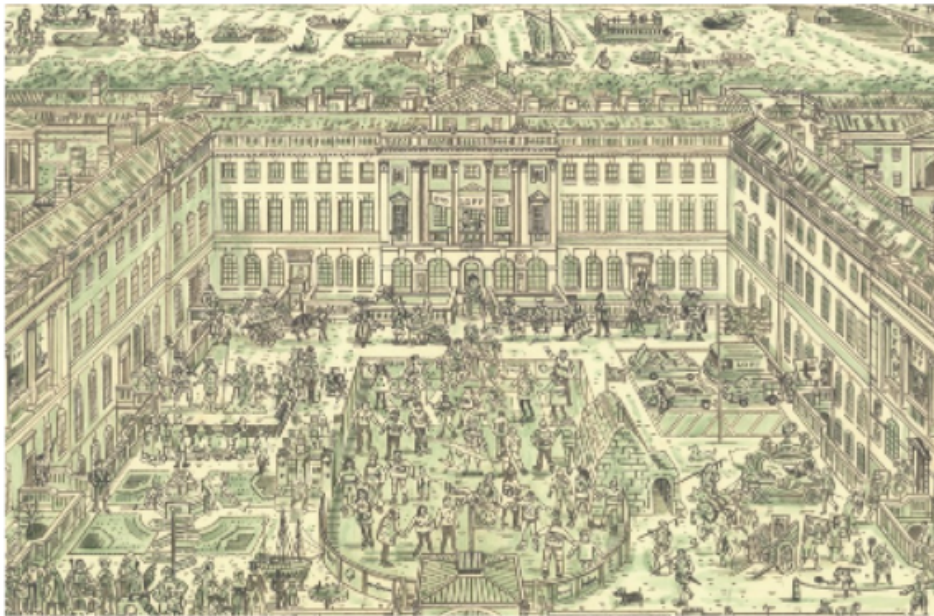




Adam Dant's Incredible Illustration Of Somerset House

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Adam Dant — the 'modern day Hogarth', and a favourite of Team Londonist — is back with another fervid illustration of London, teeming with history and hijinks. The subject this time? Somerset House: the very venue where it's on show from 21-24 March 2024, as part of the London Original Print Fair. Here, Adam tells us about the artwork.

Somerset House was once known as 'the Palace of England's Queens'. Sitting conveniently on the river with splendid gardens and apartments, it saw all matter of state visits, council meetings, masques, masquerades and intrigue. One of my favourite characters from the building's history is the court alchemist, Cornelius de la Noye, sent to the Tower for attempting to distill a draught of perennial youth. I like to think that had he been successful and officially sanctioned, then Londoners today would be visiting Somerset House to bathe in a fountain of eternal youth (although many did end up in instead of in the faux 'Roman' bath around the corner.

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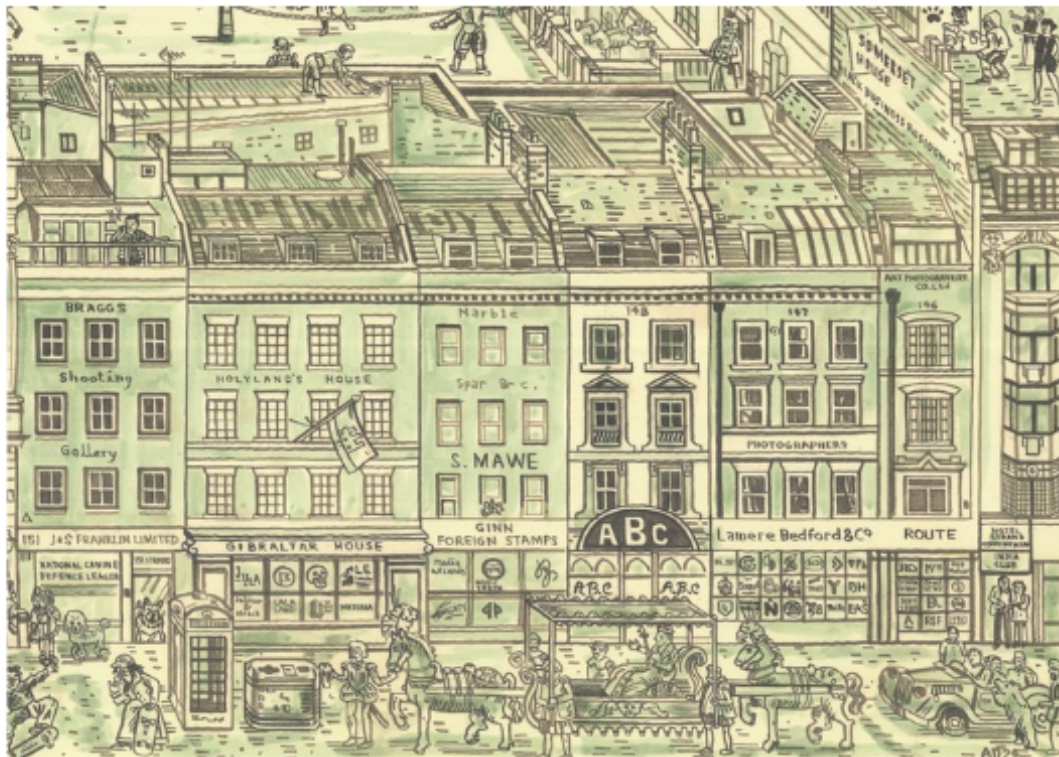




Can you spot James Bond with his beloved Aston?

That Somerset House is now filled with artists, performers, designers and innovators is a healthy nod to the most interesting and lively aspects of its history as a place for theatrical merriment and invention. A huge fire sale took place here when Oliver Cromwell plundered and flogged the collection of King Charles I, including Titians, da Vincis and Michaelangelos. Fortunately, we now have the treasures of the Courtauld Gallery to admire and inspire us. In my illustration, Samuel Courtauld's peculiar limo and one of his fabric delivery trucks can be seen in front of the buildings colonnaded facade, whose keystones' carved heads represent the principal rivers of Britain.

I'm particularly fond of the ABC logo of the Aerated Bread Company. The sign of these Prets of their day would have been seen all over town, offering a new type of social space for London's women — an attractive tearoom as an alternative to Covent Garden's grubby inns, and a place where women's public social engagements could enjoy a more prominent footing.



ABC stands for Aerated Bread Company – the Pret of its day.

Nearby, the proprietors of the (now unfortunately closed) India Club restaurant can be seen welcoming an esteemed visitor in the form of Jawaharlal Nehru who co-founded this place as the meeting place of the India League, and went on to become India's first prime minister.

Today all Londoners will have experienced the perennial (in term time) hordes of lanyard-toting King's College students who wedge up the entire pavement outside their campus between lectures. Adding to the crowd are depictions of famous characters from fiction movies which have been shot here including Sherlock Holmes, Oscar Wilde and – perched on his Aston Martin in the courtyard, which was once the inland revenue car park – James Bond.



Image the footfall at Somerset House if it had a real fountain of youth

Somerset House is dense with secret histories – too many to mention here. The figures who've worked and passed through here have made waves across the globe. That's why I'm providing a handy key for viewers when they come and see it at the TAG Fine Arts stand at the London Original Print Fair – in the very building where all this incredible stuff took place.

London Original Print Fair, Somerset House, 21-24 March 2024

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A few things to look out for:

- *Charlie Brown*
- *Someone falling (to their death?)*
- *Topless protestors*
- *A teddy bear*