Set design

Place of origin: London (designed)

Date: 1958 (designed)

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

Materials and Techniques: Charcoal, ink, pencil, gouache and watercolour on card

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

Museum number: S.304-2006

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.

Sheridan’s The School for Scandal (1777) was performed at the Det Ny Theatre, Copenhagen in 1958. Directed by Sam Besekow and featuring Bodil Kjer as Lady Teazle and Olaf Ussing as Sir Oliver Surface, the production received critical acclaim. Messel’s exuberant pastiche of 18th-century style was well suited to the artificiality and wit of Sheridan’s comedy of manners.

Descriptive line

Set design by Oliver Messel for a façade in Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s play The School for Scandal, Det Ny Theatre, Copenhagen, 1958.

Physical description

A set design for a house façade, School for Scandal, 1958. To the right, a view through an arch to a town square.

Dimensions

Height: 37.8 cm, Width: 55.8 cm

Museum number

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Object history note

The School for Scandal (1777), a play in five acts by Richard Brinsley Sheridan. Oliver Messel’s production was first performed at the Det Ny Theatre, Copenhagen, 19 September 1958. It was directed by Sam Besekow and featured Bodil Kjer as Lady Teazle and Olaf Ussing as Sir Oliver Surface.

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.

URL

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O127325/set-design-messel-oliver-hilary/