

'Sinta Tantra's The Grand Tour transforms Dulwich Picture Gallery's Welcome Hall', Around Dulwich, 16 December 2020

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Coinciding with its reopening last week, Dulwich Picture Gallery presents *The Grand Tour* (2020) a new commission and site-specific installation by London based British/Balinese artist Sinta Tantra. The work, which pays homage to the Gallery's original architect, Sir John Soane, as well as its historic collection, forms part of a fully redesigned welcome hall by Tantra, who has opened up this vital entrance space with colour, shape and light.

Designed by architect Sir John Soane, Dulwich Picture Gallery first opened to the public in 1817. Titled *The Grand Tour*, Tantra's piece refers to Soane's own journey to Europe between 1778 and 1780, where Soane's encounter with "the numerous and inestimable remains of Antiquity" subsequently influenced his entire life's work.

Consisting of two large painted murals with gold leaf applications, *The Grand Tour* envelops the welcome space to create an immersive experience for visitors. Placed on opposite walls, the paintings evoke a sense of dualism, as one side – colourful and bright – faces the other – monochrome and sombre.

For Tantra, the use of 24 karat leaf signifies the universal appeal of gold and its visible presence on many of the framed paintings inside the gallery. Tantra's repetition of arch-shaped motifs echo those of the gallery's curved archways and entrances – a framing technique often employed by Soane himself to give a sense of grandeur. The colour palette of blues, greens and pinks, meanwhile, is directly lifted from the interiors of Soane's London homes at Lincoln's Inn Field and Pitzhanger Manor.

The Grand Tour builds on Tantra's body of work in public art, highlighting the importance of colour, light and perception. "My interest in public art goes beyond wrapping artwork on architectural surfaces; it is about looking at how we as bodies approach spaces, how we navigate from one point to another, how art plays a role in enriching the spaces we occupy – layering histories and narratives together to form new perspectives."

Tantra's development of the space extends to rethinking the layout of the welcome hall: it brightens up what had previously been a darker part of the gallery to create a more open-plan arrangement that accentuates the height of the rooms. The design also importantly allows for safe social distancing for visitors in time for the Gallery's reopening on 8 December.

The commission was a welcome one for Tantra, who had herself previously worked at the Gallery after graduating from art school. Speaking of the project, Tantra said: *"I wanted to create an installation that functioned on a practical level as well as an artistic one - linking the world of Soane with that of the everyday. As an artist - and as a Londoner - Dulwich Picture Gallery has provided a fantastic opportunity, enabling me to exhibit within an institutional context for the first time, as well as contributing to one of the most beloved and historic galleries in London."*

Dulwich Picture Gallery's Director, Jennifer Scott said of the project *"It is quite the ask - to transform the Gallery's welcome hall - and to do it during such a challenging time. But Sinta Tantra has created something exceptional. Her mural 'The Grand Tour' comes with a totally reimaged space which is bright and spacious, taking inspiration from Sir John Soane's love of travel and his belief in the power of art. I cannot wait to see the reaction of the first visitor who walks through our doors when we reopen."*

Image credit: Sinta Tantra, *The Grand Tour*, © Graham Turner

www.dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk