



News Release

V&A acquires Vivien Leigh's Oscar and Wig from *A Streetcar Named Desire*

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The V&A has acquired Vivien Leigh's Oscar from the 1951 film *A Streetcar Named Desire*, in which she starred opposite Marlon Brando. The Oscar statuette, designed by film art director Cedric Gibbons in 1928, is one of the world's most recognisable awards and depicts a crusader standing on a reel of film. The Oscar has been gifted to the museum by her grandchildren.

The British film and theatre actress Vivien Leigh (1913-1967) is one of the most important film and stage performers of the mid-20th century. She first performed the famous role of Blanche DuBois on the British stage in a production of Tennessee Williams' play *A Streetcar Named Desire* in 1949. In 1950, she was offered the role in the film – a rare occasion for an actor to transfer their stage performance onto screen. In 1952, Leigh was awarded her second Oscar for her performance as Blanche, with *Streetcar* winning a total of four awards that year. Leigh had won her first Oscar for *Gone with the Wind* (1939), the first British woman to receive the award.

The Museum has also acquired the wig worn by Leigh in the film, along with her 1953 appointment diary which gives a personal insight into her life at this time and a cartoon by the artist Ronald Carl 'Giles' in which she is depicted campaigning against the demolition of the St. James's Theatre in 1957. This was a watershed moment as following this, London County Council decreed that no further theatres could be demolished unless there was a planned replacement.

Keith Lodwick, Curator of Theatre and Screen Arts at the V&A, said: "*Vivien Leigh's life and career is endlessly fascinating and we are delighted to have acquired further pieces relating to her archive, one of the most requested and popular archives in the Theatre and Performance collections. Leigh was very committed to de-glamorising herself for this role and the wig demonstrates her endless enthusiasm for creating a character. With our rich material on the making of the film including letters, telegrams, press cuttings and handwritten notes, we are delighted to acquire her Oscar which shows the success of her transformation.*"

Leigh's handwritten notes whilst preparing for *A Streetcar Named Desire* describe the important role wigs play in the creation of the character. In 1950, she wrote to the director Elia

Kazan: 'You do know that when I said over the phone I'm worried about the way I'll look, I didn't mean good I meant right. Wigs because the hair can be thin and poor.'

Stanley Hall, the most important wig maker in the UK from 1945 until the mid-1970s, created Leigh's wig for *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Hall serviced the theatre, film and TV industry and produced wigs for every major performer of the era. Interviewed by the V&A in the 1980s, he said: "The texture of hair in a wig can be important and tells an immediate story about the character. In *A Streetcar Named Desire* I feel it was essential for Blanche to have impoverished, rather thin hair of no particular colour to point out her highly nervous worn out character. When she did the film, I made her bleached wigs, the idea was that Blanche had gone through life neglecting herself. Vivien used to send the wigs back from Hollywood by air-mail, to be cleaned and redressed by me, she didn't trust the American hairdressers."

The acquisitions will enhance the existing archive of Vivien Leigh acquired by the V&A in 2013. It comprises records including letters between Laurence Olivier and Leigh, correspondence from some of the most eminent names in 20th-century history including Sir Winston Churchill, Graham Greene and Noël Coward, as well as personal diaries and photographs, visitor books, Leigh's annotated film and theatre scripts, press clippings and her numerous awards.

The V&A is the world's leading museum for art, design and performance and the material will join the V&A's National Collection of Performing Arts which houses the archives of significant performers, directors, designers and institutions including Peter Brook, Michael Redgrave, Oliver Messel and The Royal Court Theatre, London.

The Oscar and wig will be on display from 19 January 2018 in the Theatre and Performance Galleries at the V&A. They will join a rotating selection of Vivien Leigh material including a costume designed for her by Christian Dior.

Vivien Leigh: Actress and Icon (published by Manchester University Press, in association with the V&A), an edited volume written by experts in theatre and film studies and curators from the V&A, is now available, RRP £20.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

Vivien Leigh (1913 – 1967)

Born in Darjeeling, India, and educated in Europe, Vivien Leigh was an internationally recognised actress who won two Oscars for her roles in *Gone with the Wind* (1939) and *A*

Streetcar Named Desire (1951). Leigh enjoyed a distinguished stage career spanning 30 years. Married to actor Laurence Olivier from 1940-1960, the celebrated couple co-starred in plays and films and were greeted on their various theatre tours with the enthusiasm generally reserved for visiting royalty. The V&A acquired Leigh's archive in 2013.

About the V&A's Theatre and Performance Collection

The V&A's Theatre and Performance collections document current practice and the history of all areas of performing arts in the UK, including drama, dance, opera, circus, puppetry, comedy, musical theatre, costume, set design, pantomime, popular music and more. The collection was founded in the 1920s when private collector, Gabrielle Enthoven, donated her extensive collection of theatrical designs, memorabilia, books and photographs to the Museum. Since then the collection has continued to grow to include significant objects and works of art, books, manuscripts, audio-visual recordings and ephemera, as well as the archives of performing arts companies, performers, directors, stage designers and private collectors.

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