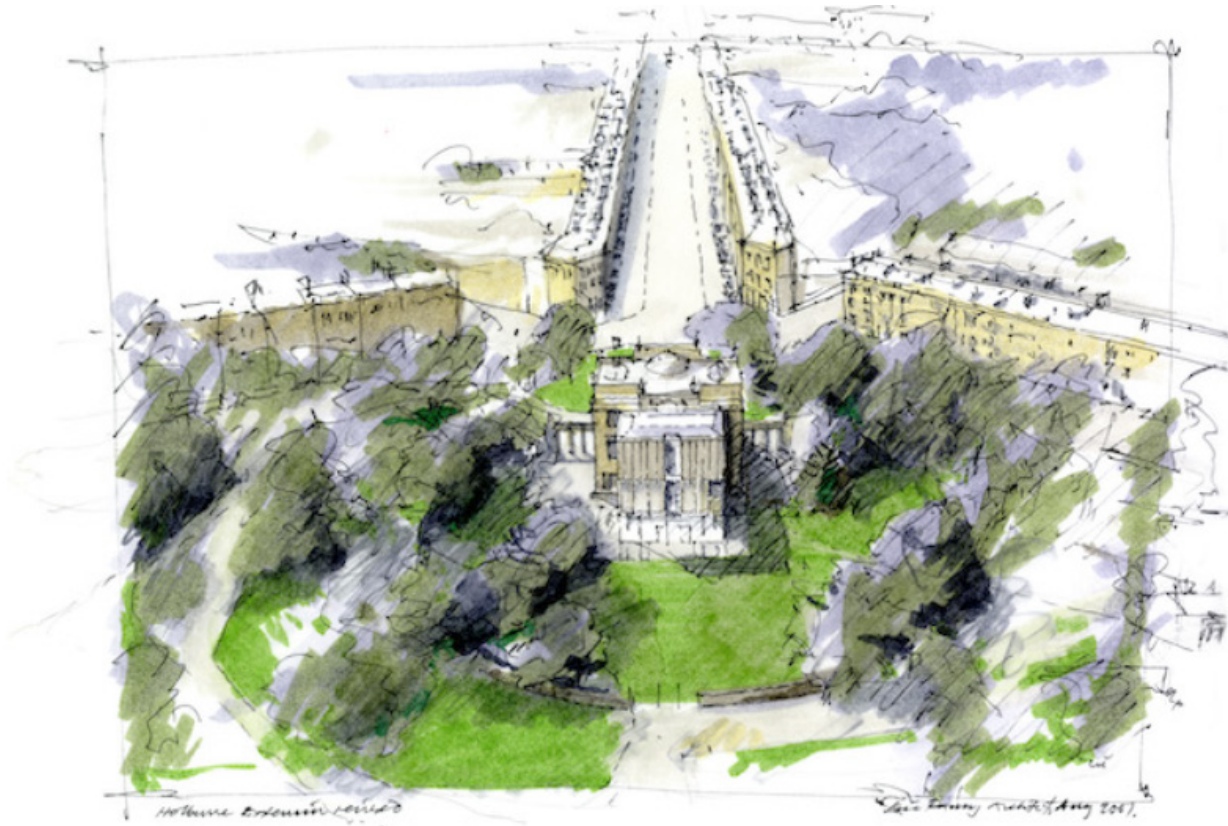


Eric Parry: How sketchbooks guide a journey of discovery

FEATURES 20.02.19



Holburne Museum of Art Bath. Copyright Eric Parry

Eric Parry is a master draughtsman who urges fellow architects to theorise with their sketching pencil. For Parry, the drawing table is where the human potential of his projects - including the shimmering Holburne Museum extension in Bath and the weathered steel structure of 4 Pancras Square in north London - reveal themselves.

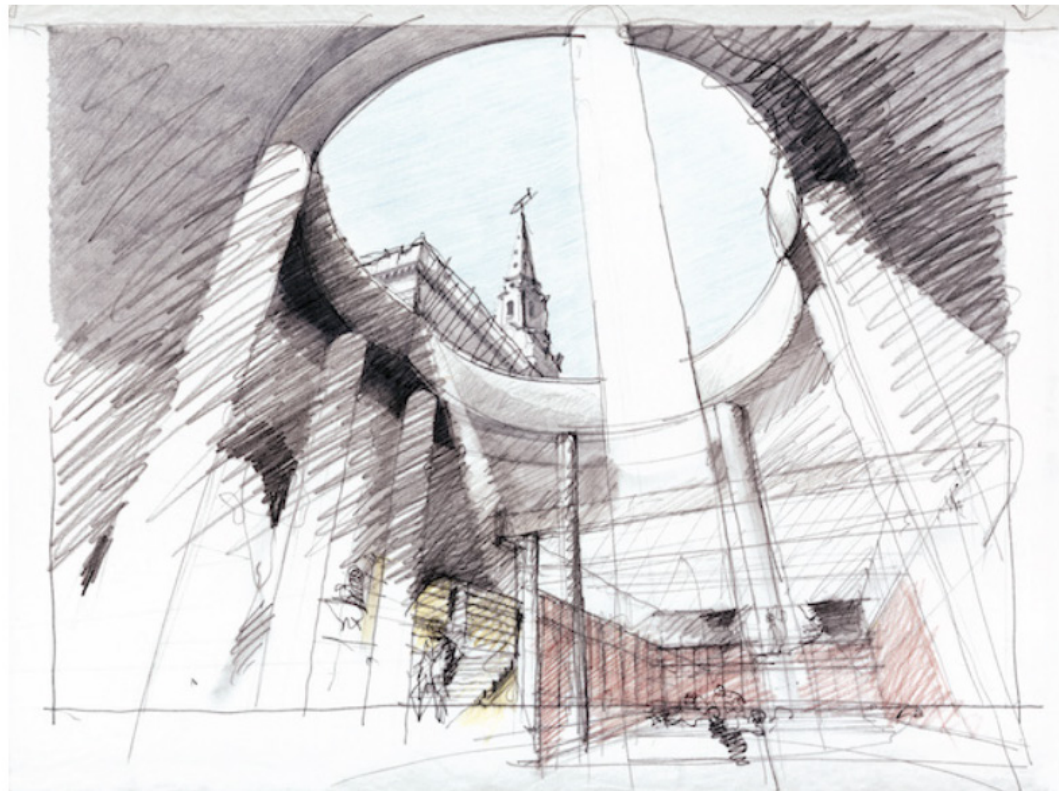
A new exhibition at the Sir John Soane's Museum in London, *Eric Parry: Drawing*, collects dozens of Parry's sketchbooks stretching back 40 years. Nestled like Easter Eggs between the Soane's lavish collection, Parry's sketchbooks and precise formal drawings display the skill of Parry's observation and imagination. But, above all, they show how the architect turns over his projects' possible futures, developing the 'richness' of social relations that have won them acclaim.

'Architecture is a cultural activity,' explains Parry. 'To get a hand on why we build particular buildings for particular social activities, drawing is as important as anything in architecture - to understand that architecture is a framework for social engagement.'

'Probably, the biggest reason for sketchbooks is that it's a way of engaging with the world more broadly.'

The Soane's exhibition splits Parry's drawings into sections each referencing reasons why Parry remains committed to sketching by hand. Here, Parry explains to senior curator [Owen Hopkins](#) what these notebooks achieve.

The pages on show here illustrate Parry's recurring interest in observing and documenting the character of people, buildings, places and cities. For him, 'character is a way of making sense of the world', of configuring what we feel through our senses into experiences that have meaning and value. Within these processes, 'the subtlest of shifts can have an incredibly powerful effect, from the crease in a smile, or the shift of an eye, all the way up to the scale of the city'.



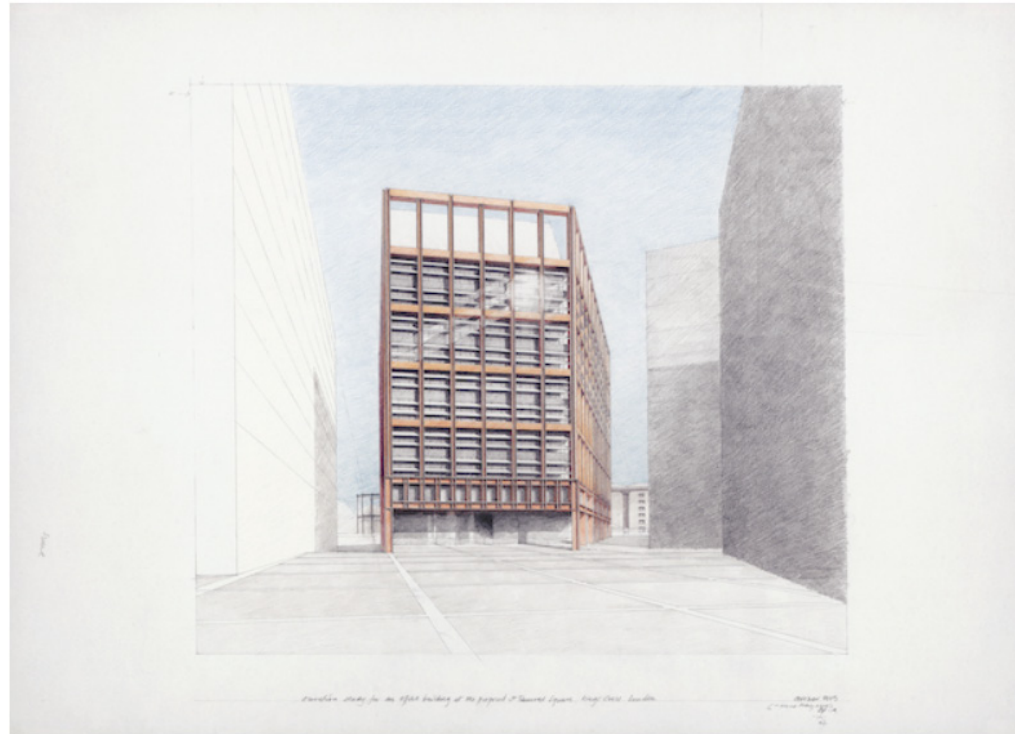
Preliminary sketch of the lightwell at St Martins in the Fields London 2002. Copyright Eric Parry

Effect

The way we experience architecture – whether a room, building or even a city – emerges not just from their physical, material qualities but what we might understand as their effects – the way light and shadow fall over a series of surfaces, the reverberation of sound in a room, the smell of a timber floor. The latter are largely intangible and fleeting and shaped also by what we bring ourselves – our mood, memories and sensibilities. These pages show how in Parry's hands drawing operates almost as an extension of this experience, conveying not just the visual field but the totality of the transient and immaterial effects of architecture.

Movement

Movement is inherent in drawing. The cumulative marks that constitute a drawing are made by a hand moving repeatedly across a page. And as an observational and analytical practice, a drawing is almost always a record of movement of some kind. 'The question', as Parry sees it, 'is how to translate movement on to the page in a way that has a sense of rapidity, pacing and rhythm'.



4 Pancras Square, north London. Copyright Eric Parry

Listening

Parry's sketchbooks contain not only drawings, but are full of notes; indeed, sometimes they are more notes than sketches. This illustrates that, for Parry, observing can be about listening as well as seeing. The pages on show here relate to various lectures and talks that Parry has attended over the years, often delivered by friends or colleagues.

Survey

Parry's sketchbooks document his various travels over the years, visiting buildings and places and recording what he saw and what he thought of them. These depictions vary between the quick sketch and comparatively detailed survey drawing, depending on the importance and interest of the subject and the time available. Both approaches, however, reflect the capacity of drawing to act as a means of analysing what one sees, discerning the important from the incidental and, critically, putting it in relation to other experiences.



30 Finsbury Square. Copyright Eric Parry

Designing

Drawing is an act of synthesis. To make a mark on paper is the start of a process of discovery, of creation and of bringing something new into existence that did not exist before. This is the essence of designing and is maybe why drawing is so fundamental to architecture. As a drawing emerges from a page over time, so a building emerges from a site.

Building

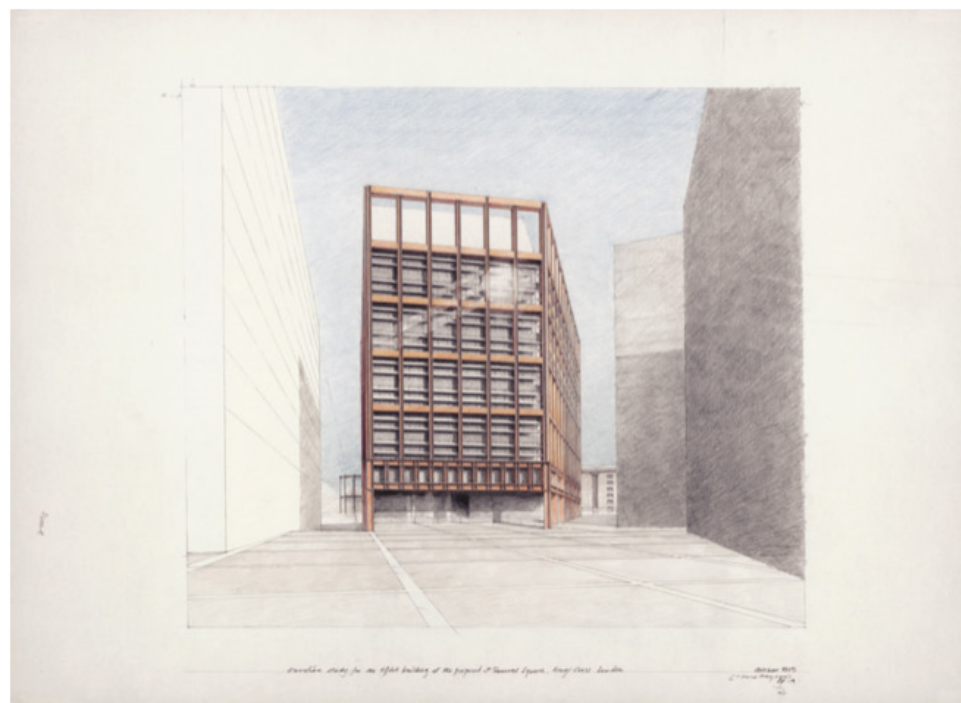
Before it ever becomes about construction, building is a process of communication. For architects, this process extends within and beyond the bounds of their discipline, as designs and ideas are communicated, not just between colleagues, but to the client commissioning the building and to the builder who is putting it up. Drawing is fundamental to this process as the means of translation between different disciplines.

Eric Parry: Drawing

Sketches and studies on show at Sir John Soane's Museum

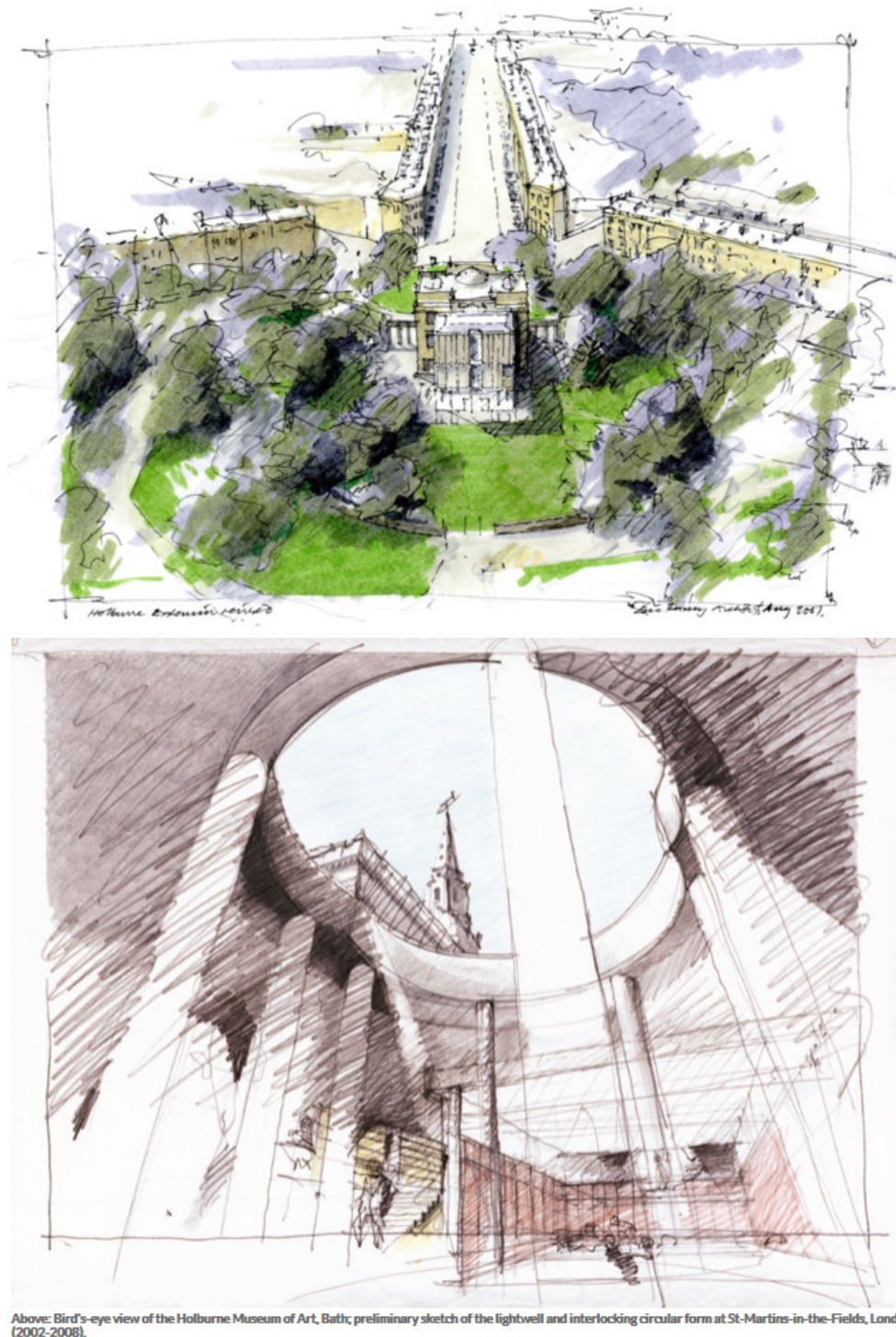


An exhibition of drawings by Eric Parry at Sir John Soane's Museum divides the work into three thematic sections: Observing, Designing and Building.



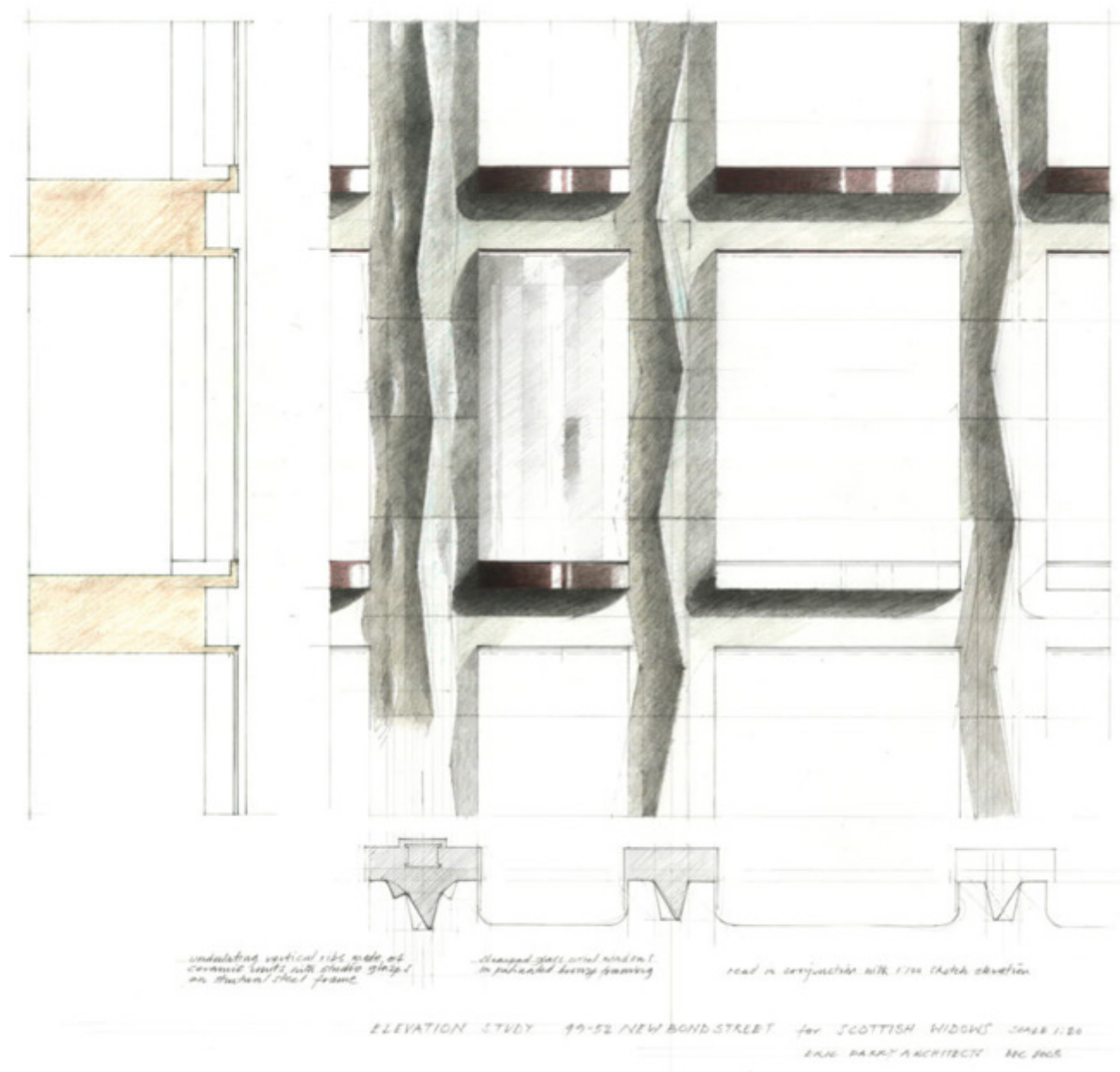
Top: Perspective view of 30 Finsbury Square (2002).
Above: Elevation study for an office building at Pancras Square, London (2003-2014)

Works on display were created over the last four decades, and range from sketchbooks that record Parry's travels to Iran and India in his twenties (displayed in purpose-designed table cases and vitrines) to exploratory drawings and detailed renderings of recent projects such as the Holburne Museum of Art, Bath (2007), the renewal of St Martin-in-the-Fields and office buildings in the City of London and the West End.



Above: Bird's-eye view of the Holburne Museum of Art, Bath; preliminary sketch of the lightwell and interlocking circular form at St-Martin-in-the-Fields, London (2002-2008).

Two additional exhibits are a video installation in the Foyle Space exploring the construction of Parry's corten-steel-framed 4 Pancras Square, and an intervention in the museum's Picture Room, illustrating the same project from different perspectives. In a supporting publication, Parry discusses the role of drawing in his practice with exhibition curator Owen Hopkins.



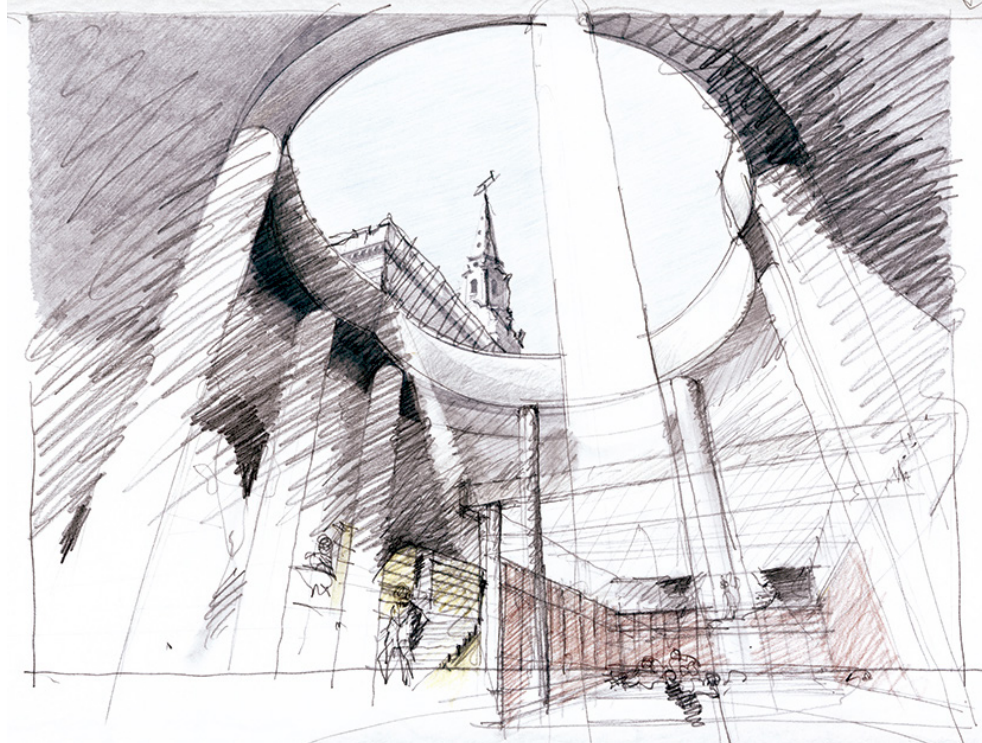
Above: Facade study, 50 New Bond Street

'Eric Parry: Drawing'

Sir John Soane's Museum, 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields, London, WC2A 3BP

20 February – 27 May 2019

A major exhibition explores the role of drawing in contemporary architectural practice



Preliminary sketch of the lightwell and interlocking circular form, St Martin's-in-the-Fields, London, 2002–08. Image: Eric Parry.



LONDON.- Drawing is a fundamental component of [Sir John Soane's Museum](#), reflecting its importance to Soane's conception and practice of architecture. Following Soane's example, this exhibition by leading contemporary practitioner Eric Parry will reveal the enduring centrality that drawing has to architectural practice and culture. It offers a never seen before insight into the extraordinary range of drawings Parry has created over the last four decades, focusing on the three sections: Observing, Designing and Building.

For Eric Parry (b. 1952) drawing is integral to his practice as an architect: not just as a design tool, but as a way of conceiving, reflecting on and analysing buildings and the places they occupy. Across projects as diverse in typology, scale and context as the new buildings at Pembroke College, Cambridge, the Holburne Museum in Bath, the renewal of St Martin-in-the-Fields, One Eagle Place on Piccadilly, 30 Finsbury Square (in the City of London) in Islington and the more recently completed 4 Pancras Square at King's Cross and Fen Court in the City of London – drawing is always fundamental to Parry's creative process.

'Observing' explores the sketchbooks that Parry first began making in his twenties and which act as a near continuous record and archive of experiences since that time. This includes his travels in Iran and India in the 1970s, teaching at the University of Cambridge and architecture schools across the world, as well as studies of buildings, places, people, and the miscellaneous ideas and observations accumulated running one of Britain's leading architectural offices.

The sketchbooks are displayed around the Museum in table cases and vitrines designed by Parry especially for this exhibition and presented according to themes and ideas that run through them: character, atmosphere, movement, analysis, precedent.

Displayed in the Museum's exhibition galleries, 'Designing' considers the different ways Parry uses the device of drawing in the process of conceiving, iterating and working up an architectural design. Drawings included in this section of the exhibition relate to buildings of a range of types and scales, from the studio designed for artist Tom Phillips to 1 Undershaft, which when built will be the tallest building in the City of London.

Finally, the 'Building' section of the exhibition will reveal how designs are resolved into computer-generated construction drawings that show with immaculate precision the inner workings of Parry's buildings, such as 30 Finsbury Square, the renewal of St Martin-in-the-Fields and One Eagle Place on Piccadilly.

Eric Parry: Drawing will also include two further interventions in the Museum: a video installation in the Foyle Space exploring the extraordinary construction process of Parry's 4 Pancras Square, and a corresponding intervention in the Museum's famous Picture Room, illustrating this particular project from different perspectives.

The exhibition will be supported by a corresponding publication in which Parry, in conversation with exhibition curator, Owen Hopkins, discusses his drawing practice and its centrality to his very conception of architecture. The publication, designed by John Morgan studio, also includes a newly commissioned essay by David Leatherbarrow, Professor at the University of Pennsylvania, USA.

Owen Hopkins, Senior Curator at Sir John Soane's Museum, said: 'Eric Parry is one of Britain's leading architects who, like Sir John Soane, sees drawing as central not only to how architecture is designed, but to the way it connects to history, memory, people and place. This exhibition will offer a unique and privileged insight into Parry's drawing practice over the last four decades – revealing its role as both design tool and a way of thinking.'

Eric Parry said: 'I was honoured to be asked to place an exhibition of my drawings in Sir John Soane's Museum, a context of such significance and intimacy. I have responded to the unique setting by showing works on paper in an ongoing process of observation, design and construction.'

Eric Parry studied architecture at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, the Royal College of Art and the Architectural Association. He spent a year studying nomadic settlement in Iran and low cost housing in Kuwait and India in 1974-75.

He established his practice, Eric Parry Architects in 1983 the year Eric was appointed as a lecturer in architecture at the University of Cambridge where he taught until 1997. He maintains a key involvement in all the practices' projects, particularly in their design development and under his leadership the practice has developed a reputation for delivering beautifully crafted and well considered buildings.

In 2006 he was elected Royal Academician (RA).