

Royal Academy of Dance gifted rare painting of legendary Russian ballerina Tamara Karsavina



Image: Christie's Images LTD. 2020.

- Rare portrait of legendary Russian ballerina Tamara Karsavina, by Jacques Émile Blanche, gifted to Royal Academy of Dance
- A pioneer of British and modern Russian ballet and a founding member of the Royal Academy of Dance, Karsavina's portrait joins a rich archive of material designed to inspire and educate students for generations to come
- The portrait will be unveiled in the new Royal Academy of Dance headquarters, set to open in Battersea in autumn 2021.
- For further information visit: www.royalacademyofdance.org

29 March 2021: The Royal Academy of Dance announces that it has been gifted a rare portrait of legendary ballerina Tamara Karsavina (1885-1978), one of its founders, by French painter Jacques Émile Blanche.

One of a handful of portraits that exist of the pioneering ballet dancer, the painting will now join a rich archive of material relating to the woman who helped shape modern British ballet as we know it today. This is the first painting by Blanche to enter the Royal Academy of Dance collection, having been gifted by the generous support of a group of donors from across the UK: The Linbury Trust, Lord and Lady Sainsbury of Preston Candover, Sir Simon and Lady Robertson, Mr Roger Harrison and Mr Kerry and Mrs Dimity Rubie.

Born in St. Petersburg in 1885, Karsavina's early career saw her dance with the Imperial Ballet alongside her celebrated rival dancer Anna Pavlova, before appearing with the distinguished Diaghilev ballet in 1909 as 'perhaps the greatest of Russian dancers'. She came to London, joining the founding committee of The Association of Teachers of Operatic Dancing of Great Britain – which went on to become the Royal Academy of Dance. A hugely influential teacher across the world of ballet, her 'Karsavina Syllabus' devised for the RAD in 1954 is still taught to students on ballet teacher education programmes at RAD Headquarters.

The painting's history

The painting is dated 1928. The work was gifted by Lady Mary Stewart Evans to English dance teacher Roger Tully in 1977. This portrait is the second painting of Karsavina by Blanche. He previously painted her in the role of The Firebird, a very prestigious role created by her with choreographer Michel Fokine. That painting is now housed in the Paris Opera, where the ballet premiered. The painting which has been gifted to the RAD is of particular significance, as there are very few paintings of Karsavina not in ballet costume.

The artist who captured Karsavina

Largely a self-taught artist, French born painter Jacques Émile Blanche (1861-1942) was a society portraitist whose loose brushwork and subdued pallet took direct inspiration from Édouard Manet and Edgar Degas to create a distinctively Impressionist style. Best known for his portraits of the Parisian cultural milieu, including Marcel Proust, Jean Cocteau and August Rodin among others; he also painted the dancing stars of the day, attending dress rehearsals of the Ballets Russes in order to paint such names as Vaclav Nijinsky and Ida Rubenstein.

Luke Rittner CBE, Chief Executive, Royal Academy of Dance says: "We are delighted to welcome Tamara Karsavina back home to the RAD. The painting will help us tell the story behind the foundation of the Academy, and the portrait will hang prominently in the new headquarters, continuing Karsavina's lifelong mission to inspire dancers for generations to come".

Lady Anya Sainsbury CBE, The Linbury Trust says:

"A friend of mine Suzanne Gielgud got in touch and said that a beautiful portrait of Tamara Karsavina, which she had seen before in her friend Roger Tully's house, was due to go on sale at Christie's. Suzanne thought I would be interested and she was right, when I saw the painting I was absolutely ravished by it. However, I felt that it should go somewhere where more people would be able to see and enjoy it. I knew of Karsavina's connections with the Royal Academy of Dance and I realised immediately that it should be acquired and given to the RAD for their new headquarters. I phoned Luke Rittner and in no time, we had together a wonderful group of people whose energy, enthusiasm and contributions made this a reality. I couldn't believe how quickly everything happened."

Charles Cator, Deputy Chairman, Christie's International says, "Christie's London are delighted that the painting of the Russian Prima Ballerina Tamara Karsavina, by society portraitist Jacques Émile Blanche (1861-1942), has been donated to the Royal Academy of Dance. The work fuses two of the greatest art forms, combining painting and dance. It is therefore fitting that after competitive bidding at Christie's in December 2020, the portrait has been gifted to the Royal Academy of Dance as one of the world's most influential dance education and training organisations".

The painting will be on view in the new Royal Academy of Dance headquarters in Battersea, launching in autumn 2021 as the brand-new home for dance.

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Notes to Editors

About Tamara Karsavina

Tamara Karsavina (1885-1978) was born in St. Petersburg and danced with the Imperial Ballet alongside Anna Pavlova. She joined the Diaghilev ballet in 1909 and developed a close working relationship with Michel Fokine who created many roles for her. In 1920 she joined the founding committee of The Association of Teachers of Operatic Dancing of Great Britain (later the RAD). Karsavina was a great teacher who wrote many articles and books on ballet technique. The 'Karsavina Syllabus' was devised for the RAD's teacher training course in 1954 and is still taught today.

About the Royal Academy of Dance

With approximately 13,000 members in 85 countries, the Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) is one of the largest and most influential dance education and training organisations in the world. Established in 1920 to improve standards and re-invigorate dance training, the Academy helps and encourages its teachers to perfect their teaching skills and pass on this knowledge to their students. There are currently over 1,000 students in full-time or part-time teacher training programmes with the Academy and each year the examination syllabus is taught to thousands of young people worldwide, with around a quarter of a million pupils per year going on to take RAD exams.

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