



MEDIA RELEASE

NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA

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Pucker up, Melbourne: Salvador Dalí's iconic *Mae West Lips* Sofa goes on display at NGV International

NGV International | From 1 July 2024 | FREE



4 July 2024: Resembling two scarlet-red lips, Salvador Dalí's iconic Surrealist design *Mae West Lips Sofa*, manufactured in 1937–38, will go on display at NGV International from 1 July 2024. Acquired by the NGV in 2023 as part of its Annual Appeal, which invites philanthropic contributions from the community, the work is one of only two in the world featuring an eye-catching red-and-black colourway and the last of Dalí's five sofas to enter a public collection.

Salvador Dalí first travelled to the United States in 1934, and from that point onwards he was fascinated by American culture and Hollywood. Mae West was at the time one of the highest paid

female actors in the United States and the infamous innuendos and double entendres of her film and stage work appealed greatly to Dalí's surrealist sensibility.

The design for the sofa is based on Dalí's gouache and photographic composition, *Mae West's Face which May be Used as a Surrealist Apartment* (Art Institute of Chicago), in which the actress' facial features and hair are incorporated into the interior design of an apartment. Her platinum blonde hair was hung over a curtain rod to provide drapes framing the room, her eyes were formed by two framed pictures, her nose became a fireplace, and her lips formed a two-tone sofa.

Dalí turned his idea into physical form after he visited Surrealist patron Edward James in London. Three sofas – in pink and red with gold fringe – were produced for James's London home. A separate pair, red with elaborate black woven fringing emulating the epaulettes worn by matadors, were produced by the interior designers Green & Abbott for the dining room at James's country estate, Monkton House, in West Sussex.

Both of these red and black sofas remained in place at Monkton House until 2016. One of the pair is now held in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Its companion entered the NGV Collection through the generous support of the philanthropic community as part of the 2023 NGV Annual Appeal. The NGV sincerely thanks Paula Fox AO and Fox Family Foundation, Mavourneen Cowen, Tim Fairfax AC & Gina Fairfax AC, The Betsy and Ollie Polasek Endowment, King Family Foundation, John and Jenny Fast, Ralph Ward-Ambler AM and Barbara Ward-Ambler, along with donors to the 2023 NGV Foundation Annual Dinner and 2023 NGV Annual Appeal in memory of Robert J. Wylde for their generous contributions.

Tony Ellwood AM, Director, NGV said: 'Salvador Dalí's instantly recognisable *Mae West Lips Sofa* is one of the most famous pieces of twentieth-century design and a true icon of Surrealism. Thanks to the generosity of our donors to the NGV's 2023 Annual Appeal, this important sculpture will join the NGV Collection for the enjoyment of generations to come.'

Celebrating 100 years since the founding of the Surrealist movement, Dalí's *Mae West Lips Sofa* will be displayed alongside a newly acquired copy of the 1924 *Surrealist Manifesto* by the movement's founder André Breton. In the manifesto, Breton famously defined Surrealism as the expression of "the actual functioning of thought" in its purest form.

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Salvador Dalí's *Mae West Lips Sofa* and André Breton's *Surrealist Manifesto* are on display from 1 July 2024 at NGV International, St Kilda Road. Entry is FREE. For further information, please visit the NGV website: [NGV.MELBOURNE](https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au)

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IMAGES:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/wnuwmmxx2zchxt82qlyw/AFEZ1ImW2mjWD0LxiSh4v8o?rlkey=mrvsza111319uq9ly3wrwwbss&dl=0>

Image credit: Salvador Dalí, *Mae West Lips Sofa* 1937-38 (1938), Purchased with funds donated by Paula Fox AO and Fox Family Foundation, Mavourneen Cowen, Tim Fairfax AC & Gina Fairfax AC, The Betsy and Ollie Polasek Endowment, King Family Foundation, John and Jenny Fast, and Ralph Ward-Ambler AM and Barbara Ward-Ambler, donors to the 2023 NGV Foundation Annual Dinner and 2023 NGV Annual Appeal in memory of Robert J. Wylde, 2023. © Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí. VEGAP/Copyright Agency, 2023

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