

# 35.

## Art Nouveau Nymph and Satyr Ring by Arvisenet

France, Paris?, c. 1900

Height 30 mm., exterior width of hoop 27 mm.  
Weight 17 gr., US size 10.5, UK size U ½

This sculptural ring is cast in gold and finely chased. The hoop is flat inside, while outside two entwined figures form the shoulders and bezel. A satyr with hairy legs, hooves, and a tail embraces a half-nude nymph with long, flowing hair and drapery below the hips. Engraved inside the hoop is the name of the maker, "ARVISENET cis." At the bottom of the hoop on the outside is the French warranty mark for gold, an eagle with head facing left,<sup>1</sup> and a lozenge-shaped maker's mark, with the initials "A" and "S" flanking crossed swords.

In much the same vein as the Art Nouveau Ophelia ring (no. 34), here is a ring that adopts a completely sculptural form, all the more remarkable on account of its kinetic quality. In its close relationship to sculpture it foreshadows art jewelry of the later twentieth and twenty-first centuries, when artists like Pablo Picasso, Alexander Calder, Anish Kapoor, and others likewise adept at monumental large-scale sculptural compositions were making jewelry as well.

The nymph and satyr whose embrace encompasses this ring's hoop form a dynamic sculpture to be worn upon the finger and reflect a new era of sensuality and eroticism in the arts and jewelry. This ring owes its imagery to ancient Greek mythology, by way of the later Baroque and Neo-Classical periods. Nymphs were young and beautiful female spirits, according to myth. Equipped with bow and arrow, they would accompany the goddess Diana on the hunt and were often shown bathing in the wood. Satyrs, the attendants of Bacchus, derived their hairy features and hooves from the god of wine and lust, and they would chase and harass the nymphs. Baroque and Neo-Classical paintings and sculptures favored scenes of nymphs sitting on the laps of satyrs or entwined with





them as lovers. A sculpture by Claude Michel (1738-1814), known as Clodion, in the Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, shows a nymph and satyr in a similar embrace.<sup>2</sup>

During the Art Nouveau period in France, Parisian jewelers popularized rings with erotic themes. One such ring by Réne Lalique displays an embracing couple in the nude, surmounted by a pearl, and is now in the Musée des arts décoratifs, Paris.<sup>3</sup> A ring with entwined lovers, now in the British Museum, London, was made by Maison Plisson & Hartz, Paris.<sup>4</sup> Rings with nymphs or lovers were also fashionable in Belgium and Germany.<sup>5</sup> An unusual sculptural ring from Henri-Ernest Dabault, Paris, shows Hera, Greek goddess of women and marriage, approaching her husband Zeus, holding his hands and a sapphire.<sup>6</sup>

This ring allows us to point to another sculptor, likely based in Paris, who had also embraced this motif. The inscription in the ring, “ARVISENET cis,” may refer to Léon or Marcel Léon Arvisenet, recorded in 1909.<sup>7</sup> Though the maker’s mark has yet to be identified, a recently auctioned plaque dated 1913 records an award from the *Chambre Syndicale Bijouterie Joaillerie Orfèvrerie de Paris* to “Arvisenet Marcel Concours des Industrie d’art 1913.”<sup>8</sup> The ring is sculpted to a high standard, no doubt with a goldsmith who worked closely alongside the sculptor.

**Provenance:**

Raphael Esmerian, Paris and New York (1903-1976).

**Literature:**

Scarisbrick 2007 [2014], pp. 278-79, figs. 386-87.

**Notes:**

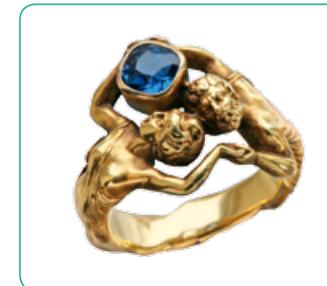
- <sup>1</sup> This mark was in use from 1838 to the present day (see Koch 1989, p. 320).
- <sup>2</sup> Inv. no. NMSk 2346. The sculptor made many variations of this theme.
- <sup>3</sup> Ward et al. 1981, no. 311.
- <sup>4</sup> Tait et al. 1984, no. 1121, and cf. no. 1123, a ring with floating nymph.
- <sup>5</sup> Janson 1971, no. 191; Chadour 1994, vol 2, no. 1693.
- <sup>6</sup> Duncan 1994, vol. 1, p. 165.
- <sup>7</sup> Vollmer 1999, vol. 1, p. 71.
- <sup>8</sup> Inumis, 2015 lot 148.



Erotic themes were fashionable and considered daring in the Art Nouveau period in France. The present ring with its dynamic portrayal of entwined lovers about to kiss is not unlike our ring.

**Gold Ring of Entwined Lovers**

Made by Plisson & Hartz  
Paris, 1900-1910  
(London, British Museum, 1978,1002.666)



In a remarkably daring design, the Greek goddess Hera and her husband and brother Zeus, ruler of the Olympian gods, reach out toward each other, clasping hands and embracing a beautiful sapphire gemstone that may have had symbolic significance for the wearer.

**Gold Ring with Zeus and Hera**

Made by Henri-Ernest Dabault  
France, c. 1902  
(Private collection, courtesy of the Tadema Gallery, London)



Throughout Europe, not only in France, the motif of couples embracing in the nude was a novel theme in jewelry in many materials and a reflection of the period. Here is an example made in Germany and in silver-gilt.

**Silver-gilt Ring with Embracing Couple**  
German, c. 1900  
(Zurich, Schweizerisches Nationalmuseum,  
Alice and Louis Koch Collection 50.6)



Caught up in a rapture of intoxication, this nymph and satyr hold each other in a euphoric embrace, in a scene quite similar to our ring.

**The Intoxication of Wine by Clodion (1738-1814)**  
France, Paris, c. 1780-1790  
(New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 14.40.687)