

# Vivien.

**SOTHEBY'S TO OFFER  
THE COLLECTION OF VIVIEN LEIGH**

*Legendary star of *Gone with the Wind**

**PREVIEW  
EXHIBITION OPENS  
IN LONDON TODAY**

**AUCTION TO  
TAKE PLACE ON  
26 SEPTEMBER 2017**

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**“THE MOST  
BEAUTIFUL  
WOMAN OF  
HER AGE”**

GLADYS COOPER  
(1888-1971),  
VIVIEN'S FRIEND



© The Cecil Beaton Studio Archive at Sotheby's

**TUESDAY 11 JULY 2017.** Hollywood icon and incandescent star of one of the most beloved films of all time, Vivien Leigh (1913-1967) captured hearts and minds with her fiery, luminous performance as Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind* in 1939. Her legendary status in the pantheon of all-time greats was assured when she secured what perhaps remains to this day the most coveted role in cinema history. Our perception of such legends is often imperceptibly entwined with the myths they come to embody. This September, a spotlight will reveal the inner person few people really knew, in effect Vivien's private life, when Sotheby's London brings to auction The Vivien Leigh Collection.

Passed down through Vivien's family, the collection comprises paintings, jewellery, couture, books, furniture, porcelain, *objets d'art* and further items celebrating all aspects of her life, from the pre-war years in London, to Hollywood and beyond, up to her death in 1967. Myriad pieces drawn from the city and country homes Vivien shared with her husband Laurence Olivier will give a new perspective on Vivien, from her appreciation of art and patronage of Modern British artists, to her passion for books and fondness for entertaining and interior design.

Vivien Leigh's family commented: *"We hope people take as much pleasure from this collection as our grandparents, parents and families have done."*

Harry Dalmeny, Sotheby's UK Chairman, commented: *"This is our chance to discover the real, and unexpected, Vivien Leigh. We're all guilty of confusing our favourite actresses with the heroines they portray, of blurring Vivien's identity with that of Scarlett O'Hara or Blanche DuBois. But, behind the guise of the most glamorous and talked-about woman of her age we find a fine art collector, patron, even a book worm, who was the intellectual equal of the literati, artists and aesthetes she counted among her coterie. Her private collection does not disappoint. Vivien approached the decoration of her homes as if she were designing a set, incorporating influences and inspiration from a life spent on screen and on stage. These houses were an extension of the theatrical space, with medieval Notley Abbey looking positively Shakespearean. Fifty years on from her death, this sale opens the door into Vivien's private world, allowing us a privileged and fascinating glimpse into a world that otherwise only her closest friends could ever have known."*



A snap of Vivien Leigh and Laurence Olivier at Notley Abbey from a never-seen-before family album.

## SALE DETAILS

In total, approximately 250 lots will be offered for sale at Sotheby's in London on 26 September 2017, with estimates ranging from £100 to £100,000.

Please find select highlights from the sale below. Full information and catalogue will be available in late summer. Download images [here](#).

Please visit our selection of highlights from the collection which opens today at Sotheby's London, and runs until 11 August. A full exhibition of all the lots in the sale will open on 22 September.

Address: 34-35 New Bond Street W1A 2AA.

The V&A will hold a lunchtime lecture tomorrow (12 July) offering an insight into the life and work of Vivien Leigh, in 3D – focussing on the stereoscopic 3D colour slides taken by Vivien between 1954 and 1967.

Full details [here](#).

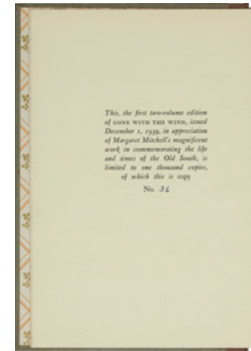
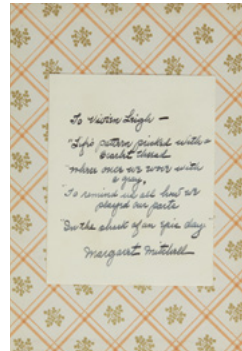
## VIVIEN LEIGH'S PERSONAL COPY OF GONE WITH THE WIND

given to her by the author Margaret Mitchell  
£5,000–7,000

The quest to find an actress to play Scarlett O'Hara is one of the most enduring stories enshrined in the annals of Hollywood. Margaret Mitchell's novel, winner of the 1937 Pulitzer Prize, was a best-seller in every sense, not only selling in staggering numbers, but striking a chord with female readers who fancied themselves as Scarlett. Among these fans was Vivien, one of the book's earliest readers: "From the moment I read [it], I was fascinated by the lovely wayward, tempestuous Scarlett. I felt that I loved and understood her, almost as though I had known her in the flesh. When I heard that the book was to be filmed in Hollywood early in 1939, I longed to play the part."

A dedicated reader of the book, Vivien kept a copy close at hand during filming and deeply resented any divergence from Margaret Mitchell's text. On the final day of shooting, Olivia de Havilland ('Melanie Hamilton') walked past Vivien, failing to recognise her. "She looked so diminished by over work... Her whole atmosphere had changed. She gave something to that film that I don't think she ever got back." Vivien went on to win her first Oscar for her performance in 1939. She was just 26 years old at the time.

Her copy of *Gone with the Wind* is inscribed by Margaret Mitchell with a hand-written poem: "Life's pattern pricked with a scarlet thread / where once we were with a gray / To remind us all how we played our parts / In the shock of an epic day".



## A SILVER CIGARETTE BOX

engraved with 'Vivien and Larry Love Myron [Myron Selznick]'. A present from the man credited with securing Vivien with the role of Scarlett O'Hara  
£400–600



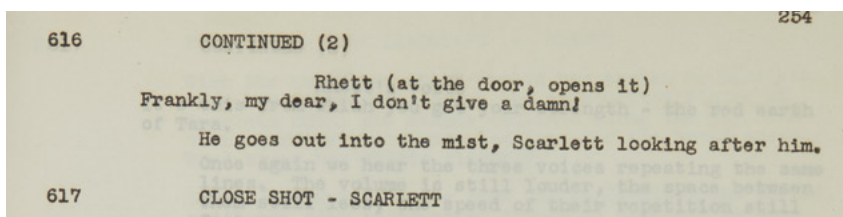
After a lengthy nationwide search for Scarlett, costing over \$50,000, speculation about who would play the novel's heroine reached fever pitch. Producer David Selznick finally

settled on Vivien, a relatively unknown actress at the time. He had initially had "no enthusiasm for Vivien Leigh... She was very beautiful, but she seemed to be a little static, not quite sufficiently temperamental for such a fiery role", but this silver cigarette box is a memento of the moment he changed his mind, and when the projection of Vivien's career changed forever.

The silver box was gifted to the couple by Myron Selznick, the man who was instrumental in securing Vivien with the coveted role. Olivier's agent in Hollywood and David Selznick's brother, Myron engineered the dramatic meeting between David and Vivien on the set of *Gone with the Wind* during the dramatic burning of Atlanta scenes, filmed before Scarlett had even been cast. The impression Vivien made – with the flames lighting up her face – was quite devastating; he recalled, "I'll never recover from that first look".

## GONE WITH THE WIND, FILM SCRIPT

presented to Vivien Leigh by David Selznick in 1939  
£10,000–15,000



### A GOLD RING

inscribed 'Laurence Olivier Vivien Eternally'  
£400-600

"Apart from her looks, which were magical, she possessed beautiful poise... She also had something else: an attraction of the most perturbing nature I had ever encountered"- Laurence Olivier recalling Vivien Leigh in 1982.

Married for 20 years, from 1940-1960, Vivien and Olivier were one of the most glamorous couples in the world. Further to watching Olivier numerous times on stage in 1934, Vivien became determined to meet him, confiding to a friend 'That's the man I'm going to marry' before they had even spoken. Her obsession was fuelled by dreams of theatrical glory and the idea that one day they might emulate Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne, the legendary husband-and-wife acting team, and become a celebrated stage couple. Towards the end of 1935 Vivien was at last introduced to her idol at the Savoy Grill. Married to other people at the time, they embarked on an affair the following year, and formally led separate lives until they were able to marry in 1940.



### FASHION & JEWELS

Vivien loved clothes and jewellery, and was not afraid to mix historic jewels with contemporary couture. Her predilection for fashion was established early in her career when she modelled a magenta evening gown with turquoise tulle by Victor Stiebel for British Vogue in 1937. She remained lifelong friends with Stiebel; a pink full length evening dress by the designer from circa 1961 is estimated at £200-300.

The bow motif appears in her wardrobe as a device frequently and here is the ultimate accessory in the form of a large mid-19th-century diamond bow brooch or pendant, estimated at £25,000-35,000, amongst other jewels worn by her in the sale.



### VIVIEN'S WIG FOR THE FILM A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

inscribed with her name  
est. £400-600

Tennessee Williams, the creator of Blanche DuBois, considered Vivien the perfect choice for the role of his vulnerable Southern belle in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and the "Blanche I had always dreamed of". The pair hit it off instantly, becoming as 'thick as thieves'; Williams felt that Vivien understood him and wondered whether "she realised that I lived with the same nervous torment".

After Vivien and Marlon Brando's acclaimed performances of the play on stage in London and New York respectively, they were chosen to star in the 1951 film adaptation. Vivien's performance was to earn her a second Oscar as best actress.



She had found the role of Blanche DuBois more demanding than Scarlett O'Hara: "I had nine months in the theatre of Blanche DuBois. Now she's in command of me in Hollywood." The film's director, Elia Kazan recognised in Vivien "the greatest determination to excel of any actress I've ever known. She'd have crawled over broken glass if she thought it would help her performance".

## A PORTRAIT OF VIVIEN

by Augustus John, 1942

£5,000–7,000

This portrait shines a light on the untold story of Vivien's deep engagement with art which she collected throughout her life. As she travelled the world for months at a time, she would not only buy new art from the countries she visited, but would also take select paintings with her to decorate her hotel and dressing rooms across the globe. Around 45 artworks are included in the sale.

Unsurprisingly, Vivien herself could not escape the attention of the artists in her circle. This beautiful drawing of Vivien in red chalk by Augustus John is a study for a painting commissioned by Laurence Olivier in 1942. The painting was never finished, allegedly because Olivier thought that the artist had become too infatuated with his subject.

Vivien's love of art was likely nurtured through her friendship with Sir Kenneth Clark, the art historian who during his time as director of the National Gallery would regularly drop by Vivien's dressing room at Haymarket Theatre around the corner on matinée days. He recalled, *"I used to make for her rather better tea than her dresser would have done. At first I went because I enjoyed looking at her... But very soon I went because I enjoyed her company and was fascinated by her character."*



The Oliviers' commission of a painting of their home Notley Abbey from John Piper shows the influence of Clark's friendship. Championed by Clark, Piper was one of the key artists he chose to record Britain during the Second World War through the War Artists Advisory Committee. As Surveyor of the King's Pictures, Clark had also helped to secure Their Majestys' commission for Piper to paint a series of atmospheric watercolours of Windsor Castle in the early 1940s. The painting of Notley Abbey was executed in the 1940s and similarly captures the house in all its dramatic glory, akin to a stage set.

## NOTLEY ABBEY

by John Piper

£8,000–12,000

## DURHAM COTTAGE

by Felix Kelly, 1954

£3,000–5,000

*"...many happy and hilarious weekends were spent with them [Vivien and Larry] at Notley Abbey and at their house in Chelsea."* - Rex Harrison

Property from Vivien's two homes, Notley Abbey and Durham Cottage, provide a glimpse into the private lives and passions of the Oliviers, from the porcelain, silver and glassware with which they entertained guests, to favourite pieces of furniture such as Vivien's 19th-century dressing table (est. £600-900) and books from their library. Durham Cottage was an exquisite space created for London living and Notley a historic retreat for relaxing. Durham Cottage in Chelsea, London was bought in 1937. Over many years, it was converted into a stylish pied-à-terre and comfortable home, featuring a flower-filled sitting room with a painting by Sickert hanging over the fireplace, a small gold and cream dining room with rich satin curtains and glass chandeliers, and a blue and white striped kitchen.



Durham Cottage by Felix Kelly

Beloved by Vivien, the Chelsea mews cottage was very much her world. In the words of Anne Norwich, a friend: *"It was tiny and sweet and bijou. I had an awful feeling of Larry being like an unfortunate bull in a china shop... I could hardly move for objects; it was an almost claustrophobic prettiness that Vivien surrounded herself with."*

Their second home, Notley Abbey in Buckinghamshire, discovered after two years of house-hunting in 1944, was more Olivier's domain. Dating from the Middle Ages, it appealed enormously to Olivier, due in no small part to the fact that it had been endowed by Henry V. (Olivier had been awarded a special Oscar for outstanding achievement in his eponymous film the same year.) *"I never had anything in my life I loved like that house. It was absolute idolatory..."*, he recalled.



Notley Abbey by John Piper

Notley did not naturally lend itself to Vivien's bright decorating style, though after some initial doubts she embraced its grandeur and decorated with abandon, enlisting the help of legendary interior designers Lady Colefax and John Fowler. Vivien gradually converted a monument into a home designed for entertaining, to where an endless cavalcade of visitors, including David Niven, Orson Welles, and Rex Harrison, would descend on weekends, and where it was apparently not uncommon to find Marlene Dietrich and Katharine Hepburn weeding the garden.

The painting of Notley will be offered for sale together with a Christmas card in which the Olivier's used Piper's portrayal of their country home.

**FURTHER INFORMATION ON ALL ASPECTS OF THE COLLECTION WILL BE AVAILABLE IN THE COMING MONTHS AT [SOTHEBYS.COM/VIVIEN](https://www.sothebys.com/vivien)**

#### Notes to editors

Cover image: Vivien photographed by Cecil Beaton in 1941  
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For further background please see Hugo Vickers' biography, 'Vivien Leigh' (Hamish Hamilton, 1988)  
"The most beautiful woman of her age" – said by Gladys Cooper (1888-1971), Vivien's friend whose career on stage and screen spanned seventy years

#### Press Contacts:

**London** +44 (0)20 7293 6000  
Matthew Floris [matthew.floris@sothebys.com](mailto:matthew.floris@sothebys.com)  
Rosie Chester [rosie.chester@sothebys.com](mailto:rosie.chester@sothebys.com)  
**New York** +1 212 606 7176  
Darrell Rocha [darrell\\_rocha@sothebys.com](mailto:darrell_rocha@sothebys.com)

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\*Estimates do not include buyer's premium. Prices achieved include the hammer price plus buyer's premium and are net of any fees paid to the purchaser where the purchaser provided an irrevocable bid.

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