

RCEWA – Mae West Lips Sofa, Salvador Dalí and Edward James

Applicant's statement

III Statement in relation to the Waverley criteria

The Committee's function is to consider whether an item referred to it is of national importance under any of the following criteria.

- a) Is it so closely connected with our history and national life that its departure would be a misfortune?*
- b) Is it of outstanding aesthetic importance?*
- c) Is it of outstanding significance for the study of some particular branch of art, learning or history?*

To assist the Committee, you may submit a written statement in support of your application, with particular reference to the three criteria set out above. You may use the space below (box 21) or attach a separate document for these purposes

Further information

The 'Expert Adviser's statement' and the 'Note of Case History' are available on the Arts Council Website: www.artscouncil.org.uk/reviewing-committee-case-hearings

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21.

- a) Is it so closely connected to the history and national life that its departure would be a misfortune?

No, this sofa is not closely connected to the history of the UK or its national life. This work is one of five that were made for James by two different manufacturers in 1938. The sofa is not unique. There are similar and better examples in England: one can be found at Brighton Museum & Art Gallery and the pink silk original remains at West Dean.

A total of five sofas were made for James, by two different manufacturers. Completed in February 1938, the first, which James retained for the dining room of his Wimpole Street home, was produced by Green & Abbott and featured duo-pink satin dyed specifically to match couturier Elsa Schiaparelli's characteristic 'shocking pink' lipstick. This version of the sofa remains today in the ownership of the Edward James Foundation. Another pair in red and pink wool was manufactured and completed in early March 1938 by Edward Carrick's firm, Associated Artist' Technicians; one of the pair now resided in the Royal Pavilion, Libraries & Museums, Brighton & Hove, and the other one is in the Boijmans Van-Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam.

- b) It is of outstanding aesthetic importance?

No, the aesthetic taste manifested by this sofa can be appreciated in the UK through other examples in public ownership. This sofa is one of a pair that was conceived by Salvador Dali and Edward James in 1936, and executed by Green & Abbott in 1938, to decorate for the dining room at Monkton House. Dalí and James collaborated on the essential design of the Mae West Lips Sofa, however it was James who decided upon the final shapes, and the upholstery treatment of the five examples that he commissioned for his own use. James designed three different interpretations of the sofa, which were produced as two pairs in wool and a single example finished in satin.

Of these five sofas, one pair was produced by Edward Carrick's firm, Associated Artist-Technicians, and another pair and the single satin example, were produced by John Hill's firm, Green & Abbott, who also coordinated most of the other internal works undertaken at Monkton. It is not a unique work by Dali.

The condition of the sofa is good for its age but of the three felt appliqué shapes, suggestive of caterpillar larvae, to the seat and backs of both examples, one has been replaced.

- c) Is it of outstanding significance for the study of some particular branch of art, learning or history?

No, it is not. The sofa is not unique and is one of five that were made for James by two different manufacturers in 1938. This is an interesting sofa but it is not, in itself, an outstanding object for the study of a particular branch of art, learning or history. Other examples of the design concept remain in the UK and on public view. While the concept of the Mae West Lips sofa is a good example of Dali's collaboration with James for British Surrealist interior decoration, it is realized and best demonstrated by the pink satin sofa retained by the Edward James Foundation and the red and pink wool example on display in Brighton. Public access to view a Mae West Lips sofa is, therefore, well served by these examples and it is believed that West Dean are planning to present their collection of Surrealist Art, including the pink lips, in a new gallery.