

Investigating the stage and costume design process in Ballets Russes with an emphasis on Léon Bakst's works

¹Farnaz Izadi

Abstract:

Is stage design related to the actor, the audience, or everything in the theater? Does spending time creating a plot for the scene create a more engaging and compelling scene? The variety of theatrical forms prevents a comprehensive answer to these questions. The production of any theater is basically like a butterfly, which comes to life overnight and disappears forever within three or four hours. Léon Bakst's progress and actions in this field started from the design of the book cover and gradually with his strong support in the selection of color and texture in the set and costume collection, his designs with luxurious colors in combination with The fine details clearly influenced the fabric and fashion. In the following, we will open how Bakst entered the Ballets Russes and we will find out that during the popularity of this company (Ballet Russ), the simplicity and creativity of Sergei Diaghilev (the founder of this company) made this group continue, and strengthen.

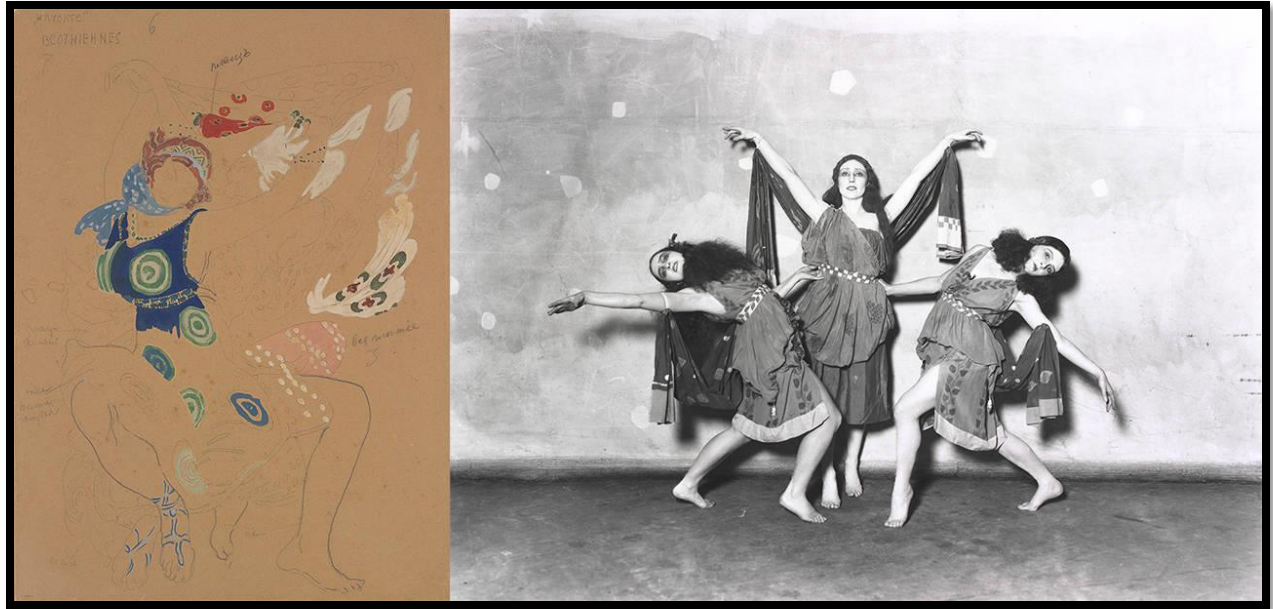
keywords: Léon Bakst, theater, set design, costume design, paint, Ballet Russes, La Chatte

¹Master of theater directing, ezadifarnaz@yahoo.com

Introduction:

Léon Bakst, a Russian Jewish artist who designed revolutionary theater designs in scenery and costumes, increased his fame day by day due to his acquaintance and professional entry into theater groups; in the meantime, in addition to adding to his knowledge and information, he encountered the criticism and cooperation of professionals such as Sergei Diaghilev and Marius Petipa, who had a significant impact on his designs. He did many designs with Benoist in his late career. Bakst's designs for the Ballets Russes, especially during his heyday (1914-1909), were luxurious, innovative, and extravagant, extending his influence to fashion and set design. What was Léon Bakst's main role at the Ballets Russes? Was ballet costume design important at that time? Were his fellow designers both stage designers and costume designers? These are the concerns that will be answered in the rest of the article. In this article, we will examine Léon Bakst's early

professional activities, his colleagues, and the theaters that designed the sets and costumes. (Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 1978)



Left to right: Costume design for a Bacchante in 'Narcisse', Léon Bakst, 1912. Museum no. S.205-1978. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Photograph of costumes designed by Leon Bakst for Mikhail Fokine's ballet 'Narcisse', by Sasha, 1925, England. Museum no. S.282-2016. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

From the beginning of the activity to the beginning of the profession:

He failed his first attempt (around the age of 16) to gain admission to the Noncredit Academy of Arts in Saint Petersburg, but was interested in visual arts from an early age. After graduating from the gymnasium and after a year of further study, he was accepted as a non-credit student at the Academy of Arts in Saint Petersburg in 1883 and began working part-time as a book illustrator, and various Produced illustrations for magazines and children's books. Meanwhile, he formed a lasting friendship with an older student, a painter named Valentin Serov. (John E. Bowlt)

In 1890, he was introduced to Alexandre Benois and an informal group known as the "Nosky Pickwickians" as a member of this group. From there, Sergei Diaghilev's meeting with Bakst had a great impact on his life. In the early 1890s, Bakst traveled in Europe, and between 1893 and 1896 he lived in Paris, studying at the Académie Julian and with Jean-Léon Gérôme. After completing his studies in Paris and further study trips, he returned to Russia. After that, he formed part of a group of artists. (L'Ancienne Douana Strasbourg)

Mir Iskusstva ("The World of Art") was a movement he founded with Diaghilev and Benois in a journal of the same name (1904-1898). The art group, founded in 1898, included a group of Bakst's

students as well as Alexandre Benois, Konstantin Somov, Dmitri Filosofov, and Eugene Lansere. Bakst also showed his work as a Munich separatist at various world art fairs and organized an exhibition of the Union of Russian Artists, among others. The beginning of the exhibition for the new art group of the organization of Russian and Finnish artists was at the Trinket City Museum of Applied Arts in St. Petersburg. Members of the movement worked through articles, lectures, and exhibitions (to educate the Russian public) about movement trends and issues in art. Bakst freely supported the magazine's working system, allowing him to focus on graphics and painting. Inspired and embodied by art movements, this Russian magazine contributed to the revolutionary group of European art in the first decade of the 20th century. (New World Encyclopedia, 2022)

Bakst showed his work in a traveling exhibition of Russian art organized by Diaghilev in 1906. In 1909 he went to Paris, where he began to design sets and costumes for Diaghilev's fledgling ballet, where he noticed the influence of several Western European countries in his work.

The first production of this company was Ballets Russes, which can be introduced as a mixed program with a selection of Russian opera and ballet. The program included Russian music and dancers. (originally called the film (Une Nuit D'Égypte, Alexandria 1909)) for this program, Bakst prepared a spectacular set and a ballet costume named Cléopâtre designed by Michel Fokine. It can be clearly said that this scene and The costumes in the evening had much appeal and splendor. The production, with its innovations in costume and its emphasis on Orientalism, violence, and sensuality—provided the template for future Ballets Russes extravaganzas—for which Bakst became the company's chief designer.

Looking at Léon Bakst's sensual costume design for Cléopâtre or Scheherazade, Boris Bilinsky's sparkling backdrop for Ruslan and Lyudmila, or Mikhail Larionov's vibrant ensemble of dancer LE SOLEIL Nuit D for Midnight Sun, we are in disbelief suspended and the question arises as to how they do something in the three-dimensional space in the action stage; Of course, roughly, we can at least try to understand how in the design of the given scene, with one of the two basic methods for decoration, either color, resulting from decorative watercolor painting, or with plastic decoration, an architecture is extracted. Can we define our work with, for example, an airplane or another volume according to the sets and costumes?

(as a main stimulus, as an auxiliary image, or as an independent beautiful object)

He followed this success with another, design for the wildly popular collection, Le Carnival and Ballet Scheherazade (both 1910). In the second case, one of the works was considered definitively from Ballets Russes. For its sensational story, he presented the color and texture and the beauty and grace in the set and costume collection with his powerful support. During this time, he also collaborated with other companies and in other media. In this way and by presenting other works, Bakst gained international fame.

His designs with bold typefaces and sumptuous colors combined with meticulous detailing clearly influenced fabric and fashion. Now, after 1912, his influence on participation in the Ballets Russes

gradually decreased, and so Diaghilev sought out new artists. Bakst, however, continued his friendship not just for the work, but for having such people as dancers (Anna Pavlova and Ida Rubenstein), both of whom formed his company. Designing theater sets and costumes was a free job for him. In 1914, Bakst was elected a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Arts. The penultimate design for the Ballets Russes in 1917 was an innovative production.

Although Bakst prepared to design a future work, Diaghilev rejected his plans, and the two, who often disagreed, effectively ended their friendship in 1919.

However, in 1921 Bakst was busy designing the London production of Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's *Dialogf; Sleeping Beauty* (also known as *Sleeping Beauty*) proved to be his last major work.

Apart from the three founders, active members of the Lansere art world were Mstislav Dobuzhinsky, and Konstantin Somov. The exhibitions organized by the art world, attracted many prominent painters from Russia and abroad, especially Mikhail Vrubel, Mikhail Nesterov, and Isaac Levitan.

Among the works that Bakst collaborated in designing the stage and costumes for are: *Fire Ballet* (1910), *Petrushka* (1911) *Adoration of Spring* (1913), the cover of *Ida Rubinstein* in the performance of *Cleopatra*, the ballet *Daphnis and Chloe*, Bakst's design for *The first performance of the ballet Daphnis and Chloe*, the stage design of *Salome*, the stage design of *Scheherazade* Korsakov, the design of the cover design of *Stravinsky's Firebird* ballet.

Ballets Russes:

Ballet Russ was a ballet company founded in 1909 by Sergei Diaghilev in Paris and performed in Europe, South America, and the United States of America until 1929 (Diaghilev's death). The collaboration of some of the leading artists of that time led to the creation of some of the most influential performances of the 20th century by the Ballets Russes.

Ballets Russes is perhaps an alternative to Diaghilev's naivety. Always looking for new solutions, to move away from the emphasis and inexhaustible curiosity about "industrial fins" from 1920. Diaghilev's tribute to his insatiable curiosity about new art and his immediate recognition, his most authentic experimental innovation of his modern productions, was held at the end of his life in the 1927 *La Chatte* show; This ballet integrated new concepts of music, choreography and visual dynamics, and in fact had more in common with the developments in ballet today with the culmination of Bakst and Benois. (Britannica, Kathleen Kuiper)

Bakst became famous for his collaboration with the World of Art group, which was formed by Sergei Diaghilev. In 1908, Diaghilev became the founding director of the Ballets Russes, and Bakst became an artist-designer for the company, designing sets and costumes. At the beginning of 1909, Bakst was primarily working as a designer, designing the sets of Greek tragedies that Marius

Petipa, as artistic director, reinvigorated his work, and the ballet in France met with worldwide repercussions.



Ballets Russes, 1925

Bakst's major successes (Cleopatra (1909), Scheherazade (1910), Carnival (1910), Narcisse (1911), Le Spectre de la (1911), and Daphnis (1912))

Also, three famous Ballets Russes masters, Diaghilev, Petipa, and Bakst, at the request of the public reconsidered the development of a more complex form of ballet by showing the elements considered only for the aristocracy. There is a whimsical appeal from the Ballets Russes in a collaborative work by the fledgling painters of the Fauvist and Art Deco styles. From the Ballets Russes designers, we can mention without question the history of the modern stage, the initial influence in theater design, in choreography, choreography, in fact, in the very evolution of ballet, the presence of Diaghilev in Paris in 1909. (Britannica, Kathleen Kuiper)

A limited sense of chronological repetition is familiar here, but there is an emphasis on the four main designers: Bakst, Benois, Goncharova, and Larionov, who help us understand the originality and diversity of the troupe and customs produced for the Ballets Russes between 1909 and 1929 he does.

The importance of theater and ballet after the revolution:

In addition, ballet artists realized a traditionally presented image with the possibility of electronic explorations in large spaces for decoration. Since there was a lot of possibility to decorate public spaces at that time (the situation had changed dramatically after the October Revolution with the opening of the monumental advertising of art), artists such as Bakst, Benois, Roerich, Nikolai Saponov, Sergei Sudeikin, and Vrubel welcomed the theater as a medium for a wider representation of visual ideas.

Critic and philosopher Vasiili Rozanov: "Basically, a world of artistic members saw little merit in state-controlled ballet productions. In fact, Diaghilev's sudden departure from the Mariinsky Theater after the failed *Sylvia* in 1901 and his intolerance of cumbersome state bureaucracy, prompted him to quickly form his own group in 1909.

Diaghilev then began his training within the Royal Ballet system on the imperial stage as to lead dancer. For example, *Cléopâtre's Egyptian Night*, prepared in Paris in 1909 (also called *Egyptian Night*). It was first produced by Michel Fokine Maryanski in 1908, as *Pavillon D'Armide* Le 1907 (the name of the ballet). In addition, Enrico Cecchetti, who coached many of Diaghilev's dancers, was ballet master for the Mariinsky and ballet teacher for the Theater Institute in St. Petersburg from 1892-1902. (Olga Shaumyan)

The Royal Ballet was one of Diaghilev's avant-garde productions, and because they were concerned with choreography and choreography, Diaghilev and his colleagues actually maintained the imperial tradition in a certain way of stage design by members of the Bakst, Benois, and Golovin groups in the art world with little reference. They went to specific principles or even production.

It is obvious that in this period of the world, artists had little understanding of the art of the revolution, which was also present in Western European designs, and Appia's words and actions enlightened them.

Joint activity of Léon Bakst and Alexandre Benois:

Alexandre Benois and Léon Bakst are two different sponsors in this field. Benois and Bakst's stage design approach deserves special attention. Both artists, Benois and Bakst, played major roles in the opening season of the Ballets Russes, which played *Le Pavillon D'Armide* in *Cléopâtre*, and both contributed directly to their acclaim among Parisian audiences, to quote one participant.

On the other hand, Benois's sense of history is so acute that he knew exactly how to enliven a particular scene and costume when it was right.

However, setting the stage for art artists was probably more difficult and sustainable than working for the world. As far as Ballets Russes were concerned with Diaghilev, the decorators, and all the Russian designers were trained as a designer or at some stage in the studio painting. In addition, many artists were graduates of the Academy of Arts, but less of prestigious private schools, such as Princess Tenisheva in St. Petersburg and Elizaveta Zvantseva (first in Moscow and then, after 1905, in St. Petersburg) were there, but above all Benois, simply and at the same time being an amateur, was the most brilliant. Filosofov once said, "In the world of art...it was hard to do something sloppily and unprofessionally in the good and true sense of the word."

Their scientific mentality was presented with the necessary flexibility; So that enabled Bakst to move easily, for example, from 19th-century St. Petersburg in *Poupées La* to Bloomsbury London

in JEUX, from Greece in Hippolytus to 17th-century France in The Princess's Dream, without paying a fee. Maybe they consider study as the easel of a painter who, when standing well, paints his favorite painting from outside the house or in nature, now with pencil and watercolor or anything else with complete flexibility; Therefore, paying tribute to a fashion in Europe, even now, can be inherently authentic and end up with a flexible and meaningful work, according to the design and study in independent works and books of the day.

Benois, Bakst, and their colleagues realized in the middle period that the maintainable style in the field of stage and costume is the recognition of the combination of color and thematic motifs.

La Chatte:

La Chatte, designed by George Balanchine, premiered in Monte Carlo in April 1927, and then in Paris the following month. Telling the love story of a young man with a cat that symbolizes a lonely woman. By clarifying and going back to a cat, Chatte La deals with the main theme of metamorphosis and instability in order to emphasize these characteristics. Designers Gabo and his brother Antoine Pevsner, according to their abstract principles of structure, applied active surfaces of mica, cells, black and white linoleum, etc., and created a variable plastic decor and costumes that reflected the movements of the great dancers.

But they were deprived of the physical appearance of their belongings due to problems with the stage distribution of symbolic value (except for Pevsner's strong statue of Venus) and the ever-changing circle axis stage.

Chatte La, considered one of several industrial spectacles in and outside of Russia, relied on simple measures for its scenic effect in modern technology of advanced materials. Diaghilev's desire to modernize ballet is to bring it closer to contemporary themes and topical issues. In Paris in June 1927, with music by Sergei Prokofiev and Yakulov's set and costumes, the socialist Russian Lo Pas D'Acie, his praise of the factory and the new machine, the end of Yakulov's introduction of moving and mechanical parts, including the real hammer. Diaghilev was criticized for this "communist tendency". Not surprisingly, he had allowed a red banner to be added to the final scene of L'Oiseau FEU De in May 1917, the wheel and piston in forums at the same time moved to the hammer movement of young factory workers, and by strengthening the tableau with a large group in front of the associations, so that it is evolving and combining several levels that are welded together landscape and body movements, able to create a The culmination of power was enormous. The success of this Ballets Russes, and not least of its experiments in design, is essentially dependent on Diaghilev's inspiration.

In the LUBONOV-ROSTOVSKY set design, he also won the title of stage designer with international recognition and many works and projects of sets and costumes for ballet dance, opera, circus drama, cabaret films, and other types of theater spectacles. It was discussed exactly here.

But is stage design exactly related to the physical stage, actors, audience, or all these elements together? Is this sign just a plot to make the scene more exciting and compelling?

It is difficult to answer these questions. Because the diversity of theatrical forms prevents a comprehensive answer. Perhaps, at each stage of the design, the subject of the designer is either incomplete or complete; Inevitably, the importance of "discipline" in a set or costume design is obtained. Yurii Annenkov in one of his studies in observing theater realized that every theater production is basically like a butterfly; that a night comes to life and disappears forever in three or four hours. With no murals, no designs, or motion pictures, it can only be kept alive by a meticulous recording of the production.

However, Russia's contribution is extraordinary, and Rostovsky Lubonov's collection is sufficient testimony to this.

The collection includes more than fifty years of stage design experience, with an emphasis on the period 1925-1905 when the constellation of radical personalities and ideas known as the avant-garde transformed Russian culture. The activities of artists during this period span the entire history of modern Russian art from Neo-nationalism and symbolism through Cubo-futurism and Suprematism to constructivism and socialist realism: Bakst, Alexander Benois, Pavel Filonov, Natalya Goncharova, Konstantin Korovin, Larionov, Kazimir Malevich, Lubov-Popova, Alexander Rodchenko, and Vladimir Tatlin formulated bold new perceptions of art and design. Their theories are a conventional approach to revolutionary painting.

Final word:

Bakst's technology and designs provide this possibility for the theater with the view that just as study can be considered as a painter's tripod for balance; Therefore, study can be considered as a basis for creating a balance in design and design with knowledge; Currently, according to the subject of the design and study, the design can end up as a flexible and meaningful work. With this basis, Bakst and his colleagues realized that the style that can be maintained in the field of stage and costume is to distinguish the combination of colors and motifs. knowledge and lack of scientific understanding will be faced and that is where the taste of each designer will be affected by the scenes no more books or titles will be produced with the name of the principles of stage or costume design and if it is produced, it will be the personal taste of the people. Was. Separation from the discussion of great and experienced designers who, in addition to the high per capita study in the field of experience, have understood and recorded many principles, in the current time when the emphasis on the stage and clothing is mentioned as a separate principle in the scene, many designers They have joined the stage and costume community, who need to study in this field before starting.

The last point is that according to the Ballets Russes, we realize that the body movements will be able to create a peak of power, which was created with the inspiration of Diaghilev, but since then

and since that period, there have been many follow-ups in this field and the continuation of this path to It has not been seen that it is hoped that with enthusiasm and raising the level of information in this field, Ballets Russes and the designs of this group will continue to be seen.

Reference:

E. Bowlt, John, Nikita D. Lobanov-Rostovsky, Shaumyan, Olga, *Masterpieces of Russian Stage Design, 1880_1930*.

The Hague, Gemeentemuseum, *Ballet in Beeld bij Bakst*, 1968, no. 10.

Strasbourg, L'Ancienne Douana, *Les Ballets Russes de Serge Diaghilev*, 1969, no. 63.

Bakst, Léon, *Daphnis et Chloé*, year Title, 1912.

[Léon Bakst – design for the ballet · V&A \(vam.ac.uk\)](http://www.vam.ac.uk)

http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Leon_Bakst

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Leon-Bakst>