

## NATALYA HUGHES

### Creative Australia & The Ballet Russes commission

2009 | *Australia and The Ballet Russes: In the Wings,*  
*Victorian Arts Centre, Melbourne*

This body of work was commissioned by the Victorian Arts Centre to mark the occasion of the centenary of the Ballet Russes. The Ballet Russes is fundamental to the establishment of a modern vision in Australia. Through their scenography and costume design, they introduced Australia to aesthetic modernism. As part of the exhibition project, three contemporary Australian artists were invited to create new work in response to their designs and The Australian Ballet's 2009 program. My contribution focussed on the work of the late 19th, early 20th century Russian artist and designer Leon Bakst, specifically his Orientalist, decadent and highly detailed costume illustrations for the ballet *Scheherazade*.

Bakst's illustrations are characterised by dense patterning, high key colours, and eccentric silhouettes. Responding particularly to their decorative details and their unique figuration, this body of work extends Bakst's costume illustrations by means of abstraction. His designs are reconfigured into a contemporary aesthetic. Influenced by Art Nouveau, Bakst's biomorphic shapes and oriental motifs in turn are transfigured into hybrid, synthetic forms that feature cell-like decorative detail.

*Creative Australia & the Ballet Russes* was exhibited at the Arts Centre, Melbourne (June–September 2009) before touring to regional Victoria (October 2009–December 2010). A 32 page full colour exhibition catalogue with essays by the curators, and additional contributions from experts in the field was also produced. Four of the drawings were acquired by the Victorian Arts Centre.

*The Two Dancers*

by: *Natalya Hughes*

Photographer: *Ben King*



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The Two Dancers, 2009, watercolour  
and pencil on paper, 36 x 48cm.  
Photographer: Ben King.



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The Young Indian, 2009, watercolour and pencil on paper, 36 x 48cm.  
Photographer: Ben King



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1.



2.

1. La Peri, 2009, watercolour and pencil on paper, 36 x 48cm. Photographer: Ben King

2. The Chief Eunuch (from Scheherazade), 2009, watercolour and pencil on paper, 36 x 48cm. Photographer: Ben King

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1.



2.

1. The Firebird, 2009, oil paint on  
linen, 160 x 120 cm. Photographer:  
Ben King

2. The Bride, 2009, watercolour and  
pencil on paper, 36 x 48cm. Photog-  
rapher: Ben King



## Creative Australia & the Ballets Russes

### Exhibition Proposal



Loudon SAINTHILL  
Departure of King Dodon scene from *Le Coq d'Or*, 1938  
gouache and pencil on paper  
the Arts Centre, Performing Arts Collection

the Arts Centre, Melbourne  
6 June 2009 – 20 Sept 2009

Victorian Regional tour  
Oct 2009 – Dec 2010

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## Creative Australia & the Ballets Russes

### Exhibition context

The Arts Centre's *Icons & Insights* exhibition program celebrates the history and contemporary practice of Australian performing arts through the collection, interpretation and presentation of material culture held within the Performing Arts and Public Art Collections. These exhibitions are developed by Arts Centre staff and have the proven ability to attract substantial audience members and enrich visitor experience.

*Creative Australia & the Ballets Russes* seeks to show the profound cultural effect that the Ballets Russes and the Russian Ballet tours had upon modern Australian dance, design and visual arts from the 1930s to the present. The exhibition will be developed in an imaginative and creative way with the specific intent that the program be supplemented with a touring schedule to Victorian provincial centres. The target audiences for the exhibition are traditional Arts Centre audiences and core patrons to the exhibition program, occasional visitors to the Arts Centre, provincial arts centre visitors, dance, visual arts and design audiences, and members of the public interested in 20<sup>th</sup> century Australian and European social history. Potential collection development outcomes may include new works of art created for the exhibition where the Arts Centre has the first option to acquire. The intention is that new relationships with significant dance, visual arts and design figures be developed.

### Exhibition schematic

*Creative Australia & the Ballets Russes* will consist of three main themes with three sub themes. It will showcase between 100 and 120 objects, including approximately nine costumes in groups of three, three clam cases for costume and paper based material and 60 running metres of wall space. The exhibition will also feature a mini cinema environment featuring moving image and sound. A selection of this content will be made for the touring component.



Scrapbooks relating to the Ballets Russes compiled by Naim Taylor, 1936-1940  
The Arts Centre, Performing Arts Collection

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### Supporting evidence

## In the Wings

*In the Wings* presents the work of three contemporary visual artists Wendy Sharpe, Tania Mason and Natalya Hughes, who have been invited to create new work in response to The Australian Ballet's 2009 Ballets Russes program.

There are many stories of modern Australian artists, such as Daryl Lindsay, Loudon Sainthill and Elinor Harry, being drawn to the spectacle of the Ballets Russes tours in the late 1930s, inspired to capture these transitory experiences in pencil and paint. In this tradition and drawing on The Australian Ballet's 2009 Ballets Russes season, Wendy Sharpe has agreed to sketch the hidden world behind the scenes, while Tania Mason will work through photography and video to create meticulously crafted charcoal drawings. For Natalya Hughes the exotic designs for the Ballets Russes provide a point of departure for a painterly re-interpretation of the visual and narrative power of costume as an embodiment of Australia's rich dance history.

A contemporary artists' project supported by Leon and Sandra Velik

Please note: previous works by the contemporary artists illustrated as indication of the type of works currently being created for *Creative Australia and the Ballets Russes*



**SHARPE, Wendy**  
*Embrace (dancers in rehearsals) 1997*  
charcoal and pastel on paper  
Photograph: Courtesy the artist



**LINDSAY, Daryl**  
*Sketchbook of ballet scenes, 1936-1940*  
charcoal on paper  
the Arts Centre, Performing Arts Collection

### In the Wings section

#### Physical requirements / Furniture:

- Approximately 25 works
- 20 running metres of wall space
- One flat top display case for a selection of sketchbooks
- One projector or television with DVD player for moving image



upper left:  
**MASON, Tania**  
*Pursuit in Arcadia 2007*  
charcoal on paper  
Courtesy the artist



upper right:  
**SAINTHILL, Loudon**  
*Painting of the Covent Garden Russian Ballet production of Les Sylphides, 1938 (detail)*  
gouache on paper  
the Arts Centre, Performing Arts Collection



upper left:  
**HUGHES, Natalya**  
*Figures and cells, 2007 (detail)*  
acrylic, pencil and pin pricks on paper  
Courtesy of the artist



upper right:  
**HARRY, Elinor**  
*Zobeida and the Golden Slave from Schéhérazade, 1940*  
gouache, watercolour and ink on paper  
the Arts Centre, Performing Arts Collection

### Supporting evidence

#### Weblinks:

<http://www.sheppartonartmuseum.com.au/pastexhibitions.asp?y=2009>

<http://natalyahughes.com/post/752589886/series-commissioned-by-the-victorian-arts-centre>

<http://www.nla.gov.au/balletsrusses-research/legacy-celebration/creative-australia-the-ballets-russes/>