

BRONZE & IVORY **AFTERNOON OF A FAUN**

By Marcel-Andre Bouraine

Circa 1930

A darkly patinated bronze satyr, abducting/carrying a gilt bronze and ivory nymph across his shoulders, on a stone base. The sculpture has strong erotic overtones.

Height : 47 cms

Signatures : Engraved 'A Bouraine' on the base

Reference : *Art Deco Sculpture*, Victor Arwas, Academy Editions/St Martin's Press, 1992, pictured pg. 25.



This sculpture was inspired by the ballet *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (Afternoon of a Faun), which was first performed by Ballet Russe in 1912, music by Claude Debussy, choreography by Vaslav Nijinsky, who also danced the lead. Both the music and the ballet were inspired by the poem *L'après-midi d'un faune* by Stéphane Mallarmé.

The style of the ballet, in which a young faun meets several nymphs, flirts with them and chases them, was deliberately archaic. In the original scenography designed by Léon Bakst, the dancers were presented as part of a large tableau, a staging reminiscent of an ancient Greek vase painting. They often moved across the stage in *profile* as if on a bas relief. The ballet was presented in bare feet and rejected classical formalism. The work had an overtly sexual nature for its time and ended with a scene of simulated masturbation.

Lydia Sokolova, the first English dancer in the Ballets Russes, gave the following description of Nijinsky's performance:

Nijinsky as the faun was thrilling. Although his movements were absolutely restrained, they were virile and powerful and the manner in which he caressed and carried the nymph's veil was so animal that one expected to see him run up the side of the hill with it in his mouth. There was an unforgettable moment just before his final amorous descent upon the scarf when he knelt on one leg on top of the hill; with his other leg stretched out behind him. Suddenly he threw back his head, opened his mouth and silently laughed. It was superb acting.

L'Après-midi d'un Faune is considered one of the first modern ballets and proved to be as controversial as Nijinsky's *Jeux* (1913) and *Le sacre du printemps* (1913).

The combination of black bronze, gilt bronze, and white ivory, makes for a very startling and dramatic sculpture. One will be surprised by the size of the work.

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