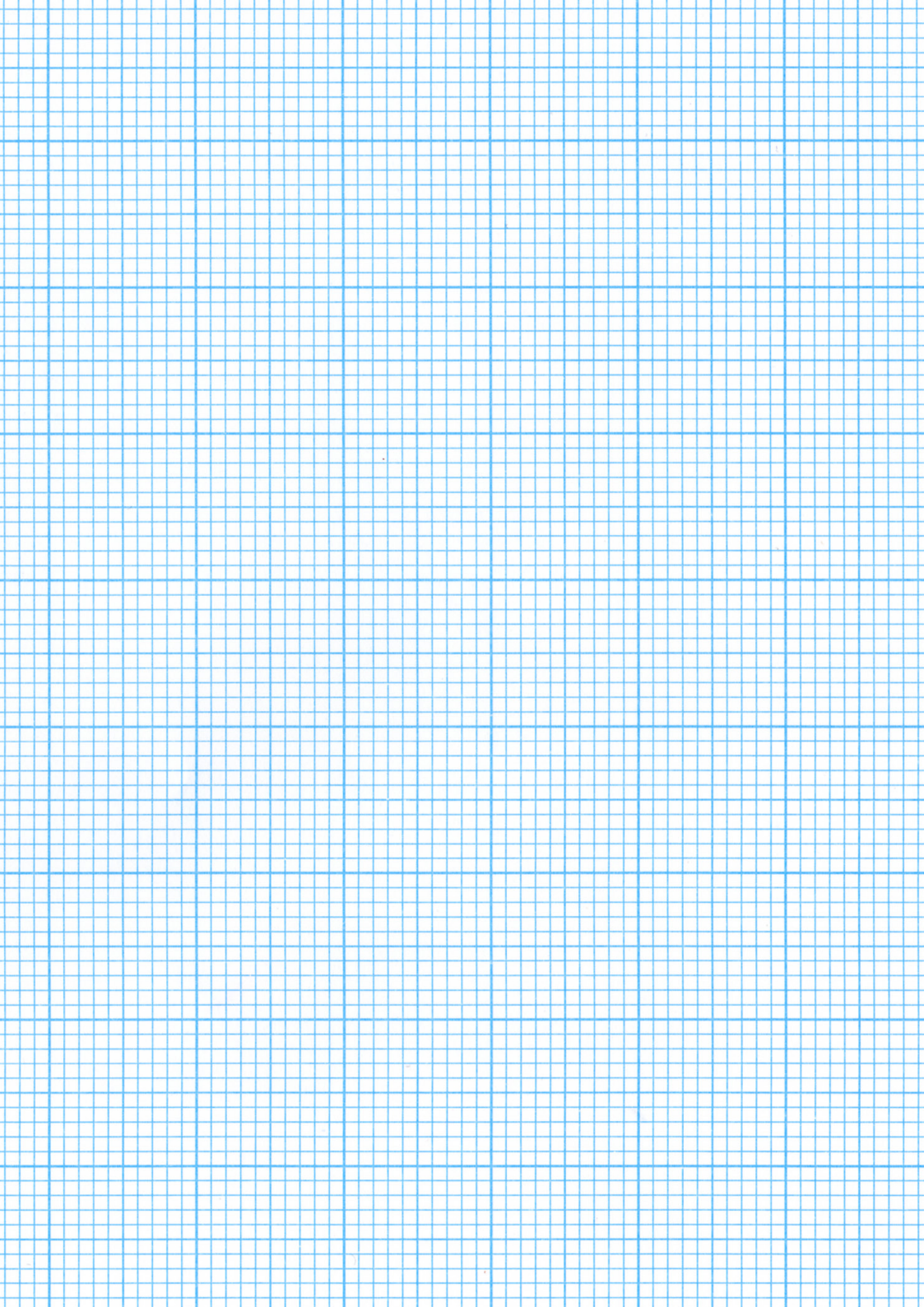


**Sam Jacob**  
**Empire of Ice Cream**



**Sam Jacob**  
**Empire of Ice Cream**

## un-Piranesi

Pier Paolo Tamburelli

The drawings of *Empire of Ice Cream* seem architectural. They are drawn on squared paper and resemble plans. Yet without scale or site, calling them plans might be rather misleading. We can see stairs, doors, windows, pillars and walls but it is never really possible to single out a building. Neither is it possible to work out what is inside from what is out. There is an abundance of black poché that creates an atmosphere of architecture. But there is a lot of pink and purple too.

*Empire of Ice Cream* explicitly refers to a disciplinary tradition. But once again, this association is misleading. At first sight, *Empire of Ice Cream* looks like a mix of Piranesi's *Campo Marzio* and Archizoom's *No-Stop City*. Like the *Campo Marzio*, these drawings show infinite variations of architectural motifs. And like *No-Stop City* they seem to extend indefinitely into space.

But these drawings are very different from their apparent precedents. While *Campo Marzio* was the final output of Piranesi's obsession with disciplinary accuracy, and *No-Stop City* didactically exposed the essence of the capitalist city, *Empire of Ice Cream* is far less defined in its ideological terms.

Sam Jacob's drawings are deliberately loose and generic. No precise quote can be detected. At times Roman, at times

Miesian, it's hard to spot a precise source: No Temple of Venus and Rome, no Tugendhat.

In other words, these drawings don't come from 'within' architecture. They are coming from somewhere outside it. Unlike Piranesi, this isn't somebody trying to escape architecture by producing even more absurd images of architecture. It is someone approaching architecture from the outside with a mannered naivety. There is no fear of architecture, but a strange love. Love for architecture in a world without architecture.

These are not the drawings of an architect. So who is the author of *Empire of Ice Cream*? Who made these drawings? Yes, Sam Jacob, but Sam Jacob as ...what?

Did he discover *Empire of Ice Cream* by rubbing a pencil over the blank sheet on top of a pad of paper like the Dude in one of the best scenes of "Big Lebowski"? Is *Empire of Ice Cream* the amusement of an unnecessarily erudite kid (maybe one of those sons of Silicon Valley billionaires who are only allowed to play with Steinerschule wooden toys)? Is *Empire of Ice Cream* the evidence of a conspiracy to conquer the world?

Whoever the author is, *Empire of Ice Cream* extends indefinitely. This infinite extension is time-bound, not space-bound. The infinity of *Empire of Ice Cream* is not space but time as seen in the endlessness of business meetings, of boring afternoons in the countryside, of the time it takes to cover an A1 page by drawing.

*Empire of Ice Cream* uses time to narrate architecture as if it were a story. These are traces of affection (or, maybe, hatred). The architectural signs left on the paper are - more than instructions for something to be built - traces of desires, proofs of moments of existence. *Empire of Ice Cream* proves

that the (fictive) person who left these signs was (fictively) alive.

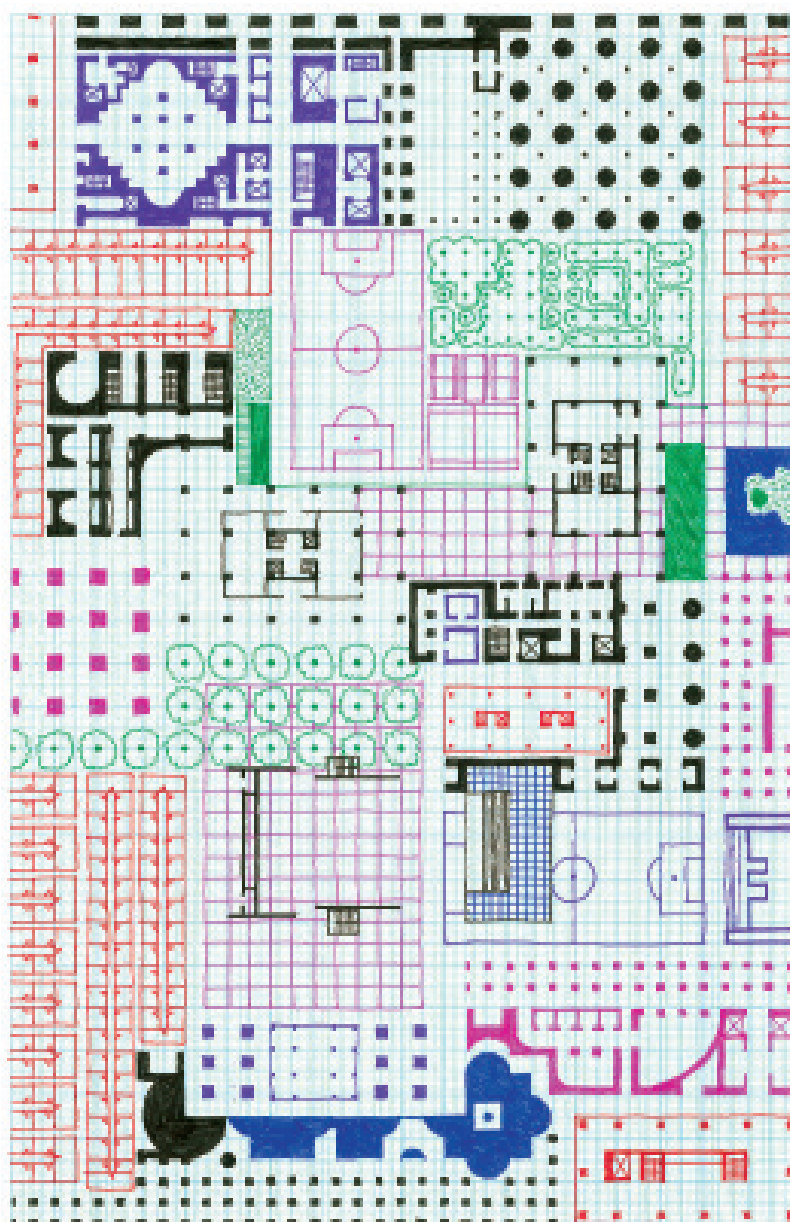
*Empire of Ice Cream* is a post-post-modern product. All the plans featured in these drawings have been translated into post-modern jargon: A post-modern version of Villa Adriana, next to a post-modern version of Versailles, next to a post-modern version of Hadid, next to a post-modern version of Stanley Tigerman. All the formal freedom of the last 30 years finds its expression here as indifference.

For all its commitment to communication and linguistics, here post-modernism appears as a form of linguistic exhaustion. A terminal, all-encompassing white noise. Yet this great annihilation strangely opens up a space for a new directness. *Empire of Ice Cream* longs for an architecture that is simply plain and human.

*Empire of Ice Cream* belongs to a city whose structure no longer resembles *No-Stop City's* repetitive-but-somehow-honest "and the same, and the same, and the same..." mantra. It belongs to a post-capitalist city that says something more like "and whatever, and whatever, and whatever..."

*Empire of Ice Cream* is a consciously post-Thatcherite London creature. While the limits of this sort of city are evident, the drawings also show that - somehow - it is possible to survive in this world. That a post-Thatcherite London can - at times - be sweet and be fun.

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Betts Project wishes to thank Nicola Barker, Pier Paolo Tamburelli, Tony Tremlett, Marwa El Mubark and Colette Sheddick.

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