



## ***Space Popular: The Portal Galleries***

Explore portals to other realms and experience the magic of a virtual extension to Sir John Soane's Museum

29 June – 25 September 2022

**Press Day:** 27 June, 10am – 3pm

11am: Speeches by curator Erin McKellar and Lara Lesmes

and Fredrik Hellberg of Space Popular

Please [RSVP](#) by 25 June, as space is limited



**Left:** *Space Popular* with Rachel Swetnam, Portal Study, 2021. **Right:** Archive of Portals. *Space Popular: The Portal Galleries*. 2022.

*Space Popular: The Portal Galleries* will present new work and research by the multidisciplinary design practice Space Popular, led by Lara Lesmes and Fredrik Hellberg.



Lara Lesmes and Fredrik Hellberg of *Space Popular*. Photographer: Anna Huix. 2021

The exhibition responds to the virtuality of Sir John Soane's Museum by focusing on 'the portal': a door or threshold that grants entrance into another environment, whether physical or virtual. The desire to travel virtually across time, space and realms has been a recurring theme in the collective imagination – one that many have explored through fictional narratives. Visitors will be guided through the magic and mechanics of virtual travel in an exhibition that bridges the technologies of Soane's time and ours. Using Sir John Soane's Museum as the point from which to begin this journey, Space Popular present their research on the portal through time and across media.

Lara Lesmes and Fredrik Hellberg of Space Popular comment:

Portals have been present in fiction for centuries. Today they are the primary means to travel between virtual worlds. During the past two years we have made a study of the history of the portals - in literature, television, cinema and gaming - that inspire the teleportation infrastructure being built today.

Unfolding walls, cleverly placed mirrors, and scale shifts are just some of the numerous examples of portals at Sir John Soane's Museum. We see the Soane as the greatest collection of pre-electronic media teleportation devices, making it an inspiring and challenging setting for our current research.

The future of our virtual experiences will be about touch. Spatial computing will take away screens, keyboards and touchpads but we will continue to use our hands to navigate and interact with virtual space. This will lead us to a whole new world of haptics where a furniture, objects, and tools become interfaces or, in other words, portals to virtual worlds. Exhibition curator Erin McKellar comments:

Sir John Soane's Museum is intricate, varied and full of surprises. Space Popular have peered through the building's doors and frames and have found inspiration in the myriad worlds within. The virtual worlds that they're creating in their new work will be as fresh and invigorating to today's visitors as Soane's spaces still feel. Through Space Popular's work, which is at the forefront of technology and of our understanding of architecture's limits, this exhibition also speaks to Soane's goal of creating an academy of architecture within his museum.



Archive of Portals. Space Popular: The Portal Galleries. 2022.

Virtual reality technology stands at the forefront of advances in architecture, art, gaming and communication. Yet the notion of 'virtual space' – non-physical environments – has its roots in pre-electronic media, such as frescoes and tapestries, and has fascinated architects, artists, writers and others for centuries. Sir John Soane himself opened the doors of his house museum to transport visitors to other realms, with walls folding to reveal hidden spaces, cleverly placed mirrors tricking the eye and pictures by Soane's office creating imaginary cities from assemblages of his work.

*The Portal Galleries* sees Space Popular drawing from and continuing Soane's architectural experiments by creating two new spatial films. One is shown on the Museum's ground floor, and is experienced through virtual reality headsets, allowing visitors to enter a series of portals across environments derived from Soane's spaces. Accompanying this will be a cross-media historical study of fictional portals, including examples such as the wardrobe from *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and the

Cheshire Cat Shortcut from *Alice in Wonderland*. At the centre of this study, a large new handcrafted 'portal table' offers a three-dimensional timeline of fictional portals and is also the stage for a second spatial film. Visitors are invited to interact with the table, which is covered in Alcantara, the soft touch and innovative material produced by the Italian firm Alcantara, to illustrate how the experience of the physical and virtual worlds is always paired.

In addition to the portal table, a series of Soane office drawings, Space Popular drawings and Space Popular films will show visitors how some of the most beloved fictional portals have shaped our understanding of the virtual today.

## **Notes for Editors**

### **About Space Popular**

Space Popular is a research driven art, design, and media studio that explores the future of spatial experience through virtual reality, film, exhibitions, speculative writing, as well as buildings and objects. The studio is directed by architects Lara Lesmes and Fredrik Hellberg, both alumni of the Architectural Association in London (2011). They founded the practice in Bangkok (2013) and have been based in London and Spain since 2016. The studio has completed buildings, exhibitions, public artworks, furniture collections, and interiors across Asia and Europe, as well as virtual architecture for the immersive internet. Clients, collaborators, and commissioners include national institutions such as MAXXI - National Museum of 21st Century Art, Rome, Italy; The Swedish Centre for Architecture and Design – ArkDes, Stockholm, Sweden; Royal Institute of British Architects, London, UK; National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul, South Korea; as well as independent galleries such as MAGAZIN, Vienna, Austria; and Sto Werkstatt, London, UK. Lesmes and Hellberg both have extensive academic experience having taught architectural design studio since 2011, first at INDA, Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok from 2011 to 2016, at the Architectural Association in London from 2016 to 2021, and currently at Daniels, Faculty of Architecture, University of Toronto since 2020, and UCLA Architecture and Urban Design since 2022. Their current MArch design and research studios both at Daniels and UCLA investigate visions for civic architecture in the immersive internet.

### **About Alcantara**

Alcantara is a creative partner of this exhibition. Space Popular also used Alcantara to create *The Wardian Case* in 2019 exhibited at Palazzo Reale in Milan. Space Popular have commented:

We are fascinated by the technical, sensory and aesthetic qualities and endless possibilities offered by Alcantara material and its potential to be the canvas and portal to our virtual experiences.

Founded in 1972, Alcantara with its production, stands as an example of Italian excellence and quality. A registered trademark of Alcantara S.p.A. and the result of a unique proprietary technology, Alcantara® is an innovative material, able to ensure unparalleled sensorial, aesthetic and functional performance. The versatility of the material has led prestigious brands to choose Alcantara for their products in the fashion and accessories, automotive, interior design and furnishing and consumer electronics sectors. Alcantara has a certified commitment to sustainability. In 2009 Alcantara obtained Carbon Neutrality Certification, an objective achieved thanks to the measurement, reduction and compensation of the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from its production activities. In order to communicate

the progress in this area, every year Alcantara prepares an annual Sustainability Report certified by BDO and available on the company's website. Alcantara's headquarters are in Milan, while the production plant and Research Centre are located in Nera Montoro (Terni), in the heart of Umbria.

### **About Sir John Soane's Museum**

Sir John Soane's house and collection at No. 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields has been a national museum since the early nineteenth century. Designed by renowned architect Sir John Soane and filled with his world-class collection of paintings, sculpture, artefacts and models, the Museum retains the same fabric and design as at the time of Soane's death in 1837. Today, the Museum encourages access to Soane's legacy in its broadest sense: architecture and design, creative originality, a commitment to learning and enquiry, and the connections between past and present that the Museum and its collections reveal.

### **Visitor Information**

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

[www.soane.org](http://www.soane.org)

#SoaneMuseum | @soanemuseum

Opening hours: Wednesdays to Sundays, 10am to 5pm

Entry is free

For full details on the safety procedures in place at the museum, please visit: [www.soane.org/your-visit](http://www.soane.org/your-visit)

### **Press enquiries**

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Click [here](#) for image sheet

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Click [here](#) for the Soane Museum 2022 Exhibition Programme

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