

Wake Up and Dream Oliver Messel: Theatre, Art and Society



Theatre Collection



LOTTERY FUNDED



The Oliver Messel Personal Archive

The Personal Archive of Oliver Messel was acquired by the University of Bristol Theatre Collection in 2015. Alongside the Oliver Messel Design Archive, housed at the V&A, it provides a comprehensive history of Messel's life and work, which were so often intertwined.

The items in the Archive come from Messel's home in Barbados where he lived from 1966 to 1978. On his death, the contents of his house and studio were left to his nephew Thomas Messel with whom the Archive remained until it was transferred to the Theatre Collection.

Over the course of the last two years the Archive has been catalogued and digitised with the aim of making all items accessible to search on our online catalogue with over 1000 accompanying images.

A number of items have also been conserved including ballet costumes, photograph albums, props and designs – a number of which can be seen here in the exhibition which features over 150 objects.

Wake Up and Dream is accompanied by an exhibition at the Royal West of England Academy (RWA) titled *Oliver Messel - Theatre and Beyond*, which runs until 13 January 2019 www.rwa.org.uk

The University of Bristol Theatre Collection would like to thank the Heritage Lottery Fund and The Linbury Trust who have generously supported their 'Sharing the Messel Magic' project, of which *Wake Up and Dream* is a part. We would also like to thank all those who have been involved in helping us to acquire, catalogue, conserve and share the Archive, including: the National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF), The Noël Coward Foundation, Friends of The National Library, The Pilgrim Trust, National Manuscripts Conservation Trust, the Royal Victoria Hall Foundation, Friends of the Theatre Collection, University of Bristol alumni and all others who have given their time and support, including Thomas and Pepe Messel.

Wake Up and Dream - Oliver Messel: Theatre, Art and Society

“I attempted to use every device to make as much magic as possible.”

Designer, artist, maker, magician... Oliver Messel's (1904-1978) career embraced a multitude of guises and, like his papier-mâché masks, allowed him to inhabit numerous social worlds and stages, moving between backstage and high society with ease.

Often regarded as one of the twentieth century's brightest theatrical stars, his imaginative and illusory design skills were in high demand. He appeared to implicitly understand the all-encompassing attention to detail required to transport audiences from modern life back to Ancient Egypt or Renaissance Italy, considering each element, from costume to staging.

However, his Personal Archive has many more stories to tell beyond the world of theatre. Intimate photographs of family and friends, capturing the cast of London's 'Bright Young Things' sit side-by-side with handwritten letters from Hollywood stars. Alongside these are ethereal costumes and designs from fêted stage and screen productions, architectural drawings of Caribbean villas, advertising props, fabric swatches and illustrations, each object shining a light on Messel's ability to turn his hand to all manner of artistic practice.

Seen here in *Wake Up and Dream* these objects weave together theatre, art and society, providing a glimpse into numerous worlds – both real and imagined. Yet, they represent only a fraction of Oliver's Personal Archive drawing on personal and professional items with which to uncover new narratives.

By revisiting memories and searching out stories, the magic and mastery of an artist whose creative vision can be seen throughout all aspects of his making is revealed. Whether creating fleeting fantasies in papier-mâché and tulle or making them concrete in paint and stone, the Archive encourages us to both look back and reflect and to 'wake up and dream'.

Oliver's Family and Friends

Oliver Messel was born to Leonard (1872-1953) and Maud Messel, née Sambourne (1875-1960) and was the youngest of three children after Linley and Anne. They moved to Nymans, the Messel family home in Sussex, from nearby Balcombe in 1915. The house remained in the family until 1953 when it was bequeathed to the National Trust. A nurturing family, the Archive contains numerous fond letters between members, especially Anne with whom Oliver was particularly close.

Oliver was schooled at Eton before enrolling at the Slade School of Art in 1922. He maintained many of the friendships made as a student throughout his lifetime. Coming of age under the shadow of WW1 he was part of a generation for whom a love of life (known to be only too short) was firmly instilled.

His name is often mentioned amongst the 'Bright Young Things' for whom costume parties and jaunts to Europe on a whim became a thing of fable. Photographs of other associated names such as artistic rival Cecil Beaton, socialite Doris Castlerosse and 'Oggie' Olga Lynn. can be seen on the stairwell.

Captured alongside these are his nephew's (Anne's son the photographer Lord Snowdon) wife HRH Princess Margaret, as well as actor, playwright and composer Noël Coward and actor Marlene Dietrich. In the lift lobby, additional 'personal snaps' can be seen of actors Katharine Hepburn, Cary Grant and producer George Cukor, taken from a photograph album collated whilst filming *Romeo and Juliet* in Hollywood in 1936.

Also seen here are photographs and objects reflecting the relationship between Oliver and Danish couturier Vagn Riis-Hansen; they lived together from 1948 until Vagn's death in 1972.

1 Black and white photograph of Oliver Messel holding the Faun mask he made for Serge Diaghilev, photograph by Fenwick Cutting, London, c.1928, OHM/3/2/3

2 Black and white photograph of Oliver Messel standing beside a bust with a Greek-style helmet, photograph by John Deakin, date unknown, OHM/3/2/39

3 Black and white photograph of Oliver Messel holding sparklers, photograph by James De Vries, date unknown, OHM/3/2/15

4 & 5 British passports issued to Oliver Messel for 1964-74 and 1974-78, OHM/4/2/3/2 and OHM/4/2/3/1

6 Guest book for 17 Pelham Place, Oliver Messel and Vagn Riis-Hansen's home, opened on a page with a drawing by Charlie Chaplin. Other signatures include Gore Vidal, Olga Lynn, Tilly Losch, Margot Fonteyn, Syrie Maugham, Noël Coward, Peter Glenville, Charles B Cochran, John Gielgud, Vivien Leigh Olivier, Laurence Olivier, Claudette Colbert, the 35th Kabaka of Buganda, Marlene Dietrich, Truman Capote, HRH Queen Elizabeth and HRH Princess Margaret, 1948-1966, OHM/4/2/8/1

7 Letter from Katharine Hepburn to Oliver Messel expressing her pleasure that he is enjoying his stay at her home whilst working on *Gigi*, 25 April 1973, OHM/2/8/27/2

8 Leather wallet containing press cuttings and photographs belonging to Vagn Riis-Hansen, OHM/4/2/5

9 Letter from Cecil Beaton to Oliver Messel congratulating him on his designs for *Helen!*, 8 February 1932, OHM/2/2/23/2

10 Black and white photograph of Leonard Messel, photographer unknown, c.1920s-30s, OHM/3/3/1

11 Black and white photograph of Anne and Michael Rosse in the drawing room at Birr Castle, photographer and date unknown, OHM/3/3/6

12 Black and white photograph of Linley Messel at 17 Pelham Place, photographer unknown, c.1940s-60s, OHM/3/3/3

13 Black and white photograph of Vagn Riis-Hansen, photographer unknown, c.1920s-70s, OHM/3/3/13

14 Black and white photograph of Maud Messel in the garden at Nymans, photographer and date unknown, OHM/3/3/2

15 Colour photograph of Vagn Riis-Hansen, photographer and date unknown, OHM/3/3/13

16 Black and white photograph of Anne and Oliver Messel in the doorway at Nymans, photographer unknown, 1936, OHM/3/4/2/5

17 Black and white photograph of aerial view of Nymans, photographer unknown, c.1950s, OHM/3/4/2/10

Further images of family and friends can be seen on the stairwell, catalogue numbers 39 - 56.

The Art of Design

Oliver's home life inspired a love of art, architecture and making that lasted a lifetime. His childhood was spent amongst Neopolitan costumes, Hungarian dolls and paintings by Velásquez, providing him with a rich appreciation of all aspects of design. His incredible thirst for travel provided further inspiration.

His creativity found its feet at the Slade School of Art, where he shared his love of mask making with friend Rex Whistler. Early designs were often made purely for entertainment or decoration using traditional papier-mâché techniques of brown paper and wax.

After leaving the Slade Oliver was apprenticed to portrait painter John Wells, a practice which was to last a lifetime. Examples of Oliver's portraits can be seen in the accompanying exhibition at the RWA.

Oliver turned his hand to a host of creative practices, including textile designs for Sekers Fabrics. This included a special collection of

commemorative silk brocades designed for the coronation in 1953 (a sample of which is on display). These were used by couturier John Cavanagh with the resulting gowns featured in *Vogue*. The textile designs were later displayed in an exhibition, which included work by Cecil Beaton and artist Graham Sutherland and featured Messel's enchanting monkeys scaling the walls.

Other notable commissions included chapter illustrations for the recipe book *Delightful Food*, a carpet design for Donegal Carpets and programmes for Glyndebourne, displayed here alongside more personal creations, such as whimsical handmade cards.

18 Handmade decoupage Valentine's card with an image of a classical temple titled *Temple of Love* with a door opening to reveal a nude male figure, Oliver Messel, date unknown, OHM/1/7/1/51

19 Handmade Christmas card, Oliver Messel, date unknown, OHM/1/7/1/52

20 Black and white photograph of glass goblet made by Steuben Glass and engraved with Oliver Messel's design for Puss in Boots from *The Sleeping Beauty*, photographer and date unknown, OHM/1/8/4/17

21 Chapter illustration for 'Soups and Sauces' from *Delightful Food*, by Marjorie Salter and Adrienne Allen Whitney, Oliver Messel, published by Sidgwick & Jackson, 1957, OHM/1/8/4/3

22 Samples of coloured wool sellotaped to paper with a list of quantities for Oliver Messel's carpet design for Donegal Carpets, OHM/1/8/4/10/8

23 Season programme for the 25th Anniversary at Glyndebourne with cover image of Oliver Messel's sketch for the jewelled rose from *Der Rosenkavalier*, 1959, OHM/1/3/12/12

24 Christmas card with Oliver Messel's sketch for the jewelled rose for opera *Der Rosenkavalier*, date unknown, OHM/1/3/10/18

25 Black and white photograph of one of Oliver Messel's masks, photograph by A.C. Cooper & Sons Ltd, date unknown, OHM/1/7/4/134

26 Black and white photograph of Oliver Messel's mask *Flora*, photograph by A.C. Cooper & Sons Ltd, date unknown, OHM/1/7/4/124

27 Winged papier-mâché mask by Oliver Messel, c.1930s, kindly lent from a Private Collection

28 Black and white photograph of one of Oliver Messel's masks, photograph by A.C. Cooper & Sons Ltd, date unknown, OHM/1/7/4/129

29 Black and white photograph of one of Oliver Messel's masks, photographer and date unknown, OHM/1/7/4/125

30 Black and white photograph of Oliver Messel's mask *Emanuel*, photograph by A.C. Cooper & Sons Ltd, date unknown, OHM/1/7/4/131

31 Papier-mâché (over a metal armature) monkey dressed in early Georgian-style livery, made by Oliver Messel as part of a group of monkeys for a Sekers Fabric advertising campaign. They were reutilised in his shop front for Justerini and Brooks, an exhibition of Sekers Fabric designs and an exhibition of his artwork, date unknown, OHM/1/8/2/20

32 Black and white photograph of a shop window display with Oliver Messel's monkeys hanging samples of silk by Sekers Fabric, photograph by Roger Wood, date unknown, OHM/1/8/2/15

33 Black and white photograph of a model in an evening gown made from a fabric designed for Sekers Fabric by Oliver Messel, photograph by John French, July 1959, OHM/1/8/2/16/20

34 Piece of Sekers Fabric silk brocade patterned with Oliver Messel's design of woven acorns and oak leaves, titled *Acorns*, date unknown, OHM/1/8/2/1

35 Black and white photograph of HRH Princess Margaret at an

exhibition of Sekers Fabric designs by Oliver Messel, Cecil Beaton and Graham Sutherland, photograph by Keystone Press Agency, July 1959, OHM/1/8/2/7

36 Typescript for part of 'Talk of the Day' from the *Evening News* about the Sekers Fabric range of coronation silks, 6 January 1953, OHM/1/8/2/2

37 Copy of *Vogue* containing advertisement for Sekers Fabric featuring designs by Oliver Messel, April 1953, OHM/1/8/2/3

38 Black and white photograph of Oliver Messel in his studio, photograph by Angus McBean, date unknown, OHM/3/2/45/4

Oliver's Family and Friends (continued)

39 Black and white photograph of Cecil Beaton at his home at Ashcombe, photographer unknown, 1936, OHM/3/6/4

40 Black and white photograph of a picnic at Ashcombe, photographer unknown, c.1930s, OHM/3/6/22

41 Black and white photograph of 'Oggie' Olga Lynn at Syrie Maugham's country house, photographer unknown, 1938, OHM/3/6/21

42 Black and white photograph taken at a dinner given on board the SS *Liberté* with guests including Oliver Messel, Lauren Bacall, Humphrey Bogart and Vagn Riis-Hansen, photograph by Louis Hamon for SS *Liberté*, 18 March 1951, OHM/2/2/2

43 Black and white photograph taken on the beach on a holiday to Venice with a group of friends, which included Marlene Dietrich and Doris Castlerosse, photographer unknown, 1937, OHM/3/6/12

44 Black and white photograph taken of a group, including Oliver Messel, posing on a boat on a holiday to Venice with a group of friends, which included Marlene Dietrich and Doris Castlerosse, photographer unknown, 1937, OHM/3/6/12

45 Black and white photograph taken at Wright Luddington's villa Val Verde in Santa Barbara, where Messel designed a Romanesque bathroom and bedroom suite, photographer unknown, 1937, OHM/3/6/14

46 Black and white photograph of Marlene Dietrich taken on a holiday to Venice with a group of friends, which included Doris Castlerosse, photographer unknown, 1937, OHM/3/6/14

47 Black and white photograph of Oliver Messel (wearing a sailor's hat with the ship name in Cyrillic), Elsa Maxwell (dressed in traditional male Tyrolean folk costume) and others at the Countess Robillon's party, photograph by Foto Giacomelli Venezia, 1954, OHM/3/2/51/2

48 Black and white photograph of HRH Princess Margaret at a party in Barbados with Oliver Messel and Vagn Riis-Hansen, photographer unknown, c.1960, OHM/3/3/9

49 Colour photograph of Oliver Messel, Claudette Colbert and her husband, Diana Henry and Adele Donan at a picnic at Bottom Bay, Barbados, photographer unknown, March 1963, OHM/3/2/93

50 Black and white photograph of Oliver Messel, possibly on holiday, Perfect Photo Repro Ltd, c.1940s-50s, OHM/3/2/43

51 Colour Polaroid of Oliver Messel at what appears to be a party, photographer unknown, 1966-78, OHM/3/2/146

52 Colour photograph of Oliver Messel standing in the garden at Maddox, photographer unknown, July 1968, OHM/3/2/104

53 Black and white photograph of Oliver Messel, Vagn Riis-Hansen, Jacqui Chan and others in a Venetian restaurant, photographer unknown, 1955, OHM/3/2/58

54 Oliver Messel, Noël Coward and another man in Jamaica, photographer and date unknown, OHM/3/3/13

55 Black and white photograph of Oliver Messel dancing with Doris Castlerosse, photographer unknown, 1934-37, OHM/3/2/30

56 Black and white photograph of Oliver Messel and friends (which may include the Mitford sisters) at what appears to be a costume party, photographer unknown, c.1920s-1930s, OHM/3/2/8

Social Conscience

The theatre of Oliver's life often intertwined with that of social and political events. As with so many of his generation, Oliver's career was affected in 1940 by the war effort. His artistic abilities were put to use as a Camouflage Officer learning various painting techniques for hiding buildings and vehicles. His skills were also used locally, disguising pillboxes in North Somerset.

Oliver was released from war service to undertake several design commissions including George Pascal's *Caesar and Cleopatra* (props from which can be seen in the lift lobby) which demanded a creative approach to materials due to rationing.

Oliver enjoyed a life of privilege and was fortunate to continue his theatrical career during the war. However, his Archive also reveals his ardent support for equality and social justice.

Having worked alongside black artists and performers, Oliver would have been acutely aware of the existence of significant racial inequality in British society. This is highlighted by his friendship with 'King Freddie', the 35th Kabaka of Buganda, who in 1953 was deposed by the British Government. Whilst the Kabaka was exiled in England, Oliver attempted to rent a flat in Mayfair for his friend, who was later refused entry by the landlord on the basis of race.

In protest, Oliver began an extensive letter writing campaign to members of parliament and the press, highlighting the Kabaka's treatment. The Kabaka was eventually returned to his position and in 1955 Oliver and Vagn visited Buganda to attend the signing of a new treaty.

57 Letter from Arthur Hill of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, to Oliver Messel suggesting possible methods of preserving tree branches for use in camouflage, 24 August 1940, OHM/1/9/1/3

58 Black and white photograph of Oliver Messel beside a small outhouse and a 'fake' building, photographer unknown, c.1940-44, OHM/1/9/2/1

59 Black and white photograph of a stone building with camouflaged army trucks labelled 'Concealment lorries parked at end of shrubbery', photographer unknown, c.1940-44, OHM/1/9/2/3

60 Black and white photograph of a dinner party at Oliver Messel's army lodgings in Norwich, photographer unknown, c.1940-44, OHM/1/9/3/35

61 Watercolour sketch and letter from Oliver Messel to Randolph Churchill explaining his ideas for trapping tanks, c. August 1940, OHM/1/9/1/2

62 Copy of a letter from Oliver Messel to Sir Thomas Lloyd of the Colonial Office explaining the events leading up to the 35th Kabaka of Buganda being refused the lease of a Mayfair flat, 7 January 1954, OHM/4/5/5/49

63 Sheet from an album of press cuttings regarding the situation in Buganda and the incident at the Mayfair flat, 7 January 1954, OHM/4/5/6

64 Black and white photograph of a dinner party held at Pelham Place with guests including Princess Elizabeth, the sister of the 35th Kabaka of Buganda, photographer unknown, c.1946-66, OHM/4/5/2

65 Black and white photograph of Oliver Messel and Vagn Riis-Hansen with the 35th Kabaka of Buganda in the garden at 17 Pelham Place, photographer and date unknown, OHM/4/5/1

66 Black and white portrait photograph of the 35th Kabaka of Buganda, photograph possibly by Antony Armstrong-Jones, c.1948-66, OHM/4/5/3

Digitised photographs taken on Oliver and Vagn's visit to Buganda for the treaty signing in 1955 can be seen on the screen in the foyer, OHM/4/5/9

A World of Illusion: From Stage to Screen

Best known for his ethereal creations encompassing both theatre and film, Oliver's introduction to costume and set design came through an exhibition of his masks at the Claridge Gallery, London. This led to introductions to theatrical producer Charles B. Cochran and Serge Diaghilev, director of the Ballets Russes.

His first job was creating masks for the Ballets Russes' *Zéphyr et Flore*, 1925, followed by numerous musical revues for Cochran, including *Wake Up and Dream!*, 1929, with music by Cole Porter. His work for *Helen!*, 1932, directed by Max Reinhardt, is still celebrated for its ground-breaking 'white on white' designs.

Success led to further offers in the world of theatre, ballet, opera and film, represented here through some of his best known productions such as *The Sleeping Beauty*, performed by Sadler's Wells Ballet, 1946, at the Royal Opera House, and the films *Romeo and Juliet*, 1936, directed by George Cukor (for which Oliver collected over 3,000 reference photographs) and Gabriel Pascal's *Caesar and Cleopatra*, 1946.

Costume and designs from *The Sleeping Beauty* demonstrate Oliver's sensitive use of colour. Pieces from his meticulously scaled set models – always made at half an inch to a foot – hint at the magical interiority of the worlds he created, referencing 17th and 18th century art and architectural styles.

His ability to embrace different mediums, from film to opera, is also seen here through items from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1937, *Comus*, 1942, and the myriad of productions he worked on for Glyndebourne Opera House, for which he designed a new proscenium arch.

Oliver's ingenious use of materials in a 'make do and mend' era is also brought to life through a display of sparkling beads, ornate trims and opalescent fabric samples from his studio, most likely used for costumes and props. Such was his skill that Vivien Leigh in a letter (on display) to Oliver declares that "I have of course told Pascal [director] that nobody in the world must do the costumes except you."

67 Costume for one of the fairy nymphs from *The Sleeping Beauty*, Oliver Messel, c.1946, acquired by the Theatre Collection in 2015 (not part of the Oliver Messel Personal Archive), 2015/008

68 Costume design for Princess Aurora in *The Sleeping Beauty*, Oliver Messel, c.1940s, watercolour, gouache, silver paint, charcoal and pencil sketch on blue paper, OHM/1/2/4/2/41

69 Costume design for Prince Florizel's sister from the last act of *The Sleeping Beauty*, Oliver Messel, c.1940s, watercolour, gouache, gold paint, charcoal and pencil sketch on blue paper, OHM/1/2/4/2/40

70 Costume design for Bluebeard from the last act of *The Sleeping Beauty*, Oliver Messel, date unknown, watercolour, gouache, charcoal and pencil sketch on blue paper, OHM/1/2/4/2/52

71 Letter from Evelyn Williams at the Old Vic in reference to payment and props for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1 January 1938, OHM/1/1/5/2

72 Piece of plastic, shaped and painted as Titania's bower, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Oliver Messel, date unknown, OHM/1/1/5/3

73 Black and white photograph from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with Vivien Leigh as Titania cradling Ralph Richardson as Bottom, alongside Robert Helpmann as Oberon and Glen Miller as Puck, photographer and date unknown, OHM/1/1/5/4

74 Costume sketch for a character with an animal's face from the ballet *The Masque of Comus*, Oliver Messel, c.1942, watercolour, gouache and pencil on paper, OHM/1/2/2/13

75 Costume sketch for a grotesque character with a pig's face from the ballet *The Masque of Comus*, Oliver Messel, c.1942, watercolour, gouache and pencil on paper, OHM/1/2/2/9

76 Set design for the play *The Infernal Machine*, Oliver Messel, c.1940, oil paint/acrylic on paper, OHM/1/1/6/11

77 Set design for the play *The Infernal Machine*, Oliver Messel, c.1940, oil paint/acrylic on paper, OHM/1/1/6/12

78 Papier-mâché mask, possibly made for the film *Caesar and Cleopatra*, 1943-46, OHM/1/4/2/27

79 Black and white photograph of Vivien Leigh as Cleopatra and Basil Sydney as Rufio in the film *Caesar and Cleopatra*, photograph by Wilfrid Newton, c.1946, OHM/1/4/2/30/11

80 Letter from Vivien Leigh to Oliver Messel mentioning that she is going to be working on *Caesar and Cleopatra* and that she has insisted Messel do the costumes, 10 October 1943, OHM/1/4/2/2

81 Head-dress made for the film *Caesar and Cleopatra* in the form of a wire circlet with leaf-shaped petals, Oliver Messel, c.1943-46, OHM/1/4/2/28

82 Black and white photograph of a set design for *The Sleeping Beauty*, photographer and date unknown, OHM/1/2/4/1/9

83 Black and white photograph of Natalia Makarova as Princess Aurora and Mikhail Baryshnikov as Prince Florimund in *The Sleeping Beauty*, for the American Ballet, photographer unknown, June 1976, OHM/1/2/4/5/23/4

84 Dried rose in envelope labelled "The Rose that Margot gave me from her bouquet on the stage of the Metropolitan Opera House New York on the opening night of *The Sleeping Beauty*" c.1949, OHM/1/2/4/6/3

85 Pieces of a set model for the ballet *The Sleeping Beauty*, Oliver Messel, gouache or acrylic on card, date unknown, OHM/1/2/4/2/1

86 Costume piece, possibly either a hair or shoulder decoration, for *The Sleeping Beauty*, Oliver Messel, date unknown, acquired by the Theatre Collection in 2015 (not part of the Oliver Messel Personal Archive), 2015/008

87 Selection of beading, trims, appliqué flowers, costume jewellery and fabric samples from Oliver Messel's studio, probably used for costumes and props, date unknown, OHM/1/15

88 Cardboard box from Harrods containing plaster of paris leaves and berry shapes mounted on wire, possibly used for the decorative scheme for the Dorchester Hotel suite, date unknown, OHM/1/15/58

89 & 90 Pages from photograph album titled "Oliver in Hollywood - *Romeo and Juliet*" including photographs of Katherine Hepburn, Cary Grant, Clark Gable, Marlene Dietrich, George Cukor and images taken on-set, compiled by Oliver Messel, c.1936, OHM/3/1/5

Further digitised photographs from the album above can be seen on the screen in the lift lobby OHM/3/1/5

91 Publicity brochure for *Romeo and Juliet*, produced by MGM,1936, OHM/1/4/1/3/29

92 Black and white photograph of Oliver Messel, George Cukor and other members of the crew on the set of *Romeo and Juliet*, photograph by Clarence Sinclair-Bull for MGM, c.1936, OHM/1/4/1/3/21

93 Letter from Dorothy Cukor at MGM to Oliver Messel passing on press cuttings and other news, 20 July 1936, OHM/1/4/1/3/31

94 Black and white press photograph of Oliver Messel working on the head-dress for Katherine DeMille as Rosalind in *Romeo and Juliet*, photograph by Clarence Sinclair-Bull for MGM, 1936, OHM/1/4/1/3/23

95 & 96 Black and white photographs from envelope labelled 'Home Cathedral Square' taken whilst filming the crowd scenes for *Romeo and Juliet*, photographer unknown, 1936, OHM/1/4/1/3/22

97 Colour postcard of a man dressed in traditional Italian livery holding a flag, possibly used as inspiration for *Romeo and Juliet*, c. 1936, OHM/14/1/3/14

98 & 99 Black and white postcards of men dressed in traditional Italian livery, performing flag-tossing and stood in a group, possibly used as inspiration for *Romeo and Juliet*, c. 1936, OHM/1/4/1/3/11 and OHM/1/4/1/3/12

100 Black and white publicity photograph of Leslie Howard as Romeo and Norma Shearer as Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*, photograph by Clarence Sinclair-Bull for MGM, 1936, OHM/1/4/1/3/28

101 Programme for the 1956 Glyndebourne Mozart season with cover artwork by Oliver Messel, 1956, OHM/1/3/12/6

102 Humorous telegram sent to Oliver Messel and claiming to be from Mozart on the opening of *Die Zauberflöte* at the Royal Opera House, 20 March 1947, OHM/1/3/1/2/3

103 Black and white postcard of Glyndebourne auditorium and proscenium arch, date unknown, OHM/1/3/12/19

104 Letter from Moran Caplat, General Manager of Glyndebourne Festival Opera to Oliver Messel reference his contract for designing *Die Zauberflöte*, 29 January 1960, OHM/1/3/1/3

105 Press cutting of the cover for *Radio Times* for a televised production of *Le Cenerentola* at Glyndebourne, 20 July 1959, OHM/1/3/4/11

106 Black and white photograph of a scene from *Ariadne auf Naxos*, photograph by Angus McBean, 27 April 1950, OHM/1/3/2/8

107 Humorous telegram sent to Oliver Messel and claiming to be from Claude-Lorraine commenting on Messel's backdrops, on the opening of *Die Zauberflöte* at the Royal Opera House, 20 March 1947, OHM/1/3/1/2/2

108 Programme for the 1954 Glyndebourne season with cover artwork by Oliver Messel, 1953, OHM/1/3/2/4

World of Interiors

Throughout his career Oliver's artistic practice embraced both temporary and permanent creations inhabiting all manner of roles from painter to designer to architect. His ability to imagine whole worlds on stage and screen, from floor to ceiling, led to commissions for party decor, shop interiors and stately homes.

Having designed costumes and sets for numerous productions staged at Covent Garden, Oliver took on the additional task of redecorating the Royal Box for state visits including that of President Auriol of France in 1950, the Queen's coronation in 1953 and a visit from the King and Queen of Sweden in 1954 for which he borrowed furniture from the V&A for the grand tented entrance.

In 1953 Oliver was commissioned to redesign a suite of rooms at the prestigious Dorchester Hotel in London, which later became known as the Messel Suite. Combining references from throughout his career, the romantic decors took their inspiration from Venetian, Rococo and Ottoman interiors. The suite also featured several of Oliver's own paintings evoking an English country garden. The success of his designs led to further commissions at the Dorchester, such as decorating the exterior in the style of a theatre box for the coronation in 1953.

Another, much celebrated commission included Rayne shoe shop in Old Bond Street, where he created jewel-like interiors using the same practice of scaled models as his set designs. Other notable interior designs include those for Norwich and Bath Assembly Rooms, Flaxley Abbey in Gloucestershire, Rosehill Theatre in Cumbria and the Reader's Digest offices in Paris.

109 Black and white photograph of the Royal Box at the Royal Opera House during a gala performance in honour of a visit by the French President M Auriol, photograph by Keystone Press Agency Ltd, 9 March 1950, OHM/1/12/1/14

110 Black and white photograph of Oliver Messel's decorations for the Royal Opera House for a gala performance in honour of a visit by the King of Sweden, photographer unknown, 1954, OHM/1/12/3/8

111 Black and white photograph of a drawing by Oliver Messel of his decorations for the Royal Opera House for a gala performance celebrating a visit by the French President M Auriol, photographer unknown, c. March 1950, OHM/1/12/1/1

112 Black and white photograph of Oliver Messel's decorations for the Royal Opera House for a gala performance in honour of a visit by the King of Sweden, photographer unknown, 1954, OHM/1/12/3/6

113 Black and white photograph of King Gustav, HM Queen Elizabeth II, HRH Duke of Edinburgh, HM Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother in the Royal Box at the Royal Opera House, during a gala performance in honour of a visit by the French President M Auriol, photographer unknown, 9 March 1950, OHM/1/12/3/35

114 Black and white photograph of the Royal Box at the Royal Opera House, during a gala performance in honour of a visit by the French President M Auriol, photograph from Keystone Press Agency Ltd, 9 March 1950, OHM/1/12/1/13

115 Oliver Messel with a scaled cardboard model of the Dorchester Hotel suite, photographer unknown, date unknown, OHM/1/10/2/2

116 & 117 Black and white photographs of the Dorchester Hotel suite and Pavilion Room, photographer unknown, 1953-76, OHM/1/10/2/33 and OHM/1/10/2/83

118 Publicity brochure celebrating the Oliver Messel penthouse suite at the Dorchester Hotel, January 1953, OHM/1/10/2/104

119 Black and white photograph of the Dorchester Hotel and Pavilion Room, photographer unknown, 1953-76, OHM/1/10/2/44

120 Postcard with a coloured image of the decorations on the outside of the Dorchester Hotel designed by Oliver Messel for the celebrations for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, 1953, OHM/1/10/2/66

121 Black and white photograph of Oliver Messel and Edward Rayne looking at Messel's scaled model for the redevelopment of the Rayne shoe shop, photograph by Photo Studios Ltd, c.1958, OHM/1/10/5/23

122 Black and white photograph of Oliver Messel's scaled cardboard model of the interior of the Rayne shoe shop in Bond Street, photograph by Peter Hope Lumley, c.1958, OHM/1/10/5/12

123 Press cutting from the *Sunday Times* advertising the redesign of the Rayne shoe shop, 15 November 1959, OHM/1/10/5/39

124 Black and white photograph of the exterior of the redesigned Rayne shoe shop, photograph by Peter Waugh, 1959, OHM/1/10/5/49

125 Black and white photograph of Oliver Messel, Edward Rayne and others seated in Rayne's showroom, 1959, OHM/1/10/5/44

126 Black and white photograph of the interior of the Rayne shoe shop with a female customer trying on shoes, photograph by Peter Waugh, 1959, OHM/1/10/5/50

'Indoor-Outdoor' Living

Upon moving to Barbados in 1966, Oliver embraced a new career envisioning architectural concepts for private houses, hotels and public buildings, right down to the furniture and textiles.

Oliver's first project was Maddox, the deserted 18th century plantation house bought by himself and Vagn in 1964. The existing building and gardens were remodelled to Oliver's designs embracing an inherent theatricality with views out to sea. These were framed by terraces and verandas which extended out from the living rooms creating what is often referred to as a Caribbean style of 'indoor-outdoor' living.

Maddox included extensive gardens, a workroom and a guest cottage used by a host of family and friends. Oliver was involved in every aspect of the design including choosing the plants and designing furniture. He worked on numerous houses in Barbados, employing local craftsman.

While living in Barbados he continued to undertake various design jobs in England and America. However, his biggest project was the design of over 17 private houses and various (unrealised) public buildings on the island of Mustique. As with all his work, Oliver approached architecture by looking to create coherent worlds and, without being commissioned, designed a schoolhouse, general store, and community centre for the island.

His first property on Mustique was the Cotton House Hotel, reconstructed from an old cotton factory. Here, he designed the layout of the accompanying grounds and guest cottages, producing numerous configurations for additional buildings and garden features.

127 Colour photograph of the exterior of Maddox, photographer unknown, c. 1960-1970s, OHM/3/4/9

128 Black and white photograph of exterior of Maddox under reconstruction, photographer and date unknown, OHM/3/4/9/3

129 & 130 Colour photographs of the exterior of Maddox, photographer unknown, c. 1960-1970s, OHM/3/4/9

131 Concept sketch of Maddox, Oliver Messel, c.1964-70, OHM/1/14/26

132 & 133 Colour photographs of interiors at Maddox, photographer and date unknown, OHM/3/4/9/69

134 & 135 Colour photographs of exteriors at Maddox, photographer and date unknown, OHM/3/4/9

136, 137 & 138 Black and white photographs of the Cotton House Hotel under reconstruction, photographer and date unknown, OHM/1/14/2

139 Colour photograph of group posed on steps of the Cotton House, Hotel, photographer and date unknown, OHM/1/14/2

140 & 141 Colour photographs of the completed Cotton House Hotel photographer unknown, c.1975, OHM/1/14/2

142 & 143 Black and white photographs of Cotton House Hotel under construction, photographer and date unknown, OHM/1/14/2

144 Diazo drawing of Cotton House Hotel, south elevation, Oliver Messel, date unknown, OHM/1/14/2

145 Tracing paper and brown ink landscape design for outdoor barbecue area on Mustique, Oliver Messel, date unknown, OHM/1/14/2

146 Concept sketch for outdoor barbecue area on Mustique, Oliver Messel, date unknown, OHM/1/14/2

147 & 148 Colour photographs of the Mustique landscape near the Cotton House Hotel, photographer and date unknown, OHM/1/1/14/2

149 Plaster mould for a piece of decorative moulding resembling a beanstalk with leaves wrapped around like a ribbon, possibly used for the Dorchester Hotel suite, date unknown, OHM/1/14/51/6

150 Mould of resin or wood on chipboard resembling two columns wrapped with ribbons, labelled No.81, possibly used for the Dorchester Hotel suite, date unknown, OHM/1/14/51/4

151 Orange sketchbook with fabric swatches for the Cotton House Hotel, Oliver Messel, date unknown, OHM/1/14/2

Wake Up and Dream Installations

The Caviar Outlook

Tom Marshman

2018

audio installation

12 mins

The Caviar Outlook has been inspired by items in the Oliver Messel Personal Archive. It includes segments of oral histories from actor Tommy Baptiste and costume designer Anthony Powell, with words by Vagn Riis-Hansen and an illustration by Ben Pollock. Audiences are invited to seat themselves at the dinner table and listen to the different conversations through the headphones as if eavesdropping on chatter at a dinner party.

Oliver's Roses

Paper roses designed by artist Diana Beltran Herrera and constructed with help from Thomas Messel, Lou Taylor, Sofia Lago, Nick, Anne Baden-Daintree, Athene Bain, Jill Sullivan, Sarah Bustamente-Brauning, Laura Gardner, Gemma Brace and Gillian Boll
2018

paper, floral wire, floral tape and glue

The installation *Oliver's Roses* has been inspired by a number of items in the Oliver Messel Personal Archive such as photographs, letters and illustrations. Referencing the collaborative nature of Oliver's practice, the installation has been created by a number of different hands, each of which have engaged with the Archive through a 'making' workshop.

Made from paper, the roses also gesture to the Archive's materiality, containing drawings, sketchbooks, press clippings and letters amongst other paper-based objects. Hidden between these pages are a multitude of stories, waiting to be discovered, such as the romantic recurrence of roses and flowers seen throughout Oliver's life and work. The installation attempts to help bring these stories to life so that the very 'scent of them fills the air' (Maud Messel).

***Wake Up and Dream* - Oliver Messel: Theatre, Art and Society**

University of Bristol Theatre Collection

22 November 2018 - April 2019

Open Tuesday - Friday, 9.30am-5pm

&

Oliver Messel: Theatre and Beyond

Royal West of England Academy

20 November 2018 - 13 January 2019

Open Tuesday - Saturday 10am-5.30pm and Sunday 11am-5pm

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