

# STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



**Georges DE FEURE (Paris 1868 - Paris 1943)**

## **Two Elegant Women: Design for the Cover of Les Modes**

Gouache, watercolour and gold, over traces of a pencil underdrawing, on pale grey paper.

Signed dE FEURE in red ink at the lower left.

370 x 261 mm. (14 5/8 x 10 1/4 in.)

This drawing is a design for the cover of the Christmas 1919 issue of the magazine *Les Modes*. The two women here depicted are influenced by the Japanese aesthetic that Georges de Feure adopted while working with Siegfried Bing, who had been a pioneer in establishing the influence of Japonisme on Art Nouveau. Between 1888 and 1891 Bing published the journal *Le Japon artistique* (or *Artistic Japan*), in French, English and German editions, and he was one of the first importers of Japanese ukiyo-e woodcut prints, which many designers began to utilize in their collections. There were many exhibitions of Japanese stencil printed fabrics in Paris in the 1880s and 1890s, and these had a significant influence on fabric design.

De Feure produced numerous cover drawings for *Les Modes* over a period of several years. Founded by the art dealers and publishers Manzi, Joyant & Cie. and published monthly between 1901 and 1937, *Les Modes* (subtitled *Revue mensuelle illustrée des Arts décoratifs appliqués à la Femme*) was one of the leading French fashion magazines of the early 20th century. Each issue was devoted to 'decorative art as applied to women', and came to include both colour and black and white photographs of society figures and actresses modelling the latest Parisian fashions.

In addition to *Les Modes* and its sister publication *Le Théâtre*, Georges de Feure contributed cover drawings for several other French journals, including *Cocorico* and *Le Figare illustré* (which devoted a special issue to the artist in February 1900), as well as the American magazine *Dress*, which was closely associated with *Les Modes*.

### **Literature:**

*Les Modes*, Christmas 1919, reproduced on the cover.

### **Artist description:**

Of Belgian and Dutch origins, Georges de Feure was largely self-taught as an artist. He was born Georges Joseph van Sluijters in Paris, where his father worked as an architect. Returning with his family to the Netherlands with the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war in 1870, De Feure did not come back to Paris until 1889. Settling in Montmartre, he may have trained with Jules Chéret and began working as an artist and illustrator. De Feure soon allied himself with the Symbolist movement, taking part in the *Exposition des Peintres Impressionistes et Symbolistes* at the *Galerie Le Barc de Boutteville*, alongside Gauguin and the Nabis artists, as well as showing his work at the *Salons de la Rose + Croix* of 1893 and 1894, where his watercolours garnered some critical praise. De Feure exhibited at the *Société Nationale* in 1894, and the same year an exhibition of his watercolours was held at the *Galerie des Artistes modernes* in Paris, leading one critic to describe him as ‘an artist whose work is never banal, but whose symbolism is not always accessible.’ By this time De Feure was also designing posters, many seemingly influenced by Japanese prints, as well as producing colour lithographs.

Like such contemporaries as Alphonse Mucha and Eugène Grasset, Georges de Feure was equally adept in the field of applied or decorative arts. Aptly described by one modern scholar as ‘the most art nouveau of all the Symbolists’, De Feure embarked on an association with the Art Nouveau pioneer Siegfried Bing that was to establish his reputation. He decorated the facade and designed two suites of furniture for Bing’s *Pavillon de l’Art Nouveau* at the great *Exposition Universelle* of 1900, a project that earned extravagant praise from critics, and thereafter worked closely with Bing as an *artiste-décorateur*, providing numerous designs for furniture, stained glass, wallpaper, ceramics and lamps. In 1903 a large exhibition of his decorative work for Bing’s *Galerie de l’Art Nouveau* was held in Paris, later travelling to The Hague and Hamburg. De Feure also established his own atelier, which handled commissions from other sources, such as Julius Meier-Graefe’s gallery *La Maison Moderne*. He continued to work as a designer and interior decorator after Bing’s death in 1905, and also undertook a number of commissions for scenery and costume designs for the stage. Among his significant later projects was the decoration of the Parisian studio of the couturier Madeleine Vionnet in 1922, and interiors and pavilions for various expositions. Late in his career De Feure was appointed Professor of Decorative Art at the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris.