

CARUSO ST JOHN
Collected Works: Volume 3 2010–2020

Third volume in Caruso St John's celebrated retrospective series, covering recent projects in Switzerland, the UK, Germany, France, Brussels, and more

Detailed project presentations are interwoven with inspirations and references, including texts by Grace Ndiritu and Roger Diener, buildings by Lewerentz and Alberti, and artworks by Peter Doig and Bernd and Hilla Becher

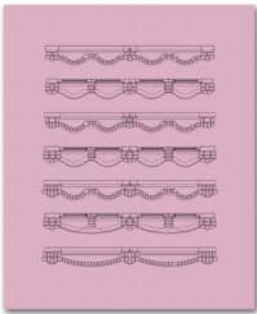
'Meaning gently surfaces in the shadows between words and images, bringing new revelations and distinguishing *Collected Works* as an important contribution and provocation to the architecture monograph format.'

Building Design

Between 2010 and 2020, Caruso St John expanded its reputation for sensitive and characterful architecture through a remarkable range of projects. Major buildings in the heart of Swiss, German, and Belgian cities explored the role urban landmarks can play in the present day, while smaller domestic projects provided the opportunity for experiments in restoration, materials, and colour. Transforming buildings for reuse – from beloved public institutions to long-abandoned industrial sites – became a focal point for the practice as it sought to emphasise its work with the existing rather than contribute to the escalating production of new construction. Their designs for memorials, exhibitions, and museums further developed this engagement with memory and aliveness to the past.

The third volume of Caruso St John's acclaimed *Collected Works* series covers this prolific period via a sequence of resonant themes. Projects are presented with extensive drawings, photography, and new commentaries, interleaved with competition entries, contemporary reviews, and material that inspired and informed the architects, including texts by Elizabeth Wilson and Grace Ndiritu and references from Alberti to Roger Diener and Pissaro to the Bechers. As a retrospective, the book is reflective, allusive, and critical, engaging with urgent contemporary questions while offering a close encounter with the mature work of one of the world's most significant architecture practices.

CARUSO ST JOHN [bio]



Embossed and silkscreened linen hardcover
22 x 26.5 cm, 464 pages
€85 £70 \$85 AU\$160
ISBN 978-1-917651-39-4

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ISBN 978-1-915743-02-2





Caption to come

The Canterbury Cathedral Organ Loft

Giuseppe Cosentino

In a letter from 1507 to her friend Isabella d'Este, Margherita Cantelmo writes 'ad me se leva il desiderio d'essere nella sacra Grocta, nel cospecto venerando de la diva immagine di quella, la quale in terra debitamente adoro'.¹ A few metres from the *camera picta*, in the Castle of San Giorgio in Mantua, the Marquise d'Este had two small rooms built in the turret of San Nicolò, one above the other: on the upper floor the study, surrounded by the works of Perugino, Mantegna and Lorenzo Costa, and on the lower floor the 'Grocta' or treasure room, to store artefacts and collections of antiquities. The barrel-vaulted ceiling of the Grocta is covered with a stunning timber vault.² The central decoration of the ceiling coffers is the *Impresa delle pause*, an erudite enigma composed of a framed pentagram on a gilded background on which are inlaid a key followed by the graphic signs of the value of various types of pauses, some longer, some shorter, some repeated. Silence, encoded in musical notation, becomes an evocation of study, both as an act of abstraction of the mind and as an inspiration that determines an architectural space. Through a lenticular reading, by means of a process of mere evocation, it is possible to reinterpret the project for the Canterbury Cathedral organ loft, designed by Caruso St John, as a space similar to the Grocta; in other words, as a place of music but even more so of silence, which in musical syntax is expressed by the pause. A suspension, which in music is a readiness to wait, the anticipation of sound and the promise of a beginning, and which in the project for the Cathedral becomes a physical interruption, an aposiopesis that takes place as a detachment from the ground.

The result of a 2016 competition to design the space to accommodate the organ, which through the centuries had never found a permanent location, the intervention fits discreetly beyond the stalls of the ancient choir located at the centre of Canterbury Cathedral. The architectural structure is composed of a horizontal space, a wooden structure which, like a sound box, holds the organ; a vertical element, also made of wood, part of which contains the staircase; as well as the light-steel pillars that, forming a dense weave, elevate the organ from the ground and at the same time bring the parts together, articulating its composition. Occupying the length of an entire bay, the organ, which measures 2.7m x 2m, rises more than 3.5m into the air, reaching a position that favours the diffusion of sound and facilitates the organist's visibility beyond the choir's Gothic stone balustrade. The choice of materials shows Caruso St John's sensitivity to the setting of the project: the walnut elements echo the wooden choir stalls. The steel structures do not conceal the stone wall but rather expose it, an intervention that seems to follow John Ruskin's exhortation 'to bind [an old building] together with iron where it loosens', an enlightened approach in which the new fits into the old 'without deception' through a process of both proximity and distance from the built.³ The ontological relationship between music and architecture is determined not only by

order and measure, but also by the evocation of images: ‘images or sounds generate thoughts that develop almost endlessly from them, and the two dimensions end up intertwining to such an extent that thought itself at some point seems to be playing music and painting’.⁴ Caruso St John’s work at Canterbury Cathedral follows this evocative process, weaving a dialogical relationship with history, to the point where we seem to see once again in the choir those elements that are elevated from the ground, such as pulpits and tombs, which are already present in the Cathedral. Another, even more explicit allusion lies in the detail of the steel pillars, which in their vertical course evoke the structural form of stone beam pillars. The spiral staircase, partly concealed by the timber structure and partly visible, is a reflection of those stairways which have always existed within Gothic walls or pillars, service paths of an impassable appearance that in some cases reveal the wonder of the unexpected, or as in this case lead to the wonder of a suspended view, caught between light and silence.

The area in which the organ is located, isolated in its elevated position, is almost a sacred space of meditative contemplation. The timber box is determined by the human measures of the body of the organist who is meant to be seated there. This measured space within the Cathedral finds an elective affinity with the monks’ desks painted by Tommaso da Modena. The image of the Benedictine cell, like the Canterbury organ, reveals a space that is so small and human-scaled that it seems to configure itself as both a reverberation and an impression of the monks’ gestures and activities.

The work on the space carried out by Caruso St John derives from thoughtful research on the context. A constant exercise that is not limited to historical and architectural analysis but includes all fields of art in the interpretation of the place.⁵ A continuous dialogue between elevated references and influences from everyday life, aimed at ‘connecting and enhancing the forces and atmospheres already present in places’.⁶

One reference in relation to their work for Canterbury Cathedral is surely Alberto Giacometti’s 1932 piece, *The Palace at 4am*.⁷ suspended rooms, epic and enigmatic, a surrealist architecture of slender elements that construct a space that is at once physical and mental.

In this exercise of the mind to work on the context through the evocation of related images, the space of the study as depicted in Antonello da Messina’s *St Jerome in His Study* appears as complementary to Caruso St John’s organ loft: two architectures suspended within another architecture. What connects these two spaces is spirituality. The spirituality of study, in Antonello da Messina, as an exercise of the soul, and the spirituality of song, which in Caruso St John becomes an evocation of the sacred.

The asymmetrical design of the organ loft is a reflection of the refined method through which Caruso St John relate to the structure of the Cathedral, tracing the shifts and misalignments that are present in its plan as a result of the historical stratification of the building. The balancing of forces – between the fullness of the casing that contains the organ loft and the sparseness of the steel elements, and between the horizontal nature of the upper part and the vertical character of the staircase below – compose, through opposition, the medieval definition of Beauty, as unity in diversity and the proportion of the parts. In this respect, Caruso St John’s project is conceived as a musical score. The aesthetic relationship lies precisely in the principle of proportion, which in musical writing is expressed through the alternation of harmony and counterpoint. Proportion is the matrix of

the beauty of creation, which in John Scotus Eriugena’s thought ultimately becomes a representation of God who ‘is the very likeness of things that are alike and the dissimilarity of dissimilar things, the opposition of opposite things and the contrariety of contraries. For he gathers and composes all these things with beautiful and ineffable harmony into one single concord.’⁸

