The Great Exhibition

In 1850 a royal commission was established, with the Prince as chairman, to organise an international exhibition celebrating technological and artistic accomplishments. Prince Albert gave it the title of ‘The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations in 1851’. Housed in the Crystal Palace, an enormous glass building designed by Sir Joseph Paxton in London’s Hyde Park, the Great Exhibition of 1851 became a symbol of the Victorian age and was perhaps Prince Albert’s greatest achievement.

The Exhibition brought together over 8,000 exhibitors and a vast array of manufactures and decorative art from around the world, covering everything from furniture and fabric to machinery and musical instruments. It was divided into sections according to geography or subject matter. Belgium, Canada, China, France, India and Spain were among the countries represented, but the majority of exhibitors were British.

On 1 May 1851 Queen Victoria opened the Exhibition in front of thousands of people. She described the occasion as ‘one of the greatest and most glorious days of our lives, with which to my pride and joy the name of my beloved Albert is for ever associated!’ The enthusiastic reception of the crowds led to the first royal appearance on the new balcony at Buckingham Palace, an addition to the building made by Prince Albert and still used by Members of the Royal Family today.

Queen Victoria was so captivated by the Great Exhibition that she visited 33 times during its run from May to October 1851. Despite the official guide book stating that no objects other than catalogues, refreshments and flowers were to be sold, the Queen made numerous purchases through one of the Commissioners of the Exhibition, Charles Wentworth Dilke. These included bronze sculptures, jewellery, pistols, porcelain and a Swiss writing desk. The Queen and Prince Albert also lent many items for display, such as a glittering pair of crystal candelabra by F. & C. Osler & Co.

From the very beginning the Great Exhibition was planned as a temporary spectacle. Perhaps with this in mind, the Queen and Prince Albert commissioned a permanent record to be made as widely available as possible. In 1854 lithographs of watercolours by Joseph Nash and Louis Haghe were published as a set. The Ivory Chair of State, presented to the Queen by the Maharaja of
Travancore, can be seen centre stage in the India section of the Exhibition.

The Great Exhibition was a huge success and was visited by six million visitors, setting a precedent for many international exhibitions that followed over the next 100 years. Profits from the Exhibition were used to buy land in the South Kensington area of London, close to the site of the Crystal Palace. A number of art and science institutions were subsequently established there, including the Natural History Museum, the Royal Albert Hall and the South Kensington Museum, the precursor to the V&A.

The Crystal Palace was dismantled and re-built in Sydenham, south London, but was destroyed by fire in 1936.

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### Works of art shown at The Great Exhibition

**Items lent by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert and included in *Victoria & Albert: Art & Love***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Maker/Designers</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tr>
<td>170</td>
<td>F. and C. Osler</td>
<td><em>Pair of fifteen-light glass candelabra, 1848</em></td>
<td>Cut glass, gilt-wood base, height 243cm, diam. 76cm. RCIN 41311</td>
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<tr>
<td>171</td>
<td>William Gibbs Rogers (1792-1875), carver; William Harry Rogers (1825-1873), designer</td>
<td><em>Cradle, 1850</em></td>
<td>Boxwood, 63 x 91 x 62cm. RCIN 1516</td>
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<td>172</td>
<td>South India (Travancore)</td>
<td><em>Throne and footstool, c.1850</em></td>
<td>Ivory, gold, diamonds, emeralds, rubies, gilt bronze, hardwood and embroidered silk velvet, throne 161 x 97 x 86.5cm, footstool 39.5 x 63.5 x 52cm. RCIN 1561</td>
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<td>175</td>
<td>Thomas Woodruff (c.1820-1902), maker; Ludwig Gruner (1801-82), designer</td>
<td><em>Console Table, c.1850</em></td>
<td>Marble, lapis lazuli, malachite and bronzed iron, 80 x 141 x 48.3cm. RCIN 41007</td>
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<tr>
<td>176</td>
<td>Elkington, Mason &amp; Co. (1842-1861), manufacturer; Ludwig Gruner (1801-1882) designer</td>
<td><em>Jewel Cabinet, 1851</em></td>
<td>Electro-plated white metal, gilt bronze, enamelled copper, porcelain and oak, 97 x 132 x 81cm. RCIN 1562</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
185  R. & S. Garrard, manufacturer; Prince Albert (1819-1861), designer; Edmund Cotterill (1795-1860), modeller
   *Centrepiece, 1842/3*
   RCIN 1570

186  Peter von Cornelius (1783-1867) and Friedrich August Stüler (1800-1865)
   *The Glaubensschild (Shield of Faith), 1842-7*
   Silver, gold, enamel and onyx, diam. 89cm
   RCIN 31605

190  Elkington, Mason & Co. (1842-1861), manufacturers; Benjamin Schlick (1796-1872) and George C. Stanton (1832-1894), designers
   *Table, 1849*
   Silver (partly gilt) and steel, 84.5 x 49 x 49cm
   RCIN 41227

354  William Kilburn (1818-1891)
   *Jenny Lind standing at a piano, 1848*
   Daguerreotype, 11.5 x 9.1cm
   RCIN 2932511

**Items purchased by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert and included in *Victoria & Albert: Art & Love***

85  Christian Daniel Rauch (1777-1857)
   *Victory, c.1851*
   Bronze, height 77.5cm
   RCIN 41615

90  Guillaume Geefs (1805-1883)
   *Paul et Virginie, 1851*
   Marble, 40 x 80.6 x 41.9cm
   RCIN 41033

173  Michael Leonz Wetli (1809-1886)
   *Writing-table, 1851*
   Sycamore, birch, maple, lime, cedar, steel and brass, 149 x 106 x 67cm
   RCIN 42714

191  Elkington, Mason & Co. (1842-1861)
   *Standing salt, 1851*
   Silver, partly gilt, 28 x 11.7cm
   RCIN 41117
202  C.G. Koenig & Sons  
Pair of percussion pistols, c.1851  
Steel, gold, platinum, elm and silver; total length 40cm, barrel length 24cm  
RCIN 62608

207  Sèvres  
Vase painted with ‘La Gloire’, 1851  
Unglazed porcelain, painted in enamels, height 48.26cm  
RCIN 34032