

Paul Coldwell: Picturing the Invisible Exhibition



Artist Paul Coldwell exhibits a new body of work exploring the notion of absence in Sir John Soane's Museum, derived from over a year's research.

Picturing the Invisible: The house seen from below

17 July to 15 September 2019

Sir John Soane's Museum

Entering Sir John Soane's Museum is like stepping into a time capsule, left exactly as Sir John Soane intended when he died over 180 years ago. But to explore the Museum is also to experience a feeling of absence: of Soane himself, of his office and students working at the back of the Museum, and of the servants who kept the house running.

Artist Paul Coldwell has been researching this notion of absence over the past year. Paul Coldwell: Picturing the Invisible will display a new body of work created in dialogue with, and now installed in, the Museum's Old Kitchens. During his research Coldwell became particularly interested in the idea of 'the house seen from below': the ways the servants would have seen, understood and perhaps even attempted to replicate aspects of what Soane created upstairs.

Unlike the master they served, the views and perspectives of the servants are largely unrecorded and therefore ultimately unknowable and inaccessible. Coldwell's project is therefore part speculation, part creative imagination and part ventriloquization – giving voice to those largely absent from, and almost entirely silent within, the historical record yet whose presence was vital to the house's functioning.

In one set of works, Coldwell speculates on how the maids and cooks might have responded to Soane's many representations and models of classical architecture by creating their own models using food and materials that might have been to hand in the kitchen. These are presented as a new set of models cast in bronze, a lyrical counterpoint to those 'upstairs' to which they stand as both homage and quiet satire.

Other works on display include a two monitor video piece, a number of cast sculptures and an installation of ceramic plates, which together picture the Museum from the viewpoint of the 'invisible', those below stairs whose daily chores enabled the house to function. As a whole, Coldwell's new body of work serves to gently destabilise the fixed reading of the Museum based on the singular vision of Soane himself by introducing other voices.

This exhibition is a continuation of work made over a number of years by Coldwell in response to Museums and collections and the manner through which new interpretations can be offered. The work is a contribution to the cross disciplinary AHRC funded network Picturing the Invisible of which Sir John Soane's Museum is a partner.

About Paul Coldwell

Paul Coldwell is Professor of Fine Art at the University of the Arts London. As an artist, his practice includes prints, book works, sculptures and installations, focusing on themes of journey, absence and loss. He has exhibited widely both in UK and abroad and his work is included in numerous public collections, including Tate, V&A, British Museum, the Arts Council of England and Musée d'art et d'histoire, Geneva.

Much of his work has involved researching within collections including at Kettle's Yard Cambridge, the Scot Polar Research Institute, Cambridge, and most recently for the Freud Museums in both Vienna (2016) and London (2017). In addition to his studio practice, he has curated a number of exhibitions including 'Digital Responses' (V&A 2001), 'Morandi's Legacy; Influences on British Art' (Estorick Collection, London, 2006) and 'The Artists Folio' (Cartwright Hall, Bradford 2014). He has published writings on many artists including Michael Craig-Martin, Christiane Baumgartner, Paula Rego, Jim Dine and William Kentridge and contributed to a range of publications including Print Quarterly and Art in Print. His book 'Printmaking: A Contemporary Perspective' was published by Black Dog Publishing in 2010.

About Sir John Soane's Museum

Sir John Soane's house, museum and library at No. 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields has been a public museum since the early nineteenth century. On his appointment as Professor of Architecture at the Royal Academy in 1806, Soane (1753–1837) began to arrange his books, classical antiquities, casts and models so that students of

architecture might benefit from access to them. In 1833 he negotiated an Act of Parliament to preserve the house and collection after his death for the benefit of 'amateurs and students' in architecture, painting and sculpture. Today, Sir John Soane's Museum is one of the country's most unusual and significant museums with a continuing and developing commitment to education and creative inspiration.