

RCEWA – *Pair of Champagne Standard Lamps*, Salvador Dalí and Edward James

Statement of the Expert Adviser to the Secretary of State that the lamps met Waverley criteria one, two and three.

Further Information

The 'Applicant's statement' and the 'Note of Case History' are available on the Arts Council Website:

www.artscouncil.org.uk/reviewing-committee-case-hearings

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Brief Description of item

A pair of standing lamps designed by Salvador Dalí (1904-1989) and Edward James (1907-1984) in 1938 for Monkton House, West Dean, Sussex, James's country house. Made by Green & Abbot, London, in 1938 and 1939. Each lamp made from a stack of ten oversize, undecorated copper alloy (probably bronze) champagne coupes standing on a base in the form of a Victorian papier-mâché tray but in the same metal painted black overall with gold ivy tendrils, berries and leaves. Six of the coupe bowls on the two lamps (four on one, two on the other) have two-part ashtray inserts, possibly added after their original manufacture. These are mainly not in their original positions and some are clearly missing. The lampshades are later replacements. Each lamp is 160 cm high overall.

Condition: The champagne coupes and their inserts have been lacquered unevenly with one coat of lacquer applied by brush, probably after their original production dates. This, and the lack of cleaning over the years, has led to extensive tarnishing. Some coupe bowls, under the ashtray inserts, maintain a bright, untarnished surface closer to the original appearance. The irregular placement of the inserts and a numbering system on their undersides, indicate that there were apparently more. The 'tray' bases have scratches and paint losses. The electrics were removed from the lamps sometime after 1986-88, probably very recently.

2. Context

These lamps are one of two pairs designed specially for Monkton House, the most important Surrealist interior ever attempted in Britain and a project described by the late Gavin Stamp (2007) as 'one of the most eccentric, revealing, enchanting and...subtly representative architectural creations of its time'. The two pairs of lamps remained at Monkton until the sale of that house after James's death and remained in store at West Dean until one pair was sold at Christie's in December 2016.

Particularly relevant texts, illustrations or exhibitions are:

Clive Aslet, 'Monkton House, East Sussex', *Country Life* (September 1985), p. 702 (close-up illustration of dining room showing one lamp)

Gavin Stamp et al., *Monkton – A Vanishing Surrealist Dream* (The Thirties Society and Save Britain's Heritage, January 1986), p. 2 (close-up illustration of the dining room showing one lamp)

Stephen Croad, Report on Monkton House for the *Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England* (April 1986)

Jonathan Glancey, 'Mad Monckton' [sic], *The World of Interiors* (May 1986), p. 146 (illustration of one lamp)

Nicola Coleby, ed., *A Surreal Life: Edward James 1907-1984* (Brighton, 1998), p. 10 (illustration of dining room showing two lamps)

Sharon-Michi Kusunoki, *Surrealism and the Golden Age, West Dean and James Legacy*, BADA stand at Grosvenor House Art & Antiques Fair (June 1999) (hand-list indicating two lamps were exhibited)

Gavin Stamp, 'Surreal Recall', *Apollo* (July 2007), p. 81

A. Görden et al, *Surreal Encounters* (National Galleries Scotland, 2016), p.206 (illustration of dining room with lamps, each with different lampshade). Two lamps were exhibited in the travelling version of the exhibition, at least in Rotterdam, if not Hamburg and Bilbao.

A Surreal Legacy: Selected works of art from The Edward James Foundation, Christie's (London, December 2016), lot 31, pp. 44-49 (illustration of dining room with pair of lamps with different lampshades, pp. 44-45)

Jane Stevenson, *Baroque between the Wars: Alternative Style in the Arts, 1918-1939* (Oxford, 2018), p.145 (illustration of dining room with pair of lamps with different lampshades)

3. Waverley criteria

The objects meet criterion 1. The lamps formed part of the original furnishing of Monkton House, the only complete Surrealist house ever created in Britain and which still survives in large part today (in private ownership). The idea for making the lamps appears to have come from Edward James, Dalí's supporter, friend and collaborator. The lamps are so closely associated with a rare and important moment in British cultural history that their departure would be a misfortune.

The objects meet criterion 2. The lamps are of outstanding aesthetic importance. They are among the most important examples of Surrealist furniture ever made in Britain. They employ the typically Surrealist strategy of taking an object of daily life and re-using it in a way that is arresting, unsettling and speaking of and to the unconscious. They are also, in aesthetic terms, among the most original examples of modern lighting ever produced in the UK. Modern lighting is not generally well preserved.

The object meets criterion 3. The lamps are of outstanding significance to the study of furniture and interior decoration as well as to the wider history of modern design and (Surrealist) art. Much more research is required of these lamps and the other pair: for example, the detailed history of their original design is as yet unknown; we do not yet know which of the pair sat in the dining room next to the Mae West Lips sofas; nor do we know precisely how the lamps were constructed or if the construction of all the lamps is identical (the applicant's auction catalogue entry suggests a slightly different construction to each pair). Only with the original objects can the design and construction of these important objects be fully understood. Despite the tarnish, the remarkably unrestored condition of these lamps makes it particularly important that they be retained.

DETAILED CASE

1. Detailed description of item(s) if more than in Executive summary, and any comments.

These lamps were the joint creation of Salvador Dalí, one of the most important, influential and, today, best known artists of the 20th century and Edward James, not only Dalí's most important British patron but also one of the most important figures in the international history of Surrealism. The Monkton furniture adds a particularly, even uniquely, British dimension to the story of European Surrealism.

The impetus for the creation of the lamps—as with most of the Dalí/James objects—probably came from James rather than the better-known artist, as it was James who passionately wanted to realize these objects for his interiors at Monkton House. One pair of lamps were apparently made to stand between the fireplace and each of the pair of the Dalí/James Mae West Lips sofas in the dining room (one recently export stopped). The other pair were made for a different room in the house. The applicants—who have had access to the James Archive (access not permitted to the expert adviser)—state that one pair of lamps stood in 'the business room', a space otherwise not referred to in the literature on Monkton.

Monkton House was originally designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens for James's parents in 1902. Its exterior and interior renovation was begun by James by 1935 when, following his divorce from the dancer Tilly Losch and his first meeting with Dalí, James had decided to make Monkton his main residence and immerse himself in (mainly) interior design. Assisted by architect Christopher 'Kit' Nicholson (and Hugh Casson) and decorator Norris Wakefield, James created at Monkton an astounding melange of Victorian, Regency and Surrealist design and decoration overlaid with a distinctly Surrealist atmosphere. Intentionally shocking Surrealist objects and surface treatments filled the spaces and surfaces of the house.

The initial conception of these lamps may have arisen in 1936, when James and Dalí began to discuss realising Dalí's ideas for three-dimensional objects. It appears (from archival documents referred to by the applicant) that the making of the lamps occurred in 1938 (one pair) and 1939 (the other), but there is a great deal that we do not yet know regarding the lamps.

2. Detailed explanation of the outstanding significance of the item(s).

The provenance of these lamps, alongside other Monkton pieces, as well as the circumstances of their creation, are exceptional in the annals of modern art and design in Britain. Edward James was Britain's most distinguished supporter of Surrealism. By 1939 James owned 250 works of Surrealist art, some 180 by Dalí (he had signed a contract with Dalí in 1936 to acquire 'virtually his entire production'). A poet, he saw himself as an artistic collaborator with visual artists, some of whom, like Dalí, he generously supported. James was memorably painted by Magritte, among others.

It should be stated that these lamps are among the least well known, exhibited and illustrated of the Dalí/James objects, including those made for Monkton. This is surely owing to the fact that they are not—at least to more recent eyes—as obviously Surrealist or brazenly outrageous as the Mae West Lips sofa or the Lobster Telephone, despite the exceptional idea of creating a lamp from a stack of oversized champagne coupes and

placing them on what, at first sight, appears to be a Victorian papier-mâché tray. With the exception of the Brighton Museum exhibition on Edward James and the travelling version of the recent Edinburgh Surrealist exhibition, most others that could have included the lamps focused on either Dalí as a fine artist or on Surrealist fine art more widely.

James's vision of his Surrealist interior, which artfully combined Victorian and Edwardian objects, remained intact for nearly half a century (even after his death) until when, despite the objections of English Heritage, the Twentieth-Century Society, SAVE Britain and leading architectural critics, the Edward James Foundation decided to sell Monkton and numerous contents rather than attempt to preserve the house and/or contents. The fact that Monkton was sold does not rule out that this hugely important house could—eventually—be restored and opened to the public much in the way that, say, Spencer House or Croome Court have once again become accessible to the visitors after much longer periods of private ownership and an even more extreme dispersal of their original contents and interior decoration.

That the Edward James Foundation still owns a pair of the same lamps is no guarantee that a pair would remain in the nation. The same body chose to sell both of the Mae West Lips sofas original to Monkton and has a long history of selling objects privately as well as at public auction.

The Dalí/James lamps under consideration are among the very most original and important examples of modern lighting ever designed in the UK. They deserve to be saved.