**Dear friend, I can no longer hear your voice…: Reclaiming Eliza Soane**

**Anne-Marie Creamer, Artist**

**Louise Stewart, Head of Exhibitions, Sir John Soane’s Museum**

**Abstract**

Sir John Soane’s Museum is the extraordinary home of Soane, a leading neoclassical architect in Georgian London, who amassed a vast collection of painting, architectural fragments and decorative objects.  Less well-known is his adored wife, Eliza Soane.  A fascinating figure in her own right, Eliza was an heiress whose money allowed Soane to set up his architectural practice.  She was a brilliant hostess and astute diplomat, and these qualities played an important role in Soane’s professional success.  This paper focuses on a new project by artist Anne-Marie Creamer which reconstructs a lost space within Sir John Soane’s Museum – the bedchamber of Eliza Soane, left undisturbed for 19 years after her sudden death before being turned into Soane’s model room.

Creamer has worked closely with the Museum over several years, undertaking extensive research in the collection that has shed light on Eliza and her bedchamber. Through a combination of photogrammetry, CG animation, sound, voice and song, her film is an imagined recreation of Eliza’s bedchamber, and a reclamation of Eliza’s presence.  The room includes objects from the collection, and the soundtrack uses fragments of Soane’s own memoir of his grief at Eliza’s death, and extracts from the diaries of family friends, Barbara Hofland and Sarah Smith, to create a meditation on love and loss.

Creamer describes the title of her film, *Dear Friend…* as grounding her visualisation of Eliza’s bedchamber in Soane’s need to hear the voice of his dead wife. The journey through Eliza’s room and possessions seems propelled by the rhythms of a choral soundtrack detailing his grief. But Eliza - given spectral form through the movement of dust, shadow, and light - remains both nowhere and everywhere in Creamer’s film.

Through Creamer’s intervention, and a renewed focus on Eliza in the spaces in which she lived her everyday life, her presence has been highlighted for in-person and online visitors.  The project will have an important legacy, ensuring that she is integrated more fully into the story of Soane and the experience of visiting the Museum.

**Biographies**

**Anne-Marie Creamer, Artist**

Anne-Marie Creamer a artist living in London. Her work experiments with cinematic & theatrical forms, often linking theatre painting & cinema. She explores how narrative - often occluded histories - are embedded in place, underpinned by her interest in the relationship between representation and presence. Her work is regularly shown internationally at galleries & museums, including Yantai Art Museum, China; Il Museo Ferroviario della, Puglia, Italy; FRAC Bretagne, France; Sogn og Fjordane Kunstmuseum Norway; Kunstvereniging Diepenheim, Netherlands; Royal College of Art; Aspex Arts, Portsmouth, and Center for Contemporary Art Prague. Publications include Salon for a Speculative Future (2020) & The Lost Diagrams of Walter Benjamin (MA Bibliotheque 2020/ 17); Sharon Kivland’s Armel Beaufils, le Regard des femmes, (Editions FRAC Bretagne, France, 2017), & The Drawing Book (Edited by Tania Kovats, Black Dog Publishing, 2006). She received the Derek Hill Scholarship to work at the British School at Rome, The Evelyn Williams Award, & the Delfina Studios Trust Award. Anne-Marie is a Senior Lecturer in Fine Art at Central Saint Martin’s, University of the Arts London, where she is also the Convenor for new HEARD research hub, for art and design in relation to health.

**Dr Louise Stewart**

Dr Louise Stewart is Head of Exhibitions at Sir John Soane’s Museum, London and curator of *Dear Friend, I can no longer hear your voice…*by Anne-Marie Creamer.  Stewart has worked at various museums, galleries and arts organisations including Nottingham Contemporary, The National Centre for Craft and Design, Ordinary Culture and the National Portrait Gallery where she was Cross-Collections Curator.  In this role she curated major international touring exhibitions and held an Art Fund New Collecting Award to acquire portraits of individuals from under-represented groups including women, people from BAME backgrounds and those affected by disability.  With a background in art-history, Stewart has a longstanding academic interest in gender and architectural space, and her PhD thesis focused on the gendered nature of banqueting in early modern England.  She has published on the spaces of banqueting in sixteenth and seventeenth-century England, festival architecture and popular perceptions of royalty in the urban environment.  Stewart joined Sir John Soane’s Museum in March 2020.