



Paris after Schéhérazade



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PARIS AFTER SCHEHERAZADE

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INTRODUCTION

On stage a set of extreme simplicity reduced to its bare essentials which shows the interior of the Schah's harem: a sort of enormous tent of the most intense and magnificent bright green, a green which is dazzling yet constant, a green both violent and astonishingly sumptuous. No other colour or practically none: a touch on the immense green surface of two or three large persian designs; in black and orange red. The floor is covered with a carpet of orange red in a paler shade. At the back, doors of blue almost black. Most of the costumes for the men and women are in colours which complement the set: subtle tones of red and a few greens. Against this general colour scheme the gold and silver on the costumes of amorous negroes discreetly glints and sparkles. Here and there darker touches of colour as in the costume of the Schah where blues and deep violets predominate and which recall the most beautiful persian miniatures. It all combines to produce an effect of power and miraculous harmony. It is spellbinding and a constant thrill for the eye. Mr. Bakst, the Russian painter, who created this wonderful picture with his colours for both set and costumes is truly a great artist.¹

This is the description of the critic Pierre Lalo of what he saw on the opening night of the ballet Scheherazade in Paris in 1910. This oriental splendour, amazed, delighted and dazzled its Parisian audiences with costumes and a set of vibrating colours, the like of which hadn't been seen for fifty years or more. My aim in this thesis is to look more closely at this one particular production of the Russian Ballet and how its effect manifested itself among the public of Paris from 1910 to the mid-twenties.

Chapter One will introduce Diaghilev's ballet company, taking into consideration the elements which went together to produce this theatrical phenomenon.

The second chapter will look at this ballet of 1910 more closely, introducing its dancers, choreographer, composer and designer.

¹ pierre Lalo, quoted in Schouvaloff, Set and Costumes for Ballet and Theatre 1987, p. 39.

Finally the third chapter will explore the effects of this ballet on Parisian designers, particularly Paul Poiret.

In my conclusion I will try to sum up the effect of Scheherazade on both public and designers and to determine why this production had such appeal. I want to also mention the Russian Ballet's influence on other ballet companies particularly two companies I have seen perform recently in Dublin: The Kirov and Scottish Ballets.

CHAPTER ONE
THE EMERGENCE OF THE BALLETS RUSSES

- i - INTRODUCTION
- ii - SERGE DIAGHILEV
- iii - THE WORLD OF ART GROUP
- iv - THE BALLET COMPANY 1909 - 1917: ITS EARLY YEARS

INTRODUCTION

Between the years of 1895 and 1920 Russia was a place of much cultural activity, a silver age when poets, painters and musicians such as Bakst, Goncharova, and Igor Stravinsky brought their country's artistic traditions into a new light, bringing it also culturally into the European mainstream.¹

The Ballet Russes was one of the most successful, exciting and influential exports that Russia produced at this time. Serge Diaghilev, the founder of this company, along with his first collaborators, the composer Stravinsky, designers Alexandre Benois and Leon Bakst, the choreographer Michael Fokine and the dancers Vaslav Nyinsky and Tamara Karsavina, reinvented ballet.²

This chapter will attempt to trace the origins of this company from a group of artists and writers called the World of Art in St. Petersburg at the end of the 1880's to the first productions of the company in Paris almost 20 years later. The company remained in existence till 1929, but I shall concentrate on its earlier years from 1909 to 1917, this being the most relevant period of its existence to my study as it was the most influential on both fashion and interior decoration. The next chapter will examine more closely some of the most notable production of the Ballets Russes in 1910.

SERGE DIAGHILEV

I now wish to give a brief account of Serge Diaghilev's background as he is undoubtedly the key figure in this chapter and also in the history of the Ballets Russes. He was born in Selistchev Barracks, in the Novgorod province of Russia, on 19 March 1872. His mother died at the birth and his father, an army officer, remarried two years later. It was Elena, Diaghilev's stepmother who was responsible for his upbringing and for giving him a love and appreciation of the arts. The family lived in St. Petersburg till Serge was 10 and then moved to the family mansion at Perm.

¹ J. E. Bowlst, Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts, Summer 1987 p. 28.

² Alexander Schouvaloff, Country Life, Vol. 181 April 1987 p. 130

Diaghilev's father inherited the family estate and distilleries, so the family were well off and lived in a style that encouraged love of the arts. There were musical evenings when chamber music, songs and sometimes whole operas were performed. Books and pictures abounded.

At 18 Diaghilev matriculated from high school and was sent to St. Petersburg to university to study law. He arrived in the summer of 1890 and stayed with his cousin Dima Filosofov who introduced him to a small band of friends already deeply interested in the arts. The group was led by Alexandre Benois; and Leon Bakst had joined the group a few months before Diaghilev.³

- iii - THE WORLD OF ART GROUP

This World of Art group, which was mentioned earlier, was made up of young artists and writers with no definite aims but to explore the world of art. Benois was the intellectual of the group, Bakst the more instinctive artist. But it was Diaghilev who had the vision to develop and exploit all their talents. He was the editor of a new magazine called Mir Iskusstvo ("World of Art", from which the group got its name) and all the members of the group contributed articles and illustrations to this publication which was in existence from 1898 to 1904.

Under the administration of Diaghilev they organised a series of exhibitions to show Russian art to the West, beginning in Paris in 1906 with an exhibition of Russian painting, followed by a series of concerts of Russian music in 1907 and the first productions of opera and ballet in 1908 and 1909. Finally in 1910 Diaghilev produced his first complete programme of ballet, which was to cause a sensation on its opening night at the Theatre National de L'Opera in Paris.

So the group of artists and writers calling themselves the World of Art became the Ballets Russes.⁴

³ percival 1979, p. 10

⁴ Schouvaloff Set and Costumes for Ballet and Theatre 1987, p. 18

This chapter will now examine more closely Diaghilev's founding of this ballet company and follow its success in Paris and elsewhere from 1909 to 1917.

As a result of his exhibitions in Paris, Diaghilev gained a host of influential and wealthy friends in the French capital. His decision to turn to ballet was not only to repeat the success of his previous exhibitions but to fully extend his genius as an impresario. He became involved with the Maryinsky Theatre of which young Pavlova, Fokine and Nijinsky were already stars. Benois may have had influence on Diaghilev's decision to turn to ballet as he (Benois) had been a life long devotee of the ballet. He had, in 1907, created le Pavillion D'Armide with Fokine for the Maryinsky; the possibility of its presentation in Paris inspired him to influence Diaghilev.

Another member of the World of Art group; Leon Bakst, had also theatrical experience. In 1903 he had been involved in the designing of the ballet la Fee Poupees at the Hermitage Theatre.

Diaghilev needed funding for his project and he thought he could obtain necessary funds from Grand Duke Vladimir, uncle of the Tsar who had backed the Opera, but he died before the ballet got to Paris. Other funds were obtained from his Parisian friends, and also from selling aristocratic titles to Russian businessmen.

The Paris Opera objected to the ballet so in the end the 1909 debut took place in the Theatre du Chatelet. The programme was of Opera and Ballet with the operatic programme including Ivan the Terrible by Rimsky Korsakov and Borodin's Prince Igor. The choice of ballets presented a problem but in the end three other ballets were added along with Pavillion D'armide to make up the programme. These three ballets were also choreographed by Fokine and from the Maryinsky repertoire: they were Les Sylphides (also designed by Benois), Egyptian Nights, and Le Festin.

The Theatre du Chatelet was renovated with new carpets and lighting for the occasion. Another preparation for the opening night was the commissioning of Jean Cocteau to produce an illustrated brochure. Every device was used to excite the press and public and Serov's poster showing Pavlova in ballet dress appeared all over Paris announcing the Saison Russe at the Chatelet in May-June.

Diaghilev told the company,

I am delighted to be showing Paris the Russian Ballet for the first time. Ballet to my mind ^{is} one of the most lovely arts and exists nowhere else in Europe.⁵

So on 19th May 1909 the Russian Ballet performed for the first time in Europe. One member of the audience on that first night was the poetess Ann de Noailles and she recorded its effect,

When I reached my box, and I arrived late, for I did not believe the sensation foretold me by some of the initiated, I realized that a miracle confronted me. I could see things that had not lived before. Everything dazzling, intoxicating, enchanting, seductive had been assembled and put on that stage.⁶

The whole season was an indisputable triumph and the Ballet Russes became the rage of Paris. They were invited to perform at the Quai D'Orsay and the Opera, which had originally turned down the season. Despite this success Diaghilev wouldn't commit himself to a further season. He made it clear to the company that a second would require new ballets and this is what happened; five more ballets were added to the repertoire for a new season.

⁵ Spencer/Dyer 1974, p. 49

⁶ Ibid. p. 51

Diaghilev had wanted a ballet to Rimsky Korsakov's symphonic poem Scheherazade and a version of the Russian fairytale The Firebird. The second Paris season was the opportunity for staging these two ballets. Along with these le Carnaval, les Orientales and Giselle were added to complete the programme.

This second season in Paris in May/June 1910 was an even greater success than the 1909 programme. le Carnaval surprised the audiences with its romantic simplicity, but it was Scheherazade which both astounded and satisfied them. It raised the name of Leon Bakst to star quality as designer of set and costumes for this production. He revolutionized theatrical design and his daring use of colour launched new fashions and influenced interior decoration for more than a decade.

Scheherazade represents the quintessence of Diaghilev's Russian / Oriental phase with its combination of sumptuous design, sex and violence. The decor itself in Paris provoked prolonged applause at each performance.

The Firebird, also in the 1910 programme, was of greater importance as the first complete Diaghilev ballet. It launched the composer of its music, Igor Stravinsky, on his international fame.

It was in the same year as these ballets were performed that Diaghilev decided to form a permanent company, as he still hadn't a permanent troupe of dancers. He told the company,

It seems senseless to me to go on assembling a fresh company every year only to perform in Paris for a short season. Our very success proves that there is a demand for ballet and that we should be all but certain to succeed. After taking everything into consideration therefore I propose founding for the first time a large private company.⁷

⁷ Ibid. p. 62

The season which opened in Paris on 6th June 1911 included a series of new ballets, le Spectre de la Rose, Narcisse, Sadko, Petrushka and a new version of Swan Lake. With these ballets the company journeyed to Monte Carlo and Rome before they opened in Paris. They also went to London and the season at Covent Garden opened on 21st of June 1911. Although the audiences were somewhat shocked by the productions, the company became popular in London.

After journeying in Europe with his company, Diaghilev was anxious for Russia to see the ballets of Fokine, the superb decors and, especially, Nijinsky. Failing to book any of the St. Petersburg theatres, he took Narodny Dom (Peoples House) which unfortunately burned down before the season took place. So, the Ballets Russes never performed in Russia.

1912 was a momentous year in the annals of the Ballet Russes, the beginning of its cosmopolitan as against Russian character, the break with Fokine and the emergence of Nijinsky as choreographer. Four ballets were added to the repertoire: le Dieu Bleu, Thamar, L'apres-midi d'un Faune and Daphnis and Chloe. All were designed by Bakst, himself shortly to fall into disfavour. None of the subsequent performances of these ballets or of Jeux or The Rite of Spring in 1913 had as much effect or were as successful as the previous ballets of 1910.

One of the contributing factors to the failing impact of the company was the introduction of new, non Russian elements. The old group of designers, choreographers, dancers, etc. was also changing with Fokine gone and Bakst and Benois playing only minor roles in the 1914 season.

By this time war had been declared and Diaghilev settled in Switzerland, gathering round him a new committee including Bakst and Stravinsky and the conductor Ernest Ansermet. He began to assemble the company, selecting new dancers including Nelideva, Nemchinova and Spessivtseva.

The war almost destroyed the Ballets Russes, losing the Paris and London seasons. However, in 1915 Diaghilev signed a contract with the metropolitan Opera for the Ballets Russes to make its debut in New York and also to tour to 16 different towns. The unavailability of Nijinsky to dance the Faune in the U.S. led to Leonide Massine, a choreographer dancing Nijinsky's part. This led to a break with Nijinsky who later returned as a choreographer.

This break with Nijinsky, along with the absence of Fokine and the lessening participation of Benois and Bakst, was a break with Russianism which was the essence of the company. To my mind it was the Russianism of the company which had caused its success; the more Russian elements the company lost, the more its impact on audiences lessened.

Introduction of new members and influences is clear in the 1917 production of Parade, which was designed by Picasso, Picasso having met Diaghilev in Rome.

Gulliame Apollinaire claimed that in Parade,

Picasso, the cubist painter and Leonide Massine, the boldest of choreographers have given cubism concrete form and achieved the first union of painting and dancing, modelling and mime, which is to herald a fuller art, for hitherto decoration and choreography have only been linked by superficial means.⁸

This seems to be a bit hard on the Fokine/Bakst partnership which was equal to, if not more successful and influential than Parade. But as Lifar points out,

Although the ballet was an undoubted success in Paris it was in fact, a far cry from the wild enthusiasm with which the earlier ballets had been greeted.⁹

⁸ Ibid. p. 90

⁹ Ibid. p. 90

It is these early ballets of 1910 especially Scheherazade that I will examine more closely in the following chapter.

CHAPTER TWO
THE 1910 PRODUCTION OF SCHEHERAZADE

- i - INTRODUCTION
- ii - SCHEHERAZADE : STORY OF THE BALLET
- iii - LEON BAKST : DESIGNER OF SCHEHERAZADE
- iv - SET AND COSTUMES

- i - INTRODUCTION

Of the ballets performed by the Ballets Russes in 1910 in Paris, Scheherazade is undoubtedly the most memorable, I come to this conclusion after considerable reading on the subject of the Ballets Russes in various sources. Scheherazade is mentioned again and again as being perhaps the high point of the Ballets Russes productions, firstly because it was the truly new ballet of this company, as other ballets of theirs were just new versions of existing works. As I have mentioned in the previous chapter, Diaghilev wanted to stage a ballet to Rimsky Korsakov's music Scheherazade, and what resulted was phenomenal.

In this chapter I want to take a close look at this ballet, through the examination of its costumes, set, story and the influences of the man who designed it: Bakst, I hope to discover reasons why this ballet appealed so much to the Parisian audiences of 1910, an appeal which developed into a fanaticism for things oriental, not only in fashion but in the decorative arts in general.

- ii - SCHEHERAZADE : STORY OF THE BALLET

Scheherazade was first performed on the 4th of June 1910 at the Theatre National de l'Opera in Paris.

The ballet is based on the prologue to the 1001 nights (the Arabian Nights). Dr. Mardus's translation into french of the Arabian Nights was published between 1896 and 1904 which led to a nostalgia for a legendary Persia and Arabia.

The basic story centres round the harem of Schahriar, King of India and China. His brother Schah Zeman, comes to tell him of his matrimonial troubles. They both pretend to go hunting. As soon as they have gone, the Grand Eunuch opens first a bronze door through which enter negroes dressed in copper, then a silver door through which enter other negroes dressed in silver and, finally, a gold door through which enters a negro dressed in gold. This is Zobeida's (Zobeida being the King's favourite dancer) favourite negro, together they become the central point of a frenzied orgy. As it rises to its climax they are interrupted by Schariar's unexpected return.

He is so angered at what he sees that at a sign from him, guards rush on waving scimitars and massacre all the dancers. Schahriar hesitates over the fate of Zobeida but she snatches a dagger from one of the guards, stabs herself and dies at the feet of her sovereign.¹

The principle dancers of this production were Alexis Boulgakov as Schahriar, Vasili Kissilev as Schah Zeman, Ida Rubinstein as Zobeida, Vaslav Nijinsky as Zobeida's favourite negro and Enrico Cecchetti as the Grand Eunuch.

The set and costumes were by Leon Bakst with the front cloth scene by Valentin Serov. The music for this ballet was composed in 1888 by Rimsky Korsakov and was thought of as a free musical interpretation of some of the tales from the Thousand and One Nights. The various episodes of the symphonic suite are spread over four closely connected movements, the unifying element leading from one to the other consists of violin passages (symbolising Scheherazade telling stories to her menacing Lord).²

- iii - LEON BAKST DESIGNER OF SCHEHERAZADE

At this stage I feel, I should introduce Leon Bakst and explain briefly how he came to be a designer for the Ballets Russes.

Bakst was born on 27th April 1866 in Grodno, Russia, to a lower middle class family. He attended the sixth Gymnasium (public school) in St. Petersburg where he began to draw. In 1883 he entered the St. Petersburg Academy of Arts, where he stayed for four years, during which he undertook diverse commissions, illustrating books for children and making copies of portraits.

The decisive event in his life came in 1890 when he made the acquaintance of the then young artist Alexandre Benois and his friends, Serge Diaghilev being one of them. This group later became known as the World of Art group.

¹ Schouvaloff, Set and Costumes for Ballet and Theatre 1987, p. 35

² Phaidon Book of Ballet 1981, p. 164

Bakst's aesthetic horizons were broadened by their discussions on various aspects of literature music and art, by their reading of new books and illustrated magazines and also by their attendance at theatrical performances and concerts.

His travels abroad to Italy, Spain and North Africa contributed greatly to his artistic development. Also, visiting museums such as the Louvre and exhibitions at the Salon generated new impressions for him. He preferred the painting of the old masters such as Rubens and Rembrandt. The more aware he became of the grandeur of these artist's work, the more dissatisfied he became with his own work, motivating him to take up more drawing classes. The greatest progress he made in these years was in the use of watercolours and pastels.

1898 was a milestone in Bakst's creative career; this was the year of the setting up of the Mir Iskusstvo (World of Art Group). The World of Art journal produced by the group enriched Bakst's art, infusing it with greater substance and purpose. His drawings for the covers of this magazine were recognisable for their rhythmic severity and play of black and white. Sinuous lines were combined with broken and dotted lines, small dashes, hatching and shading. The characteristics of these drawings show the influence of western graphic artists, particularly Aubrey Beardsley.

Bakst was also interested in portraiture, Benois and Diaghilev being two of his sitters. Landscape, too, found interest with him. He produced most of his landscape works between 1903 and 1904 when in France, Finland and outside Moscow. In his later landscapes a decorative quality emerges unlike the previous works which were generalized in form and conformed to a greenish grey colour scheme. The best of these later landscapes was painted in 1908 and is called Acacia branch above the sea, (See figure 1) marked by an unexpected compositional arrangement and colour scheme.

The colouring of the work, vivid in a blend of full blown blues, greens, yellows and pinks, anticipated the vibrant splashes of colour which emerged two years later in the decor for Scheherazade.

After his travels in Greece, Bakst's interest in antiquity increased and he began to lecture and publish articles on classical culture. He also began to teach at the Elizaveta Zvantseva school of art, where he taught for four years. After 1910 he settled in Paris to dedicate himself entirely to his job as stage designer for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes.

Bakst had had an interest in theatre since he was a boy, when he used to entertain his sisters by putting on toy shows with paper cut out figures. Getting involved in the World of Art was the first step to a career in the theatre, the World of Art Group having literally become the Ballets Russes company.

Bakst had already been involved in theatre design before he designed for the 1909 and 1910 seasons. He had designed for the Hermitage and Maryinsky theatres but his work wasn't really appreciated till his work for the Ballets Russes was seen.

The first ballet he designed for this company was Cleopatre for the 1909 season, which earned him unprecedented success. The costume sketches for this ballet show the artist's increased mastery with a more sinuous line, a more expressive silhouette, with far richer colour.³

Far more sensational was the enthusiasm with which his production of the ballet Scheherazade was received, when it opened in Paris the following season.

³ Pruzhan 1988, p. 24

The set for Scheherazade is the Khan's harem (See Figure 2 and 3) and when the curtain rose on the first night of its performance the audience was dazzled by the sight of the sumptuously rich apartments of the harem. The setting was quite freely organized which gave an illusion of a real life interior, which may have been one of the appealing factors, and one of the reasons why orientally influenced interiors became so popular around that time in Paris. This ballet perhaps awakened in the public a desire for exotic surroundings which interior decorators responded to by enabling the public to purchase furniture, wallpapers etc. in this oriental style.

The colours used in the set created a sense of oriental opulence and luxury. The emerald green silk curtains which draped on either side of the stage were lavishly ornamented in pink and gold. The walls and ceilings were resplendent with mosaics and paintings; red carpet covered the floor on which scarlet rugs stood out as dark splashes of colour. Gold and silver lamps were suspended from above (See Figure 3). While working on the set for Scheherazade Bakst drew mainly upon Persian miniatures for his inspiration. To these designs he added motifs from Turkish and Chinese ornaments thus synthesising his concept of oriental art from several sources.

The costumes were in perfect harmony with the scenery and echoed the basic colours of the set. Bakst used pure primary colours, sometimes contrasting with each other in a daring manner: a good example of this is the costume for Schahriar (See Figure 4) in which bright reds and oranges are used with blues and greens. The costume for the Eunuch (See Figure 5) includes the use of large areas of orange and yellow broken by pattern. The bodice and overskirt of the costume are in a dark shade of orange broken by zig zags of green. The large cummerbund is yellow broken by a pattern of diamonds in orange and brown. The Red Sultana costume also makes use of contrasting colours (See Figure 7), the bodice is in blues and greens, while the harem pants are in orange/red with triangular motifs in green.

The main influence of these costumes was in the work of fashion designers such as Worth, Paquin and Poiret, who based their design on Bakst's costumes. The pantaloone harem-type pants seen in the designs for the *Silver Negro* or *Eunuch* (See Figure 5) were transformed into Paris fashion and called jupes-culottes. Figure 6 shows a group of dancers in the harem pants costumes. Head-dresses of turbans with aigrettes (tuft of feathers) were the usual accompaniment to this oriental style of dress.⁴

Figure 8 shows Tamara Karsavina as one of the dancers in Scheherazade, her costume includes a turban and aigrette.

This style of dress came at a time when women's fashion was undergoing a radical change with women's bodies being released from the imprisonment of the corset and dress lengths becoming shorter. The orientalism which was influencing fashion suited this new way of dressing perfectly, another reason for its popularity with the Parisian public.

I will discuss in greater detail in the next chapter the influences on fashion and the decorative arts for which this ballet was responsible.

Scheherazade's success was also due to an interest in Islam and Persia which had already been aroused by the unquenchable thirst of the French aristocracy for exotic novelties, Napoleon's conquest in the near East brought a new enthusiasm for Turkish as well as Egyptian art.

Scheherazade disclosed for the first time Bakst's full colouristic potential. He was also able to adapt the colour scheme to the music and by means of the various nuances of colour, enhance the feelings produced by the music. This was the most significant innovation to occur in theatre design for many years.

⁴ Pruzhan, 1988 p. 25

Of the other ballets of the 1910 repertoire none were as successful as Scheherazade. The Firebird however, due to its colourful costumes and brilliant music was also popular. Les Orientales which by its name we know was set in the orient also had appeal; the Parisian audiences already having an interest in things exotic.

The other ballets didn't receive such acclaim from the press such as the words of praise for Scheherazade from Yakov Tugenhold, the St. Petersburg correspondent of the Apollon Journal.

Paris is enchanted by this creative effort of Bakst's, as spicy, sensuous and vivid as oriental fabrics and semi-precious stones, impregnated with the aroma of the orient.⁵

The next chapter looks more closely at Scheherazade's effect on the designers of Paris.

⁵ Pruzhan 1988, p. 25

CHAPTER THREE
THE INFLUENCE OF SCHEHERAZADE ON THE DECORATIVE ARTS
(Particularly fashion and interior decoration in Paris)

- i - INTRODUCTION
- ii - PAUL POIRET
- iii - POIRET'S FASHIONS
- iv - ATELIER MARTINE
- v - OTHER DESIGNERS INFLUENCED

According to a lot of periodicals of the time the productions of the Russian Ballet Scheherazade in particular had a wide effect and remarkable influence on fashion and decoration in Paris. Jacques Emile Blanche in Les Arts Plastiques wrote,

The first performance was an important evening for the theatre, for dressmakers, for interior decorators for jewellers and for all branches of decoration.¹

This chapter will deal with some of the designers influenced by this Russian ballet sensation. After much research into which designers were obviously affected by the orientalism of this ballet, Paul Poiret emerges to my mind, as one of the best examples. Although Poiret himself denies being influenced by Scheherazade. He said,

Like many French artists I was struck by the Russian ballet, and I should not be surprised if it has a certain influence on me. But it must be clearly stated that I already existed and that my reputation was made long before that of M. Bakst.²

Whether this is true or not I still believe that the similarities between the costumes (in both colour and style) of Scheherazade and Poiret's fashion designs are too obvious not to consider. Later in this chapter I will further illustrate this point with the help of illustrations, comparing some of the costumes with some of Poiret's work.

¹ Spencer/Dyer 1974, Chapter by Martin Battersby p. 149

² Mackrell 1990, p. 31

Paul Poiret was also involved with interior decoration, setting up a school called the Atelier Martine (after one of his daughters) whose wallpapers, textiles and decorative schemes betray the oriental leanings of Poiret himself. I will also later in the chapter look at the work of these workshops.

As well as Paul Poiret, I will also mention other designers in various fields whose work displays evidence of being influenced by the Russian Ballet, though perhaps not Scheherazade specifically.

- ii - PAUL POIRET

Poiret was born in Paris on 20th April 1879, the son of a cloth merchant of comfortable means.

A love of theatre led to an interest in theatrical decor and costumes. He was apprenticed to an umbrella maker, and he began making miniature dresses out of scraps of fabric used to cover parasols.

One of the most elegant dressmakers in Paris at the time, Madame Cheruit, gave him practical encouragement by buying some of his early sketches. He was later employed by Jacques Doucet as a full time designer.

After his military service and a short period working at Worth, he opened his own establishment where he was able to give full reign to his ideas on dressing women. Poiret became most celebrated for adapting oriental fashions for Parisians, some of which I will take a close look later in this chapter.

Poiret's attraction to fashions based on the orient extended to a series of lavish fetes and fancy dress balls which he gave. The zenith of these oriental style parties came on 24th June 1911 when he gave his "1002nd Nights Ball" or "Persian Celebration" attended by 300 people (See Frontispiece). One of the guests described the setting:

Persian orchestras sheltered in cypresses, there were parrots in trees studded with a thousand twinkling lights, multicoloured cushions, story tellers, acrobats, artisans, miniature firework displays and delicate fountains in crystal bowls, nothing was forgotten, down to thick carpets in the garden muffling footsteps, so that the only sound was the rustling of the silks and satins of the costumes.³

Mme. Poiret's costume for the ball was the very sort which practically the day after the ball entered the realm of fashion as the lampshade tunic (See Figure 9). She wore harem pantaloons of ochre chiffon covered with white chiffon, a short tunic in gold cloth wired at the bottom and edged with a gold fringe, a bodice and sleeves of chiffon, the sleeves were trimmed with fur, and a turban of gold cloth and chiffon with a large turquoise and aigrette.

It is fashions like this that I will now take a look at point out the similarities to the costumes of Leon Bakst.

- iii - POIRET'S FASHIONS

In this section of this chapter I hope to visually illustrate oriental influences on Paul Poiret and the similarities of his designs, either in shape, pattern or colour, with the costume designs of Leon Bakst for ballet in particular the Ballets Russes production of Scheherazade.

I am not going to take each costume and compare it to a fashion design. Instead I intend concentrating on the most obvious similarities between a few of the costumes and Poiret's work.

I will start off with Leon Bakst's drawing for Schahriar, King of India and China (See Figure 4). The first thing that strikes me about this costume is the colours; the richness of the blues and reds is very appealing.

³ Georges Lepape quoted in Deslandres 1987, p. 50

This costume is also alive with pattern, a pattern which I have seen in designs of Paul Poiret's particularly for coats. It is the triangular pattern on the tunic part of the costume and on the overskirt part, a pattern probably considered a border. This pattern (See Figure 10) is quite similar to the pattern (See Figure 11) on a coat of Paul Poiret's in a drawing by Georges Lepape (See Figure 12). This same pattern appears again a year later in 1912 on the cover of Les Modes on another coat of Poiret's (See Figure 13). The design has been changed and developed slightly (See Figure 14) but still gives that triangular border effect.

This costume (See Figure 4) also includes a turban and aigrette which were adopted eagerly into fashion, examples of which can be seen in Figure 13. Another example of a turban follows. The harem pants of the King's costume were also brought into everyday fashion. Nearly all the costumes of Scheherazade include a turban or some kind of head gear; this element of the oriental look also found a place in the fashionable styles of Paris at the time. Turbans with tufts of aigrettes became the usual accompaniment to the harem pants, jupes culottes and lampshade skirts adorning the most fashionable Parisians of the day.

Figure 15 shows a turban included in a costume of an odalisque from Scheherazade, this brightly coloured piece is also decorated with strings of beads. These strings of beads are used by Paul Poiret in his turban designs (See Figure 16). An aigrette is combined with this turban, the aigrette being a feature of the majority of Scheherazade's costumes as seen in this catalogue illustration (See Figure 17).

Poiret's lampshade skirts bear a distinct resemblance to the over tunic of the Eunuch's costume (See Figure 5). These lampshade skirts (See Figures 9 and 18) were either worn over harem pants, as in the costume design, or further adapted and teamed with a long clinging skirt. Figure 18 also includes another turban and aigrette.

The model also wears armlets and anklets, perhaps to emphasise the bands of the harem pants which were usually decorative. Most of the costume designs also include armlets.

Paul Poiret also did some designing for the theatre. His 1913 design for the play Le Minaret (See Figure 19) displays all the elements of both his fashion designs and the costumes of the Ballets Russes which I have already discussed: the turban and aigrette, the turban decorated with strings of beads, the lampshade tunic with the bold circular motifs over the harem pants.

As well as the styles of the dresses being influenced by the Ballets Russes costumes, the colours used changed dramatically. The subdued and even drab hues of grey, navy blue, prune, kaki, olive and myrtle green mentioned in descriptions of dresses early in 1910 were very soon replaced by more exciting shades of begonia rose, cerise, jonquil, delft blue, rose vif and nuit d'orient (a rich deep ultramarine). The vivid green of jade or emeralds and a particularly hard shade of orange in a slightly muted tone to be called "tango" in the 1920's were two innovations soon everywhere.

These colours can be seen in Figures 12 and 13. The following illustrations also display Poiret's use of bright vivid colours. Figure 20 shows a group of girls at the theatre, where both the dresses and the decor show the influence of the Ballets Russes as well as the oriental feeling of the clothes themselves.

The blues and greens in one of the girl's dresses, is echoed in the striped vivid wallpaper which contrasts dramatically with the pink cushions on the chairs and the pink/purple of one of the model's outfits. This use of contrasting colours was a characteristic of Bakst's designs, he used colours such as the blues of turquoises and sapphires with reds of rubies and coral, and sharp intense yellows with purples evoked from amethysts grapes and aubergines.

Those familiar with the orient and even certain periods of European art can detect that these juxtapositions of brilliant colour were obviously derived from Persia, India and Turkey.

In Paris the Fauves (Matisse, Rouault, Dufy) had used equally strong colours since 1906 but didn't have a big impact. The canvases of the Fauves remained compositions enclosed in a frame. The ballet, on the other hand, had a much greater impact on its audiences as it was presented at fashionable and highly publicized theatrical occasions.

Figure 22 is another example of the lampshade skirt, this one being very colourful with a border of floral motifs. In figure 21 the setting for the model is more colourful with cushions of varied colours and patterns piled in a similar fashion to the cushions of the set of Scheherazade (See Figure 3).

Jewellery was also effected by this kaleidoscope of colours, designers introduced coloured stones and enamels. Rene Lalique broke new ground by combining stones with motifs of carved glass and delicately wrought metalwork in his pieces. Jewellery didn't take off straight after the ballets. However, after the war, an influx into Paris of foreign visitors and an advantageous rate of exchange led to the creation of rich exotic baubles. Carved Indian emeralds, rubies and sapphires were combined with diamonds in massive brooches, bracelets and earrings which could have decked Zobeida the heroine of Scheherazade. Long ropes of pearls ending in tassels of seed pearls were set off by deep red Persian corals or black onyx. Tassels were used a lot, but not only applied in silk profusion to dresses and evening cloaks. They were also often used in the most unlikely places, eg. on lampshades, cushions and instead of handles on furniture.

This advertisement (See Figure 23) for Indra artificial pearls which appeared in 1913 gives us an idea of the kind of image which these pearls complemented: an image of a fantastical orient.

The cushions of various shapes, fabrics and colours were a feature of advertisements during the 1920's. In more bohemian houses these cushions were used as a substitute for conventional seating. The curtains and draped fabric from the ceiling is used in the same way as the curtains of the Scheherazade set (See Figure 3), draped in such a way to give a tent-like effect.

Poiret wasn't only interested in orientalism in fashion and decoration: he wanted to create an atmosphere. His range of perfumes of eastern aromas helped achieve this atmosphere. He was the first couturier to establish a successful sideline from perfumes.

Similar to the emergence of dramatic colours for his fashions, he needed to develop the type of scent which went with these designs, a more pungent accompaniment scent than the discreet and bland flower perfumes which had hitherto been considered suitable for respectable ladies. Now that chic women were anxious to look like odalisques, something more heady was required to suit the prevailing passion for the world of the Arabian Nights.

Based on sandalwood, patachouli and cloves the new scents were combined with chemical essences to create more subtle essences. They were given appropriately sultry names, Poiret's "l'etrange fleur", "Maharadjah" and "Antinea ou au Fond de la Mer", were guaranteed to give voluptuous feelings of the Ballets Russes and to conjure in our memories the choreographic and decorative seductions of Scheherazade.⁴

These perfumes were produced under the name Rosine (named after another of his daughters) in laboratories in Paris. He had a factory in Courbevoie, a suburb to the west of Paris, for bottling and packaging, each perfume had its own bottle which were made by Lalique and Baccarat. Figure 24 shows a selection of these perfumes in their bottles as well as powders and toilet waters which had been popular.

⁴ Battersby 1984, p. 66

Poiret didn't advertise; he preferred to send out perfumed Rosine invitation cards to his collections and to distribute fans with the names of the scents on the front and delightful floral designs on the back.

As well as a house of perfume, Poiret set up a workshop to produce interiors which would complete his desired atmosphere. The Atelier Martine was set up in 1911.

- iv - THE ATELIER MARTINE

This school of decoration involved young teenage girls drawing from nature; in zoos, gardens, etc. whose drawings were used to compile colourful ranges of wallpapers and furnishings. Most of these designs in the end showed the oriental leanings of Poiret himself in their use of rich vibrating colours, rare woods, and unusual materials such as vellum and shagreen. The bold patterns of the textiles lavishly embellished with gold and silver lent an element of sensuous.

The interior shown in Figure 25 is typical of the image produced by the Martine workshops. An exotic atmosphere is created with walls covered in plaited straw surmounted by tree patterned frescoes. A divan "in the style of Paul Poiret" was comprised of a base with two mattresses of unequal size covered with multicoloured cushions. The carpet and pouffes are in printed fabric by Martine.

These interiors meant that an elegant woman could wear a dress designed by Poiret in a settling from the studios of his Atelier Martine, her dress, curtains and upholstery expressing a harmony of design which emanated from the same source.⁵

⁵ Mackrell 1990, p. 51

Through his work in fashion (including his house of perfume) and interior decoration, Paul Poiret created a whole exotic atmosphere which could be experienced by the Parisian public, the same public who had been dazzled and amazed by the splendours of the Russian Ballet.

The feeling created by Scheherazade could now be experienced off stage and in everyday life in the clothes of Paul Poiret, clothes which when worn with one of his perfumes and surrounded by his furnishings created the nearest look to Scheherazade acceptable in everyday life. Paul Poiret made the orient available to the fashion conscious of western Europe.

- v - OTHER DESIGNERS INFLUENCED

The arrival of the Russian Ballet in Paris coincided with the emergence of a host of young talented and extremely versatile designers. Fashion and interior decoration were closely linked with the theatre and it was inevitable that the oriental trend should pervade the decorative arts.

Designers of textiles, furniture, ironwork, glass and bookbinding succumbed to the magic of Diaghilev. The war years were only a temporary lull in this creative outburst.

Designers such as Emile-Jacques Ruhlmann who began to use rare materials in his furniture: materials such as ivory, shagreen, and tortoiseshell. Other furniture designers replaced tassels for handles. Tassels also became very popular trimmings and were available in a variety of types, sizes and materials (See Figure 26). Glass artists were also influenced by this colourful trend. I have already mentioned Rene Lalique for his part in making Paul Poiret's scent bottles. He also used some of the characters of the Diaghilev Ballets as sources for glass engraving (e.g. Figure 27, The Firebird).

Enamelled glass enabled the use of strong colour. Figure 28 shows the work of three glass artists. The middle vase is decorated in areas with the colour tango made so popular in the 1920's.

Textile designers also welcomed the new colour schemes; lavenders, oranges, reds and hot pinks began to emerge in both printed and woven fabrics as well as in carpets, wallpapers and furnishings. Figure 29 gives us an idea of the type of textiles and wallpaper designs being produced.

Jewellery as I have mentioned already, was affected also with the use of coloured stones such as coral and jade combined with onyx and crystal (See Figure 30). Cigarette cases were also highly ornamented and coloured with enamels (See Figure 31).

By the mid 1920's however, the craze for oriental decoration had waned partly due to over familiarity and because newer themes were in the air. The rich colours was the most lasting legacy of the Russian Ballet in both fashion and interior decoration.

The productions of this company continued to hold sway over audiences 'till the mid 1920's but the later works had little or no influence on the decorative arts. The comparative failure of Le Dieu Bleu (one of the ballets of the 1912 repertoire) convinced Diaghilev that the vein of Indo-Persian inspiration had been worked out. Important ballets were still created but none succeeded in influencing fashion and decoration as Scheherazade had done.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY

As well as influencing the decorative arts of the day, the Russian Ballet also had an effect on other ballet companies as regards costumes and sets. Two companies that I have seen, the Kirov and Scottish Ballets to me show evidence of Bakst-influenced costumes and sets.

The Kirov production in question is Le Corsaire (an oriental style ballet, performed in Dublin in May 1990), whose main set (See Figure 32) resembles that of Scheherazade (See Figure 3) with the ceiling drapes as well as the style of oriental costume.

The Scottish Ballet's performance of The Nutcracker (Christmas 1990 in Dublin) to me showed evidence of colour combinations similar to the Diaghilev Ballets in its Russian (See Figure 33), Chinese and Arabian dancers costumes.

Scheherazade's effect on its audiences was immediate: it provoked various reactions, most of which were favourable (if at first the London audiences were shocked, they eventually accepted the revolutionary productions of the Ballets Russes).

This favourable reaction is very much due to the time in which Scheherazade came to Paris; a time when Parisians were fascinated by the orient, as I have referred to in chapter two, a time when the French aristocracy had an unquenchable thirst for exotic novelties. For the theatre going public of Paris Scheherazade was the orient, or rather, the atmosphere of the orient presented on stage.

The designers I have mentioned in this thesis all were influenced and benefitted from the effects of the Ballets Russes, borrowing a spectrum of vivid intense colours to use in their work be that in the field of fashion; Paul Poiret's use of colour in his fashion designs was inspired by the costumes of Bakst, or in textiles (See Figure 29), glass (See Figure 28) or interior decoration.

Of all the designers influenced Paul Poiret took full advantage of his customers' love of the exotic, making available to them fashions and interiors in the oriental style.

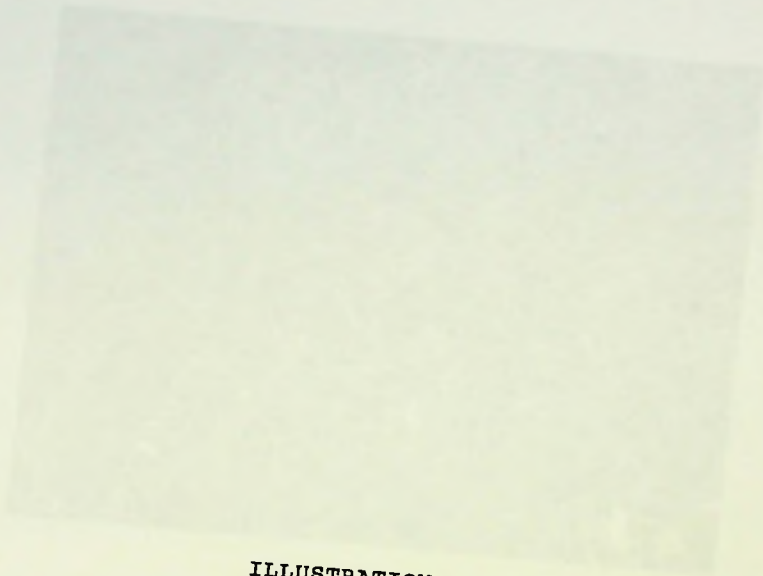
The Ballets Russes fever fizzled out towards the end of the 1920's. Perhaps through over familiarity, oriental style dress and interiors became less and less in demand. The use of vivid colours and daring colour schemes remained popular far longer than the craze for the exotic.

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ILLUSTRATIONS



FIGURE 1 Acacia Branch above the Sea (Bakst, 1908).

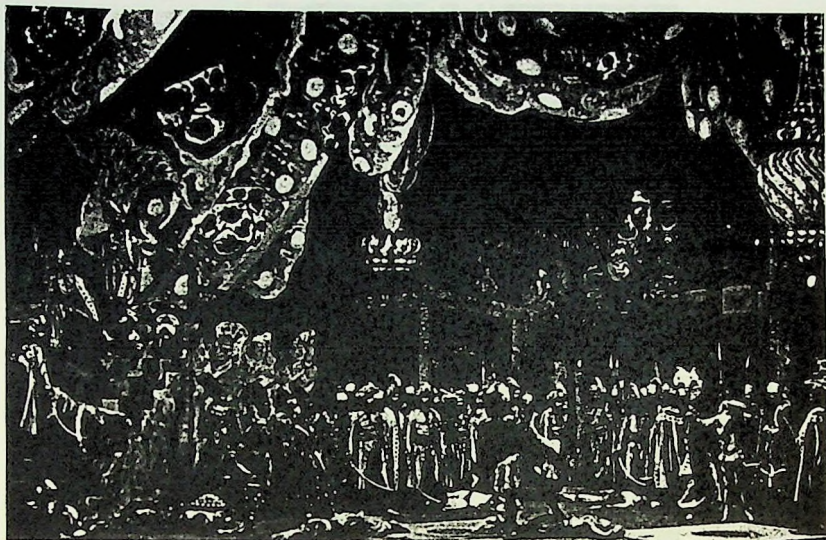


FIGURE 2

A Scene from the ballet Scheherazade
(First performed in Paris, 1910).

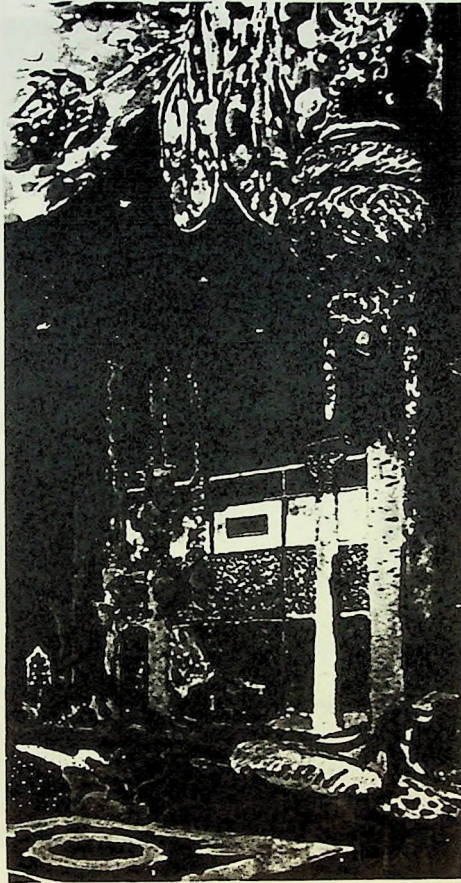


FIGURE 3

A Section of the set design for the ballet
Scheherazade (Bakst, 1910).



FIGURE 4

Scheherazade, costume design for Schahriar, King of India and China, (Bakst, 1910).



FIGURE 5

Scheherazade, Eunich costume design (Bakst, 1910).



FIGURE 6

Group of Dancers from Scheherazade.



FIGURE 7

Scheherazade, Red Sultana costume design (Bakst, 1910).



FIGURE 8

Tamara Karsavina, one of the dancers from Scheherazade.



FIGURE 9

Lampshade Tunic, Poiret.
Lepape 1914.

Drawing by Georges

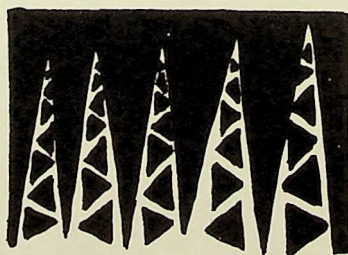


FIGURE 10

Pattern No. 1



FIGURE 11

Pattern No. 2

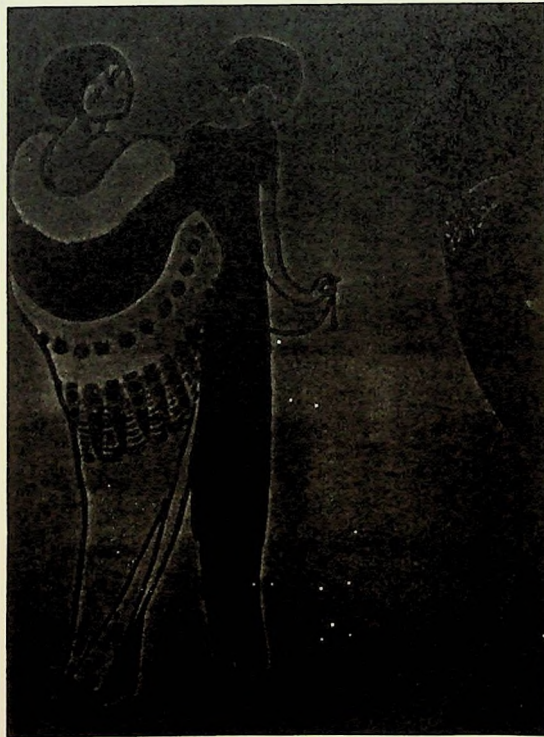


FIGURE 12

Coats, Poiret. Drawing by Georges Lepape 1911



FIGURE 13

Coats, Poiret. Drawing by Georges Lepape for the cover of Les Modes 1912.

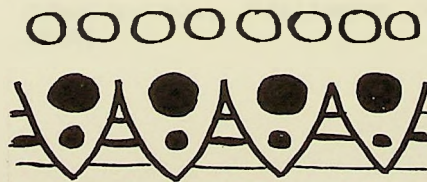


FIGURE 14

Pattern No. 3



FIGURE 15

Scheherazade, Odalisque costume design (Bakst 1910).



FIGURE 16

Turban Design, Poiret. Drawing by Georges Lepape
1911.



FIGURE 17

Catalogue of costumes, Scheherazade programme 1910.



FIGURE 18

Painting of Mme. Poiret wearing a lampshade tunic (her costume for the 1002nd Nights Ball). Painting by Georges Lepape 1911.

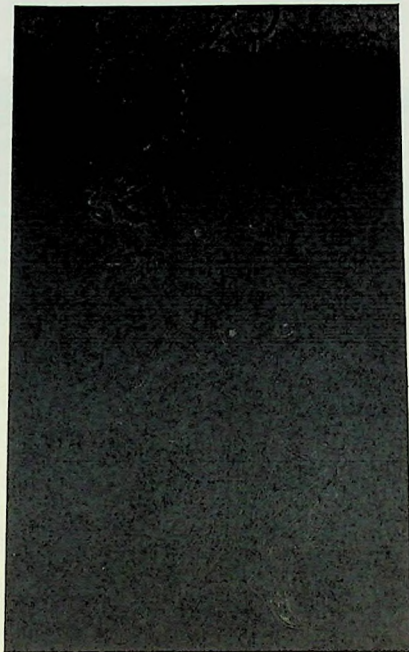


FIGURE 19

Minaret costume design, Poiret. Drawn by Erte
1913.



FIGURE 20

Girls at the Theatre, drawing by Georges Lepap.
1911.

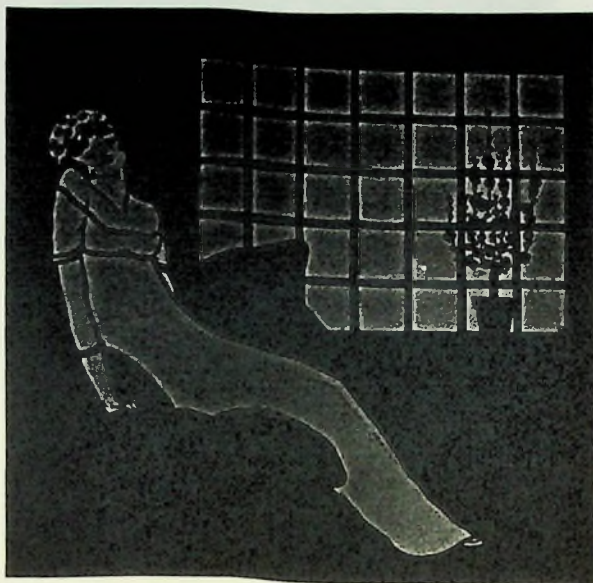


FIGURE 21

Girl on Cushions, drawing by Georges Lepape 1911.



FIGURE 22

Lampshade Tunic, Poiret. Drawing by Georges Lepape 1911.

Drawing by Georges



FIGURE 23

Advertisement for Indra Pearls 1913.



FIGURE 24

Perfumes, Powders and Toilet Water by Rosine.



FIGURE 25

Martine Interior 1925.

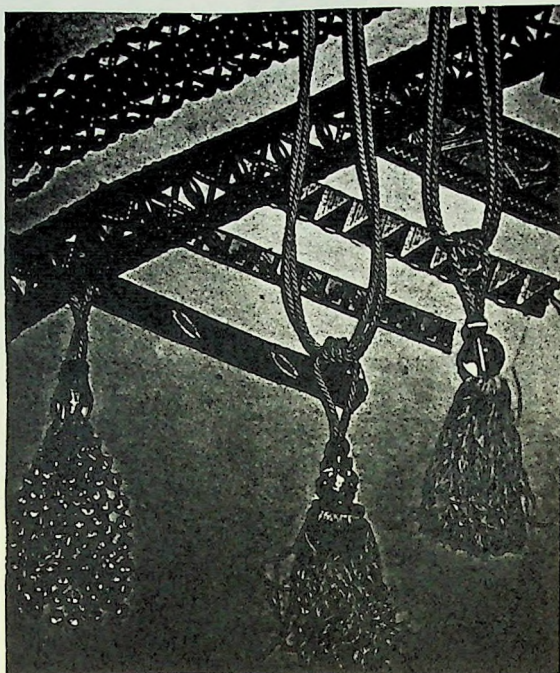


FIGURE 26

A selection of tassels and trimmings available in the mid 1920's. Materials include, stained wood, silks, bakelite and glass.

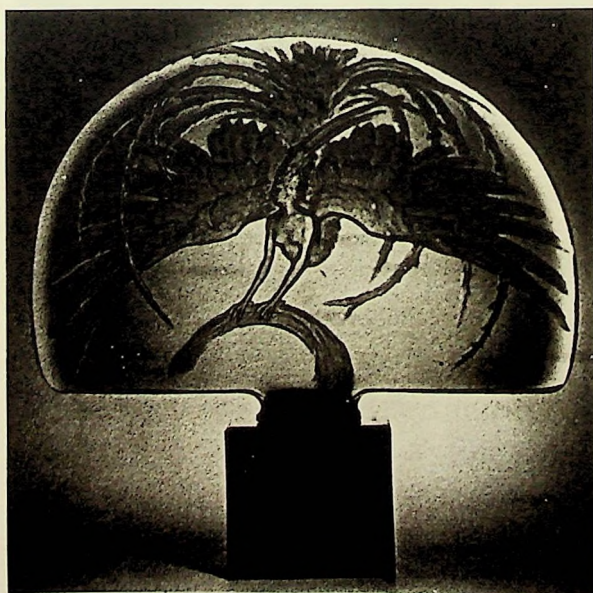


FIGURE 27

Table light engraved with Firebird Figure, René Lalique 1930.

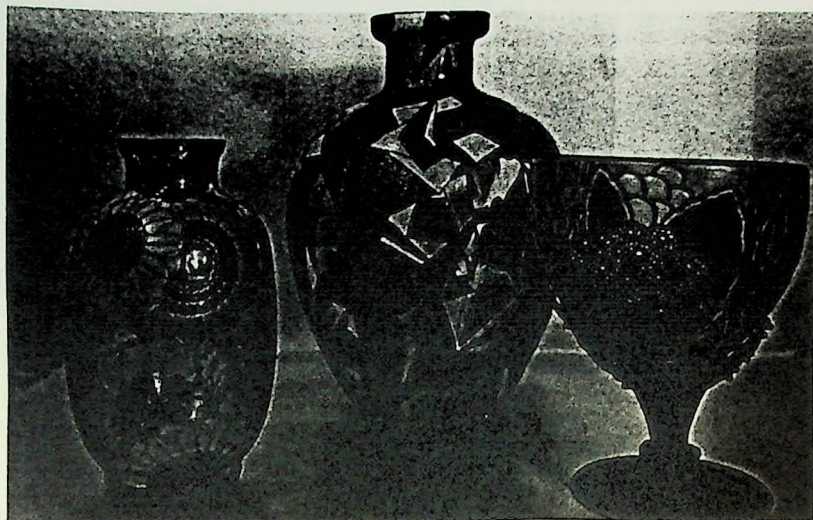


FIGURE 28

Glass vases, enamelled.



FIGURE 29

Textile Designs, 1925.

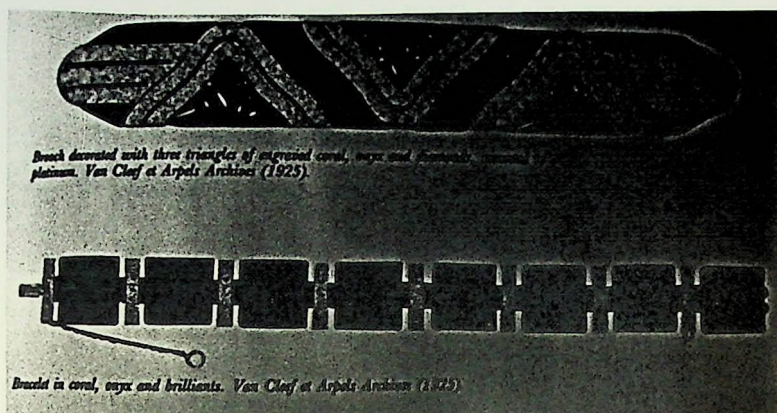


FIGURE 30

Jewellery, Bracelet and Brooch, made of coral, onyx and diamonds. Van Cleef and Arpels Archives (1925).

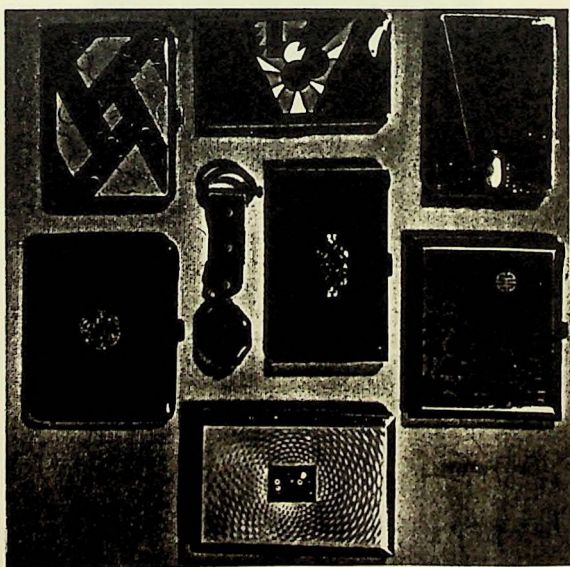


FIGURE 31

Cigarette cases, coloured enamels.

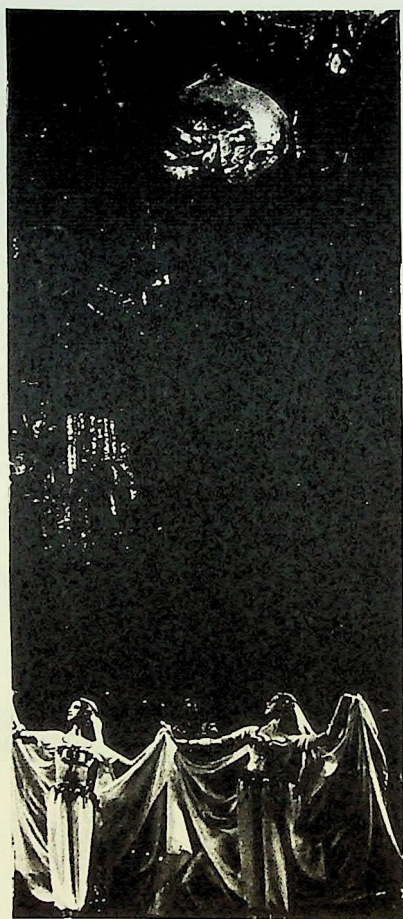


FIGURE 32

Scene from Le Corsaire, The Kirov Ballet.
Performed in Dublin, May 1990.

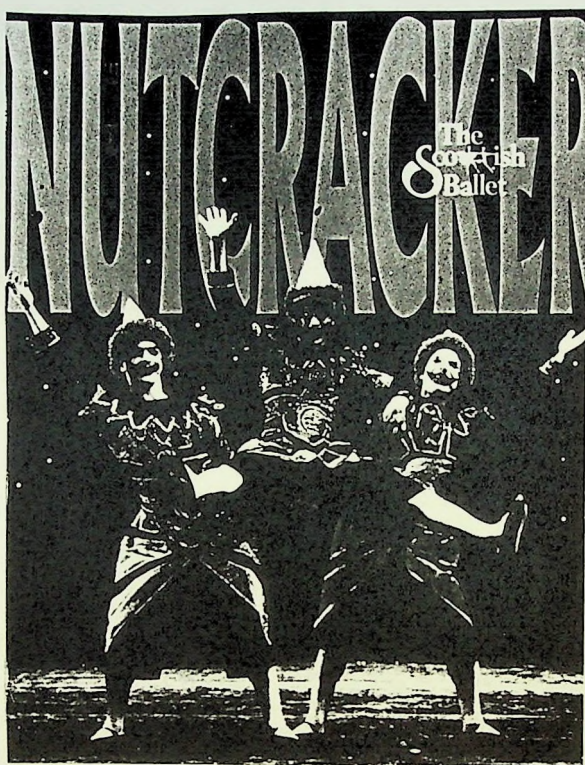


FIGURE 33

Russian dancers from The Nutcracker, The Scottish Ballet. Performed in Dublin Christmas 1990.