

V&A acquires a burkini and flag designed for the Rio 2016 refugee team for Rapid Response Collection

vam.ac.uk | @V_and_A | #RapidResponseCollecting

Friday 2 December 2016



Today, the V&A announces that it has acquired a burkini – a full-body swimming costume. The garment, first launched in 2004 to encourage Muslim women into sports, became a symbol of national identity politics in France this summer, as women were fined for, and in some cases banned from, wearing the garment in public. The burkini joins other timely acquisitions including a flag designed for the first ever Refugee team to compete in the 2016 Olympic Games, and a Vote Leave campaign leaflet distributed in the run-up to the UK's referendum on European Union membership. All objects are now on display in the Museum's regularly updated Rapid Response Collecting gallery exploring how current global events, political changes and pop cultural phenomena impact, or are influenced by, design, art, architecture and technology.

The Museum acquired the burkini from Melbourne-based fashion designer Aheda Zanetti. Zanetti invented the swimwear garment in 2004 through her brand Ahiida as a solution for Muslim women wanting to dress more modestly when participating in sport. The garment comprises a long-sleeved knee-length top with close-fitting hood and trousers and a wide graphic transfer printed across the chest area to prevent it from clinging to the body. Since its launch, over 700,000 Ahiida burkinis have been sold worldwide and the design has been appropriated and mass produced by a number of large retailers in Britain and internationally. The burkini hit headlines around the world and ignited social media debate this August when the Mayor of Cannes introduced a ban on the garment on the grounds that it contravened the strict secularism enshrined in French law to keep religion out of public life – a move initially supported by the French Government. The ban was overturned on the 26 August 2016 by country's highest administrative court, the French Council of State.

Refugee Nation is the not-for-profit creative project set up to support the first ever refugee team to compete in the Olympic Games. The organisation commissioned the artist and Syrian

refugee, Yara Said, to design its team flag, now in the V&A's collection. Through the flag's design, Yara wanted to reflect the lifejackets worn by many fleeing conflict around the world, including herself: *'For me, the lifejackets are a symbol of solidarity for all those who crossed the sea in search of a new country. I myself wore one, which is why I so identify with these colours.'* While the International Olympic Committee did not allow the team to fly the flag in official processions, numerous spectators and fellow athletes displayed it in acts of unity during the 2016 Rio Games drawing global attention to the current refugee crisis.

Corinna Gardner, Acting Keeper of the V&A's Design, Architecture and Digital Department, said: *"Design is a mirror to society. The objects that the V&A collects through its Rapid Response Collecting programme are evidence of social, political, technological and economic change and therefore mean more than their material value. These objects have become newsworthy because they advance what design can do, or because they reveal truths about how we live today and how we might live tomorrow. Rapid Response is a permanent legacy of objects to help future visitors and researchers make sense of the world we live in today."*

Other recently acquired objects on display include Mon Mon, the internet enabled soft toy activated via WeChat, the Chinese social media platform. The toy enables parents to communicate with their children if working late or living away from home. Cyclist Bradley Wiggins' 3D printed Pinarello titanium handlebar that helped him to break the Hour Record by more than 1.5km on 7 June 2015, and a tile made for the exterior of 'A House for Essex' – the holiday home designed by artist Grayson Perry, in collaboration with FAT Architecture also feature. Also on display for the first time is one of the 4.2 million 'Help protect your local hospital...' leaflets distributed by the Vote Leave campaign ahead of the UK's European Union referendum. Featuring a blue logo similar to that trademarked by the NHS, the leaflet was part of a parliamentary inquiry examining the absence of fact in the cases made for and against leaving the EU.

- ENDS -

Notes to Editors

- The FREE display is in the V&A's Gallery 74a and is curated by Corinna Gardner, Acting Keeper of the V&A's Design, Architecture and Digital Department
- V&A's Design, Architecture and Digital Department builds upon the V&A's industrial design heritage dating back to 1851. It is dedicated to enhancing the V&A's reputation as the UK's leading public resource for the study of design
- The V&A is open daily from 10.00 to 17.45 and until 22.00 on Fridays

For further PRESS information about *Rapid Response Collecting* please contact Laura Mitchell in the V&A press office on +44 (0) 20 7942 2503 or email l.mitchell@vam.ac.uk (not for publication).

A selection of press images are available to download free of charge from pressimages.vam.ac.uk