



Les Sylphides

Date

c. 1909

Primary Maker

Henry Tonks

Medium

Pastel on paper

Dimensions

58.3 x 58.7 cm

Description

This pastel shows a scene from the ballet 'Les Sylphides'.

'Les Sylphides' is a short, non-narrative ballet blanc. Its original choreography was by Mikhail Fokine, with music by Frédéric Chopin orchestrated by Alexander Glazunov. Glazunov had already set some of the music in 1892 as a purely orchestral suite, under the title 'Chopiniana', Op. 46. In that form it was introduced to the public in December 1893, conducted by Rimsky-Korsakov. It was presented as 'Les Sylphides' in the first season of Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes in 1909. Les Sylphides has no plot, but instead consists of many sylphs dancing in the moonlight with a poet or young man. These figures can be seen at the base of the picture with the theatrical scenery of a forest reaching high up above the dancers. Sylphs are mythical creatures associated with the air and are generally described as being invisible, however, through literature, in particular the famous poem by Alexander Pope entitled 'Rape of the Lock', they take on the form of a spirit.