



The Art of Ballets Russes: The Serge Lifar Collection of Theater Designs, Costumes, and Paintings at the Wadsworth Atheneum

Alexander Schouvaloff

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The Serge Lifar Collection of Theater Designs, Costumes, and Paintings at the Wadsworth Atheneum Serge Lifar, the last great protege dancer of famed Russian ballet producer Serge Diaghilev, collected paintings, set designs, and costume designs from Diaghilev's Ballets Russes and from his own later productions at the Paris Opera. In 1933 Lifar's European dance company met financial disaster on tour in the United States, and Lifar was forced to sell his collection to pay for return fares for his troupe. The \$10,000 he received from the Wadsworth Atheneum's flamboyant and imaginative director A. Everett "Chick" Austin was considered extravagant at the time. This collection, recognized as invaluable evidence of the emergence of modernism in theater and in Western art, is today unrivaled as a comprehensive documentation of the Ballets Russes. This catalogue presents the 188 works of art and thirty-two costumes that compose the Serge Lifar Collection. It has been enlarged since 1933, most notably with the 1996 acquisition of original costumes. Most of the set and costume designs and all of the costumes were made for thirty-seven Ballet Russes productions, from the first in 1909 to the last in 1929. The Ballet Russes was one of the greatest artistic movements of the early twentieth century, which fused the efforts of composer, choreographer, dancer, and designer into total works of art. Diaghilev commissioned prominent Russian painters and artists from the School of Paris -- among them Bakst, Picasso, Matisse, Braque, and Miro -- to design sets and costumes. This book provides notes about each production and the corresponding items in the collection, as well as a new assessment of the immediate impact and lasting influence of the renowned Ballet Russes.

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