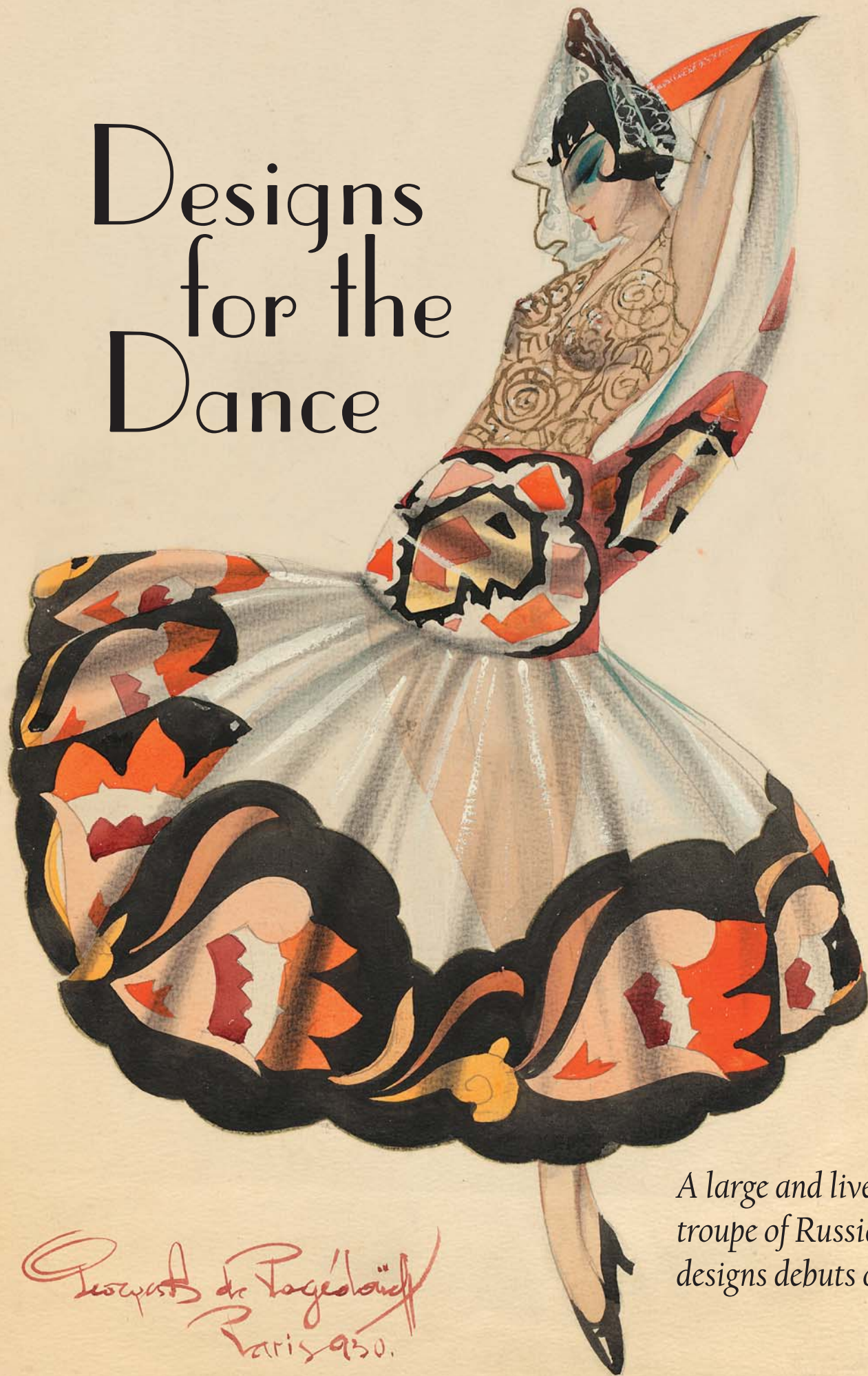


# Designs for the Dance



A large and lively  
troupe of Russian stage  
designs debuts on line.

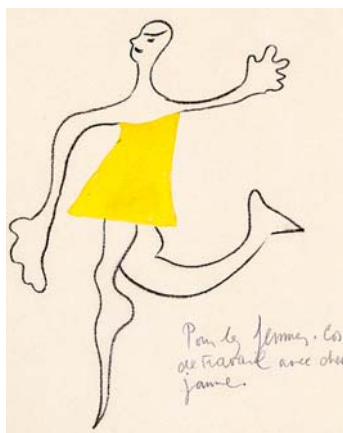
*Georgy de Tugoloueff*  
Paris 1930.



**W**HEN IMPRESARIO Serge Diaghilev launched his Ballets Russes in Paris in 1909, he injected into the tired corpus of European ballet a massive dose of adrenaline. In the 20 years that he ran the legendarily innovative company, he brought together and nurtured the best choreographers, dancers, and stage designers of his era, commissioned much enduring music, zinged up audiences far and wide, and revolutionized ballet.

Diaghilev's first choreographer was the dancer Mikhail Fokine, who realized his vision of ballet as an art that unified dance, drama, music, and painting. Russians Léon Bakst and Alexander Benois were the company's first scene and costume designers. Others to color Diaghilev's stage would include Pavel Tchelitchev, Natalia Goncharova, Mikhail Larionov, Marc Chagall, André Derain, Georges Braque, Henri Matisse, and Pablo Picasso.

The Harvard Theatre Collection has one of the most important collections in the world of original stage designs by Russian artists, as well as some by artists of other nationalities whose work appeared in Russian productions—about 700 designs, most dating from 1890 to 1930, the majority relating to the Ballets Russes. All of these images are being digitized, and, says project manager Elizabeth Carroll-Horrock, the entire collection will be on mline this summer, along with descriptive information about it. Images appear both in a screen resolution for practical browsing and in a higher resolution that



ballet set to Georges Bizet's opera music and for the queen, king, and Hamlet in a ballet by Bronislava Nijinska based on Shakespeare's play, set to music by Franz Liszt. (Nijinska danced Hamlet for the 1934 premiere, at the Paris Opera.) Above: Costume design by Joan Miró for another ballet based on Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, set to music by English composer Constant Lambert, choreographed by Nijinska, and premiered by Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes in 1926 in Monte Carlo, with George Balanchine dancing. Painter Max Ernst collaborated on the set designs, and when the ballet opened in Paris, leaders of the Surrealist movement reportedly staged a protest because they didn't like two artists associated with their group involved in such a capitalist venture. Right: Costume design by Léon Bakst for the Blue Sultana in Rimsky-Korsakov's *Schéhérazade*, premiered by Diaghilev's Ballets Russes in 1910. With Diaghilev and Alexander Benois, Bakst formed the World of Art group in Russia and published an influential art magazine. A book designer and portraitist, he had a taste for the Oriental and the Classical in work for the stage. He was the first artistic director of the Ballets Russes and one of its most significant designers.



permits study of details. "Because Russian theatrical design is taught in virtually every graduate-level theater program in the world, and also in most undergraduate programs, and because no other collection on this subject has been made accessible in this way," says Fredric Woodbridge Wilson, curator of the Harvard Theatre Collection, "we expect that the resource will be widely appreciated and heavily used, not least in Russia and elsewhere in Europe, and not only by students of theatrical design. The images have a strong visual appeal for even a casual audience."

To view the collection, go to <http://via.harvard.edu:748/html/VIA.html>, which is the Harvard College Library's Visual Information Access catalog. At "Search VIA," search for "htc," and click on the title of the design you wish to view.

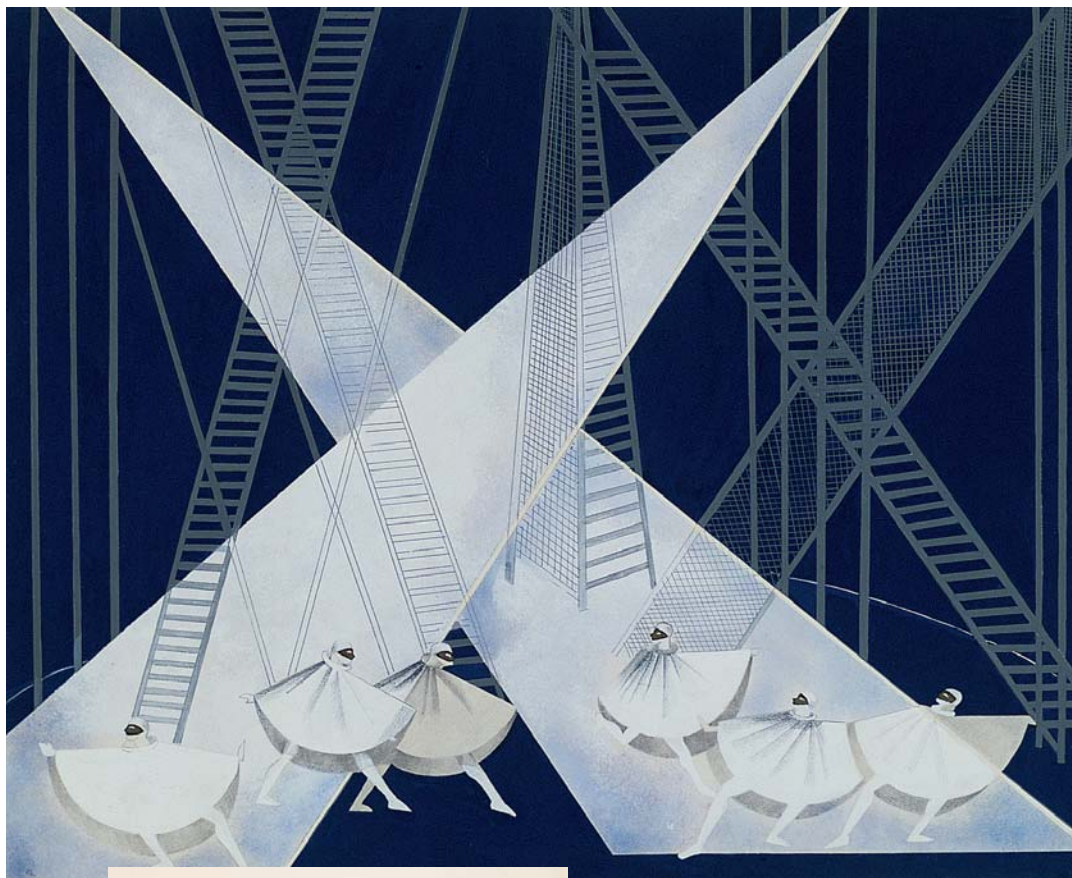
To celebrate the completion of the digitization project, the Theatre Collection will mount in its Pusey Library galleries an exhibition, *Russian Theatrical Designs*, which may be viewed in actual reality from September 22 through November 24.

"Étonne-moi!" (Astonish me!) Diaghilev is said to have challenged his sometime collaborator Jean Cocteau. That was the goal of the maestro himself, of his company, and of scores of alumni of the astonishing Ballets Russes.

~CHRISTOPHER REED







Facing page: Costume design, 1916, by Natalia Goncharova for the King of the Sea, from the ballet *Sadko*, based on a Russian folktale about a minstrel able to catch golden fish with the aid of the sea-king's daughter. The ballet, with music from Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov's opera, was premiered in Paris by Diaghilev's Ballets Russes in 1911. Goncharova was a prominent figure in the Russian avant-garde. Most of her stage-design work was for Diaghilev, including productions of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Le Coq d'Or* and Igor Stravinsky's *Les Noces*.



Above and left: Scene design and costume design, circa 1927-28, by Alexandra Exter for *Le Cirque*, a ballet by Elsa Krüger, a dancer and the manager of Berlin's Russian Theatre. The piece may not have been produced. Russian born, Exter studied at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière in Paris, where she met Picasso, Apollinaire, and Braque. Many of her designs are in Cubist style. Below: Design for a cinema curtain by Theodore Komisarjevsky, a Russian theatrical director and designer and colorful figure in the European theater of his day. Right: A 1920 costume design by George Barbier, a former fashion illustrator, for Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova. She and Vaslav Nijinsky (brother of Bronislava Nijinska) were the first superstars whom Diaghilev brought to Paris, in 1909. Diaghilev and Nijinsky soon became lovers; Pavlova soon left the company, allegedly because of Diaghilev's preference for the male dancers. She is shown here in the role of Amarilla the gypsy girl, from the ballet *Amarilla*, created for her own dance company in 1912, with music by Alexander Glazunov.





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Facing page: Costume design by Alexander Golovin for Swampwench, or Kikimora, in Stravinsky's fabulist *Firebird*, premiered by the Ballets Russes in Paris in 1910. (Mikhail Fokine had Pavlova in mind for the ballet when he choreographed *Firebird*, but when she heard Stravinsky's music, she is said to have declared it nonsense and declined to dance to it.) Golovin studied at the Moscow School of Painting and became the leading designer for the Mariinsky and Alexandrinsky Theaters in St. Petersburg. Right: Costume design by Mikhail Larionov for Renard in the 1921 Paris Opera production of Stravinsky's *Renard the Fox*. A Cubist painter as well as a scene and costume designer, and the spouse of Natalia Goncharova (see preceding page), Larionov became a great influence on the Ballets Russes and was named artistic director in 1921.



Right and below: Costume designs by Alexander Benois for an artisan disguised as a crow and for a monster in Stravinsky's *Petrouchka*, premiered by the Ballets Russes in 1911. Benois later designed many ballet productions for La Scala, Covent Garden, and the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. His scene design above, of a carnival in St. Petersburg for act one of *Petrouchka*, was created in 1957 for a Covent Garden production. In the center is a stage within a stage. The showman will part the blue curtain and summon to life the puppets of *Petrouchka*, the Moor, and the Ballerina. Benois brought to the theater vivid color, inventive stage magic, and fantastic imagery.





"Нарз Птица",

Кикиморы

Тюкхь 10.

Тюкхь 10.

Франгопуло  
Большакова?

Свекисъ  
Каукозь  
Леонидъ 2  
Монжика  
Декомбъ  
Кирхгеймъ.



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