

Den vilde,  
vovede og sene  
Willumsen

J J F W W

Wild,  
Bold, and Late  
Willumsen

Musen, matrosen, Harlekin  
og anføreren: Willumsens portrætter  
af Michelle Bourret

The Muse, the Sailor, the Harlequin,  
and the Leader: Willumsen's Portraits  
of Michelle Bourret

I 1928 mødte J.F. Willumsen Michelle Bourret, en 28-årig fransk danserinde, som skulle blive hans muse og samleverske i de næste 30 år. I de talrige malerier, der forestiller Bourret, optræder hun i skikkelse af gudinden Diana, danser i forskellige dragter, leger med en kat, passer haven og overrækker Willumsen en fødselsdagskage på hans 80-årsfødselsdag. Willumsen malede sine portrætter af Bourret i en afgørende fase af sin karriere. Den sommer afslørede Statens Museum for Kunst *Det store relief*, som mange betragter som Willumsens største bedrift. Skulpturrelieffet, der består af Carrara-marmor i mange forskellige farver, som kunstneren omhyggeligt udvalgte i et italiensk stenbrud, samt træ, bronze og perlemor, havde været 35 år undervejs. Willumsen beskrev selv relieffet som "en Sammenstilling af symbolske Typer for (mit) Syn paa Tilværelsen og Menneskelivet".<sup>1</sup> For kunstneren stod *Det store relief* som hans hovedværk, ligesom Auguste Rodins *Helvedes port* eller Edvard Munchs *Livsfrisen*. Da Willumsen havde færdiggjort dette monumentale projekt, vendte han tilbage til maleriet og fokuserede i en stor del af sin sene karriere på portrætter. Willumsens portrætter af Bourret er drevet af en konstellation af impulser, som spænder fra mellemkrigsårenes fornyede interesse for den klassiske kunst til nye tendenser i den moderne dans, og de røber, hvor kompliceret deres forhold var.

**Willumsen og efterkrigstidens nyklassicisme**

Willumsens fokus på det figurative kom ikke som nogen overraskelse i 1928. I kølvandet på Første Verdenskrig valgte mange kunstnere realismen – og i særlighed skildringer af kvindekroppen – som middel til at overvinde krigens rædsler. Den hele og intakte klassiske figur tjente til at bekæmpe de billede af ødelagte, skamferede og lemlestede kroppe, som mange europæere så under og efter krigen. Selv om det manifesterede sig på mange forskellige måder, valgte kunstnere i Frankrig, Italien og Tyskland at

In 1928, J.F. Willumsen met Michelle Bourret, a 28-year old French dancer who would become his muse and companion for the next thirty years. In the numerous paintings that feature her, Bourret takes on the guise of the goddess Diana, dances in various costumes, plays with a cat, tends to the garden, and presents a birthday cake to Willumsen on his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. Willumsen produced his portraits of Bourret at a pivotal moment in his career. That summer, the National Gallery of Denmark unveiled *The Great Relief*, viewed by many as Willumsen's greatest achievement. Comprised of multiple colours of Carrara marble, meticulously selected by the artist at an Italian quarry, as well as wood, bronze, and mother-of-pearl, the sculptural relief was a project 35 years in the making. Willumsen himself described the relief as a 'collation of types symbolising (my) view of existence and human life'.<sup>1</sup> For the artist, *The Great Relief* functioned as his *magnum opus*, akin to Auguste Rodin's *The Gates of Hell* or Edvard Munch's *Frieze of Life*. After the completion of this monumental project, Willumsen returned to painting, focusing on portraiture for a large part of his late career. Driven by a constellation of impulses, ranging from the post-war classical revival to emerging trends in contemporary dance, Willumsen's portrayals of Bourret reveal the complexities of their real-life partnership.

**Willumsen and Post-War Neoclassicism**

Willumsen's focus on the figurative comes as no surprise in 1928. In the wake of WWI, many artists embraced realism, and particularly the female form, as a means to cope with the horrors of war. The classical figure, whole and intact, served to combat the visions of broken, severed, disfigured, and amputated bodies that many Europeans saw during and after the war. Although it manifested

arbejde inden for den klassicistiske æstetik, som repræsenterede orden, organisation og varige værdier.<sup>2</sup> Som Ulla Hjorth skriver i *J.F. Willumsen i Europa*, var Willumsen, selv om han altid havde arbejdet i en figurativ stil og altid havde holdt sig fra de forskellige former for abstraktion, der var fremherskende i de første to årtier af det 20. århundrede, yderst opmærksom på de tendenser, der begyndte at gøre sig gældende i Frankrig, Tyskland og Italien. Ulla Hjorth bemærker, at Willumsen, selv om han fastholdt, at han ikke interesserede sig for tidens andre kunstneriske bevægelser, måtte have set Giorgio de Chiricos værker på sine gentagne rejser til Italien i 1920'erne og 1930'erne. Hun drager paralleller mellem de Chiricos arkitekturmotiver og Willumsens billeder af Rom og Venedig, men de Chiricos eksempel var sandsynligvis også en væsentlig kraft i Willumsens figurmalerier i 1920'erne og 1930'erne.<sup>3</sup>

I december 1919 udkom de Chiricos essay *Piccolo trattato di tecnica pittorica* (Lille tekst om maleriets teknik), som blev meget læst i Italien og Tyskland. De Chirico gjorde sig til fortaler for en tilbagevenden til traditionelle materialer og teknikker og en traditionel ikonografi og opfordrede til en realistisk figurskildring: "Og i denne tilbagevenden er det store problem, der skræmmer (kunstnerne) mest, menneskeskikkelsen ... Man har forsømt og forvrænget den antropomorfe repræsentation, og det har opmuntret hele hærskarer af malere til at frembringe dumme og letkøbte reproduktioner. Det dyriske menneske udgør et problem, som nu vender tilbage og tegner sig større og frygteligt end nogensinde, for denne gang mangler vi de våben, som vi skal bruge imod det, eller rettere, de findes, men de er sløve, og mange har glemt, hvordan man bruger dem."<sup>4</sup> Indtil 1919 var de Chiricos værker trøstesløse arkitekturlandskaber, der ofte var fulde af brudstykker af klassiske buster og befolket af mannequiner. Efter offentliggørelsen af *Piccolo trattato di tecnica pittorica* afspejlede de Chiricos stilistiske beslutninger, især i hans portrætter, hans beundring for renæssancemalerne. Adskillige tyske kunstnere fra Neue Sachlichkeit-gruppen beundrede i høj grad de Chiricos afhandling og støttede desuden en tilbagevenden til figurmaleriet og forkastede den subjektivitet, abstraktion og maleriske overdådighed, der prægede førkrigsårenes ekspressionisme.<sup>5</sup>

De Chiricos *Selvportræt (Autoritratto)* omkring 1922 er en klar visuel manifestation af idelet om en "tilbagevenden til håndværket". I maleriet ses et selvportræt, der er anbragt over for en marmorbuste forestillende kunstneren, og i baggrunden ses nogle trøstesløse bygninger, som måske hentyder til de Chiricos tidligere metafysiske værker. De Chiricos fine schattering og modellering i gengivelsen af sit eget ansigt og mar-

itself in varying ways, artists in France, Italy, and Germany adopted the aesthetics of classicism, which represented order, organization, and enduring values.<sup>2</sup> As Ulla Hjorth argues in *Willumsen in Europe*, although he had always practiced in a figurative style, never adopting any of the forms of abstraction prevalent in the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Willumsen was extremely conscious of emerging trends in France, Germany, and Italy. In spite of his insistent denial of any interest in other contemporary artistic movements, Hjorth asserts that Willumsen would have encountered the work of Giorgio de Chirico on his repeated trips to Italy throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Although she draws parallels between de Chirico's architectural motifs and Willumsen's images of Rome and Venice, it is likely that de Chirico's example also served as an important force in Willumsen's figural paintings of the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>3</sup>

Published in December 1919, de Chirico's essay, *Piccolo trattato di tecnica pittorica*, ('Return to Craft'), was read widely in Italy and Germany. Championing a return to traditional materials, techniques, and iconography, de Chirico encouraged an embrace of realistic figuration: 'And so the great problem that terrifies (artists) most in this return is that of the human figure ... The neglect of anthropomorphic representation and the deformation of it, encouraged entire legions of painters to turn out stupid and facile reproductions. With its return the problem of animal-man looms larger and more terrible than ever, since, this time, the right weapons to confront it are lacking, or rather they do exist, but they are blunt, and many have forgotten how to use them.'<sup>4</sup> Prior to 1919, de Chirico's work consisted of desolate architectural landscapes, often filled with fragments of classical busts and inhabited by mannequins. After the publication of 'Return to Craft', his stylistic decisions, especially in his portraits, reflected his admiration for Renaissance painters. A number of German artists of the Neue Sachlichkeit group greatly admired de Chirico's treatise and also supported a return to figurative representation, rejecting the subjectivity, abstraction, and painterly exuberance of pre-war Expressionism.<sup>5</sup>

De Chirico's *Autoritratto* (Self-Portrait) ca. 1922 is a clear visual manifestation of 'Return to Craft.' The painting features a self-portrait facing a marble bust of his own likeness, with several desolate buildings in the background, perhaps a nod to de Chirico's earlier metaphysical works. His use of fine shading and delicate modelling in the rendering of his own face and the marble bust demonstrates his

morbusten viser, at han har tillagt sig en nyklassicistisk eller nybarok stil, som er stærkt påvirket af gamle mestre som Rafael og Peter Paul Rubens. De Chirico tilføjer også et "se ipsum" efter sin signatur i nederste højre hjørne; det er latin for "ham selv" og hævder på én gang hans identitet og hans forhold til den klassiske fortid. På samme måde slutter *Piccolo trattato di tecnica pittorica* med sætningen "Pictor classicus sum": Jeg er en klassisk maler.

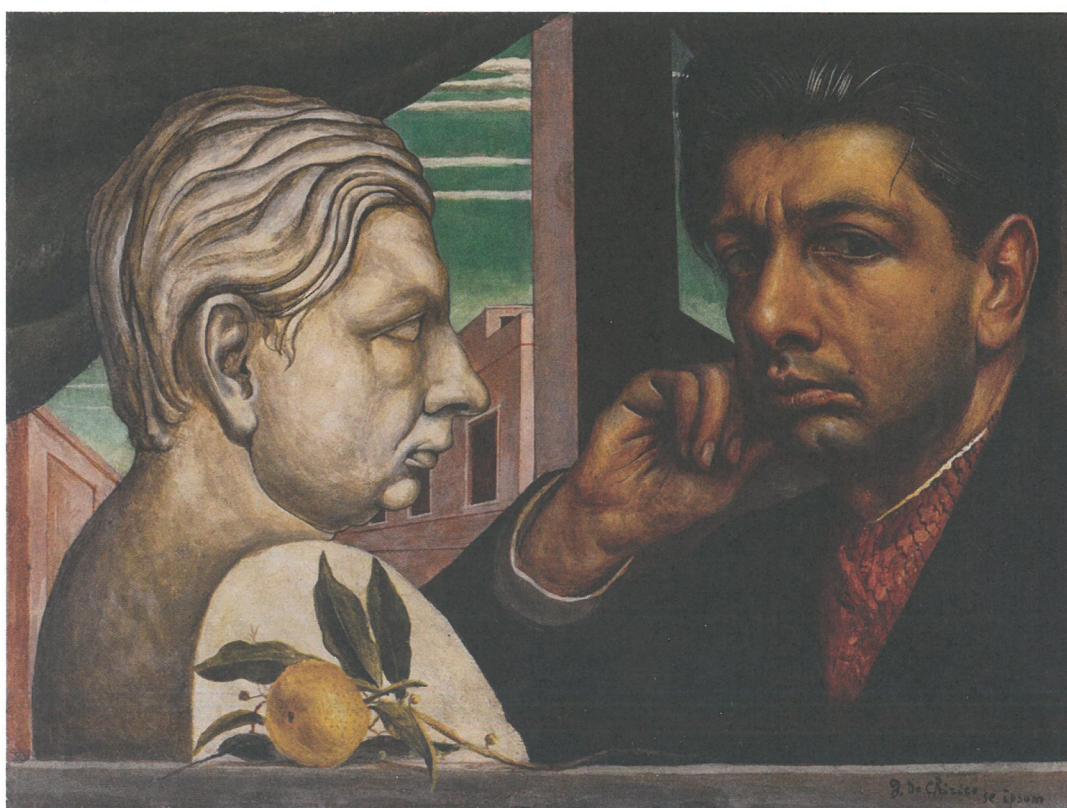
Selv om Willumsen måske ikke havde læst *Piccolo trattato di tecnica pittorica*, gav mange af de idealer, som de Chirico formulerede i sit essay, genlyd hos kunstnere, som virkede efter krigen. Willumsens figurative værker efter 1928 afspejler de stilistiske og ikonografiske valg, som både de Chirico og Neue Sachlichkeit-kunstnerne havde inkorporeret i deres. Willumsen eksperimenterede med flere forskellige klassiske motiver i den sene del af sin karriere, og i mange af dem indgik Bourret. I *Sangen – plastiken – dansen. Tre nøgne piger i en park* (1930) holder tre nøgne kvinder, med Bourret i midten, hinanden i hænderne, mens de danser i skoven. Willumsens henvisning til de tre gratier – Zeus' døtre og gudinder for ynde, skønhed og kreativitet – er indlysende, og det samme er hentydningen til de talrige fremstillinger af de tre gratier i renæssancens malerkunst og den klassiske skulptur. Willumsen sidestiller imidlertid dette klassiske motiv med sin egen interesse i tidens dans og fremstiller kvinderne som allegorier på sang, bevægelse og dans.<sup>6</sup> Ole Nørlyng forklarer betydningen af Willumsens brug af ordet "plastik" i værkets titel: "Det udtryk, han brugte om den slags bevægelse – plastik, det vil sige plasticitet, smidighed, skulpturalitet i

adoption of a Neoclassical or neo-Baroque style, heavily influenced by Old Master painters such as Raphael and Peter Paul Rubens. De Chirico also adds 'se ipsum' after his signature in the lower right corner, Latin for 'he himself,' asserting both his identity and his relationship to the classical past. Likewise, 'Return to Craft' ends with the phrase 'Pictor classicus sum': I am a classical painter.

Although Willumsen may not have read 'Return to Craft,' many of the ideals de Chirico proposed in his essay reverberated throughout the work of artists practising after the war. Willumsen's figural work after 1928 reflects stylistic and iconographic choices that both de Chirico and the Neue Sachlichkeit artists had incorporated into theirs. Willumsen experimented with several classical subjects throughout his late career, many of which feature Bourret. In *Song – Movement – Dance. Three Naked Girls in a Park* (1930) three nude women, with Bourret in the center, join hands and dance in the forest. Willumsen's reference to the Three Graces – the daughters of Zeus and the goddesses of charm, beauty, and creativity – is evident, as is his allusion to the numerous representations of the Three Graces in Renaissance painting and classical sculpture. However, Willumsen juxtaposes this classical subject with his own interest in contemporary dance, casting the women as allegories of song, movement, and dance.<sup>6</sup> Ole Nørlyng explains the significance of Willumsen's use of 'plastik' in the work's title: 'The term he used for this kind of movement – plastik, i.e. plasticity, flexibility, sculpturality in motion – was extremely widespread in Germany and Scandinavia

Giorgio de Chirico  
Autoritratto, ca. 1922  
Selvportræt / Self-Portrait  
Olie på lærred / oil on canvas  
38.4 x 51.1 cm  
Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio

Sangen – plastiken – dansen.  
Tre nøgne piger i en park, 1930  
The Song – The Movement –  
The Dance. Three Naked  
Girls in a Park  
Olie på lærred / oil on canvas  
83 x 104 cm  
J.F. Willumsens Museum





J.F.W. April 1930

bevægelse – var uhyre udbredt i Tyskland og Skandinavien i 1920’erne, og denne disciplin, der udvikler menneskets evne til at bevæge kroppen harmonisk og smukt, gav i kombination med egentlig gymnastik en dramatisk virkning og tilsteds værelse på scenen, således at bevægelserne fik tilført udtrykskraft og dramatisk liv.<sup>7</sup> Willumsens brug af ”plastik” henviste sandsynligvis til den form for frigjort bevægelse, som Isadora Duncan var forkæmper for i begyndelsen af det 20. århundrede. Duncan afviste mange af de traditionelle former for koreograferet dans og advoerede for, at dansen, for at kunne udvikle sig, måtte vende tilbage til sine antikke rødder: en hyldest til naturen og til kroppen, til bevægelsen og til naturen.<sup>8</sup>

Willumsen vedblev i de følgende årtier at skildre Bourret som en klassisk inspireret skikkelse. I *Jægerpigen i skoven* (omkring 1934) (s. 61) løber Bourret nøgen gennem skoven med en bue i den ene hånd og en pil i den anden. Willumsens fremstilling af hende er inspireret af gudinden Diana, hvilket er helt i tråd med mellemkrigsårenes tilbagevenden til klassiske motiver. I *Den gamle maler og hans muse* (1947) (s. 27) og *De to kunstnere. J.F. Willumsen og Michelle Bourret* (1954) optræder danserinden i plisseret antik klædedragt. Selv om hun ikke bærer nogen af de attributter, der almindeligvis forbindes med den græske mytologis ni-

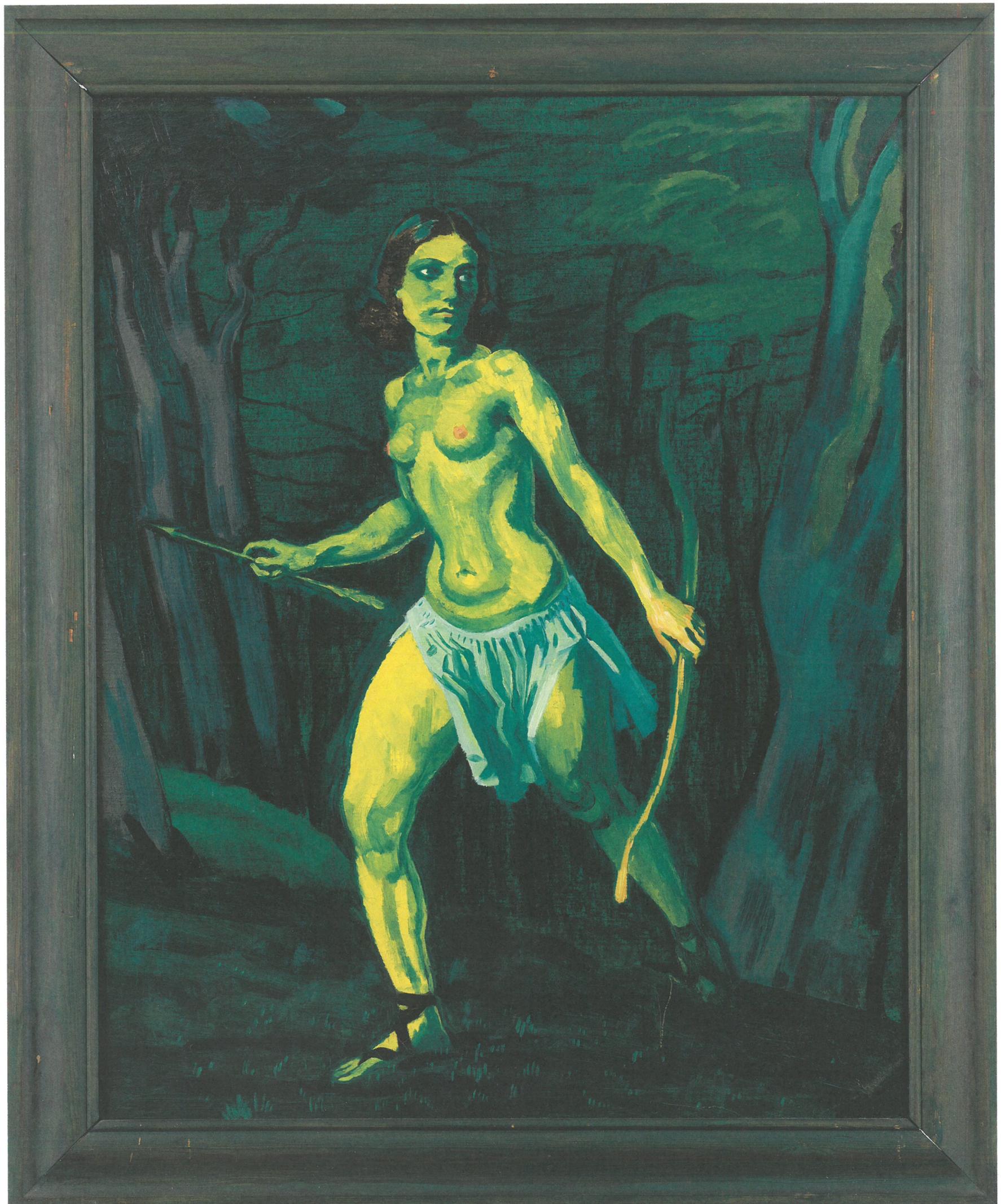
in the 1920s, and this discipline, which develops the human ability to engage in harmonious, beautiful body movements, actually combined with a true kinetics or calisthenics with dramatic effects and stage presence, so that the movements were enriched with expressive power and dramatic life.<sup>7</sup> Willumsen’s use of ‘plastik’ was likely a reference to the type of liberated movement pioneered by Isadora Duncan in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Rejecting many of the traditional forms of choreographed dance, Duncan advocated that in order for the medium to progress, it must return to its roots in antiquity: a celebration of nature and the body.<sup>8</sup>

Willumsen continued to portray Bourret as a classically-inspired figure throughout the next several decades. In *Huntress in the Forest* (c. 1934) (p. 61), Bourret runs nude through the woods, a bow in one hand and an arrow in the other. Inspired by the goddess Diana, his depiction of her is in keeping with a post-war return to classical motifs. In *The Old Painter and his Muse* (1947) (p. 27) and *The Two Artists. J.F. Willumsen and Michelle Bourret* (1954), the dancer appears in pleated antique garb. Although she does not carry one of the attributes commonly associated with the nine muses of Greek mythology, her vaguely Greco-Roman tunic and braided hairstyle in *The Old Painter and his Muse*

To kunstnere. J.F. Willumsen og Michelle Bourret, 1954  
Two Artists. J.F. Willumsen and Michelle Bourret  
Tempera på lærred / tempera on canvas  
159 x 130 cm  
Victor Petersens  
Willumsen-samling,  
Herregården Odden

Diana jager i den sorte skov. Portræt af Mme M. Bourret, 1930  
Diana Hunting in a Black Forest. Portrait of Mme M. Bourret  
Olie på lærred / oil on canvas  
106 x 83 cm  
J.F. Willumsens Museum





muser, minder hendes græsk-romerske tunika og flettede hår i *Den gamle maler og hans muse* om de døtre og frisurer, der ses afbildet på antikke vaser og buster. Ligesom mange af Willumsens samtidige – de Chirico, Pablo Picasso, André Derain, Gino Severini og Neue Sachlichkeit-kunstnerne – fandt inspiration i den klassiske verden, kombinerede han antikke motiver med sin udpræget moderne malerstil.

### Willumsen og det mangefacetterede danseportræt

Willumsens mest komplekse og nuancerede portrætter af Bourret er imidlertid tre helfigurmalerier, som alle blev færdiggjort i perioden 1931-1935 og viser hende udføre en sømandsreel (1931), som Harlekin (1934) og i færd med at danse bostonvals (1935). De mange forarbejder i form af tegninger og fotografier, som Willumsen udførte til disse tre lærreder, viser, hvor nøje han iagttag Bourrets bevægelser, positurer og ansigtsudtryk. Disse portrætter bekræfter Willumsens optagethed af tidens dans samt Bourrets profession, men de tjener også som et middel for kunstneren til at udtrykke sin kritik af Europa efter Første Verdenskrig og antydede desuden det raffinerede i deres forhold.

Portrættet som en form for politisk kommentar var på mode efter Første Verdenskrig, især blandt tyske kunstnere. Mange medlemmer af Neue Sachlichkeit –

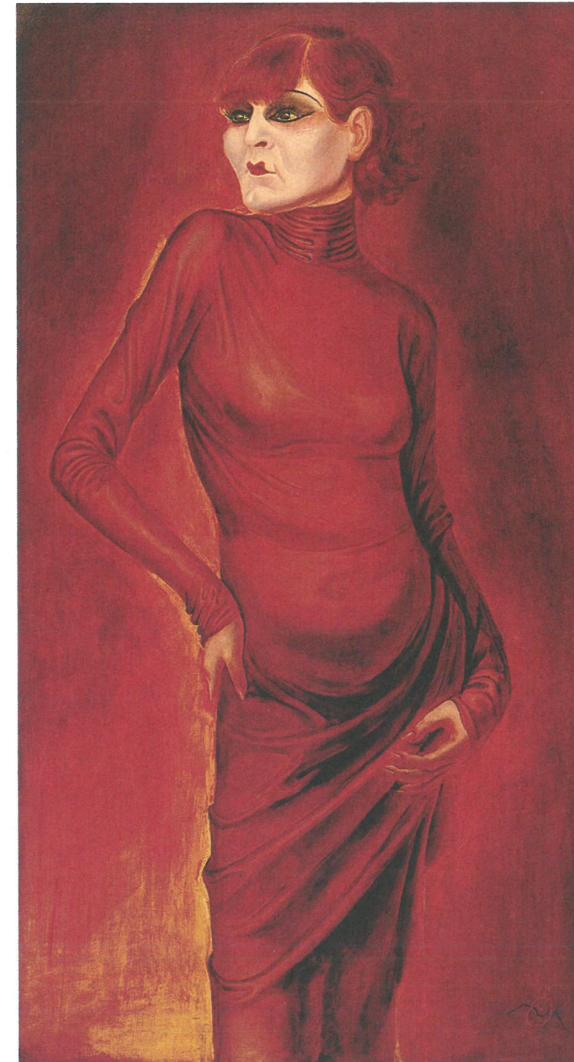
evoke the types of costume and coiffure depicted on ancient busts and vases. Similar to the ways in which many of his contemporaries – de Chirico, Pablo Picasso, André Derain, Gino Severini, and the artists of Neue Sachlichkeit – found inspiration in the classical world, Willumsen married antique subject matter with his distinctly modern painting style.

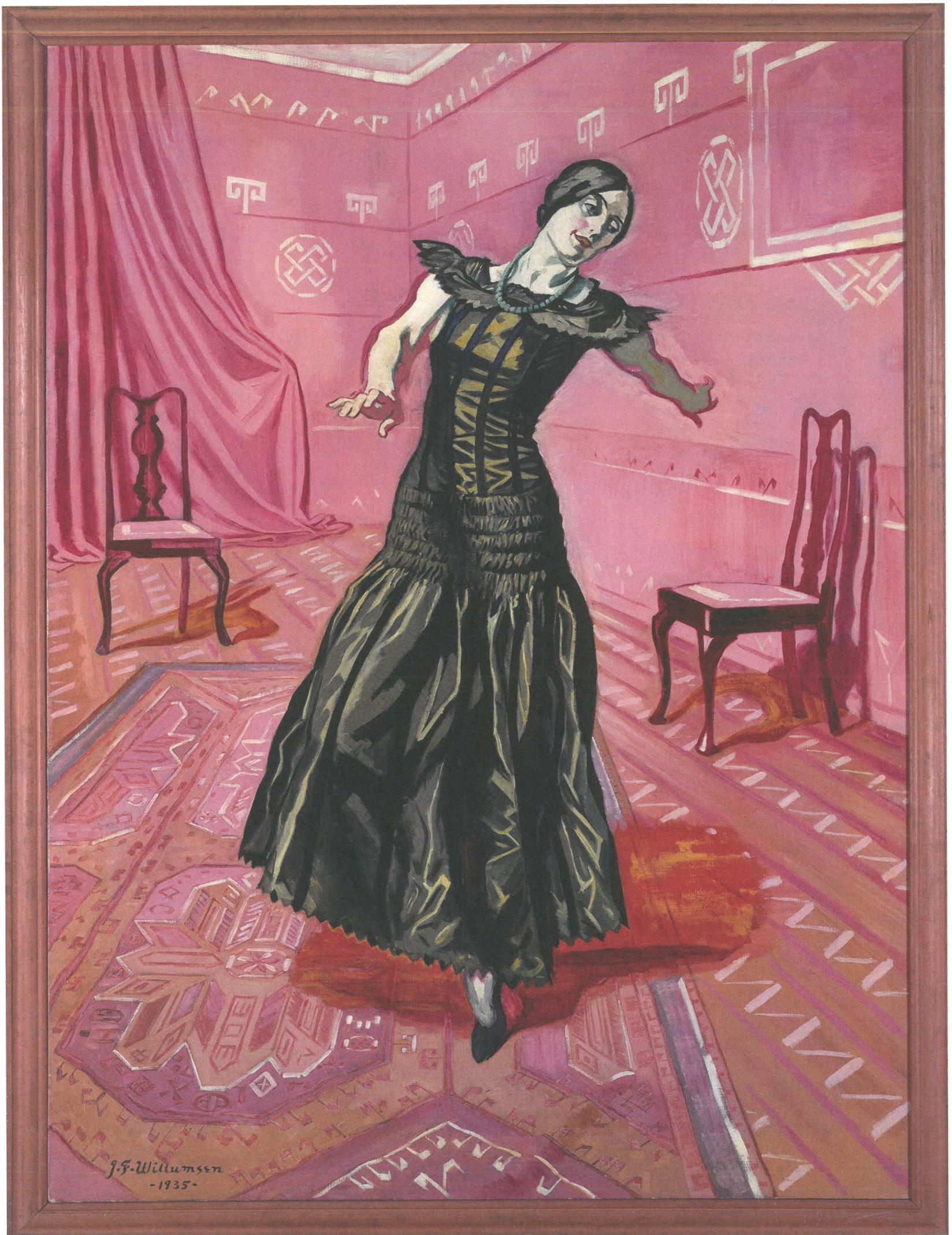
### Willumsen and the Multifaceted Dance Portrait

Willumsen's most complex and nuanced portrayals of Bourret, however, are three full-length paintings, all completed between 1931 and 1935, showing her performing the sailor's reel (1931), as a harlequin (1934), and dancing the Boston Waltz (1935). The many preparatory drawings and photographs that Willumsen made for the three canvases demonstrate his close observation of Bourret's movement, poses, and facial expressions. These portraits establish Willumsen's engagement with contemporary dance as well as Bourret's own profession, but they also serve as a vehicle through which the artist expressed his criticism of post-war Europe and hinted at the subtleties of their relationship.

Portraiture as a form of political commentary was in vogue after WWI, especially among German artists. Many of the members of Neue Sachlichkeit, especially

Otto Dix	
Bildnis der Tänzerin	
Anita Berber, 1925	
Portræt af danserinden	
Anita Berber	
Portrait of the Dancer	
Anita Berber	
Olie og tempera på krydsfiner /	
oil and tempera on plywood	
120 x 65 cm	
Sammlung Landesbank	
Baden-Württemberg im	
Kunstmuseum Stuttgart	
Michelle Bourret danser	
Valse Boston, 1935	
Michelle Bourret Dancing	
the Boston	
Olie på lærred / oil on canvas	
190 x 141 cm	
J.F. Willumsens Museum	





J.F. Willumsen  
-1935-

især de, der havde kæmpet ved fronten – indlagde en kritik af krigen og Weimar-republikken i deres portrætter. Otto Dix, en af tidens mest fremtrædende portrætkunstnere, malede *Portræt af danserinden Anita Berber* i 1925. Berber, der var bedst kendt som kabaretkunstner og nøgendanser, og hvis karriere var på sit højeste i årene 1916-1928, kom til at repræsentere den glamour, de excesser og den erotik, der prægede Berlin i årene efter krigen. Berber var lige så berygtet for sin afhængighed af kokain og alkohol, som hun var kendt for sin forføreriske sceneopræden, og Dix skildrede hende som en kombination af hæslig og sensuel – en sammenstilling, der definerer perioden meget præcist. Berber, der er klædt i en rød kjole, som klæber til kroppen, ser ned på sit publikum. Hendes kridhvide ansigt, omhyggeligt påførte læbestift og tynde, plukkede øjenbryn gør et på én gang strengt og grotesk indtryk. Hendes røde næsebor røber hendes kokainafhængighed. Hendes slyngede arme, som ender i hvide hænder med lange, klo-lignende negle, giver hende et truende udtryk. Dix' portræt af Berber karakteriserer tilværelsens ekstremer under Weimarrepublikken: forførisk, lidenskabelig og lokkende, men samtidig farlig, pervers og destruktiv.

Selv om Willumsen generelt ikke er kendt for at skabe politisk motiveret kunst, antyder hans valg af motiv og dragt i *Michelle Bourret danser sømandens reel*, bestemte politiske holdninger. I det første af tre helfigurportrætter af den dansende Bourret, viser hendes positur – med vægten på fodballerne, bøjede knæ og armene over kors – at hun danser en dans, der også kendes som sømandshornpipe eller netop som sømandsreel. Sømandsreelen, der bygger på skotske og irske folkedanse, har været forbundet med den britiske marine siden 1800-tallet og er blevet danset af britiske søofficerer et godt stykke ind i det 20. århundrede. Det bidrog til denne folkedans' popularitet, at den hyppigt blev vist på scenen, lige fra varietéforestillinger til Ballets Russes' repertoire.<sup>9</sup> Bourret, der er klædt i en løs fortolkning af en fransk marineuniform, danser foran havet og et skib, der vender stævnen ind mod kysten. Willumsen har omhyggeligt sørget for at gøre teksten på hendes hue, hvor der står "Tourville", synlig. Søfolk i den franske marine bar typisk et huebånd med navnet på deres skib, og det er således muligt, at Bourrets dragt hentyder til den svære krydsler Tourville af Duquesne-klassen, der blev søsat i 1928 og var opkaldt efter den franske admiral Anne Hilarion de Tourville, der tjente under Ludvig XIV. At Willumsen så omhyggeligt nævner Tourville, rummer et budskab, der rækker videre end hans interesse for tidens avantgardedans. Ved at koble en reference til et nybygget fransk krigsskib sammen med en dans, der i vid udstrækning blev associeret med den britiske marine, afspejlede Willumsens billede af Bourret, der

those who had fought at the front, infused their portraits with criticism of the war and the Weimar Republic. Otto Dix, one of the most prominent portraitists of the era, painted *Portrait of the Dancer Anita Berber* in 1925. Best known as a cabaret performer and nude dancer who reached the height of her career between 1916 and 1928, Berber came to represent the glamour, excess, and eroticism of post-war Berlin. As notorious for her addictions to cocaine and alcohol as she was for her seductive performances, Dix portrayed Berber as a combination of ghastly and sensual – a juxtaposition that aptly defines the period. Clad in a red gown that clings to her body, Berber looks down at her audience. Her chalky white face, meticulously applied lipstick, and thinly plucked eyebrows are both severe and grotesque. Her red nostrils betray her cocaine addiction. Her sinuous arms, which end in white hands with long, talon-like fingernails, give her a menacing air. Dix's portrayal of Berber characterizes the extremes of life in the Weimar Republic: seductive, passionate, and alluring, while also dangerous, perverted, and destructive.

Although he is not typically known for creating politically motivated artwork, Willumsen's choice of subject matter and costume in *Michelle Bourret Dancing the Sailor's Reel* also suggests specific political inclinations. In the first of three full-length portraits of Bourret dancing, her pose – with her weight on the balls of her feet, her knees bent, and her arms crossed – indicates that she is performing a dance more commonly known as the sailor's hornpipe. Based on Scottish and Irish folk dances, the sailor's hornpipe came to be associated with the British navy in the 19th century and was actively performed by British naval officers well into the 20th century. This folk dance was also popularized by numerous on-stage performances, ranging from variety shows to the Ballets Russes's repertoire.<sup>9</sup> Dressed in a loose interpretation of a French naval uniform, Bourret dances before the sea and a ship turned towards the shore. Willumsen takes great care to make visible the lettering on her hat, which reads 'Tourville'. Typically, sailors in the French navy donned a ribbon bearing the name of their ship on their hats, thus it is possible that Bourret's costume refers to the Duquesne-class heavy cruiser *Tourville*, completed in December 1928 and named after Anne Hilarion de Tourville, a French naval commander who served under Louis XIV. Willumsen's specificity in naming the *Tourville* indicates a message beyond an engagement with contemporary avant-garde dance. In pairing a reference to a recently-completed French warship with a dance that was widely associated with the

Michelle Bourret danser  
Sømandens reel, 1931  
Michelle Bourret Dancing  
the Sailor's Reel  
Olie på lærred / oil on canvas  
190 x 141 cm  
J.F. Willumsens Museum



danser en sømandsreel, måske ikke blot nye tendenser i dansen, men også tidens politiske klima og antydede kunstnerens støtte til de allierede (nemlig Storbritannien og Frankrig) i kølvandet på krigen.

Kunstnerens næste store danseportræt, *Michelle Bourret danser Harlekin*, blev færdiggjort i 1934. Harlekin er en berømt figur fra den italienske *commedia dell'arte*. Han lokker Columbine væk fra Pierrot, og figuren, som siden slutningen af 1800-tallet havde været almindelig kendt i populærkulturen, betragtedes derfor i almindelighed som drilsk, flirtende og kraftfuld. I modsætning til andre samtidige fremstillinger af Harlekin er Willumsens version en kvinde med Bourret i forførerrollen. Klædt i Harlekins karakteristiske spraglede, tørnede, tætsiddende dragt og med en klapstok i hånden skrider Bourret selvsikkert fremad, en pointe. På flere af de tegnede forarbejder er Bourrets ansigt halvt dækket af den sorte maske, som Harlekin traditionelt bærer i *commedia dell'arte*. I maleriet fremhæver Willumsen hendes ansigtstræk med en grel sminke. Øjenlågene er lysende blå, ansigtet gulligt, og de knaldrøde læber er trukket tilbage, så tænderne er synlige, og alle andre aspekter af maleriet er lige så overdrevne i forhold til de fotografiske og tegnede forstudier.

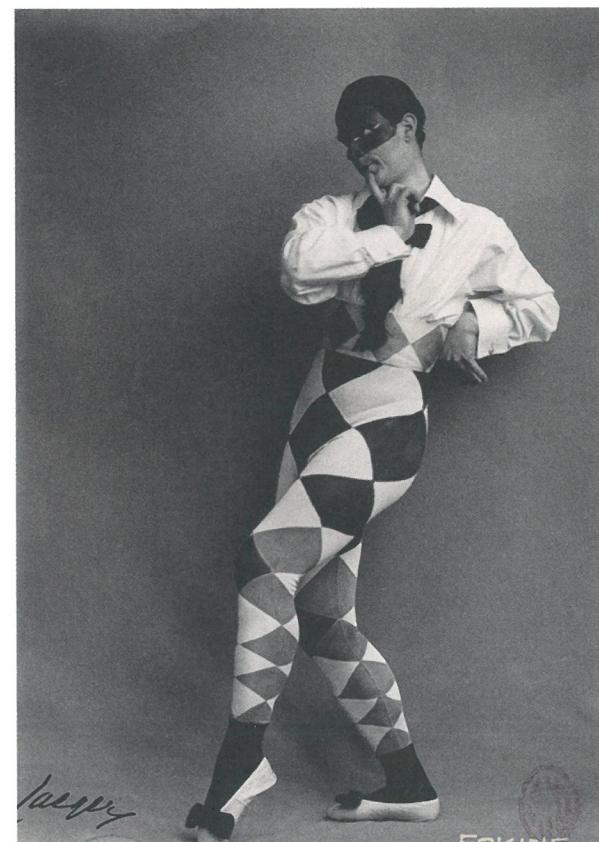
Det er muligt, at Willumsen – der var en ivrig samler af billedmateriale, som han organiserede i tematiske albums – også var inspireret af mere samtidige Harlekin-skildringer. I 1914 blev Ballets Russes' koreograf, Michel Fokine, bedt om at iscenesætte *Carnaval* for Kungliga Baletten i Stockholm. I værket indgår nogle

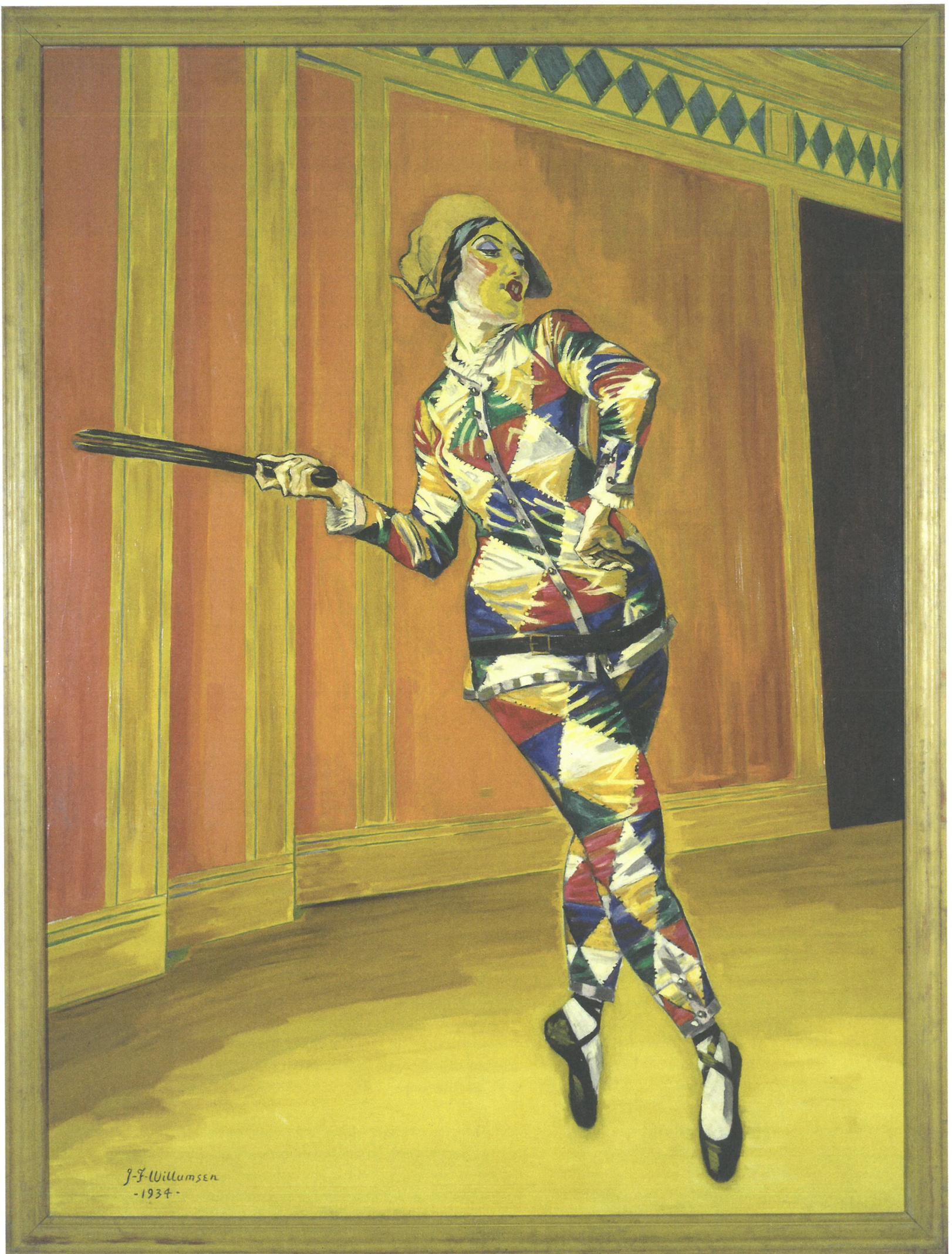
British navy, it is possible that Willumsen's image of Bourret dancing the sailor's reel reflected not only emerging trends in dance but also the political climate of the time, hinting at his support for the Allies (namely, Britain and France) in the wake of the war.

The artist's next major dance portrait, *Michelle Bourret Dancing Harlequin*, was completed in 1934. Harlequin, the famous character from the Italian *commedia dell'arte*, seduces Columbina away from Pierrot and thus the character, who by the end of the 19th century was commonplace in popular culture, was widely known as mischievous, flirtatious, and lusty. Unlike representations of Harlequin by his contemporaries, Willumsen's version is female, casting Bourret as a seductress. Dressed in Harlequin's signature brightly-coloured chequered bodysuit and carrying a slapstick, Bourret strides forward confidently, en pointe. In several preparatory drawings, half of Bourret's face is covered with a black mask, traditionally worn by Harlequin in the *commedia dell'arte*. In the painting, Willumsen emphasizes her facial features with garish make-up. With bright blue eyelids, a yellowed face, and bold red lips pulled back to reveal her teeth, all aspects of the painting are exaggerated from the preparatory photographic and drawing studies.

It is possible that Willumsen – an avid collector of visual material that he organized into thematic scrapbooks – would also have been inspired by a more contemporary portrayal of Harlequin. In 1914, the choreographer for the Ballets Russes, Michel Fokine, was asked to stage *Carnaval* for the Royal Swedish Ballet. The production

Atelier Jaeger (Stockholm)  
Michel Fokine (Arlequin /  
Harlekin / Harlequin), 1914  
Fotografi / photography  
15,5 x 11 cm  
Bibliothèque nationale de  
France, département  
Bibliothèque-musée de l'opéra,  
Alb.KochnoCarnaval28  
  
Michelle Bourret danser  
Harlekin, 1934  
Michelle Bourret Dancing  
Harlequin  
Olie på lærred / oil on canvas  
190 x 141 cm  
J.F. Willumsens Museum





af de faste figurer fra *commedia dell'arte*, blandt dem Harlekin og Columbine, som han begærer. På et reklamefoto for forestillingen optrådte Fokine i Harlekins kostume og indtog en positur, der lignede Bourret i det færdige maleri. Med det ene ben fremadbøjet (Bourrets højre, Fokines venstre) og den modsatte arm bøjet for at fremhæve overkroppens drejning er de to posaturer næsten hinandens spejlbilleder. Willumsens fremstilling af Bourret som Harlekin forbinder hans interesse for tidens dans med noget, der måske er en karakteristik af Bourret selv. Willumsen kunne have malet Bourret som Columbine, og han havde da også fotograferet hende i en dragt, der ligner den, som Columbine bar, da balletten blev opført i 1914, men han valgte i stedet at afbilde hende som Harlekin. Harlekin og Columbine er ballettens to hovedpersoner, men Harlekin er langt mere på scenen. I *Carnaval* danser Harlekin en kompliceret solo, og partiet blev ofte danset af Ballets Russes' største stjerner, blandt dem Michel Fokine, Leonid Leontjev og Vaslav Nijinskij. At Willumsen lod Bourret danse Harlekin var måske udtryk for hans beundring for hendes kunnen og talent eller for, at hun var Harlekin i forhold til hans Columbine.

Det sidste lærred i Willumsens dansetrilogi er *Michelle Bourret danser Valse Boston* (1935). Klædt i en sort taftkjole danser Bourret alene i et strålende oplyst rosa interiør. Som Ole Nørlyng bemærker, er dette den eneste afbildning af Bourret, hvor hun danser en dans, der kræver en partner, men alligevel er alene.<sup>10</sup> Værkets titel angiver, at hun danser bostonvals, der i vore dage beskrives som en krydstrinsvals. Som det fremgår af betegnelsen, indledes denne vals ved, at danserne træder skråt ind foran deres modsatte fod, og det er muligvis denne bevægelse, Willumsen har indfanget. Hendes venstre fod er nemlig ikke synlig, hvilket giver indtryk af en skrøbelig balance, som hun holder ved at strække armene ud til siden. Krydstrinsvalsen danses i et langsommere tempo end den traditionelle vals, hvilket tillader danserne at udvise mere opfindsomhed og fleksibilitet i valget af dansetrin. Krydstrinsvalsen stiller også partnerne mere lige, idet parret kan danse side om side eller bevæge sig side-værts.<sup>11</sup> Den førende part i parret begynder som regel med at føre højre fod frem foran den venstre, og det er traditionelt den mandlige part, der har denne rolle. I dette tilfælde er Bourrets højre fod strakt frem foran hendes venstre, hvilket markerer, at det er hende, der fører an i deres partnerskab.

Willumsens portrætter af Michelle Bourret viser kunstnerens forbindelse med samtidens stiltendenser i Italien og Tyskland og hans optagethed af forskellige former for dans. Dertil kommer, som det måske mest markante, at disse portrætter indfanger nuancerne i

features some of the stock characters from *commedia dell'arte*, including Harlequin and his love interest, Columbina. In a promotional photograph for the performance, Fokine donned the costume for Harlequin and posed in a manner similar to that of Bourret in the finished canvas. With one leg thrust forward (Bourret's right, Fokine's left) and the opposing arm bent to emphasize the twisting of the torso, the two poses are nearly mirror images. Willumsen's representation of Bourret as Harlequin juxtaposes his interest in contemporary dance with what is perhaps a characterization of Bourret herself. Willumsen could have portrayed Bourret as Columbina, and in fact, he had photographed her in a costume similar to the one worn by Columbina in the 1914 production of the ballet, but he chose to depict her as Harlequin instead. Harlequin and Columbina are the primary characters in the ballet, but Harlequin spends more time on stage. His role in *Carnaval* includes a complex solo and was often performed by the Ballets Russes's greatest stars, including Michel Fokine, Leonid Leontiev, and Vaslav Nijinsky. The casting of Bourret as Harlequin perhaps signalled Willumsen's admiration for her skill and talent, or that she was, in fact, the Harlequin to his Columbina.

The final canvas of Willumsen's dance trilogy is *Michelle Bourret Dancing the Boston* (1935). Dressed in a black taffeta gown, Bourret dances alone in a brightly colored pink interior. As Ole Nørlyng observes, this is the only depiction of Bourret performing a dance that requires a partner, and yet she remains alone.<sup>10</sup> The title of the work indicates that she is dancing the Boston Waltz, referred to today as a cross-step waltz. As the name infers, the dancers step diagonally in front of their opposing foot to begin the three-step waltz, which may be the movement Willumsen has captured here, since her left foot is not visible, making her appear precariously balanced as her arms stretch outward. The cross-step waltz is performed at a slower pace than a traditional waltz, enabling more creativity and flexibility in the types of steps performed. The cross-step also provides greater equality between the partners, as the pair can travel side-by-side or move laterally.<sup>11</sup> Typically, the lead begins by crossing the right foot over the left, and traditionally that role is taken by the male half of the dancing couple. In this instance, Bourret's right foot is crossed over her left, designating her as the leader of their partnership.

Willumsen's portraits of Michelle Bourret establish the artist's connection to contemporary stylistic trends in Italy and Germany and his engagement with various forms of dance. Additionally, these portraits perhaps most prominently capture the nuances of the relation-

Willumsens og Bourrets indbyrdes forhold. Willumsen betragtede utvivlsomt danserinden som sin kunstneriske lige, for de signerede begge to maleriet *Den gamle maler og hans muse*. Han beundrede tydeligvis Bourrets kunnen – han omtalte engang hendes dans som ”mærkelig og kraftfuld” – og i samtlige tre danseportrætter viste han hende i roller, som traditionelt udfyldtes af mandlige dansere. Han brugte disse malerier til at kommentere hendes styrke (i skikkelse af en sømand) eller hendes udad vendte og flirtende personlighed (i Harlekins skikkelse) eller hendes rolle i deres forhold (idet hun fører an i valsen). Det forekommer passende, at Bourrets egen personlighed kom klarest til udtryk i malerier, der viser hende i dansen, hendes egen foretrukne kunstneriske udtryksform.

#### Noter

- 1 Citeret i ”The Great Relief”, besøgt den 9. august 2016, <http://www.jfwillumsensmuseum.dk/index.php?id=200&L=1>, dansk udgave: <http://www.jfwillumsensmuseum.dk/museets-samling/willumsen-samlingen/relieffet/>
- 2 Mere om dette emne findes i Silver, Kenneth, red., *Chaos and Classicism*, New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2010. 3 Ulla Hjorth beskriver Willumsens forhold til italiensk kunst nærmere i kapitel 4 af *Willumsen i Europa*, Frederikssund: J.F. Willumsens Museum, 2006. 4 Uddrag af en engelsk oversættelse, ”Return to Craft”, er gengivet i Harrison, Charles og Wood, Paul, red. *Art in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003. Citaterne i den danske tekst er oversat efter den engelske udgave. 5 Kenneth Silver forklarer betydningen af de Chiricos essay for tyske kunstnere nærmere i ”A More Durable Self” i *Chaos and Classicism*. 6 Dette emne udforskes mere detaljeret i Ole Nørlyngs to publikationer ”Dancing Life Itself: The Meanings and Forms of Dance in the Mirror of Vitalism” i Hvidberg-Hansen, Gertrud og Oelsner, Gertrud, red. *The Spirit of Vitalism: Health, Beauty, and Strength in Danish Art, 1890-1940*, København: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2011, og ”Til bal med Willumsen” i Krogh, Leila og Lomholt, Niels, red. *Demons Stemme*, København: J.F. Willumsens Museum, 1996. 7 Nørlyng, ”Dancing Life Itself” 274. 8 Ibid. 9 Nørlyng, ”Til bal med Willumsen” 111-112. Tirza True Latimer behandler også sømandsfigurens betydning i underholdning og senere populærkultur i 1920’ernes og 1930’ernes Frankrig i det sidste kapitel af sin bog *Women Together/ Women Apart: Portraits of Lesbian Paris*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005. 10 Nørlyng, ”Til bal med Willumsen” 115. 11 Bostonvalsens historie, og sel-skabsdansens historie i det hele taget, er kompliceret og ofte dårligt dokumenteret. Nogle af de bedste oplysninger om bostonvals findes i Franks, A.H., *Social Dance: A Short History*, London: Routledge og Kegan Paul, 1963, 164-170 og Buckland, Theresa Jill, ”Dancing Out of Time: The Forgotten Boston of Edwardian England” i Dodds, Sherril og Cook, Susan C., red. *Bodies of Sound: Studies Across Popular Music and Dance*, London: Ashgate Publishing, 2013, 55-72. De bedste kilder til oplysninger om specifikke trin er gamle lærebøger i dans, fx Newman, Albert W., *Dances of To-Day*, Philadelphia: The Penn Publishing Company, 1921, som beskriver bostonvalsens mange varianter (blandt andet krydstrinnet), samt Richard Powers’ hjemmeside, især hans side om krydstrinsvals. [http://socialdance.stanford.edu/Syllabi/cross-step\\_waltz.htm](http://socialdance.stanford.edu/Syllabi/cross-step_waltz.htm)

ship between Willumsen and Bourret. Willumsen undoubtedly thought of the dancer as an artistic equal, as they both signed the canvas *The Old Painter and his Muse*. He clearly admired Bourret’s skill – he once referred to her dancing as ‘strange and powerful’ – and in each of the three dance portraits, he portrayed her as taking on roles traditionally filled by male dancers. He used these paintings to comment upon her strength (in the guise of a sailor) or her outgoing and flirtatious personality (as embodied by Harlequin) or her role in their relationship (as she takes the lead in their waltz). It seems fitting that Bourret’s own personality was most clearly manifested in paintings that depict her dancing, her chosen medium of artistic expression.

#### Notes

- 1 Quoted in ‘The Great Relief,’ accessed August 9, 2016, <http://www.jfwillumsensmuseum.dk/index.php?id=200&L=1> 2 For more on this topic, see Silver, Kenneth, ed., *Chaos and Classicism*, New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2010. 3 Ulla Hjorth elaborates upon Willumsen’s relationship to Italian art in Chapter 4 of *Willumsen i Europa*, Frederikssund: J.F. Willumsens Museum, 2006. 4 Excerpts of an English translation of ‘Return to Craft’ are published in Harrison, Charles, and Wood, Paul, eds. *Art in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003. 5 Kenneth Silver elaborates upon the importance of de Chirico’s essay for German artists in: ‘A More Durable Self,’ in: *Chaos and Classicism*. 6 This topic has been explored in greater detail in Ole Nørlyng’s two publications: ‘Dancing Life Itself: The Meanings and Forms of Dance in the Mirror of Vitalism,’ in: Hvidberg-Hansen, Gertrud and Oelsner, Gertrud, eds. *The Spirit of Vitalism: Health, Beauty, and Strength in Danish Art, 1890-1940*, Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2011, and ‘Til Bal med Willumsen,’ in: Krogh, Leila, and Lomholt, Niels, eds. *Demons Stemme*, Copenhagen: J.F. Willumsens Museum, 1996. 7 Nørlyng, ‘Dancing Life Itself,’ 274. 8 Ibid. 9 Nørlyng, ‘Til bal med Willumsen,’ 111-112. Tirza True Latimer also discusses the importance of the figure of the sailor in entertainment and subsequently popular culture in 1920s and 1930s France in the final chapter of her book *Women Together/ Women Apart: Portraits of Lesbian Paris*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005. 10 Nørlyng, ‘Til Bal med Willumsen,’ 115. 11 The history of the Boston Waltz, and social dance in general, is complicated and often poorly documented. Some of the best information on the Boston Waltz can be found in Franks, A.H., *Social Dance: A Short History*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963, 164-170 and Buckland, Theresa Jill, ‘Dancing Out of Time: the Forgotten Boston of Edwardian England,’ in: Dodds, Sherril, and Cook, Susan C., eds. *Bodies of Sound: Studies Across Popular Music and Dance*, London: Ashgate Publishing, 2013, 55-72. The best resources for specific steps are vintage dance manuals, such as Newman, Albert W., *Dances of To-Day*, Philadelphia: The Penn Publishing Company, 1921, which describes the many variants of the Boston Waltz (including the cross step) as well as Richard Powers’ website, especially his page on the cross-step waltz. [http://socialdance.stanford.edu/Syllabi/cross-step\\_waltz.htm](http://socialdance.stanford.edu/Syllabi/cross-step_waltz.htm)