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A Century of Olympic Posters
17 May 2008 – 7 September 2008

To coincide with the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games and the build up to London 2012, the V&A Museum of Childhood’s summer exhibition, A Century of Olympic Posters is the first exhibition in the UK to bring together a large range of Olympic Games posters from the 1900 Paris Games to the present day.

Drawn mainly from the V&A’s internationally renowned collection of prints and posters, the exhibition will display more than 100 Olympic posters, including works by leading artists such as David Hockney, R.B. Kitaj, Andy Warhol and Victor Vasarely. As a four-yearly design challenge the posters provide fascinating snapshots of the changing artistic, political and social contexts in which they were created.

Posters are an important means of communication for the Olympic Games and shape expectations of the Games to come. The exhibition explores how the posters were used to convey messages to an international audience about the look and feel of individual Games through eye-catching and memorable imagery.

The Olympic Games – and the posters which accompanied them – often marked new beginnings. For the 1948 Games, as war-torn London looked towards a brighter future, the poster design projected a powerful image of the city combining an image of the marble statue of ‘Discobolus’ (evoking the ancient Games) with a view of the Houses of Parliament. An abstract, modernist design for the 1956 Olympic Games held in Melbourne marked the arrival of the Games in the southern hemisphere.

Other highlights on display include the Op Art poster for the 1968 Games in Mexico City which cleverly captures both the mood and artistic style of the 1960s as well as expressing the pattern-making imagery of pre-Hispanic Mexican cultures; and The Start of the Sprinters’ Dash poster by Yusaku Kamekura for Tokyo 1964, which was the first to use the medium of photography to capture the drama of modern day sportsmen in competition. Also included will be the pioneering official poster for the 1912 Stockholm Games, which was selected from a design competition and was the first to be produced in many different languages for international distribution.

In addition to the posters will be examples of the original programmes of events, a ticket from the Paris 1900 Games and an Olympic torch from London 1948. An extra display at the Museum of Childhood will be a selection of official Olympic mascots dating from the 1960s to the present day.

The exhibition will open at the V&A Museum of Childhood on 17 May and will still be on display when London becomes the official host city for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, at the Beijing closing ceremony on 24 August 2008.
exhibition will then tour to museums and galleries around the UK and internationally during the build-up to London 2012.

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Notes to Editors:

– The V&A Museum of Childhood reopened in December 2006 following an extensive £4.7m transformation. Caruso St John architects created a stunning new entrance and gallery space and made the Museum fully accessible to all visitors. The ambitious redevelopment has restored the home of the UK’s most important collection of childhood objects to its former Victorian glory with fully updated the galleries and displays, and expanded educational spaces.