

AN ART NOUVEAU GILDED BRONZE SCULPTURE 'TAMBOURINE DANCER'

By Agathon Leonard

Circa 1900

The epitome of Art Nouveau styling, this gilt bronze sculpture of a woman clad in loose fitting long dress, bell-shaped sleeves, a scarf, and a chignon hairstyle, is typical of the figures that Agathon Leonard designed. His inspiration was based on the famous American dancer, Lois Fuller. His sculptures were made in biscuit ceramic, in gilded bronze sometimes with ivory components.

- Height : 28.5 cm
- Signatures : Inscribed *A Leonard Sculp*, and foundry mark of *Susse Freres Editeurs Paris*.
- Reference : (i) Alistair Duncan, *Art Nouveau Sculpture*, Academy Editions London, 1978, pg. 32.
(ii) Dan Klein and Margaret Bishop, *Decorative Art 1880-1980*, Phaidon Christie's, 1986, pg. 73.



Agathon Léonard, also known as Léonard Agathon van Weydevelt, was born in Lille in Belgium in 1841 and died in Paris in 1923. He was a French Art Nouveau sculptor. After moving to Paris as a young man, he studied sculpture with Eugene Delaplanche at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. In 1887 he became a member of the Société des Artistes Français and then went to become a member of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts in 1897.

He exhibited at the annual Expositions Universelles and won silver (1889) and then gold in 1900 – the year he also elected as a Chevalier of the Legion d'Honneur.

He achieved great success with a piece based on scarf dances popularised by the American dancer Lois Fuller. This comprised fourteen female figures dancing and playing music around a central female figure. This was displayed at a table centerpiece at the World's Fair held in the Pavillon de Sevres in Paris in 1900. Its design balanced classical forms with sensuous movement typical of the fin-de-siecle style and was so popular, it sold-out and was re-issued several times during the 9 month exposition.

Whilst Leonard worked mainly in bronze, which was cast as the Susse Freres Editeurs foundry, he also produced pieces in marble and quartz and produced Art Nouveau statuettes, pottery and medallions.

Some of his work is now displayed in museums, including his bas-relief of St. Cecilia (Abbeville Museum) and a bust titled 'The Plundered of Shipwrecks' which can be found in the Nantes Museum.

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