

Oliver Messel photographed by Angus McBean Harvard Theatre Collection, Harvard University

The personal archive of one of the 20th century's foremost theatrical designers will be catalogued, conserved and made available to the public, thanks to a grant from HLF.

Oliver Messel's (1904-1978) career spanned the worlds of stage, film, opera, interior design, portraiture and architecture.

He designed landmark stage productions including *Sleeping Beauty* (1946) and *Ring Around the Moon* (1950) and costumes for many famous films including *Romeo and Juliet* (1936) and *The Thief of Baghdad* (1940).

Messel was known as one of the ‘bright young things’ in 1920s London and counted among his friends and colleagues the likes of photographer Cecil Beaton and artist Rex Whistler.

Personal insight

The archive offers an unrivalled and very personal insight into Messel’s incredible life. It includes photographs, sketchbooks, costume and set designs, stage, film and architectural plans and a selection of plaster casts, masks and costumes.

[quote=Nerys Watts, Head of HLF South West]“Thanks to National Lottery players, our grant will open up the never-before-seen magical archive to the public.”[/quote]

The £73,000 National Lottery grant will enable the University of Bristol Theatre Collection to catalogue all 75,000 items in the archive and ensure they are properly stored. Selected items will be digitised and a series of public workshops will be held so that people can explore the archive in more detail. A small exhibition will be held in 2018 at the Theatre Collection.

Nerys Watts, Head of HLF South West, said: “Oliver Messel was one of Britain’s most celebrated designers and this archive provides a comprehensive insight into his creative process and his life as a ‘bright young thing’.

“Thanks to National Lottery players, our grant will open up the never-before-seen magical archive to the public and we are delighted to be playing a role in making sure this remarkable man’s story is better known to a much wider audience.”