



News Release

V&A acquires unique costume worn by pioneering ballet performers, Vaslav Nijinsky and Bronislava Nijinska

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The V&A has acquired a collection of significant material relating to the career of ballet dancer and choreographer, Bronislava Nijinska. The collection includes a rare and stunning art-nouveau costume designed by revolutionary stage designer Léon Bakst, for Bronislava's brother, the Polish dancer and radical choreographer Vaslav Nijinsky. The costume was designed for Nijinsky's performance as a moth in *Papillon*, a miniature ballet choreographed by Nicholas Legat, staged in St. Petersburg in 1909. It was later repurposed for Bronislava Nijinska, who introduced Russian avant-garde ideas to the rest of Europe through her work as a ballet performer, teacher and choreographer. This piece is part of a collection of costumes, designs, posters, photographs and drawings which document Nijinska's career and has been acquired thanks to the support of the Linbury Trust.

Jane Pritchard, Curator of Dance at the V&A, said: "It is very exciting for the V&A to acquire this truly amazing collection. It contributes to our knowledge of the artistry of Bronislava Nijinska, now recognised as one of the great choreographers of twentieth century dance. Each costume has its own story to tell and the Bakst costume shows evidence of how design evolved and changed from representational costumes created for the Imperial ballet to abstract costumes for Modernist dance."

Bronislava Nijinska had danced with Diaghilev's Ballets Russes and left in 1914 following her brother's dismissal as a result of his marriage. She returned to Russia where she remained, working as a teacher and choreographer until 1920. After the War she moved to Kyiv and during the early years of the Revolution put forward her own ideas of dance movement. She worked alongside fine artists, Alexandra Exter and Vadim Meller who created costume designs for her. In 1919, Nijinska had her brother's costume altered and updated to present her abstract solos. The decoration on the skirt added to the costume for Nijinska show striking parallels with contemporary paintings by Russian artist El Lissitzky.

The original costume was bright yellow, green and black with tight cuffs attached to hold the wide sleeves in place. The jacket is trimmed with glass 'emeralds' and it and the green silk-satin cap are liberally sprinkled with green sequins. For Nijinska the yellow sleeves were toned down with black paint and colourful geometric shapes appliqued on the costume. The costume, now beautifully conserved and mounted, is on display in the Theatre and Performance Gallery of the V&A alongside photographs of Nijinska wearing the costume again in 1921 when she danced in cabaret in Vienna before re-joining Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. Also displayed are artefacts from the collection relating to Nijinska as a student, such as his diploma.

The costumes join the V&A's National Collection of Performing Arts along with designs, posters, photographs and drawings which document Nijinska's career. Included in the collection are costumes designed by Natalia Goncharova and Alexandra Exter, both of whom have been described as 'Amazons of the Avant Garde'. Particularly fascinating are the surviving costumes designed by Alexandra Exter for Nijinska's tour to sea-side resorts and spas, from Margate to Penzance and from New Brighton to Whitby in 1925. With her own small company she introduced ideas from modern Russian dance-theatre to British audiences before presenting the works to *The Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* in Paris – the 'Art Deco' World Fair which played a key role in the development of Modernism.

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Notes to Editors:

For further PRESS information please contact the V&A press office on +44 (0) 20 7942 2502 or email press.office@vam.ac.uk (not for publication).

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About the V&A's Theatre and Performance Collection:

The V&A's Theatre and Performance collections document current practice and the history of all areas of performing arts in the UK, including drama, dance, opera, circus, puppetry, comedy, musical theatre, costume, set design, pantomime, popular music and more. The collection was founded in the 1920s when private collector, Gabrielle Enthoven, donated her extensive collection of theatrical designs, memorabilia, books and photographs to the Museum. Since then the collection has continued to grow to include significant objects and works of art, books, manuscripts, audio-visual recordings and ephemera, as well as the archives of performing arts companies, performers, directors, stage designers and private collectors.