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KUNST SEIT 1982



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FRANÇOIS AUGUSTE RODIN

1840 - Paris - 1917

Danseuse Cambodgienne (also called: *Danseuse devant un miroir*)

Graphite, watercolour and gouache on wove paper (vélin); 1906-7.
295 x 200 mm

PROVENANCE: Dr. Henrik Allard (1868 – Gothenburg - 1941) – As a gift to his daughter and his son in law Erik Killander (1889 - Djursholm - 1972) – Thence by descent to his grandchild

EXHIBITIONS: *Auguste Rodin*, cat. no. 298, Svensk Franska Konstgalleriet, Stockholm 1960, cat. no. 72 (titled *Danseuse devant un miroir*) – *Rodin – levande form (Living Form)*, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, 20 January until 13 March 1966, cat. no. 89

*I followed them to Marseille; and would have followed them to Cairo!*¹

This drawing of a *Cambodian Dancer* belongs to the famous series executed by Rodin after the Royal Khmer Ballet in 1906. The story is well known: in 1906, Cambodia, then a kingdom under French protectorate, was one of the countries invited to take part in the Marseille Colonial Exhibition. King Sisowath 1st, the young monarch of Cambodia, decided to make his state visit accompanied not only by his retinue and ministers, but also by the Royal Ballet, which until then had performed exclusively for the court and the king's entourage. The arrival of the Khmer Ballet in France was a real event, reported in the local and Parisian press. The dancers performed throughout their stay in Marseilles - from April to July - with the exception of a few performances in Paris organized for the presidential festivities around 14 July. On 10 July, Rodin was invited at the last open-air show which took place at the Pré Catelan in the Bois de Boulogne by the Ministry of Colonies. On the 12th, he made a few sketches of the king, his delegation and the dancers before their return to Marseille and their final departure for Cambodia on 20 July. Struck by the extraordinary suppleness of the Cambodian women and the authentic beauty of these ancient dances, Rodin decided to follow the Cambodian dancers to Marseille and take advantage of the few days remaining to draw them.

Rodin was able to sketch them in the gardens of the Villa des Glycines where they were staying. Émile San Remo, a Marseilles photographer, documented these sketching sessions [Fig. 1]. Describing the sessions, Rodin wrote: *With my enchanting friends I have spent the four most beautiful days of my life [...]. They have brought antiquity back to life for me. In reality they have shown me all the fine gestures and all the fine movements of the human body which the ancients were able to capture so well in their images. [...]. These monotone and slow dances that follow such strange musical rhythms possess an extraordinarily perfect beauty that resembles the beauty of [ancient] Greece but with a very*

¹ Louis Vauxcelles, in his preface to the catalogue of the exhibition *Dessins d'Auguste Rodin*, Galerie Devambez, Paris 1908: *Je les ai contemplées en extase ... Quel vide elles m'ont laissé ! Quand elles partirent, je fus dans l'ombre et le froid, je crus qu'elles emportaient la beauté du monde ... Je les suivis à Marseille; et je les aurais suivies jusqu'au Caire!* – Raphaël Masson, *Sources of Inspiration*, in Raphaël Masson and Véronique Matussi, *Rodin*, Musée Rodin, Paris 2004, pp.173-4.

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*special character of its own. The Cambodian dancers have introduced me to movements that I have yet to find elsewhere, whether in sculpture or in nature.*²

Rodin noted in particular the ‘wave’-like undulation of their bodies, which starts from the shoulder blades and descends into the spine and then the knees. This impression of a serpentine line that flows from top to bottom is indeed present in many of the 150 or so drawings of Cambodians he is known to have produced around 1906.³ About a hundred of them are sketches of individual dancers. But there are also studies of hands and arms, and sketches depicting a number of dancers on a single sheet. What is so remarkable about these drawings is their extraordinary spontaneity and weightlessness. They constitute one of Rodin’s outstanding achievements.

The drawings of Cambodian dancers not only mark a high point in Rodin’s late *oeuvre*, they also constitute the culmination of a remarkable artistic career. The drawings, despite their frequently cursory, ethereal quality, show him at the peak of his powers as a draughtsman and colourist. They are outstanding depictions of oriental dance tradition.⁴ Rainer Maria Rilke visited the exhibition of Rodin’s drawings of *Cambodgiennes* at the Galerie Bernheim-Jeune in Paris in 1907, writing: *One might call them ‘herbarium’ sheets, going from one to the next. Here flowers have been preserved and through careful drying their random characteristics have been compressed with a definitive intensity that reveals their very being – like a symbol.*⁵ This in confirmation of an annotation he had noticed in Rodin’s hand in the margin of one of the drawings, namely: *fleur humaine.*⁶

This previously unpublished drawing of a Cambodian dancer from the Henrik Allard collection, seen both from the back and from the front (which is quite unique in the series), is part of the so-called ‘H Group’, a particular group of dancers where the dancers’ faces are simple ovals, with little indication of their features, and the dark brown flesh colour of the body.

The rapid, spontaneous quality of the drawing indicates that the work was probably done in Marseille, while the colouring was probably done at a second after Rodin’s return to Paris.

These characteristics are also to be found in the Cambodian Dancer in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, for example (fig. 2) or in certain versions in the Rodin Museum (figs. 3 to 6), watercoloured in different ways.⁷

² *Ich habe mit meinen niedlichen Freundinnen die vier schönsten Tage meines Lebens verbracht. . . Sie haben für mich die Antike wieder aufleben lassen. Sie haben mir in der Wirklichkeit die schönen Gesten, die schönen Bewegungen des menschlichen Körpers gezeigt, die die Alten im Bilde festzuhalten verstanden. . . . Diese monotonen und langsamen Tänze, die dem Rhythmus einer seltsamen Musik folgen, haben eine außerordentliche, eine vollkommene Schönheit, die der griechischen Schönheit gleicht, aber doch ihren besonderen Charakter hat. Durch die Tänzerinnen von Kambodscha habe ich Bewegungen kennengelernt, die ich noch nirgends gefunden hatte, weder in der Bildhauerkunst noch in der Natur.* Auguste Rodin, *Äußerungen über die Kambodschanischen Tänzerinnen*, in *Kunst und Künstler*, IV, Berlin 1906, pp. 531-2 (comments by Rodin cited by Georges Bourdon in *Rodin et les petites princesses jaunes*, published in *Le Figaro*, 1 August 1906).

³ Alexandra Gerstein, in: *Rodin and Dance. The Essence of Movement*, exh. cat., The Courtauld Gallery, London, 20 October 2016 until 22 January 2017, p 88

⁴ J. A. Schmoll gen. Eisenwerth, *Kambodschanische Tänzerinnen*, in *Auguste Rodin, Zeichnungen und Aquarelle*, exhib. cat., Münster, Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, 1984, p.397.

⁵ *Herbarium-Blätter, möchte man sagen, wenn man so von einem zum anderen geht. Blumen sind da aufbewahrt worden und haben, bei vorsichtigem Vertrocknen, ihre unwillkürliche Gebärde zu einer endgültigen Intensität zusammengezogen, die ihr ganzes Gewesensein wie in einem Zeichen enthält.* Rainer Maria Rilke, in *Kunst und Künstler*, VII, Berlin 1908-9, pp.223-4. The exhibition at the Galerie Bernheim-Jeune was the first exhibition solely of Rodin’s drawings.

⁶ *Cinq études de danseuses cambodgiennes*, Musée Rodin, Paris [inv. D 4517]. – J. A. Schmoll gen. Eisenwerth, op. cit., p. 398.

⁷ Christina Baley-Urbe in her letter dated 12 December 2024. – See also: Christina Baley-Urbe, *Rodin et les danseuses cambodgiennes. Sa dernière passion*, exhib. cat., Musée Rodin, Paris 2006, pp. 53-69.

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Christina Buley-Urbe has confirmed the authenticity of this drawing in her letter dated 12 December 2024. She will include the work in the *Catalogue raisonné des dessins d'Auguste Rodin* under no. 241201.



Fig. 1: Émile San Remo. *Rodin drawing a Cambodian dancer in Marseilles.* Photograph, 1906.



Fig. 2: *Cambodian Dancer*, 1906,
Graphite, watercolour, gouache on wove paper,
290 x 196 mm.
Museum of Fine Art, Boston
Inv. no. 48.851

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Fig. 3: *Danseuse cambodgienne*, 1906-07,
Graphite, watercolour, gouache on wove paper,
299 x 200 mm.
Private collection
(Formerly Le Claire Kunst, Hamburg)



Fig. 4: *Danseuse cambodgienne de trois-quarts vers la gauche*, 1906,
Graphite, watercolour, gouache on wove paper,
312 x 197 mm.
Musée Rodin, Paris
Inv. no. D. 04512



Fig. 5: *Danseuse cambodgienne de face*, 1906,
Graphite, watercolour, gouache on wove paper,
300 x 199 mm.
Musée Rodin, Paris
Inv. no. D. 04452



Fig. 6: *Danseuse cambodgienne de face*, 1906,
Graphite and watercolour on tracing paper,
333 x 251 mm.
Musée Rodin, Paris
Inv. no. D. 04485