum's blockbuster exhibition *Hogarth: Place and Progress*. It was the latter that proved to her the good health of her programme, which celebrates its 10th year of operation in 2022.

'What was wonderful was just before the Hogarth exhibition that summer, the majority of our young team had all got jobs.' These included posts at the Soane itself, roles in other museums and places for further study. It did mean she had an opportunity to recruit and welcome 35 new volunteers across a period of a month and a half (which she did).





Volunteer Liz Herry in the Sepulchral Chamber.  
Photo: Tom Ryley

The loyalty that Weston has built may also be down to her rounded view of what volunteers gain, that 'people are often volunteering because they want to make friends or understand more about culture or place', as well as for career enrichment. She values seeing bonds developing in front of her, including across generations, and has spent two days a week with many long-standing volunteers since moving to the capital for her role in 2016. 'So from my point of view, they have become a London family.'

Weston began her career in collections management and curatorial work, but had a eureka moment when she launched a voluntary programme at her previous post. 'It was just seeing people gain confidence; their opinions of themselves started to improve. I suddenly went, "I don't want to work behind the scenes anymore."'

In the last three years in particular, she has worked hard to increase inclusivity. By changing the language on application forms, and allowing people to apply via SurveyMonkey on their mobile devices, she says, 'I suddenly found that I had different people applying.' In spring this year, she worked with the Museum's Learning Officer Rhiannon Litterick to forge an 'inclusive recruitment' drive for the Soane Youth Panel. The resulting new group, compared to the previous panel, she says, has 'a better balance of genders, a greater representation of ethnicity, and because we're online at the moment, we have been able to involve people outside of London.'

Where voluntary roles are advertised has broadened, and Weston recently partnered with organisations including the Somers Town Living Centre, which supports the wellbeing of local residents, and mental health charities Camden Mind and We Are Ageing Better. Feedback has been positive, and it is important to Weston that 'whether you are 18 and your home is in South

Korea or you're retired and recovering from a serious illness, we are providing good support.'

Weston recruited some new volunteers for the October 2020 reopening, most of whom donated less than four hours each before the second lockdown closed the Museum again. Despite this brief contact, most also returned to the Soane when the second lockdown ended in May 2021.

'This was Soane's museum, but also his home,' says Weston, 'and I think that that level of homeliness is still there and is at the core of our Volunteer community. Our workplace culture is getting better and better; we have people openly talking about mindfulness. And that is unique, I think. I've never worked at a place that has been so supportive.'

A diverse group of people on the ground also means that their voices can be heard, says Weston, and she feeds back thoughts from her voluntary team to the Soane's Inclusion, Diversity and Equality working group and senior management. 'I just want to always be working to make volunteering with us available for people, whoever they are,' she says. 'So that everyone can come in and experience this magical museum.'





# RAISING FUNDS

Stephen Gosztony, Trustee and Chairman of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, reveals how this year's financial challenges have been and are continuing to be met, not only by the Development team, but by all departments of the Museum.

Two extended periods of closure have placed exceptional pressure on Sir John Soane Museum's finances and fundraising. To ensure we would be able to reopen in as good a condition as before we entered lockdown, we needed to turn to all available resources to maintain our collection, our fabric and our staff. At the same time, it was also vital not to relax our concerted focus on new projects and programmes that shape our vision for the longer term.

A key feature of the Soane's funding has always been revenue-generation through the commitment of staff, supporters, patrons and our in-house commercial arm, Soane Museum Enterprises (whose operations were brought to a standstill by the pandemic). We also receive discretionary support from two independent, arm's-length institutions – Sir John Soane's Museum Foundation in the US, and Sir John Soane's Museum Trust.

Yet we remain crucially dependent on our government grant, as access to the Museum and its exhibitions remains free of charge. The government's grant-in-aid to the Museum is a much valued and critical part of its funding. It is, however, capped, which in real terms results in a progressive diminution of funding, as costs rise over time. This is an issue that the Museum will continually face in the years to come.

Nevertheless, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) has acted promptly and supportively during the Covid crisis, and its emergency funding as part of £100 million targeted support for national cultural institutions has contributed to the Soane's running costs. There has also been a temporary deferral of an increase in pension contributions and an additional capital sum for vital maintenance work.

These benefits come with responsibilities. Though it is the smallest national museum in the UK, the Soane must still participate fully

in the official DCMS processes, just as larger institutions with considerably more finance and administrative staff do. Throughout the crisis, our Director and Chairman were involved in regular conversations with their counterparts and with the National Museums Directors Council, while Finance Director Louise Peckett was tireless in preparing the recurring submissions and detailed responses needed to support these grants – which required input from all of the Museum's operating departments.

The government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme was also invaluable and enabled us to furlough our front-of-house and events teams. Unlike other national museums, our Visitor Assistants also manage the security of the Museum during working hours, so we were reliant on colleagues travelling into the Museum on a rota system throughout lockdowns. The flexibility of the scheme was therefore vital, helping us to preserve the closely-knit teams – with all their experience and commitment – without the need to make any redundancies.

Sir John Soane's Museum Foundation in the US and the UK-based Sir John Soane's Museum Trust, which both act as independent institutions, also provided critical financial assistance. The Foundation's Executive Director, Michael Diaz-Griffith, and its Chair, Paul Whalen, launched a Crisis Appeal, backed by a matched-giving pledge by one of the Soane's most outstandingly generous supporters, Deborah Loeb Brice. The open-handed and munificent response from the Foundation Board and the wider network of Soane supporters in the US was particularly impressive during a time of considerable pressure for charitable organisations in the US, especially in New York.

The Sir John Soane's Museum Trust, funded five years ago by an appeal to a wide range of donors and supporters, is an independent



Michael Diaz-Griffith (left) and Paul Whalen (right) of Sir John Soane's Museum Foundation in the US. Photo: Alonso Diaz Rickards

charitable endowment whose object is to promote and support the Museum, and it is run by an arm's-length board of Trustees. The endowment is managed with the objective of generating real, long-term returns sufficient to meet regular grant applications, and its record to date has allowed it to build sufficient reserves, both to make continuing grants on a discretionary basis to the Museum and to respond at times of extraordinary need. The Trust's response to requests for funding the Soane's commitment to its strategic plan and post-Covid recovery will be critical.

Over the past year, we have been almost entirely prevented from offering the programme of

membership benefits for which our Development team has built an enviable reputation – and which is part of the appeal of our Patrons' Circle. Even so, the loyalty and kindness of our supporters at all levels – our Friends, Patrons and major donors, including the loyal members of the Museum's Inspector's Fund – has been palpable. This gives us confidence that we can revive the involvement of this remarkably resilient and generous community over the coming year.

Our corporate supporters and programme sponsors have also been unfailingly sympathetic in the face of postponements and cancellations. The commitment and generosity of those who

underwrite our public programmes, in most cases to ensure they are free at the point of access, has been of particular comfort to our Education and Learning teams.

Programmes inevitably had to be scaled back, and prudent savings and efficiencies made where possible, but the Development team was nevertheless keen that this should not compromise a high level of engagement. A major outcome of the past year has been that team's success in refocusing our communication and fundraising efforts by enhancing the Museum's digital and virtual capabilities, and expanding our online content. Examples include:

- Substantial support from Bloomberg, introducing digital interpretation for the first time on its powerful new app, Bloomberg Connects. We were also able to upgrade the Museum's wi-fi, a considerable challenge owing to the historic nature of the Museum.
- A grant from the Museums Association – Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund to expand our interactive digital platform, *Explore Soane*.
- Several new launches: an online exhibition platform; a section of our website dedicated to our international Soane Medal programme with continuing support from The Rolex Institute; and new video content that will allow our *By Design* series and the award-winning *Opening up the Soane* project to reach wider audiences who are not able to visit the Museum.

Another valuable source of funding in the recent period has been legacies, an area we hope will become more important going forward. Just before lockdown, we were fortunate to receive some legacy funding. The Trustees designated these funds to be spent in the future as needed to protect and support the Museum's longevity and viability, including the implementation of its three-year plan. Legacies are favoured by current inheritance tax treatment, and will surely



be a welcome resource for the uncertain post-crisis years ahead.

Even as pandemic restrictions ease, potential elements could affect the Museum's financial position in the future: restricted access, the decline in foreign tourist numbers, and unpredictable changes in social behaviour that could affect footfall and the use of the Museum as an event destination, which has been so vital for Soane Museum Enterprises.

While our funders and supporters accept that maintenance of day-to-day viability must be the major short-term concern, the Development team has not lost sight of the need to fund

the longer-term vision needed to refresh our visitor experience and our cultural relevance. The Director talks elsewhere of our three-year strategic plan drawn up during the pandemic, mapping a positive and imaginative response to current challenges. Examples of this are our digital work and the restoration and repurposing of Soane's Drawing Office.

The campaign to restore the Drawing Office, which has never before been open to the public, marks the 200th anniversary of its installation. Visitors will have access to the fascinating oldest-surviving example of an architectural drawing office of its kind, but the project goes

much further, with multiple positive outcomes. Artists and makers, independently or through a planned residency programme, can be inspired by the architectural design and collection as Soane's pupils once were, while global digital audiences will be able to understand more about the Museum through interactive virtual tours and interpretation. The opportunities for renewal that this project provides are in themselves part of our recovery and will address many of our goals over the coming years.



# ESSENTIALS

Photo: Matt Clayton

**Sir John Soane's Museum is grateful to the following for their generous support during 2020/21**

The Alan Baxter Foundation  
 The John Armitage Charitable Trust  
 The Estate of John Balson  
 The Behrens Foundation  
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 The Foyle Foundation  
 Stephen Gosztony and Sue Butcher  
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 The Deborah Loeb Brice Foundation  
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 The Museums Association – Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund  
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**Sir John Soane's Museum is indebted to the contribution of the members of the Inspectress' Fund**

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Declan McCarthy  
Morrison & Foerster LLP

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James Campbell  
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Manolo Guerci  
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The Museum gratefully acknowledges the support it receives for all exhibitions from the Government Indemnity Scheme, administered by Arts Council England.

## EXHIBITIONS

### Langlands & Bell: Degrees of Truth

4 March 2020 – 3 January 2021  
(Soane Gallery, Foyle Space and throughout Museum)

Arranged across the whole Soane Museum, this exhibition brought together four decades' worth of work by Langlands & Bell, including new works specially commissioned for the exhibition. Taking place in what some commentators have called a 'post-truth' era, this show reflected on the capacities of architecture and objects to bear witness to the technological, political, economic and cultural relationships that define contemporary society. Because the exhibition was interrupted early in its run by Covid-19, the show in the Museum was supplemented by an online version that brought together installation photographs, images from Langlands & Bell's vast digital archive and new interpretation specially conceived for the online display. The success of this online exhibition prompted the commissioning of an online exhibitions platform, and all future exhibitions will be accompanied by an online version.

A cloth-bound hardcover catalogue accompanied the exhibition.

This exhibition was made possible thanks to the support of Pomellato and Christian and Florence Levett.

This year, our activity was impacted by the pandemic and the Museum's closure, and we held a total of two exhibitions. One major Museum-wide exhibition was held at Sir John Soane's Museum. A second exhibition was shown on our online exhibitions platform.

### The Architecture Drawing Prize

15 January – 14 February 2021  
(online)

This exhibition displayed the winning and commended entries of the third annual Architecture Drawing Prize. Launched in 2017, the prize was jointly conceived by Sir John Soane's Museum and the World Architecture Festival and sponsored by Make Architects. The prize celebrates drawing's significance as a tool in capturing and communicating architectural ideas, recognising the continuing importance of hand drawing, but also embracing the creative use of digitally produced renderings. This year a special lockdown prize was awarded to a drawing relating to the changes that Covid-19 will bring to architecture. The entries were evaluated for their technical skill, originality in approach and ability to convey an architectural idea, whether for a conceptual or actual building project.

The online exhibition also marked the first collaboration between Exhibitions and the Youth Panel at Sir John Soane's Museum. Youth Panel members produced a video intervention, which focused on making an architectural drawing. Youth Panel members also conducted interviews with the shortlisted entrants and presented their picks in the form of creative responses to the work.

## LOANS

### Pitzhanger Manor and Gallery, Ealing

Hogarth: London Voices, London Lives  
10 September – 31 December 2020

The eight canvases making up William Hogarth's *A Rake's Progress* (SM P40 – P47)



## Key Performance Indicators

	2020/21	2019/20
Total charitable giving*	£1,295,160	£1,520,635
Ratio of charitable giving to DCMS grant-in-aid	94%	121%
Number of visits to the Museum (excluding virtual visits)	2,090	118,015
Number of unique website visits	216,226	535,544
Number of visits by children under 16	84	4,883
Number of overseas visits	63	68,367
Number of facilitated and self-directed visits to the Museum by visitors under 18 in formal education	542	2,009
Number of instances of visitors under 18 participating in on-site organised activities**	374	1,171
% of visitors who would recommend a visit	88%	90%
Admissions income (gross income)	£1,014	£112,963
Trading income – net profit/(loss)	(£49,586)	£193,044
Number of UK loan venues	1	3

\*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

\*\* Includes online organised activities

## FINANCES

	2020/21 (Draft – not audited)		2019/20	
	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £

### Charitable income

Grant-in-aid from Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport	1,281,000	100,000	1,087,000	165,000
Other grants and donations	504,397	790,763	870,138	650,497
Visitors	1,014	-	112,963	-

### Trading activities

Retail sales	43,895	-	344,605	-
Room hire	900	-	235,229	-
Other trading activities	53,356	-	73,792	-

### Other income

	22,705	-	20,941	-
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### TOTAL INCOME

	<b>1,907,267</b>	<b>890,763</b>	<b>2,744,669</b>	<b>815,497</b>
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### Expenditure

Development and fundraising	217,948	47,350	230,766	45,411
Communications	105,412	31,704	101,652	26,490
Trading	227,889	103,551	480,355	39,720
Charitable activities	1,366,279	612,251	1,619,473	703,394

### TOTAL EXPENDITURE

	<b>1,917,527</b>	<b>794,856</b>	<b>2,432,246</b>	<b>815,015</b>
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### NET INCOME/(EXPENDITURE)

	<b>(10,260)</b>	<b>95,907</b>	<b>312,424</b>	<b>482</b>
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### Notes

- Figures for 2021 are draft results for the year ending 31 March 2021, not yet finalised at the time of publication. They have not been audited.
- Figures for 2020 are extracted from the Annual Report and Accounts of Sir John Soane's Museum for the year ending 31 March 2020, reported in the Consolidated Statement of Financial Activities.





## LETTERS TO THE SOANE

By Philip Hewat-Jaboor

I first became aware of the Museum when I was, as a teenager, fortunate to be invited by its then Curator John Summerson to meet over a sandwich lunch in his office and hear his advice on a schoolboy project about the Adelphi. I have been captivated ever since.

The *genius loci* of the Soane is overwhelming and captivating. The Museum is deeply imbued with the personality of its owner and the subliminal resonance of history offered not only by the collections themselves but by the romance of their extraordinary provenances. It was and remains a transportive place in which to live, learn and work.

As with everyone who visits for the first time, my eyes were opened to a stimulating new way of looking, taking in marvellous contrasts of scale, space, colour and display. Fantasy and practicality are brought together in magical reflective interiors bathed in colour and Mediterranean light. Soane's flair in presenting works of art – whether his avant-garde purchase of Seti I's alabaster sarcophagus so hauntingly displayed in its Sepulchral Chamber, or the magic of the folding panels of the Picture Room – is revolutionary.

As my research interests developed, my love for Soane's period grew. It was also the time of the collectors William Beckford, Thomas Hope and George IV, and one of the most cosmopolitan and vibrant artistic periods London has ever known, providing a melting pot for new artists and craftsmen and exceptional opportunities to acquire works of art and commission new work. Soane was at the centre of all of this, collecting for pleasure and knowledge, to inform his work, and to inspire others. In this special moment in history, collectors were passionate about opening their collections more widely to stimulate new and better design, and the Museum's role as a place of study and inspiration continues today.

I was delighted to have recently been invited to join the board of Sir John Soane's Museum Foundation, and I hope to be able to further the sterling work that the Foundation has carried out for so long, not only with vital fundraising but also working ever more closely with the Museum to spread the Soanean word to new audiences. Together we can seize new opportunities, particularly those offered by the internet, to provide enriching experiences for visitors in person and online.

The Museum has risen to the challenges of the pandemic with exciting initiatives, particularly the *Explore Soane* digital resources that offer virtual access to the Museum and its collections. Recent exhibitions carefully incorporating the work of contemporary artists and designers within the historic interiors echo Soane's own collecting – the mixing of the old with the contemporary – and I know this will be an increasingly strong catalyst in stimulating all those who work in the creative industries, and anyone interested in a fresh way of seeing.

We live in a challenging time, but one of great opportunity, and I am delighted to see the Soane take advantage of this and lead the charge in presenting a traditional space in a dynamic new way. When today's teenagers step inside the Museum, I trust they will be captivated just as I was.

*Philip Hewat-Jaboor is Chairman of Masterpiece, Patron of the Soane and Trustee of the Sir John Soane's Museum Foundation*

**Sir John Soane's Museum  
Annual Review  
2020/21**

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Visitor Assistant

Katie Weston  
Volunteer Manager

Christine White  
Human Resources Officer

Jane Wilkinson  
Head of Conservation

Olga Zilbershtein  
Visitor Assistant

