

V&A acquires a 'Scandal' by leading British sculptor Charles Sargeant Jagger

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The V&A has acquired an Art Deco bronze relief that scandalised 1930s high society.

Image



Bronze 'Scandal' relief, by Charles Sargeant Jagger

The work by leading British sculptor Charles Sargeant Jagger (1885-1934) has been bought with generous donations from The Art Fund, the National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF), Old Possum's Practical Trust and private donors and will go on display from 22 April in the V&A's Dorothy and Michael Hintze Sculpture Galleries.

Scandal depicts a naked couple embracing while an audience of disapproving onlookers in the background peer at them with mouths agape and hands raised in

horror. The 1.6 x 1.5 metre relief was boldly displayed in the drawing room of society couple Henry and Gwen Mond where it both scandalised and satirised 1930s polite society with its reference to the couple's earlier ménage à trois with the writer Gilbert Cannan.

Scandal was commissioned by Henry Mond (heir to the ICI fortune and later the second Lord Melchett) and his wife Gwen in 1930 for their drawing room at Mulberry House, Smith Square, Westminster. The relief is a humorous play on the relationship between the couple's public notoriety and private life. It is a highly original work of art, rich in symbolism, and was an integral part of their celebrated 1930s Art Deco interior.

Scandal was purchased by the V&A at a Christie's auction in New York for \$157,000 (approximately £85,000). The Art Fund, the UK's leading art charity, awarded £30,873 and the NHMF gave a total of £22,041 towards the acquisition. The relief is a companion piece to the Melchett fire basket, also by Jagger, that the V&A acquired in 2005 for £66,000 with the help of The Art Fund and the Friends of the V&A. The two will now be displayed together, as intended by the artist, for the first time in over thirty years.

Mark Jones, Director of the V&A, said: "Scandal is a wonderful example of Jagger's work and was a daring riposte by Henry Mond to 1930s society. This is a welcome addition to the V&A's 20th century British Sculpture gallery."

David Barrie, Director of The Art Fund, said: "I'm delighted The Art Fund has been able to help the V&A acquire another exceptional example of Jagger's work. It is very good news that Scandal, once the focal point of one of the greatest English private art deco interiors, will now be on public display."

Carole Souter, Chief Executive of NHMF, said: "Jagger was one of our nation's leading sculptors and this National Heritage Memorial Fund grant has helped bring one of his most famous works back to the UK for everyone to enjoy."

About the sculptor

Charles Sargeant Jagger was born in Kilnhurst near Sheffield in 1885. In 1908 he was awarded a scholarship to study at the Royal College of Art where he studied sculpture and modelling until 1911. He served in the First World War in the Dardenelles and on the Western Front and was wounded three times, the last time seriously. In 1918 he was made an Official British War Artist for the Ministry of Information. Following the war, he undertook numerous war memorial

commissions of which the most famous is the Royal Artillery Memorial at Hyde Park Corner (1925).

About the Mond family

Henry Mond was born in London in 1898, the only son of Alfred Mond, chairman of Imperial Chemical Industries and an important patron of the arts in his own right. Like Jagger he served in the First World War. In 1918 he had a motorbike accident outside the St John's Wood studio occupied by Gwen Wilson (a South African art student) and Gilbert Cannan (a writer with a growing reputation). Following the accident, Gwen insisted on nursing Henry until he was fully recovered; he became their lodger and her lover. Henry and Gwen married in 1920 challenging society's rules with the unconventional nature of their match; he was heir to a considerable fortune, she was from an unknown South African family. Henry went on to become deputy chairman of ICI, a director of Barclays Bank and an MP. He died in 1949.

Notes to editors

The V&A is one of the world's greatest museums of art and design, with collections unrivalled in their scope and diversity. On 28 April the Museum will open a new gallery to showcase recent acquisitions. The display will be updated annually with a small number of objects rotated more frequently. On display from 28 April will be 21 works acquired by the Museum over the last two years.

The Art Fund is the UK's leading independent art charity. It offers grants to help UK museums and galleries enrich their collections and campaigns widely on behalf of museums and their visitors. It is entirely funded from public donations and has 80,000 members. Since 1903 the charity has helped museums and galleries all over the UK secure 860,000 works of art for their collections.