

# concerning an idea about place: items from the swedenborg collection

EXHIBITION NOTES | SWEDENBORG HOUSE

**October 2022 - January 2023**

WILLIAM BLAKE | S T COLERIDGE | JEREMY DELLER  
EMANUEL SWEDENBORG | BRIDGET SMITH  
IAIN SINCLAIR | D T SUZUKI | KESSLER VOGES  
VERNON WATKINS | J J G WILKINSON

CURATED BY STEPHEN MCNEILLY



The Swedenborg Society  
SWEDENBORG HOUSE  
20-21 Bloomsbury Way  
London, WC1A 2TH

**2022**

# preliminary note

In a now famous passage from his *Arcana Caelestia*, printed in London between 1749-56, Emanuel Swedenborg wrote that our 'ideas of place and distance' are not anything real but 'states of thought and affection'. (§1376) Since then, this idea has had a profound influence on philosophers, writers and artists alike, and has had a direct impact on Romanticism, Symbolism, Surrealism and Psychogeography. Curated by the Society's Museum Director, Stephen McNeilly, this intimate exhibition draws together miscellaneous items from the Swedenborg Collection that explore this theme and confirm our experience of place as an 'inner sense', linking the external world of things to our internal world of ideas and feelings.

## **About the Society**

Established in 1810, the Swedenborg Society is a registered charity, academic publisher, archive and museum. It is the leading publisher of Swedenborg's works in the world and it commissions a diverse body of literature exploring Swedenborg's thought and legacy. Based in a Grade II listed building in Bloomsbury, it also organizes a diverse programme of cultural events and activities including lectures, exhibitions, educational workshops and film screenings. In addition to supporting academic research through doctoral scholarships it also supports a Residency programme and an annual film festival. For more information on the many activities funded and staged by the Society please visit the Society's website or become a friend or member and receive regular updates.

**[www.swedenborg.org.uk](http://www.swedenborg.org.uk)**

## 1

### **Manuscript notebooks for *Tengai to Jigoku (Heaven and Hell)***

D T Suzuki (1870-1966)

Two manuscript notebooks

Date: 1909

Completed during an intense period of just over twelve weeks in early 1909—in rooms in Great Russell Street opposite the British Museum and close to the Society's then headquarters in Bloomsbury Street—this handwritten manuscript translation of Swedenborg's *Heaven and hell* contains the famous section at §192, where Swedenborg offers a definition of place as a condition of state. In English the passage reads: 'All changes of place in the spiritual world are effected by changes of state of the interiors, which means that change of place is nothing else than change of state. In this way I have been taken by the Lord into the heavens and also to the earths in the universe; and it was my spirit that so journeyed, while my body remained in the same place. Such are all movements of the angels; and in consequence they have no distances, and having no distances they have no spaces, but in place of spaces they have states and their changes.'

## 2

### **Illustrations for the *Book of Job***

William Blake (1757-1827)

Intaglio etchings

Date: 1825

The Swedenborg House Collection has five etchings from William Blake's *Illustrations for the Book of Job*. The series includes twenty-two plates in total, all prepared by Blake and completed in 1825, when Blake was 68 and living at Fountain Court in the Strand. They are today considered among Blake's finest works and were also a rare critical success when Blake was alive. The three prints on display are plates 5, 16 and 18. Plate 5 illustrates verse 7 from chapter 2: 'Then went Satan forth from the presence of the Lord'; plate 16 illustrates verse 17 from chapter 36: 'Thou hast fulfilled the judgment of the wicked'; and plate 18 illustrates verses 8 from chapter 42: 'And my servant Job shall pray for you.'

## 3

### **Malacca walking stick**

Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772)

Date: c. 1770s

Brought to London on his final visit in 1771, this copper-tipped malacca walking stick accompanied Swedenborg on his short walking trips between his lodgings in Cold Bath Fields, Clerkenwell and the print shop of Mary Lewis at no. 1 Paternoster Row. His landlord, Richard Shearsmith, tells us that Swedenborg often attended dinners and social events and could be seen dressed in a full-bottomed wig, a pair of long ruffles, a hilted sword and this walking stick.

#### 4

### **Marginalia in *Oeconomia Regni Animalis***

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834)  
First edition of Swedenborg's  
*Oeconomia Regni Animalis* published  
in 1740

Date of marginalia: unknown

ST Coleridge was famous for his marginal notes and in this copy of Swedenborg's *Oeconomia Regni Animalis*—owned by Charles Augustus Tulk—he made extensive comments on Swedenborg's concept of the *fluidum spirituosum*, which for Swedenborg served as a nexus between the soul and body, and the point of contact between material space and immaterial non-space. This *fluidum* is described by Swedenborg as a non-visible animating principle within the arteries which can only be observed through its effects, similar in this sense to later descriptions of electricity in the bloodstream.

#### 5

### **Seat**

J J G Wilkinson (1812-99),  
Mahogany Chair  
Date: unknown

This chair was once owned by J J G Wilkinson and painted on the back rest is the Wilkinson family crest. Wilkinson is one of the most remarkable individuals of the nineteenth century. Social reformer, homoeopath, poet, philosopher, medical doctor and former

Librarian of the Swedenborg Society, he was also the first person to publish a selection of William Blake poems in a single edition. Regarding furniture and seating in the next life, Swedenborg was to write that the 'quality of each spirit is discernible' instantly by the chair they occupy and every spirit 'knows his seat in a room and is known from it' and 'goes to that part of a house which corresponds to their quality'. (*Spiritual Diary* §5991)

#### 6

### **Concerning an idea about place**

Unknown

7 hand-coloured prints on cotton  
paper and 4 carbon paper drawings  
Date: unknown

Discovered recently in the collection at Swedenborg House these Swedenborgian inspired drawings and prints draw upon the notion of place as an abstract configuration of values and forms. Written onto some of the colour prints are reference points drawn from Swedenborg's description of London in the spiritual realm. There are over 40 such prints and drawings in the collection in total.

#### 7

### **Four Corners at Swedenborg House**

Kessler Voges  
Polaroid photographs  
Date: 2022

These 4 photographs form part of a series of 500 Polaroid images documenting the architecture at Swedenborg House. The project was begun in 2010.

## **8 Copper Printing Block**

Unknown  
Wood and copper plate  
Date: 1846

Published in Swedenborg's *Principia* vol. II chapter IV under the title: 'On the universal solar and planetary chaos, and its separation into planets and satellites'. The illustration forms part of a series of diagrams showing the first formations of matter and space from gaseous substances.

## **9 Use the Interior to Imagine the Exterior**

Bridget Smith  
Screen print on paper  
Date: 2016

Produced for the exhibition *Now It is Permitted: 24 Wayside Pulpits* during Bridget Smith's residency at Swedenborg House, *Use the Interior to Imagine the Exterior* is one of 58 specially commissioned visionary statements from invited artists, writers, musicians, poets and filmmakers. Designed by the Fraser Mugeridge studio.

## **10 Aesthetic Movement**

Jeremy Deller and Karl Holmqvist  
Poster  
Date: 1999

Produced on the occasion of an event held at Swedenborg House during 1999 entitled *Now it is Allowable* and organized in conjunction with the Cabinet Gallery.

## **11 Boxes and itinerary**

Cardboard and paper  
Date: c. 1924

Found under the floorboards of the Swedenborg Gallery when undergoing recent renovations these boxes were once used to store the oak floor panels currently *in situ* in the space.

## **12 Plaster cast of the wrong skull**

J V Hultkrantz (1862-1938),  
Plaster  
Date: 1908

Place marker for an internal space, the domed enclosure of the skull serves as both cockpit and antennae chamber. Intended as a replica of Swedenborg's skull, the plaster cast is in fact an error, a memorial to an unknown woman of indeterminate age. The cast itself was made in 1908

after Swedenborg's mortal remains had been repatriated from their resting place in the vaults at the Ulrika Eleonora Church in Princes Square, Wapping (now called Swedenborg Gardens), where they had lain for 136 years, and prior to their interment in a stately and newly commissioned sarcophagus in Uppsala Cathedral.

### **13** **Head of a wrong man**

Framed text, wall

Author: Iain Sinclair

Date: 2010

This text was commissioned and included as part of an exhibition staged by the Swedenborg Society in 2010 entitled *Fourteen Interventions* and was one of a series of eight descriptions of objects written by Iain Sinclair to accompany the exhibition. These texts were printed in 2012 in a book with Brian Catling entitled *Several Clouds Colliding*, published conjointly by BookWorks and the Swedenborg Society.

### **14** **Swedenborg's Skull**

Vernon Watkins (1906-67)

Typescript poem and letter from the author

Date: 1957

The Welsh poet Vernon Watkins—close friend and collaborator of Dylan Thomas—was inspired

to write the poem on display here after he had been shown the real skull in 1956, which was then in Swansea and in the ownership of Mr W A Williams. It was typed and sent to the society by the author.

### **15** **Rooms For hire**

Street Sign

Hand painted lettering on aluminium

Date: 1924

The original place marker for Swedenborg House. Once situated on the first-floor bricked window of Barter Street facing Bloomsbury Way and visible from New Oxford Street.

Commissioned in 1924 when the Society moved into the premises and decommissioned in 2010, as part of the Society's bicentenary celebrations.

### **16** **ad caput capitis**

Unknown

4 prints

Date: unknown

Discovered in an untitled folder in the Society's archive in 2010, these 4 offset prints depict profile, front and elevation views of the substitute skull. Although the dating of the works are unknown, the images are drawn from the official photographs of the skulls first published in 1910 in *The Mortal Remains of Emanuel Swedenborg*, by Johan Vilhelm Hultkrantz.