

V&A acquires Mae West Lips sofa by Salvador Dalí and Edward James

vam.ac.uk | @V_and_A



Today, the V&A announces it has acquired one of the most important examples of British Surrealist furniture ever produced. Purchased with support from Art Fund, the V&A members and a bequest from Derek Woodman, the Mae West Lips sofa was the joint creation of artist Salvador Dalí (1904-1989) and his most important British patron, Edward James (1907-1984). Dalí and James collaborated on the design after James suggested that they should create a sofa based on Dalí's gouache (or drawing) 'Mae West's Face which May be Used as a Surrealist Apartment' (1934-35).

James had five Mae West Lips sofas produced in 1938 in different fabrics. A pink satin version has previously been on long-term loan to the V&A, appearing as a star object in the 2007 major exhibition *Surreal Things: Surrealism and Design*. The version that the V&A has now acquired is one of a pair designed specifically for James' country home, Monkton House in West Sussex, originally designed by Edwin Lutyens in 1902.

Following its sale by the Edward James Foundation in 2017, a temporary export stop was placed on the sofa after the buyer applied to export it from the UK. Christopher Wilk, Keeper of Furniture, Textiles and Fashion at the V&A, said: "This is one of the most beautiful and important examples of modern furniture ever produced. Its provenance and the circumstances of its creation are exceptional in the annals of modern art and design in Britain."

Stephen Deuchar, director of Art Fund, said: "Salvador Dalí and Edward James' Mae West lips sofa has become both an iconic piece of 20th century design and a joyous expression of Surrealism. For the V&A to save this for the nation is an absolute triumph, and we're delighted to play a part in its acquisition. I am sure that it will be a huge favourite with visitors from around the country and the world."

James renovated the Lutyens-designed Monkton House in the mid-1930s as part of his attempt to create 'a complete Surrealist house'. He was assisted by architects Christopher 'Kit' Nicholson and Hugh Casson, as well as decorator Norris Wakefield. The home artfully combined James's taste for Victorian, Edwardian and Surrealist design, and included

intentionally shocking Surrealist objects such as the bright red Mae West Lip sofas with black wool fringing. James described that their fringing was intended 'to look like the embroidery upon the epaulettes of a picador or the breeches and hat of a toreador'. When the Edward James Foundation put the Monkton House up for sale in 1986, the remaining contents of the house, including this sofa, was moved to the foundation's headquarters in West Dean.

Dalí was the most famous of all Surrealist artists and remains one of the most popular of modern artists today. In 1935 Dalí met a kindred spirit in the British collector and poet Edward James. This led to a deep friendship between James and Dalí, with James becoming a large-scale collector of Dalí's work, and the pair embarked on various artistic collaborations. James rapidly became Britain's most distinguished supporter of Surrealism, and his collection one of the largest and most important in the world. Most of it has now been dispersed. James was a strong promoter of Surrealism and partly responsible for its international recognition.

- ENDS -

Notes to Editors

For further PRESS information please contact the V&A press office on +44 (0) 20 7942 2503 or email k.morais@vam.ac.uk (not for publication).

About the V&A

The V&A is the world's leading museum of art, design and performance, with collections unrivalled in their scope and diversity. It was established to make works of art available to all and to inspire British designers and manufacturers. Today, the V&A's collections, which span over 5000 years of human creativity in virtually every medium and from many parts of the world, continue to intrigue, inspire and inform.

Art Fund

Art Fund is the national fundraising charity for art. In the past five years alone Art Fund has given £34 million to help museums and galleries acquire works of art for their collections. It also helps museums share their collections with wider audiences by supporting a range of tours and exhibitions, and makes additional grants to support the training and professional development of curators. Art Fund is independently funded, with the core of its income provided by 139,000 members who receive the National Art Pass and enjoy free entry to over 320 museums, galleries and historic places across the UK, as well as 50% off entry to major exhibitions and subscription to Art Quarterly magazine. In addition to grant-giving, Art Fund's support for museums includes Art Fund Museum of the Year (won by The Hepworth Wakefield in 2017) and a range of digital platforms.

Find out more about Art Fund and the National Art Pass at www.artfund.org

