

BETTS PROJECT

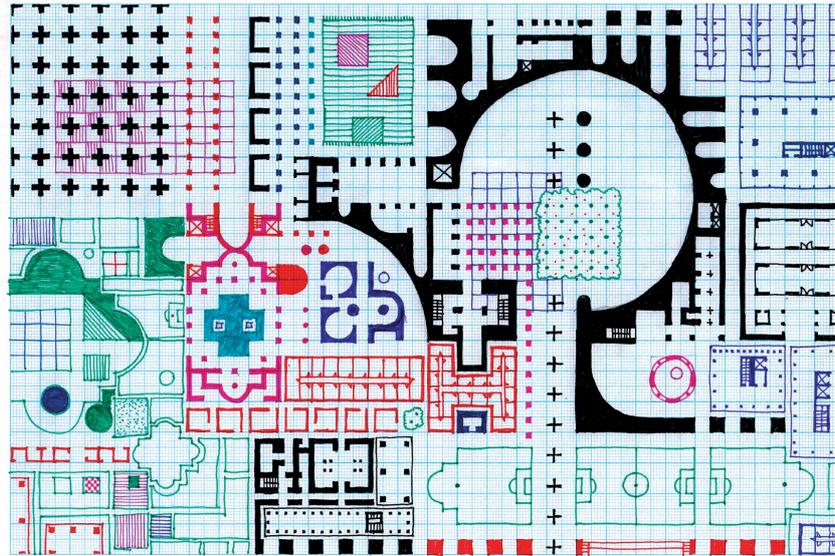
PRESS RELEASE

SAM JACOB EMPIRE OF ICE CREAM

OPENING RECEPTION:

FRIDAY 25 JANUARY 2019, 6 – 8 PM

26 JANUARY – 9 MARCH 2019



Betts Project is pleased to present ‘Empire of Ice Cream,’ a solo exhibition by British architect Sam Jacob. This is the artist’s first exhibition at the gallery, and showcases a series of drawings made on graph paper along with three sculptures that together explore the significance of fragmented architecture and our ability of recollection.

The exhibition’s title takes its name from a 1922 poem by Wallace Stevens, which is considered a harsh didactic lesson studying the use of the metaphor of ‘coldness’; “enjoy the sweet cold before the bitter cold claims you.” Jacob relates this poem to the neoliberal attitudes dominant in Britain during the 1950s — when Margaret Thatcher was working on cost-saving methods for preserving the foamy quality of soft serve ice cream so that it could be frozen, preserved and endlessly produced. It is from within this ambivalence of something sweet and desirable yet regressively produced that this exhibition departs.

Conceived between 2011 and 2019, ‘Empire of Ice Cream’ is a series of meticulously filled graph paper that show the remnants of architectural plans gathered from an assortment of historic and contemporary references. These elements are sometimes grand and monumental, others banal and generic, but all are summoned impromptu from Jacob’s memory; segments from Ancient Greek temples, football pitches, something Meisian, parts of a church, orchards, fountains, straightforward corridors, a chunk of Parliament, and a Buzzcock’s single cover are some examples.

Jacob first conceived the series in 2011 as part of an invitation to participate in the second edition of San Rocco Magazine: ‘The Even Covering of the Field,’ which explored the idea of ‘the field is where we live’. In their own description of the field, these drawings investigate space as a sprawl of fragments that stretch to the horizon. They probe contemporary space as an all-consuming territory, an inescapable terrain that encrusts the earth and assimilates everything – the densities of cities, the grandest of monuments, the conventions of everyday life, everything built, and even what might be left of the wilderness. They are maps of empires with enclaves and exclaves, borders and passageways, and ever-amalgamating components that make up a sprawling world of conglomerations and aggregations.

‘Empire of Ice Cream’ sits in a tradition that includes Piranesi’s “Campo Marzio” and Archizoom’s “No-Stop City”; drawings that elucidate architectural ideas as much as they do real places, and that give graphic form to concepts and sensations as much as physical structures. As Sam Jacob describes:

‘Every piece of architecture is a world. Each an empire within its own borders. But outside of these perfect islands of architecture the city they make up renders them fragments. We experience them as fragmented sequences of different worlds. And as the city itself remains in a constant state of construction and destruction.’

Jacob's synthesis of fragmented structures and half-located memories take physical form through the three sculptures in the exhibition. They were initially conceived for the exhibition 'pieces' at the Soane Museum in 2015 as a response to the museum's collection of ancient sculpture fragments. Lenin's Urn explores "the effect of history on objects," and takes its cue from the shape of a Victorian railing finial outside the Tavistock Square house inhabited by Vladimir Lenin – the communist politician that led Russia and then the Soviet Union from 1917 until 1924. The finial piece was 3D-scanned, enlarged and then carved on a computer-numerically-controlled (CNC) router to produce a faithful recreation of the original object. Two sculptures both entitled *A False Description of the Thing Destroyed* combine found fragments from antiquity with fired plasticine, one a Roman pottery jug 1st century AD found amongst a ship wreck and the other a 3rd century BC Greek ceramic shard.

Sam Jacob is director of Sam Jacob Studio, established in 2014. The studio has just won the Victoria and Albert Museum's competition for the transformation of its main entrance on Cromwell Road (planned to complete in 2020). Forthcoming work includes a new mixed use building in London's Hoxton, curation of *The Lie of the Land* at the Milton Keynes Gallery, a new public toilet in London's West End and work for the National Collections Centre in Wiltshire. The studio's recent projects include 'Fear and Love' at the Design Museum, public realm design and cultural strategy for a south London market and the V&A's first international gallery in Shenzhen.

Jacob's work has been published and exhibited internationally including at the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2016 and 2014 (where, as part of FAT he was co-curator of the British Pavilion), 'Spaces Without Drama' at the Graham Foundation (2017), Chicago, 'A Very Small Part of Architecture' in Highgate Cemetery (2016), the Chicago Architecture Biennial (2017) and 'Disappear Here' at the RIBA Architecture Gallery, London (2018).

Sam Jacob is currently a professor at University of Illinois at Chicago and visiting professor at the University of Hong Kong and has taught at Yale, Karlsruhe HfG and the AA in London where he also established AA Nightschool, a programme that opened up new ways of sharing of architectural knowledge. He has been a columnist for the AJ, Art Review and Dezeen and is the author of 'Make It Real, Architecture as Enactment' published by Strelka Press. Previously he was a founding director of FAT Architecture, a practice that was hailed as "changing the architectural weather" for its idiosyncratic approach. FAT's built projects included the Heerlijkheid Hoogvliet in Rotterdam, A House for Essex with Grayson Perry, the BBC Studios in Cardiff and the Blue House in Hackney.

image: Sam Jacob, *Empire of Ice Cream-Untitled No.7*, 2011, 21 x 29.7 cm, ink on graph paper. © The Artist. Courtesy Betts Project.

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Opening Hours

Wednesday – Friday, 11 – 6 pm
Saturday, 12 – 5 pm
or by appointment

About Betts Project

Betts Project is a London-based contemporary art gallery specialising in architecture, founded in 2013 by Marie Coulon. The concept behind Betts Project is to introduce both a specialist audience and wider public to new ways of discovering and thinking about architecture, through the exhibition and promotion of materials integral to architecture – largely drawings, but also models and other forms of representation. It aims to support and promote work by established and emerging international architects, as well as lesser known or overlooked practices still very much relevant to the contemporary discourse.

The gallery is also driven by the desire to introduce architectural objects as works of art. To do so, it organises high calibre exhibitions for new and established audiences and participate to art fairs, and thereby brings unique collectable works to the market at an affordable price.

Over the past years the exhibition programme has featured solo shows by established international figures such as Günter Günschel, Denise Scott Brown, De Vylder Vink Taillieu architects, Florian Beigel + Philip Christou, Caruso St John, Alexander Brodsky, Lars Lerup, Tony Fretton, Fred Scott, Studio Mumbai, Richard Goodwin, Peter Märkli alongside artist Hans Josephsohn, Pier Vittorio Aureli, and OFFICE kgdvs with photographer Bas Princen.

Next exhibition: Jacques Hondelatte / Epinard Bleu

To find out more visit: www.bettsproject.com and sign-up to the Betts Project e-newsletters.

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