



# Surreal Eden: Edward James and Las Pozas

*Margaret Hooks*

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Icons of surrealism such as the Lobster Telephone and Mae West Lips sofa would not exist if it weren't for Edward James. Born into fabulous wealth his father was a scion of the Phelps-Dodge dynasty, his mother a beautiful socialite said to be the daughter of King Edward VII James amassed one of the finest collections of surrealist art and was the major benefactor of Salvador Dalí, Leonora Carrington, and René Magritte. He lavished his fortune on an ostentatious lifestyle and landmark artistic ventures such as Dalí's Dream of Venus pavilion at the 1939 World's Fair and a series of spectacular Balanchine ballets for his wife, the exotic Viennese dancer Tilly Losch.

Turning his back on the strictures of England, a faltering career as a poet, and his failed marriage, James followed the movable feast around Europe and then headed for America and 1940s Los Angeles, where he was a member of the colony of artists and writers that included Man Ray, Isamu Noguchi, and Christopher Isherwood. But it was ultimately in Mexico that he felt at home and became an artist in his own right, creating the remarkable Las Pozas, in the remote town of Xilitla, an area abounding in waterfalls and wild orchids. Working with local Otomi Indians, he sculpted the jungle, illuminated the forest, and built parapets in the sky. Award-winning biographer Margaret Hooks tells the bizarre, often tragic tale of his life and the creation of his surreal masterpiece, captured exquisitely in photographs by Sally Mann, Michael Schuyt, Lourdes Almeida, and others.

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