Costume design

Place of origin: London (designed)

Date: 1955 (designed)

Artist/Maker: Messel, Oliver Hilary Sambourne, born 1904 - died 1978 (designer)

Materials and Techniques: Charcoal, pencil, gouache and watercolour on paper

Credit Line: Acquired with the support of the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Art Fund and the Friends of the V&A

Museum number: S.174-2006

Gallery location: In Storage

Public access description

Great Britain's leading theatre designer from the early 1930s to the mid 1950s, Oliver Messel (1904-1978) won international acclaim for his lavish, painterly and poetic designs informed by period styles. His work spans ballet, drama, film, musical, opera and revue. Messel's traditional style of theatre design became unfashionable from the mid 1950s onwards, and he increasingly concentrated on painting, interior and textile design, including designing luxury homes in the Caribbean.

Mozart's opera Le Nozze di Figaro (The Marriage of Figaro) (1786) was performed to celebrate the twenty-first anniversary of the Glyndebourne Festival Opera in 1955. Critics praised Messel's exuberant pastiche of 18th-century art and design 'The décor by Oliver Messel was in his richest and most inventive vein, fully emphasising the unique blend of sharp satire and human understanding for the folly and unhappiness of the characters which Mozart so perfectly caught in his music' (The Tatler, 22 June, 1955).

Messel designed an 18th-century maid's costume for Susanna. Messel found infinite variety in the Baroque and Rococo styles of the eighteenth century, including Mozart, whose music represented for Messel 'the essence of everything that is most beautiful of the age in which he lived.' (Glyndebourne Festival Programme, 1956)

Descriptive line

Costume design by Oliver Messel for Susanna in Mozart's opera Le Nozze di Figaro (The Marriage of Figaro), Glyndebourne 1955.

Physical description

A costume design by Oliver Messel for the Susanna in a Glyndebourne production of Le Nozze di Figaro, 1955. A full, frontal view of a woman in eighteenth century dress, carrying a basket on the left. A blue dress with black apron. Yellow and red trim on skirt, and red lace up bodice.

Dimensions

Height: 37.9 cm, Width: 25.2 cm

Museum number

S.174-2006

Object history note

Le Nozze di Figaro (The Marriage of Figaro) (1786), an opera in four acts by Mozart with libretto by da Ponte, from Beaumarchais' La folle journée, ou, Le Marriage de Figaro (1778). Oliver Messel's production was first performed by the Glyndebourne Festival Opera at Glyndebourne on 8 June, 1955. It was directed by Carl Ebert and featured Bruscantini as Figaro and Elena Rizziere as Susanna. It was revived at Glyndebourne in 1956, 1958, 1962, 1963 and 1965.

Lord Snowdon, Oliver Messel's nephew, inherited Messel's theatre designs and other designs and artefacts. The designs were briefly stored in a disused chapel in Kensington Palace before being housed at the V&A from 1981 on indefinite loan. The V&A Theatre Museum purchased the Oliver Messel collection from Lord Snowdon in 2005.

Historical significance: At the height of his career, Messel designed costumes and sets for operas at Glyndebourne, 1951-1959.

URL

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O125808/costume-design-messel-oliver-hilary/