

THE MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM TO EXHIBIT THE FINAL WORKS OF THE GREAT ITALIAN DRAFTSMAN AND CLASSICIST GIOVANNI BATTISTA PIRANESI

*The Drawings Are on Loan from London's Sir John Soane's Museum
and Record the Artist's Visit to the Ancient Site of Paestum*

**Piranesi and the Temples of Paestum:
Drawings from Sir John Soane's Museum**
January 23 through May 17, 2015

New York, NY, December 17, 2014 —In 1777, the great Italian draftsman and printmaker Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778) visited the haunting and majestic archaeological site of Paestum on the Gulf of Salerno, about 60 miles south of Naples. A Greek colony dating to circa 600 B.C., Paestum had long been abandoned when it was rediscovered in the eighteenth century. Antiquarians eagerly studied the site, visiting its three ancient Doric temples, then identified as the Basilica, the Temple of Neptune, and the Temple of Ceres. The Basilica and the Temple of Neptune are among the best-preserved early Greek temples.



Giovanni Battista Piranesi. *Interior of the Temple of Neptune, Looking South-East* (Study for plate XVII of the *Différentes vues de Pesto*), ca. 1777-78. Brush and brown ink and wash over black chalk on paper. Courtesy of the Trustees of Sir John Soane's Museum, London.



Giovanni Battista Piranesi. *View of the Temple of Neptune and the Basilica, Looking South-West* (Study for plate IV of the *Différentes vues de Paestum*), ca. 1777-78. Pen and brown ink and wash over black chalk on paper. Courtesy of the Trustees of Sir John Soane's Museum, London.

Piranesi immediately began a set of monumental drawings that combined an antiquarian's interest in the buildings with an appreciation for the picturesque qualities of the ruins. The drawings were preparatory for a set of prints, but unfortunately, the artist died in 1778 before completing the project. The drawings—the last of Piranesi's illustrious career—were ultimately completed by his son, Francesco, and published posthumously the same year.

Beginning January 23, the Morgan Library & Museum will exhibit fifteen of the seventeen surviving Paestum drawings for the first time ever in the United States. The works are on loan from Sir John Soane's Museum in London, where they recently underwent restoration. *Piranesi and the Temples of Paestum: Drawings from Sir John Soane's Museum* will remain on view through May 17.

"The Morgan is delighted to be the first American museum to exhibit these remarkable drawings," said Peggy Fogelman, acting director of the Morgan. "Their beauty and majesty of scale are truly impressive, offering museum-goers a bold encounter with the artist's unique style. We are grateful to Sir John Soane's Museum for lending us these unforgettable works."

Giovanni Battista Piranesi

Famous for his etchings of Rome and his fantastic “prisons” series (the so-called *Carceri*), Piranesi’s career in art and architecture began in his hometown of Mogliano Veneto, near Treviso to the north of Venice. His education commenced with an introduction to Latin and the history of ancient civilizations, provided by his brother Andrea. Piranesi went on to study architecture under his uncle, Matteo Lucchesi, a Venetian architect and engineer who specialized in excavation and served as the Magistrate of Waterworks (*Magistrato delle acque*). In 1740, Piranesi went to Rome, where he studied etching and engraving under Giuseppe Vasi. He remained there for three years, collaborating with pupils of the French Academy. Following his time in Rome, he moved to Venice, where he often visited with Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, one of the great painters of his day.

In 1747, Piranesi returned to Rome and opened a workshop on the Via del Corso, beginning two of his best known projects: the *Vedute di Roma (The Views of Rome)* and the *Carceri (Prisons)*. The *Vedute* (continued from 1748 until 1774) depict both the modern city and Rome’s ancient ruins. The *Carceri* (published in 1750, with a second edition in 1761) imagines an extraordinary world of subterranean vaults with implausible, intertwining stairways and fantastic machinery. The works have been credited as highly influential for the Romantic and Surrealist movements.

Piranesi garnered much praise and recognition during his lifetime. In 1761 he became a member of the Accademia di San Luca, and, in 1767 he was honored with the knighthood of the Golden Spur.

The Paestum Drawings: Measured and Imaginative

Piranesi’s Paestum drawings underscore the artist’s distinctive approach to architectural perspective, often featuring off-center vanishing points to enhance the splendor of a view. *Interior of the Temple of Neptune, Looking South-East* (Study for plate XVII of the *Différentes vues de Pesto*), as an example, offers a spectacular rendition of the second-tier columns of the interior colonnade. This drawing demonstrates particularly well the ways in which Piranesi combined architectural study with compositional drama. The viewpoint seems to blur the distinctions between the columns of the Temple of Neptune and those of the Basilica beyond, while the atmospheric play of light and shade makes this one of the most evocative drawings of the series.



Giovanni Battista Piranesi. *View of the Temple of Neptune, Looking South-West* (Study for plate X of the *Différentes vues de Paestum*), ca. 1777-78. Pen and brown ink and wash over black chalk, and red chalk, heightened with white on paper. Courtesy of the Trustees of Sir John Soane's Museum, London.

In a similar manner, *View of the Temple of Neptune, Looking South-West* (Study for plate X of the *Différentes vues de Paestum*) depicts the exterior of the well-preserved structure. The triangular pediment had remained almost entirely intact, and this drawing is a carefully rendered study of the façade's details. However, the related etching shows the façade from a slightly different view, which suggests that Piranesi used not only the drawings exhibited here, but also a set of measured works on paper that do not survive, when he prepared the prints.

Paestum: History of a Greek Colony

Located in a malarial swamp, Paestum includes the remains of a former Greek colony that had been largely ignored until the mid-eighteenth century, when the rediscovery of Herculaneum and Pompeii aroused a new interest in the desolate site. It is particularly known for its three Doric temples, which are among the best-preserved examples of their kind: the Temple of Hera I, (ca. 550-30 B.C.), the Temple of Hera II (ca. 450 B.C.), and the Temple of Athena (ca. 500 B.C.).

Aside from remaining archaeological evidence, little is known about the early centuries of Paestum, which was founded as Posedonia by Greek colonists around 600 B.C. Originally, eighteenth-century archaeologists mis-identified the structures. The Temple of Hera I, the oldest

surviving temple in Paestum, was initially referred to as the Basilica, a Roman civic structure, until Greek inscriptions later revealed that the goddess Hera was worshipped there. The Temple of Hera II was thought to be a place of worship for the sea god, Neptune (or Poseidon, the Greek god for whom the colony was named), though it is now understood that the temple houses two altars, likely in tribute to Hera and Zeus. The Temple of Athena, located on the highest point of the town, was erroneously known by Piranesi and his contemporaries as the Temple of Ceres, until terracotta statuettes depicting the goddess Athena were uncovered.

Sir John Soane

In 1817, the English architect Sir John Soane (1753-1837), who had met Piranesi in Rome shortly before the artist's death, acquired fifteen of his Paestum drawings, which are on display in this exhibition.

Soane's house, museum and library in London have been a public museum since the early nineteenth century. On his appointment as Professor of Architecture at the Royal Academy in 1806, Soane 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 England's most unusual and significant museums with a continuing and developing commitment to education and creative inspiration.

Public Programs

Family

Drawing Buildings that Tell Stories

When Italian artist Piranesi drew ancient buildings, he made them look oddly alive. Join artist and National Arts Club instructor Simon Levenson for an exploration of Piranesi's haunting drawings of monumental Greek ruins. After a short tour of the exhibition, each family will be invited to use a pen, a brush and ink to draw expressive buildings that can tell mysterious and fantastic stories. Appropriate for children age 6 to 12.

Saturday, January 24, 2-4 pm

Tickets: \$6 adults; \$4 for Members; \$2 for children

Lecture &
Screening

Piranesi, Yo-Yo Ma, and the Sound of the Carceri

Introduced by John Marciari

The Sound of the Carceri (François Girard/1998/55 minutes) explores the relationship between art, architecture, and music with Yo-Yo Ma performing Bach in a digital three-dimensional rendering of Giovanni Battista Piranesi's *Carceri*, the imaginary prisons found in his etchings. Preceding the screening, John Marciari, Charles W. Engelhard Curator and Department Head, Drawings and Prints, Morgan Library & Museum, will talk about Piranesi's dark and haunting world seen in the *Carceri*. He will juxtapose these images with Piranesi's fantastical and imaginative depictions of Rome and the serene and factual

images of Paestum seen in the exhibition *Piranesi and the Temples of Paestum: Drawings from Sir John Soane's Museum*.

Friday, March 6, 7 pm

Free with museum admission.

Gallery Talk **Piranesi and the Temples of Paestum: Drawings from Sir John Soane's Museum**

Per Rumberg, Associate Curator, Drawings and Prints

Friday, March 13, 6:30 pm

Free with museum admission.

Lecture **"His conduct is mischievous": Piranesi and Soane**

Mark Rakatansky

Sir John Soane, although an admirer of the graphic works of Piranesi, remarked that his "conduct is mischievous" in his only built work Santa Maria del Priorato. Similar sentiments have been expressed about Soane, particularly in regard to his own House-Museum. Mark Rakatansky, Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, Columbia University, will explore the complex relationship of these two architects and the unsettling "mischievous" engagements of their architecture, drawings, and writings. This lecture is cosponsored by Sir John Soane's Museum Foundation.

Thursday, March 19, 6:30 pm

Tickets: \$15; \$10 for Morgan and Sir John Soane's Museum Members; Free for students with valid ID

Organization and Sponsorship

This exhibition is made possible through the generosity of The Gilbert and Ildiko Butler Family Foundation.

Organized by Sir John Soane's Museum, London, with the Morgan Library & Museum, New York.



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The Morgan Library & Museum

The Morgan Library & Museum began as the private library of financier Pierpont Morgan, one of the preeminent collectors and cultural benefactors in the United States. Today, more than a century after its founding in 1906, the Morgan serves as a museum, independent research library, music venue, architectural landmark, and historic site. In October 2010, the Morgan completed the first-ever restoration of its original McKim building, Pierpont Morgan's private library, and the core of the institution. In tandem with the 2006 expansion project by architect Renzo Piano, the Morgan now provides visitors unprecedented access to its world-renowned collections of drawings, literary and historical manuscripts, musical scores, medieval and Renaissance manuscripts, printed books, photography, and ancient Near Eastern seals and tablets.

General Information

The Morgan Library & Museum

225 Madison Avenue, at 36th Street, New York, NY 10016-3405

212.685.0008

www.themorgan.org

Just a short walk from Grand Central and Penn Station

Hours

Tuesday–Thursday, 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.; extended Friday hours, 10:30 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.; closed Mondays, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year’s Day. The Morgan closes at 4 p.m. on Christmas Eve and New Year’s Eve.

Admission

\$18 for adults; \$12 for students, seniors (65 and over), and children (under 16); free to Members and children 12 and under accompanied by an adult. Admission is free on Fridays from 7 to 9 p.m. Admission is not required to visit the Morgan Shop, Café, or Dining Room.