ROLLS-ROYCE | MEDIA INFORMATION

PHANTOM AT 100:

A SILENT WITNESS TO A CENTURY OF ART

Wednesday 6 August 2025, Goodwood, West Sussex (EMBARGO UNTIL 13:00 BST)

* Rolls-Royce celebrates Phantom’s century-long presence in the art world
* How Phantom was connected to leading artists, and how it became art itself
* Art for every Phantom: Charles Sykes and the Spirit of Ecstasy mascot

*“For 100 years, the Rolls-Royce Phantom has moved in the same circles as the world’s leading artists. As a symbol of self-expression, Phantom has often featured in incidents of creative significance – many of them defining moments of the last decade. As we mark Phantom’s centenary, it is the perfect time to reflect on this motor car’s endlessly intriguing legacy and the artistic personalities who played a role in shaping its story.”*

**Chris Brownridge, Chief Executive, Rolls-Royce Motor Cars**

Rolls-Royce has been associated with the greatest names in contemporary art since its foundation. Masters including Salvador Dalí, Andy Warhol, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Christian ‘Bébé’ Bérard and Cecil Beaton all travelled by Rolls-Royce. Dame Laura Knight, the first woman elected to full membership of the Royal Academy of Arts, even used a Rolls-Royce as a mobile studio, painting from its interior at racecourses such as Epsom and Ascot. The world’s most notable collectors, too, were drawn to the brand, among them Jacquelyn de Rothschild, Peggy Guggenheim and Nelson Rockefeller.

However, it is Phantom, the marque’s pinnacle product which celebrates its centenary in 2025, that is most closely linked to the art world. Over eight generations and 100 years, this motor car has been owned by some of the most famous creatives in modern history. Phantom itself has been exhibited in galleries around the world as an artwork in its own right – from institutional collections, such as London’s Saatchi Gallery and the Smithsonian Design Museum in New York, to countless independent galleries and exhibition spaces.

This enduring connection between Phantom and the art world reflects a long tradition of creative exchange. Over the years, Phantom has attracted the most vivid artistic imaginations, giving rise to encounters that are as unexpected as they are unforgettable.

**SALVADOR DALÍ, THE CAULIFLOWER, AND THE FROZEN PHANTOM**

Anyone rejoicing in the title Salvador Domingo Felipe Jacinto Dalí i Domènech, Marquess of Dalí of Púbol, is always likely to attract attention. But the Spanish artist better known by his abbreviated name, Salvador Dalí, nevertheless went out of his way to occupy the limelight. Having shocked the art world with his surrealist images of nightmarish landscapes, chimeric animals, suggestive food and melting clocks, he was eager to bring his unique brand of excess and eccentricity to a wider audience.

In the winter of 1955, he was asked to give a lecture at Paris-Sorbonne University. Seeing a golden opportunity to create a moment in modern art, Dalí borrowed a friend’s black and yellow Phantom and filled it with 500kg (1,100lb) of cauliflowers.

After a wild ride through the streets of Paris in his brassica-laden motor car, Dalí pulled up outside the university and flung open the Phantom’s doors, sending the cauliflowers cascading to the cold December ground. How many of the 2,000-strong audience now remember his exposition on *‘Phenomenological Aspects of the Paranoiac Critical Method’* is debatable, but his arrival before the lecture became legendary.

To honour this defiantly surreal performance, Rolls-Royce has commissioned a contemporary artist to create an original artwork inspired by this gloriously eccentric, cauliflower-filled Phantom moment.

This memorable moment was not the only time Dalí immortalised Phantom. An artwork he produced for a 1934 illustrated book titled *Les Chants de Maldoror* (The Songs of Maldoror) incorporated a surreal interpretation of Phantom. In this piece, Dalí depicts the motor car stranded in a bleak, icy landscape, seemingly frozen in desolation. The image is both elegant and eerie, epitomising Dalí’s knack for juxtaposing opulence with the absurd.

**ANDY WARHOL AND MORE THAN 15 MINUTES OF FAME**

Dalí spent every autumn and winter in New York City, where he based himself in a suite at the St Regis Hotel in Manhattan. It was here, in 1965, that he first met a young visual artist named Andy Warhol. This seminal moment in art was captured by British photographer David McCabe, who later recalled: “Dalí turned the whole event into theatre. Andy was petrified”.

Seen by many as Dalí’s natural successor, Warhol became one of the most influential artists of the 20th century. Unlike his mentor, however, he actually owned a Phantom; a 1937 model that had been converted into a shooting brake in around 1947. In 1972, Warhol and his Swiss agent, Bruno Bischofberger, happened to pass an antique shop in Zurich where it was on sale. Warhol bought it on the spot and shipped it to New York. He owned the car until 1978, when he sold it to his friend and manager, Fred Hughes.

In tribute to Pop Art’s lasting impact, Rolls-Royce has commissioned a contemporary artist to reimagine Phantom in the style that propelled this bold style from Studio 54 into the cultural mainstream.

**AN ARTWORK FOR EVERY PHANTOM: CHARLES SYKES AND THE SPIRIT OF ECSTASY**

This tradition of artistic collaboration and connection with the world’s most famous and provocative creatives dates back to Rolls-Royce’s earliest days, when a fine artist would sculpt the brand’s most enduring symbol.

Since 1911, Rolls-Royce motor cars have been graced with the most famous and evocative mascot in the world: the Spirit of Ecstasy. This defining feature of the brand’s iconography was originally created by talented and prolific artist Charles Robinson Sykes.

Following a scholarship at the Royal College of Art in London, in 1902 he was hired by The Hon. John Douglas-Scott-Montagu, 2nd Baron Montagu of Beaulieu, to provide the illustrated elements of his magazine, *The Car Illustrated*. Later, Montagu asked Sykes to create a series of paintings depicting his Rolls-Royce Silver Ghosts. These images caught the attention of Claude ‘CJ’ Johnson, the marque’s first commercial managing director, who commissioned six Sykes oils showing Rolls-Royces arriving at locations including the opera, the golf links, and the salmon stream, for the company’s 1910-11 catalogue.

Soon afterwards – and despite Sir Henry Royce’s antipathy to the concept – CJ had decided Rolls-Royce needed an official mascot. He commissioned Sykes to create a sculpture inspired by the imposing Greek statue *The Winged Victory of Samothrace*, which he had admired at the Louvre in Paris. Sykes captured its impact, but created a more ethereal figure that better expressed his experience of travelling in a Rolls-Royce. Indeed, his daughter Jo recalled that he was “very impressed with the smoothness and speed of the car and imagined that even so delicate a thing as a fairy could ride on the bonnet without losing her balance”.

Whatever Sykes’ primary inspiration had been, CJ was delighted with the new mascot and appointed Sykes as sole supplier in 1911. From then on, Sykes personally supervised his production team, with his daughter Jo succeeding him in 1928. Until Rolls-Royce took production in-house in 1948, every Phantom owner may therefore have unknowingly owned a Sykes original.

Though now best remembered for his work with Rolls-Royce, Sykes enjoyed a successful career as an artist. His work remains highly regarded and is held in several institutional collections, including the British Museum and the V&A in London.

**PHANTOM: A CANVAS AND A CATALYST**

As Phantom enters its second century, its artistic legacy feels more relevant than ever. For creatives and collectors, it remains both a canvas and a catalyst that offers visionary thinkers something rare: a form of expression that is personal, timeless, and charged with purpose.

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FURTHER INFORMATION

You can find all our press releases and press kits, as well as a wide selection of high resolution, downloadable photographs and video footage at our media website, [PressClub](https://www.press.rolls-roycemotorcars.com/rolls-royce-motor-cars-pressclub).

You can also follow the marque on social media: [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/company/rolls-royce-motor-cars/); [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/user/RollsRoyceMotorCars); [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/rollsroycecars/); and [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/rollsroycemotorcars).

EDITORS’ NOTES

Rolls-Royce Motor Cars is a true luxury house, creating the world’s most recognised, revered and desirable handcrafted Bespoke products for its international clientele.

There are over 2,500 people working at the Home of Rolls-Royce at Goodwood, West Sussex. This comprises both its global headquarters and Centre of Luxury Manufacturing Excellence – the only place in the world where Rolls-Royce motor cars are designed, engineered and meticulously built by hand. An [independent study](https://www.press.rolls-roycemotorcars.com/rolls-royce-motor-cars-pressclub/article/detail/T0414618EN/%C2%A34bn-for-uk-plc%E2%80%99%3A-rolls-royce-motor-cars-%E2%80%93-the-great-british-success-story) by the London School of Economics & Political Science confirms that since the company first launched at Goodwood in 2003, it has contributed more than £4 billion to the UK economy and adds more than £500 million in economic value every year.

Rolls-Royce Motor Cars is a wholly owned subsidiary of the BMW Group and is a completely separate, unrelated company from Rolls-Royce plc, the manufacturer of aircraft engines and propulsion systems.

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