



William Kent: Designing Georgian Britain

Organised by the Bard Graduate Center, New York City and the V&A

22 March – 13 July 2014

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A collaboration between the V&A and the Bard Graduate Center examines the life and work of William Kent (1685-1748), the leading architect and designer of early Georgian Britain. The exhibition celebrates Kent's oeuvre over four decades (1709-48) when Britain defined itself as a new nation with the act of union with Scotland (1707) and the accession of a new Hanoverian Royal Family (1714).

Kent was a polymath, turning his hand to painting, sculpture, architecture, interior decoration, furniture, metalwork, book illustration, theatrical design, costume and landscape gardening. The exhibition demonstrates how Kent's artistic ingenuity and inventiveness led him to play a dominant role in defining British taste and a new design aesthetic for the period.

The exhibition brings together nearly 200 examples of William Kent's work including architectural drawings for prominent buildings such as the Treasury (1732-37) and Horse Guards (1745-59) at Whitehall, spectacular gilt furniture from Houghton Hall (1725-35) and Chiswick House (1727-38), designs for landscape gardens at Rousham (1738-41) and Stowe (c.1728-40; c.1746-47), as well as paintings, illustrated books and Kent's model for the Royal palace that was never built (1735), demonstrating the versatility of the 'Kentian' style. Many of his most renowned works still survive in country houses around Britain and the exhibition draws together important loans from private collections alongside objects from the V&A's own collection.

Like many of his contemporaries, Kent travelled to Italy where he came under the influence of Italian Baroque art, the splendours of the Roman palazzi and the architectural style of Andrea Palladio. From 1709 to 1719, he studied painting in Rome and travelled throughout the country where he met important figures on the Grand Tour such as Richard Boyle, third Earl of Burlington, who would become Kent's best-known patron, securing him a series of career-defining commissions back in Britain. The opening sections of the exhibition show examples of the drawings which Kent made whilst on tour, including preparatory sketches for early assignments such as his fresco in the church of San Giuliano dei Fiamminghi in Rome (1717).

Kent is perhaps best known for the interiors and landscape gardens he designed for some of Britain's grand country estates. On display are rare examples of Kent's richly gilded and upholstered furniture made for Chiswick House, Wanstead House and Houghton Hall,

alongside architectural plans and detailed drawings he made for these commissions. Newly-produced contextual films demonstrate the grandeur of his vision for Houghton and Holkham, and reveal his pioneering approach to garden design at Chiswick, Rousham and Stowe.

The Kentian style was adopted by many of the most powerful patrons of Georgian Britain who in time secured Kent important Royal commissions and brought him to public attention. One section of the exhibition is devoted to Kent's designs for the new Royal Family including those he produced for Frederick, Prince of Wales's Royal Barge (1732), Queen Caroline's Library at St James' Palace (1736-37) and the Hermitage in Richmond Gardens (1730-31) together with spectacular examples of silver including a chandelier commissioned for the Royal palace in Hanover.

The exhibition also examines Kent's projects for the redesign of Georgian London. On display are architectural renderings and elevations for the facade of Horse Guards (1753) which show Kent's lasting impact on the appearance of London today. Other architectural projects were never realised including the proposals he submitted for a new House of Parliament (1733-40) and interiors for the House of Lords at Westminster (1735-36), designs for which are on display.

2014 marks the tercentenary of the Hanoverian accession to the throne, a crucial moment in which the new British nation created an original sense of style that is still recognised across the world today. The exhibition is one of many events taking place across Britain and Germany in celebration of the 300th anniversary, for further details visit:

<http://www.london.diplo.de/300yearsBritishGermanRoyalTies>

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Notes to Editors

- *William Kent: Designing Georgian Britain* has been co-curated by Julius Bryant, Keeper of Word & Image, V&A, and Dr. Susan Weber, Director of the Bard Graduate Center.
- The exhibition launched at the Bard Graduate Center, New York City from 20 September 2013 – 9 February 2014 and opens at the V&A from 22 March – 13 July 2014.
- The V&A is open daily 10.00 – 17.45 and until 22.00 every Friday.
- The exhibition is the third in a series of research collaborations between the Bard Graduate Center, New York City and the V&A that re-examines the great tastemakers of Georgian Britain (*James 'Athenian' Stuart*, 2006-7 and *Thomas Hope*, 2008).
- The exhibition has been generously supported by The Ruddock Foundation for the Arts. With thanks to the American Friends of the V&A through the generosity of The Selz Foundation.

Ticket Information

Tickets: £8 (concessions available)

V&A Members go free

Tickets on sale January 2014 visit www.vam.ac.uk

About the Bard Graduate Center: Decorative Arts, Design History, Material Culture, New York City

Founded in 1993 by Dr. Susan Weber, the Bard Graduate Center, an international study and exhibition center of Bard College, has aimed to become the leading graduate institution for the study of the cultural history of the material world. Through its rigorous MA and PhD programmes, the Center promotes new levels of scholarship while its exhibitions and education programmes enhance the general public's understanding and appreciation of the decorative arts, design history, and material culture.

Exhibition Publication

William Kent: Designing Georgian Britain, edited by Susan Weber presents 21 essays by leading scholars of 18th-century British art and design, including Julius Bryant (co-curator), Geoffrey Beard, John Harris, John Dixon Hunt, Frank Salmon, Charles Hind and David Watkin. The book is published by Yale University Press and is richly illustrated with over 600 colour images, including the pieces featured in the exhibition. A chronology of Kent's projects, an exhibition checklist, and an extensive bibliography round out this scholarly publication.

For PRESS information on the book please contact Celia Graham-Dixon on +44 (0)207 079 4900 or email celia.grahamdixon@yaleup.co.uk

For further PRESS information about the V&A exhibition *William Kent: Designing Georgian Britain* please contact Alice Evans in the V&A press office on +44 (0) 20 7942 2508 or email a.evans@vam.ac.uk

A selection of press images are available to download free of charge from pressimages.vam.ac.uk

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