

Heart and sole

Footprint design telling a story of lost love stars among a selection of 'out of the ordinary' collectables lots sold at auction.

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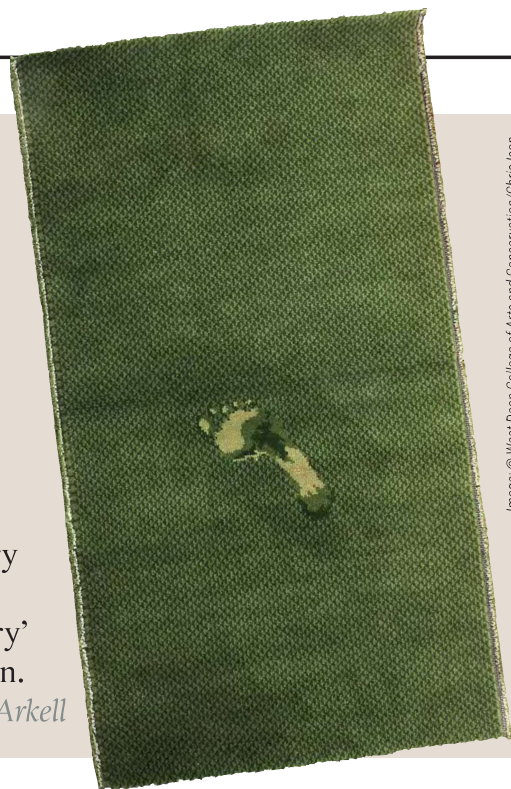
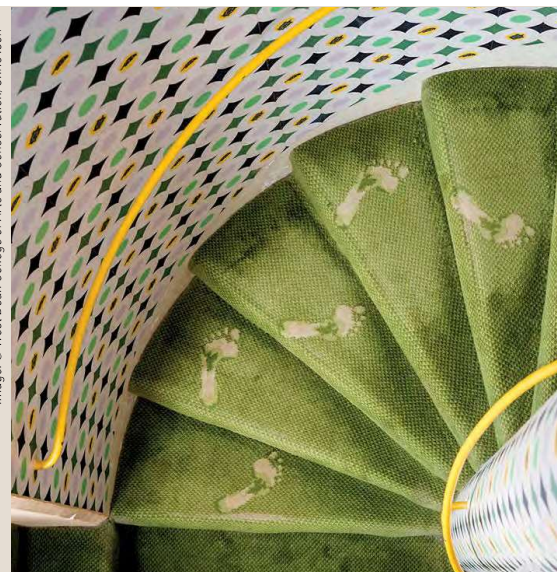


Image: © West Dean College of Arts and Conservation/Chris Ison



Left: fragment of trial for the Tilly Losch footprint creation that can still be seen in West Dean college, above.

Les Ballets was a ballet season put on in Paris in 1933 and financed by Edward James, the millionaire and sponsor of the Surrealists.

It was staged partly to win back his wife, the famous dancer Tilly Losch. However, although she did decide to take part she left him again afterwards.

A lot sold at **Sworders' (25% buyer's premium)** Out of the Ordinary auction on February 7 including two large, rare posters and a programme for *Les Ballets* also featured an intriguing 2ft 11in x 15in (90 x 38cm) section of carpet designed with Losch's footprint.

After that 1933 season, the whole company were invited to West Dean, James' large country house near Chichester in Sussex. It had become a centre for Surrealism supporting artists such as Magritte and Dalí (and is now home to the West Dean College of Arts and Conservation, which James founded).

James saw Losch's footprints going up the stairs in Monkton House, his private residence on the West Dean estate, after she came out of the bath. He had the image woven into a carpet designed by him in collaboration with interior designer Norris Wakefield. The college says it is "significant as an early example of James' commissioning of Surrealist interiors".

The piece offered at Sworders was a trial for the finished carpet.

One story goes that when Losch left James he had another carpet commissioned for another house on the estate with the feet replaced with the paws of his wolfhound.

The footprint carpet was subsequently moved to West Dean House when the couple divorced in 1934. It can be seen on the spiral staircase in West Dean college.

Austrian dancer, choreographer, actress, and painter Losch had married James in 1930.

One of the posters shows a dramatic image of Losch wearing the huge dress designed by Russian-born Surrealist painter Pavel Tchelitchew, who also created the poster.

The items were all gifted to the consignor here by the artist and designer Martin Battersby.

The carpet had minor edge wear, the programme some loose pages and rust to the staples, and the posters – the largest 4ft x 2ft 7in (1.2m x 80cm) – had foxing and some tears.

Estimated at £700-900, the lot sold for £4200 in Stansted Mountfitchet, Essex. Sworders said: "It was purchased over the phone by a private UK collector with a very specific interest in Edward James. He told us that he'd previously been collecting all manner of items relating to James, and mounted several exhibitions relating to him."

Iron Lady

Memorabilia given to Margaret Thatcher but found in a waste disposal site in London 20 years ago formed part of the auction.

"The collection came to us from someone whose father had owned

a storage company during the 1980s, and helped move Margaret Thatcher out of No 10 in November 1990," said Otto Billstrom, 20th century design specialist at Sworders.

"Her people put these pieces in storage, it was probably forgotten about, and our vendor's father ended up salvaging them when they were sent for disposal a decade later."

Of particular note was a large 22in (56cm) bronzed plaster bust of President Ronald Reagan purportedly presented to Thatcher by 'the Gipper' as a gift during the state visit in 1982. Estimated at £500-700, it made £9000 online.

An (unsigned) oil painting of the Iron Lady seated in blue dress on a green armchair carried a brass plaque detailing its presentation *From a true friend and admirer with sincere best wishes on your birthday, 13th October 1995*. The dedication was signed by Prof Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie, a minister and future prime minister of Indonesia. It took £1100.

Another lot comprised a walnut box bearing a plaque inscribed

Presented to Former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher on the occasion of Her visit to Bellingham International Airport, March 15 1991. It was offered together with a (more commercially attractive) photograph presented to Thatcher by the SAS after the storming of the Iranian embassy



Left: bust of Ronald Reagan purportedly presented to Margaret Thatcher – £9000 at Sworders.

at the end of the siege in 1980. The framed photo of the PM flanked by three soldiers in gas masks holding assault rifles is inscribed *To Mrs Margaret Thatcher From 22 SAS Regt*. The two items sold for £1500.

Sworders said the Thatcher lots were "bought privately by an individual who had some personal ties to Mrs Thatcher, from where the bust once came. Margaret Thatcher memorabilia is an interesting field, as people who collect the pieces either had some form of personal connection to her, or are devoted sympathisers with her (and incidentally Ronald Reagan's) politics, and the buyer here falls into that demographic."

Sworders has been holding its Out of the Ordinary auctions since 2018. Head of sale Mark Wilkinson said they "continue to grow and evolve. However, they are a sale that needs to be carefully curated so there is balance within the sections and the sales are not too large. It's very easy to take in too much of one category, like taxidermy for instance.

"Our annual February sale this year got the balance spot on with a good mix of high-quality unusual art and collectables with also some craziness throughout.

"The market is looking for the unusual, which these sales supply in spades. We have, however, learnt over the years what does sell and what does not, or what is just too weird.

"The Out of the Ordinary sales are far from the highest turnover auctions for Sworders, but they do constantly create more free columns of press editorial than any other sale." ■