



## V&A acquires the archive of Vivien Leigh

The V&A is delighted to announce that it has acquired the archive of the British film and theatre actress Vivien Leigh (1913-1967) in the centenary year of her birth. The archive comprises many never-before-seen records including affectionate letters between Laurence Olivier and Leigh, correspondence from some of the most eminent names in 20th-century history including Winston Churchill, Graham Greene and Noël Coward, as well as personal diaries and photographs, visitor books, Leigh's annotated film and theatre scripts, press clippings and her numerous awards.

Born in Darjeeling, India and educated in Europe, Vivien Leigh was an internationally recognised actress who won two Academy Awards for her roles in *Gone with the Wind* (1939) and *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) and enjoyed a distinguished stage career spanning 30 years. Married to actor Laurence Olivier from 1940-1960, the celebrated couple co-starred in plays and films and were greeted on their various tours with the enthusiasm generally reserved for visiting royalty. As well as the professional contacts they made through their stage work, they entertained a wide circle of guests at Notley Abbey, the home in Buckinghamshire they created in 1943. An impressive list of signatures ranging from Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall, Sir Alec Guinness to Bette Davis, Orson Welles, Judy Garland and Rex Harrison is recorded in their visitors' book.

The archive was acquired by the V&A through Robert Holden Ltd from Vivien Leigh's grandchildren. It covers all aspects of her career and personal life from when she was young to her death, including her diaries begun as a 16-year-old in 1929 and maintained until the end of her life in 1967. Notably, the archive explores the grand love affair between Leigh and Laurence Olivier and contains more than 200 letters, telegrams, photographs, newspaper clippings and postcards between 1938 and 1967. During April-June 1939, whilst Olivier was playing in *No Time for Comedy* on Broadway in New York and Leigh was shooting *Gone with the Wind* in Los Angeles, a total of 40 letters were exchanged between the couple. Full of theatrical observations and comment, their correspondence is also concerned with the foundation of the National Theatre.

Martin Roth, Director of the V&A said: "Vivien Leigh is undoubtedly one of the UK's greatest luminaries of stage and screen and along with Laurence Olivier, remains a true star of her time. We are thrilled to acquire her archive intact in this centenary year of her birth and to be able to make it available to the public for the first time. It not only represents Vivien Leigh's life and career, but is also a fascinating insight into the theatrical and social world that surrounded her. The V&A is the natural home for the archive as there are so many links to other areas of the collection, from the costume designs in the Oliver Messel collection to the costumes worn by Leigh in *Duel of Angels*, designed by Christian Dior."

Vivien Leigh meticulously kept more than 7,500 personal letters from friends and colleagues addressed to both her and Laurence Olivier. The archive uncovers correspondence with T. S. Eliot, Arthur Miller and Marilyn Monroe, Winston Churchill, Edith Sitwell and with Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother who offers her thanks to the couple for remembering her. Professional correspondence includes many letters from playwright Tennessee Williams and one addressed to Leigh in September 1950 enthuses about her role of Blanche DuBois: "*It is needless to repeat here my truly huge happiness over the picture and particularly your part in it. It is the Blanche I had always dreamed of and I am grateful to you for bringing it so beautifully to life on the screen.*" In a particularly revealing letter addressed to film director Elia Kazan during preparation for this role, Leigh states "*You do know that when I said over the phone I'm worried about the way I'll look, 'I didn't mean good I meant right'*".

There are photographs including albums of large format stills from *Gone with the Wind* and *Romeo and Juliet* that have never before been publicly displayed, and an extensive collection of stereoscopic transparencies taken by Leigh herself whilst on tour in the USA, Australia, New Zealand and the UK. These personal photographs reveal the social world that surrounded her as well as behind the scenes of the theatres in which she performed.

A changing selection of material from the archive will be on display in the V&A's Theatre and Performance Galleries from autumn 2013. The V&A will make the archive available for research for the very first time once cataloguing has been complete and digital records will also be available on Search the Collections.

A free lunchtime lecture *Vivien Leigh: Role Model or Victim Figure?* will take place on 13 November at the V&A. Writer Jayne Sheridan will recount Leigh's story of ambition and beauty (no booking required).

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#### **Notes to Editors**

The V&A is home to the UK's national collection of theatre and performing arts and recently began collecting costumes designed for film. Leigh's archive joins those of other notable stars of stage and screen including Michael Redgrave, Paul Scofield and Ronnie Barker. The Museum already holds a number of other pieces in the collection connected to Leigh including costumes designed by Christian Dior for *Duel of Angels*, 1958 and an Oliver Messel designed headdress worn by Leigh in the film *Caesar and Cleopatra*, 1945.

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