



# Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, 1909-1929: Twenty Years That Changed the World of Art

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DIAGHILEV'S BALLETS RUSSES, 1909–1929  
TWENTY YEARS THAT CHANGED THE WORLD OF ART

A CENTENARY EXHIBITION BY

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*Thursday, April 16 – Friday, August 28, 2009*

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THE BALLETS RUSSES OF SERGE DIAGHILEV claims a special position, even a unique one, in the history of the performing arts, in terms of a reawakening of interest in ballet in Europe and America, in bringing Russian culture to the attention of the rest of the western world, and in presenting ballet as an equal partnership of movement, music, and visual design, in which all of the creative participants—composers, designers, and choreographers, as well as the inventors of plots and scenarios—could exert an influence upon the other aspects of their collaborative works.

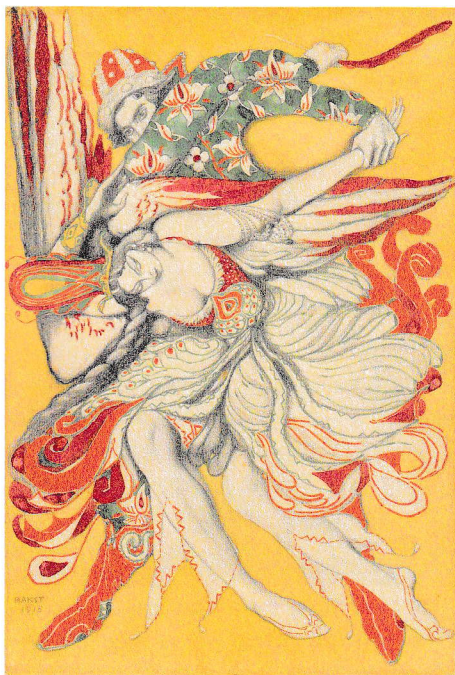
This was an enterprise that appealed especially to privileged and cultured populations in the largest cities, but it was to exert an effect and influence on the future of ballet that extended beyond those metropolises and endured beyond the impressive immediate accomplishment of having presented some seventy individual ballets that were created and performed by many of the significant artists of the early years of the twentieth century.

Serge Diaghilev was responsible for having brought together and given important opportunities to such emerging creative artists of that time as Stravinsky, Poulenc, Prokofiev, Picasso, de Chirico, and Miro, as well as a number of leading Russian painters, including Bakst, Benois, Roerich, Goncharova, and Larionov. Many of the greatest Russian dancers, among them Nijinsky, Fokine, Karsavina, Kschessinska, and Pavlova, danced for Diaghilev; and he fostered the careers of many more dancers who were nurtured under the auspices of the Ballets Russes. It was Diaghilev, perhaps more than any other figure, who was responsible both for raising the prominence of the male dancer and for seizing upon the sensual possibilities of ballet. In him, management and administration were elevated to a creative art.

Especially in its earlier years, the Ballets Russes was grounded most of all in Russian culture: amid a number of modernist, advanced works, Diaghilev brought out ballets based on traditional Russian themes, created by Russian-born artists, composers, and choreographers, and performed by dancers trained in the Russian style. Diaghilev also revived a number of representative ballets and operas from the nineteenth-century Russian tradition.

The Ballets Russes began on a small scale: the first season consisted only of a few weeks in Paris, with no immediate expectation of permanency; and the second season, limited to Paris and brief appearances in two other cities, was nearly as brief. It was the third season, in 1911, that brought the Ballets Russes also to London, where it truly caught fire; from that time, performing now under Diaghilev's own name, the company was eagerly followed and enthusiastically reported, as it grew in size, in repertory, in prestige, and in fashion.

It could be said that in Diaghilev the role of the producer had become



much like that of a curator. The Ballets Russes, for all that they represented the individual creative contributions of composers such as Stravinsky and de Falla, and of artists such as Bakst and Picasso, represented Diaghilev's own aesthetic convictions and realized his own artistic intentions. Those personal convictions and predilections were not permanent and unchanging, and they reflected to some extent political and sociological realities over those twenty turbulent and eventful years. But there was perhaps never quite a parallel circumstance in the history of the arts in which the tastes and personal influence of one person had such an effect on the future of the world of art.

### THE EXHIBITION

THE YEAR 2009 is the centenary of the founding of the Ballets Russes. "The World of Art," the phrase we have chosen to use within our title, is not only a broad declaration of the impact and influence of the Ballets Russes, but it is in fact a translation of the title of a periodical in support of modern art, "Mir Istkusstva," which Diaghilev edited in St. Petersburg, and which first brought him recognition.

Both the exhibition, and the symposium planned in connection with the exhibition, pay tribute to Diaghilev as a genius among impresarios and

entrepreneurs, as well as to the celebrated repertory of ballets that were created under his supervision, and to the creators and performers whose collaboration brought them about. We hope these presentations will also bring to life the beauty and impact of the works that resulted from the historic collaborative enterprise of the Ballets Russes.

The exhibition has been organized by Fredric Woodbridge Wilson, Curator of the Harvard Theatre Collection. Its more than 200 original documents and art works are drawn from the holdings of the Harvard Theatre Collection, in fact from many of the individual collections within this large department of the Harvard College Library.

It is intended that this exhibition should narrate—however episodically, as is inevitably the case with exhibitions—the history of Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, the creation of the individual ballets, and the life of Diaghilev; and to convey to its audience some sense of why this artistic undertaking was uniquely celebrated in its time.

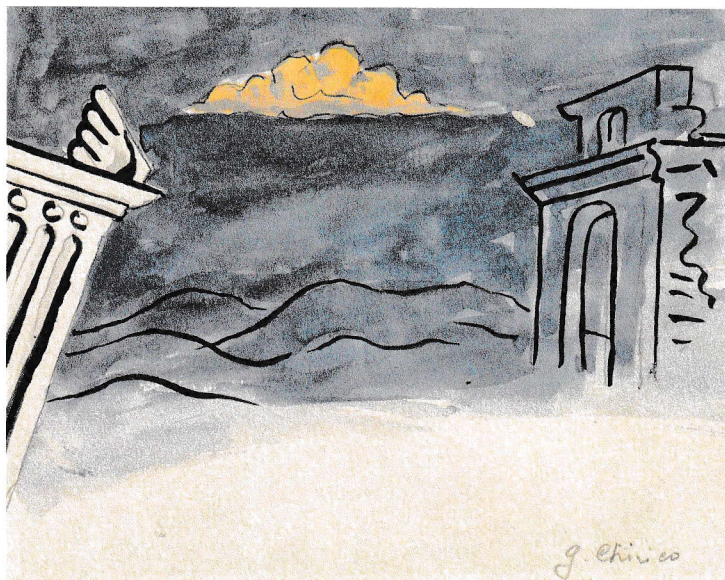
To many viewers, this exhibition will appear to be, in the first place, a display of fine art, supplemented by documents that provide those art works with some degree of context. This would not be altogether a mistaken impression, given the importance and popularity of much of the visual art associated with the Ballets Russes, although in fact the exhibition was planned with the manuscripts and documents placed firstly, to be illustrated by the works of art.





Furthermore, the worth of an example of visual art in a theatrical collection has less to do with its perfection of execution and its condition of preservation—in short, with its beauty—than with its ingenuity of conception and its suitability to a particular dramatic situation, musical or choreographic treatment, story, or premise. It is often the signs of process and use—revisions, annotations, and wear—that not only attest to its authenticity but bear witness to its theatrical function. And since theatrical designs, to take the largest category of visual art, serve most often as guides to the fabrication of a utilitarian stage property or decoration, and usually are not in themselves the end-products, or even close likenesses of the end-products, so draftsmanship *per se* is often not the most important criterion by which they should be judged. Sometimes the relative homeliness of a rendering may belie its true significance.

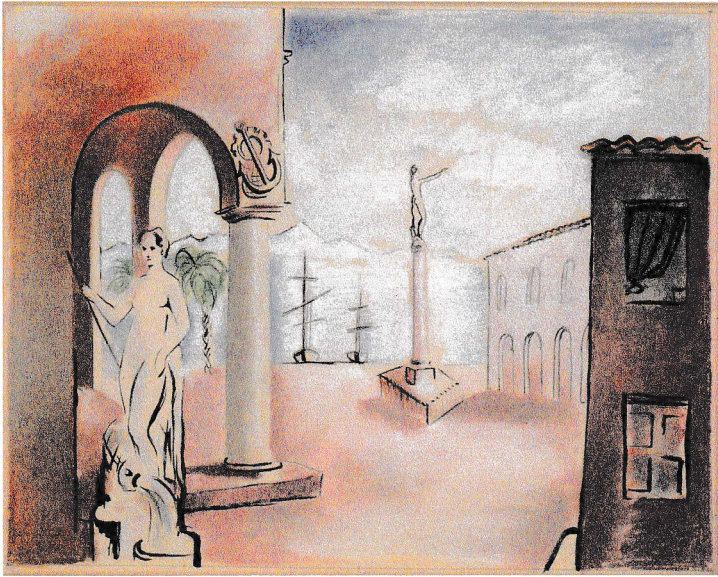
Within the setting of a large research library, one that is freely available to and used by a worldwide community of scholars, our exhibitions have a separate and parallel purpose. That purpose is to show, as persuasively as possible, the attractions of original sources—manuscripts, art work, photographs, programs, and many other types of material—as the foundation for historical research. In an exhibition on a subject for which the Harvard Theatre Collection contains such a wealth of material from which to draw, as in the present instance, we hope to show the possibilities for research that are uniquely available in the largest collections, in which items that were separately acquired, and which are often very different in nature, can complement, supplement, and



inform one another—design with design, portrait with letter, program with photograph, and so on. To foster historical research, or future stage production, or future artistic creativity, is the first purpose of collections like this one, and public exhibitions are often an effective way to bring their holdings to the notice of those who are best able to make productive use of them.

There is no single way to approach an exhibition of this kind: it makes just as much sense to follow the attractions of one's own eye as to proceed systematically. Of course, it is necessary for any display of a collection of physical objects to be placed in some one arrangement, whereas many possible arrangements might have been possible; and all of those various juxtapositions might have told quite different versions of a story. Most of our descriptive labels are self-contained, and do not provide any particular continuity of narrative. But those labels are intended to serve the original material, so we hope most earnestly that the visitor will be more inclined to examine and enjoy the actual objects than to study the accompanying texts.

The exhibition is installed in the Lamont du Pont Copeland Gallery, the Edward Sheldon Exhibition Rooms, and the George Chaffée Room, all of which are located on the main floor of the Nathan Marsh Pusey Library. Pusey Library, which is located in Harvard Yard to the left side of Widener Library, as one faces the Widener front steps, is open from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on weekdays. (The library is closed in evenings and on weekends.) The exhibition is open to the public without charge.



## SELECTED EXHIBITION HIGHLIGHTS

### *Original Costume and Scene Designs*

- Scene and costume designs by Alexandre Benois for the ballet *Petrouchka*.
- Scene, costume, and curtain designs by Natalia Goncharova for *Le Coq d'Or*.
- Costume designs by Nicholas Roerich for *The Rite of Spring* and the *Polovtsian Dances*.
- Scene and costume designs by Robert Edmond Jones for *Till Eulenspiegel*, choreographed by Vaslav Nijinsky, the only ballet designed by an American artist and the only ballet that received its premiere in the United States.
- Costume designs by Léon Bakst for ten ballets, including *Schéhérazade*, *Le Dieu Bleu*, *The Firebird*, *Daphnis et Chloé*, *The Legend of Joseph*, *Papillons*, *L'Après-cmidi d'un Faune*, *Les Femmes de Bonne Humeur*, and *The Sleeping Princess*.
- Scene and costume designs and sketches by European modernist, avant-garde, and surrealist artists Pablo Picasso (*Mercur*, *Parade*), Giorgio de Chirico (*Le Bal*), Pedro Pruna (*Les Matelots*), Naum Gabo (*La Chatte*), and Henri Matisse (*Le Rossignol*).
- Scene and costume designs by Joan Miró for the ballet *Roméo et Juliette*, accompanied by the first, rejected scene design by Christopher Wood.
- Costume designs by Boris Anisfeld for the opera and ballet *Sadko*, together with a scene design by Serge Soudeikine and several designs by Natalia Goncharova for the 1916 American tour.
- An original scene sketch by Natalia Goncharova of the setting for the ballet *Les Nozes*, showing the proposed arrangement of four grand pianos on stage.





### *Original Portraits and Scene Renderings*

- A portrait of Diaghilev by Constantine Korovine, as well as caricatures of Diaghilev by Jean Cocteau, Mikhail Larionov, and Edmond Dulac.
- A portrait of the principal ballerina Tamara Karsavina in the ballet *Cléopâtre* by George Barbier, another in *Le Pavillon d'Armide*, and a third by Pappenheim.
- A portrait of Serge Lifar in *La Chatte* by Eileen Mayo.
- A character portrait by Leon Bakst of Adolph Bolm and Tamara Karsavina in the ballet *The Firebird*.
- A large oil portrait by Jacques-Émile Blanche of the charismatic dancer Ida Rubinstein in *Schéhérazade*.
- Caricatures and informal sketches of Diaghilev and several of the Ballets Russes artists and composers by Mikhail Larionov and Jean Cocteau.

### *Original Manuscripts*

- The original manuscript by Léonide Massine of *Liturgie*, his earliest ballet for Diaghilev, but which was ultimately rejected, accompanied by his sketches and choreographic diagrams, and an original costume drawing by Natalia Goncharova.
- The original manuscript by Nicolai Sergeyev of the complete dance notations for Marius Petipa's ballet *The Sleeping Beauty*, which Sergeyev reproduced for Diaghilev in 1921 as *The Sleeping Princess*.
- The complete manuscript tabulation of the entire twenty-one-year history of

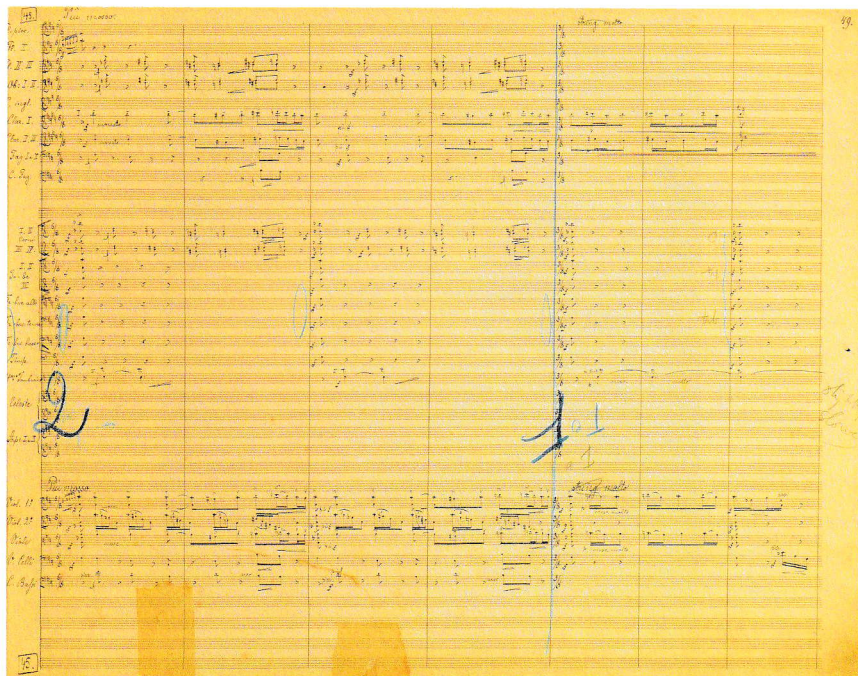
Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, by the company's régisseur, Serge Grigoriev.

*Original Musical Scores, all used in Ballets Russes performances or rehearsals*

- The manuscript orchestral score of Nicolai Tcherepnin's 1911 ballet *Narcisse*.
- Diaghilev's own copy of engraved printer's proofs of the piano score of Richard Strauss's ballet *The Legend of Joseph*, heavily annotated in Russian.
- A manuscript piano score of Vittorio Rieti's 1927 ballet *Le Bal*, with an autograph dedication by the composer to Diaghilev.
- A manuscript score of Georges Auric's ballet *Les Fâcheux*.
- The manuscript orchestral score of Vernon Duke's ballet *Zephyre et Flore*.
- A manuscript piano score of Manuel de Falla's ballet *El Corregidor y la Molinera*, which Diaghilev prevailed upon de Falla to revise and expand as *The Three-Cornered Hat*.

*Documents and Letters*

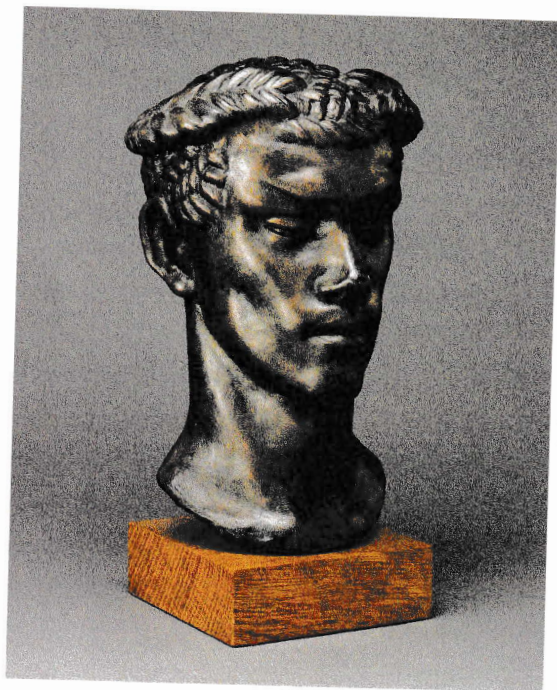
- The earliest original contracts between Diaghilev and Vaslav Nijinsky, Tamara Karsavina, Lubov Tchernicheva, Michel Fokine, George Balanchine, Léonide Massine, conductors Ernest Ansermet and Pierre Monteux, and other important figures in the Ballets Russes.
- The original contracts between Diaghilev and American presenters for the first tour in 1916 and a proposed 1925 tour that did not materialize.

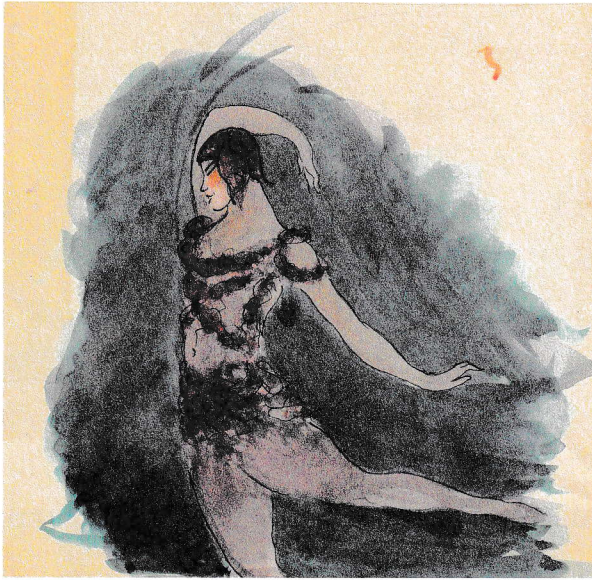


- A rental score, program, and illustrated manuscript title page for James M. Barrie's play *The Truth About the Russian Dancers*, written for and starring Tamara Karsavina in a parody of herself.
- Autograph letters from Jean Cocteau, Erik Satie, and Pablo Picasso to Serge Diaghilev regarding the ballet *Parade*, accompanied by an autograph manuscript essay by Jean Cocteau regarding the ballet.
- An autograph manuscript by Diaghilev comprising a proposed cast list for the 1921 production of *The Sleeping Princess*.
- An autograph letter from Diaghilev to his intimate friend Misia Sert.
- Letters from Walter Nouvel to Diaghilev concerning book collecting, one of Diaghilev's well-known passions, as well as letters from Diaghilev to book dealers.
- A telegram from Venice to Serge Grigoriev in Paris, informing him of Diaghilev's death in 1929.
- Medical correspondence concerning Vaslav Nijinsky's lengthy institutionalization.
- Legal papers of Romola Nijinsky, who was often in financial and legal distress.

### *Photographs*

- More than sixty photographs of original dancers in costume, as they appeared in performance with Diaghilev's Ballets Russes.
- Photographs of members of the company, including posed group photographs and



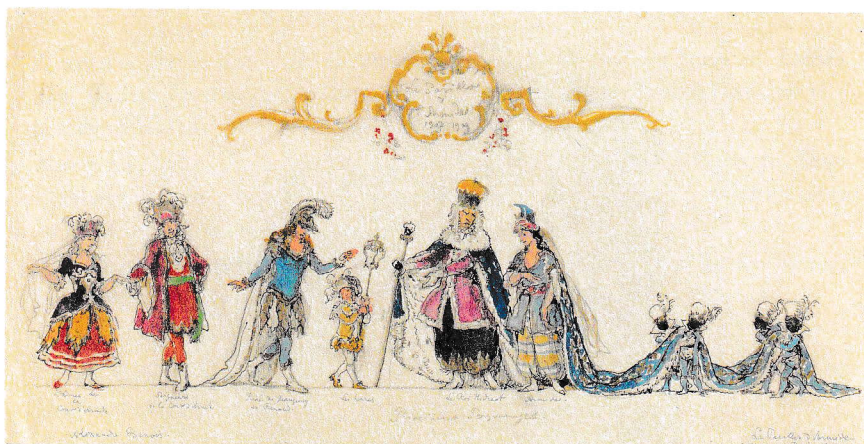


informal snapshots, on tour and out of costume.

- Personal photographs of Diaghilev and his circle, as well as choreographers and dancers, including a signed photograph of the wedding of Vaslav Nijinsky.

### *Figurines and Other Objects*

- Figurines, a bronze bust by Una Troubridge, and bronze plaques by Charpentier-Mio of Vaslav Nijinsky, in *L'Après-Midi d'un Faune*, *Schéhérazade*, and *Le Spectre de la Rose*.
- Figurines of dancers Tamara Karsavina, Michel Fokine, and Vera Fokina in the ballets *Carnaval*, *Cleopatra*, and *Schéhérazade*.
- A menu, hand-painted by Pablo Picasso, used onstage in the ballet *The Good-Natured Ladies*.
- Original jewelry and accessories worn onstage by various Ballets Russes dancers.
- The complete series of twelve limited-edition, hand-colored illustrated booklets, *Impressions of the Russian Ballet*, published in London by Cyril Beaumont between 1918 and 1921 and largely illustrated by Ethelbert White, together with other of Beaumont's important publications about the Ballets Russes, and four hand-colored prints by White of scenes from the Ballets Russes.
- An original wooden trunk used during the Ballets Russes' 1916 American tour.
- An extremely large ("elephant folio") album compiled by one of Diaghilev's most important patrons, the Marchioness of Ripon, containing many photographs by the Baron de Meyer as well as original works of art by Jean Cocteau and others—one of three volumes, all of which are in the Harvard Theatre Collection.



## EXHIBITION ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND CREDITS

Fredric Woodbridge Wilson, Curator  
ORGANIZATION, SELECTION, DESIGN, RESEARCH, AND WRITING

Thomas M. Garrett  
MATTING, FRAMING, AND MOUNTING

Diana Limbach and Iris M. Fanger  
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Pamela Madsen  
COORDINATION AND SYMPOSIUM MANAGEMENT

Margaret McMahon and Howard R. Turner  
Houghton Library Collections and Programs Staff  
ORGANIZATION ASSISTANCE

Weissman Preservation Center  
CONSERVATION AND MOUNTING

Harvard College Library Imaging Services  
DIGITIZATION AND PHOTOGRAPHY

## COLLECTION DONORS

WE ARE MOST GRATEFUL to the many donors of collections and individual collection items that have been drawn upon in this exhibition, and for the endowed funds that have been used to make purchases of items that are shown in the exhibition. These donors and funds are acknowledged in the captions



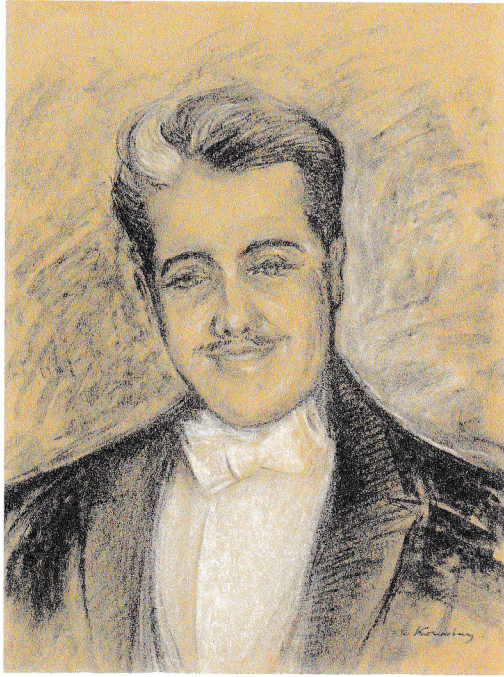
and labels that are associated with the individual items in the exhibition. Among the collections that have been included in the exhibition are the following:

- The Howard D. Rothschild Collection
- The Frederick R. Koch Collection
- The Stravinsky-Diaghilev Foundation Collection
- The George Chaffée Collection
- The Paul Stiga Collection
- The A. J. and Tess Pischl Collection
- The Carl Taggersell Collection
- The John M. and Ruth N. Ward Collection
- The George Balanchine Papers

#### FUNDING AND SUPPORT

The exhibition and the accompanying symposium are supported by the following endowed funds in the Harvard Theatre Collection:

- The Howard D. Rothschild Fund for the Ballets Russes of Serge Diaghilev
- The Beatrice, Benjamin, and Richard Bader Fund for the Visual Arts of the Theatre
- The Barry Bingham, Sr., Fund for Publications



The Edmond de Rothschild Foundation Fund for Dance  
The Parmenia Migel Ekstrom Memorial Fund for Dance  
The Walter Terry Memorial Fund for Dance  
The John Kasdan Fund for Dance  
as well as a gift from Mr. Melvin R. Seiden.

#### SYMPOSIUM

The New College Theatre is made available for the symposium through the courtesy of the Office for the Arts at Harvard, Jack Megan, Director, and the Harvard Dance Program, Elizabeth Bergmann, Director.

#### THE HARVARD THEATRE COLLECTION

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## IMAGES

1. *Salomé*, 1913. Tamara Karsavina as Salomé. Character portrait by George Barbier (1882–1932). Original drawing, ink and watercolor. Unpublished, but similar to a drawing published in *Album dédié à Tamar Karsavina*, Paris, 1914. Howard D. Rothschild Fund, purchased in 2002. HTC 28,029.
3. *L'Oiseau de Feu (The Firebird)*. Character portrait by Léon Bakst (1866–1924). Original drawing, gouache. Howard D. Rothschild Collection. Bequest, 1993. HTC 4,221, MS THR 414.4.13.
4. *Le Coq d'Or (The Golden Cockerel)*, 1914. Scene design by Natalia Goncharova (1881–1962), the original designer, for a London revival, 1937. Original drawing, watercolor and pencil. Frank E. Chase Fund, purchased in 1977. HTC 4,886, MS THR 422.20.
5. *Chout*, 1921. Curtain design by Mikhail Larionov (1881–1964). Original drawing, gouache. Howard D. Rothschild Collection. Bequest, 1993. HTC 4,335, MS THR 414.4.74.
6. *Le Bal*, 1929. Scene design by Giorgio di Chirico (1888–1978). Original drawing, ink and watercolor. Howard D. Rothschild Collection. Bequest, 1993. HTC 4,181, MS THR 414.4.52.
7. *Les Matelots*, 1925. Scene design by Pedro Pruna (1904–1977). Original drawing, watercolor and crayon. Howard D. Rothschild Collection. Bequest, 1993. HTC 4,336, MS THR 414.4.116.
8. *Narcisse*, 1911. Scene by Ethelbert White (1891–1972). Hand-colored print, uniform with illustrations for Cyril W. Beaumont's *Impressions of the Russian Ballet*, 1918–1921. From the Peggie Cochran Album, 1919. Howard D. Rothschild Collection. Bequest, 1992. HTC 4,307, MS THR 414.
9. *Narcisse*, 1911. Autograph manuscript full score by Nicolai Tcherepnin (1873–1945). Serge Grigoriev Archive. Howard D. Rothschild Fund, purchased in 1995. HTC MS THR 0465.214.
10. *L'Après-midi d'un Faune (The Afternoon of a Faun)*, 1912. Vaslav Nijinsky as the Faun. Portrait bust by Una Vincenzo Troubridge (1887–1963), 1913. Bronze, from a plaster original owned by Lydia Sokolova. Howard D. Rothschild Collection. Bequest, 1993. HTC 16,601, MS THR 414.1.80.
11. *Le Spectre de la Rose*, 1911. Vaslav Nijinsky as the Spectre. Character portrait by Jean Cocteau (1889–1963). Original drawing, watercolor and pencil. Reproduced as a poster, 1913. Marchioness of Ripon Albums, Vol. 1. Frederick R. Koch Collection, given in 1984. HTC 4,869, MS THR 449.
12. *Le Pavillon d'Armide*, 1909. Principal Characters. Costume design by Alexandre Benois (1870–1960), Paris, 1909. Original drawing, gouache and pencil. Howard D. Rothschild Collection. Bequest, 1993. HTC 4,225, MS THR 414.4.31.
13. *Schéhérazade*, 1910. The Blue Sultana. Character portrait by Léon Bakst (1866–1924), 1922. Original drawing, ink, watercolor, and gouache. Howard D. Rothschild Collection. Bequest, 1993. HTC 4,317, MS THR 414.4.21.
14. Serge Diaghilev (1872–1929). Portrait by Constantine Korovine (1861–1939). Original drawing, crayon and chalk. George Chaffée Collection, given in 1949. HTC 4,339.



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