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# Degas, (Hilaire Germain) Edgar

(b Paris, July 19, 1834; d Paris, Sept 27, 1917).

Geneviève Monnier

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French painter, draughtsman, printmaker, sculptor, pastellist, photographer and collector. He was a founder-member of the Impressionist group and the leader within it of the Realist tendency. He organized several of the group's exhibitions, but after 1886 he showed his works very rarely and largely withdrew from the Parisian art world. As he was sufficiently wealthy, he was not constricted by the need to sell his work, and even his late pieces retain a vigour and a power to shock that is lacking in the contemporary productions of his Impressionist colleagues.

## I. Life and work.

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### 1. Early years, to 1860.

The eldest son of a Parisian banking family, he originally intended to study law, registering briefly at the Sorbonne's Faculté de Droit in 1853. He began copying the 15th- and 16th-century Italian works in the Musée du Louvre and in 1854 he entered the studio of Louis Lamothe (1822-69). The training that Lamothe, who had been a pupil of Ingres, transmitted to Degas was very much in the classical tradition; reinforced by the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, which he attended in 1855-6, Degas developed a rigorous drawing style and a conviction of the importance of line that remained with him for the whole of his career. One of his enduring aims was to be a classical painter of modern life: 'My art has nothing spontaneous about it, it is all reflection'.

In 1856 Degas arrived in Italy where he had an extensive family network. His father's sister, Laura Bellelli, was closest to the young painter, and he spent lengthy periods with her and her family in Naples and Florence over the three-year period that he spent in Italy. He also paid several long visits to Rome, where he worked at the Villa Medici with other young French artists and executed a large number of copies after Old Masters. In July 1858 he left Rome for Florence, stopping at Viterbo, Orvieto, Perugia, Assisi, Spello and Arezzo; during the journey, he made numerous sketches in his notebooks, including drawings of the frescoes by Signorelli at Orvieto. In Florence Degas stayed with the Bellellis until March 1859; during this period he produced dozens of preparatory drawings for a projected family portrait, which he finished in 1867 (the Bellelli Family, 1858-67; Paris, Mus. d'Orsay). The sketches range from rough compositional notations to formal portraits, among them some showing the artist's first use of pastel (*Laura Bellelli*, 1858-9; Paris, Mus. d'Orsay). The final painting, which shows Baron Bellelli seated with his back to the viewer, combines classical serenity with psychological tension; the unconventional composition gives the work an unsettling atmosphere, which is one of the most characteristic aspects of Degas's later portraits.



Edgar Degas: Bellelli Family, oil on canvas, 2.0×2.5 m, 1858–67 (Paris, Musée d'Orsay); Photo credit: Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY

This formative period spent studying and copying the Italian masters laid the foundations of Degas's later career; study after study reveals the influences that were to have a profound effect on most of Degas's oeuvre. A trip to Siena and Pisa with Gustave Moreau in March 1859 was especially important; together they copied the frescoes of Benozzo Gozzoli in the Campo Santo, Pisa. Moreau broadened Degas's interests, encouraging him to experiment with texture and to develop an appreciation of Delacroix. In April 1859 Degas returned to settle in Paris with his father, who encouraged him to study further. In 1860 he visited Naples and Florence again.

## 2. France and New Orleans, 1861–73.

In 1861 Degas stayed in Normandy with his friend Paul Valpinçon; together they visited the Haras du Pin stud-farm, which undoubtedly inspired Degas's first racehorse scenes. *Gentlemen's Race: Before the Start* (1862; Paris, Mus. d'Orsay) is the earliest of his works to have a resolutely contemporary subject. At the Louvre in 1862, while copying Velázquez's *Infanta Maria Margarita*, Degas met Edouard Manet for the first time and through him made contact with the young Impressionists who met at the Café Guérbois.





Edgar Degas: Gentlemen's Race: Before the Start, oil on canvas, 485×615 mm, 1862 (Paris, Musée d'Orsay); photo credit: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY



Edgar Degas: Woman with Chrysanthemums (or A Woman Seated Beside a Vase of Flowers (Madame Paul Valpinçon?)), oil on canvas, 29 x 36 1/2 in. (73.7 x 92.7 cm), 1865 (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, H. O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929, Accession ID: 29.100.128); photo © The Metropolitan Museum of Art <http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/110000559>

Until 1865, when Degas exhibited the *Misfortunes of the City of Orléans* (Paris, Mus. d'Orsay) at the Salon, he continued to work on such history paintings as *Semiramis Building Babylon* (1861; Paris, Mus. d'Orsay) and *Young Spartans Exercising* (1860-62; London, N.G.); after that date he concentrated on portraits (*Woman with Chrysanthemums*, 1865; New York, Met.) and racing scenes. In the summer of 1869 Degas returned to the Normandy coast, where he executed a number of pastels before going to meet Manet at Boulogne-sur-Mer. Mostly seashore scenes (e.g. *Cliffs at the Edge of the Sea*, 1869; Paris, Mus. d'Orsay), they are unusual subjects for an artist who normally avoided unpopulated landscapes.

In the 1860s, Degas expanded his subject-matter into the themes of urban leisure typical of Impressionist painting. Towards 1869 he began to make wax sculptures of horses, possibly to help in conceiving and composing such paintings as *The Steeplechase* (1866, reworked 1880-81; Upperville, VA, Paul Mellon priv. col.), and around 1870 he began to take an interest in dance and opera. In 1870, during the Franco-Prussian War, Degas enlisted in the National Guard; in 1871, after the war, he travelled to London. In 1872 he left for New Orleans, where his uncle and two of his brothers were engaged in the cotton trade. While there he painted the *Cotton Market at New Orleans* (1873; Pau, Mus. B.-A.; smaller version (600×730 mm), Cambridge, MA, Fogg). The picture includes several family portraits; carefully chosen as a modern and 'commercial' subject, the Pau version was the first of his works to be bought by a public collection (1878). Other major canvases from this period include the



*Orchestra of the Opéra* (c. 1870; Paris, Mus. d'Orsay), *Orchestra Musicians* (1870–71, reworked c. 1874–6; Frankfurt am Main, Städel. Kstinst. & Städt. Gal.) and *Dance Class* (1871; New York, Met.). In 1873 Paul Durand-Ruel bought several of Degas's paintings, including *Dance Class at the Opéra* (1872; Paris, Mus. d'Orsay).



Edgar Degas: *Cotton Market at New Orleans*, oil on canvas, 730×920 mm, 1873 (Pau, Musée des Beaux-Arts); photo credit: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY

### 3. Impressionism and Realism, 1874–81.

This was an important period during which Degas considerably broadened his scope and extended his exploration of Realist subject-matter. On 27 December 1873 Degas, Claude Monet, Camille Pissarro, Alfred Sisley, Berthe Morisot, Paul Cézanne and other artists had joined together to form the *Société Anonyme Coopérative à Capital Variable des Artistes, Peintres, Sculpteurs, Graveurs* etc with the aim of organizing independent exhibitions without juries, selling the works exhibited and publishing a journal. On 15 April 1874 the first exhibition opened at 35 Boulevard des Capucines; Degas exhibited ten works, among them *Carriage at the Races* (c. 1872; Boston, MA, Mus. F.A.). On 15 May, however, the company was dissolved following hostile criticism in the press and lack of buyers. Over the next 22 years, a further seven group exhibitions were held; Degas participated in six, despite a lack of sympathy with some tendencies exhibited by the Impressionists. He shared the group's taste for clear,

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light painting and for the technique of juxtaposing strokes of paint or pastel, but he rarely painted *en plein air* and seldom directly before the motif, preferring to work up his pictures from memory and from sketches. This emphasis on the role of the imagination distinguished him from Renoir, Monet and Sisley; among the Impressionists he was closest to Pissarro and at one stage to Manet, while in later years he was intermittently intimate with Gauguin.

Degas saw himself as a 'Realist' or 'Naturalist' painter and disliked the term 'Impressionist'; his preference for urban subjects, artificial light and concentration on drawing became increasingly pronounced after the first group exhibition. As a keen observer of everyday scenes, he attempted to capture natural positions and break down movement, grasping its underlying rhythms; this was an essential part of his work, as was made clear in his repetitions and variations on a few themes (e.g. there are over 600 versions of ballerinas). Fascinated by new inventions, he experimented ceaselessly, making technical discoveries in engravings, photography and monotypes. He had a predilection for developing pioneering mixtures of materials and for using a wide variety of techniques, both in his works on paper and canvas and in his sculptures. He viewed his sculptures as stages in the progress of his research into the nature of movement, similar in their way to the photographs of Eadweard Muybridge, which he admired and was influenced by.

At the Second Impressionist Exhibition in 1876 Degas exhibited 24 works including the Cotton Market at New Orleans. In 1877 he showed 25 works at the Third Impressionist Exhibition, including his first monotypes. His difference from the other Impressionists was increasingly apparent, and he wanted the fourth exhibition title to be expanded to 'Groupe d'Artistes Indépendants, Réalistes et Impressionnistes'. In 1878 his *Ballet Rehearsal* (1876-7; Kansas City, MO, Nelson-Atkins Mus. A.) was lent by Louisine Havemeyer to a New York exhibition: this was the first time that his work had been shown there. At the Fourth Impressionist Exhibition in 1879 he exhibited 20 paintings and pastels and 5 fans; at the fifth (1880) he exhibited 12 works. A crisis in the Degas family finances in the mid-1870s made it important to him to sell his work; part of the attraction of the monotypes that he started to produce during this period was the rapidity with which they could be executed. Although his prints and pastels were inexpensive, their subjects—brothel scenes and low-life—were not calculated to please the general public. This became particularly clear in 1881, when he showed the *Little Fourteen-year-old Dancer* (wax original; Upperville, VA, Paul Mellon priv. col.; for bronze version see fig.) at the Sixth Impressionist Exhibition. A polychrome wax figure fixed on a wooden base, wearing a real tulle tutu, a satin ribbon and a wig, the sculpture created an uproar. The most controversial work at the exhibition, it was seen as the apotheosis of scientific Naturalism: 'The terrible realism of this statuette creates a distinct unease; all ideas about sculpture, about cold, lifeless whiteness ... are demolished ... at once refined and barbaric ... [it is] the only truly modern attempt that I know of in sculpture.' (Huysmans, 1883, pp. 226-7). Reviewers suggested that it should be placed in a museum of zoology or anthropology; it was seen as a social 'type', an ethnological specimen, rather than a work of art. Degas had deliberately encouraged this view of the sculpture by including two portraits of teenage males (untraced; see Lemoisne, 1946-9, nos 638-9) in the exhibition under the title *Criminal Physiognomies*; taken from courtroom sketches of prisoners in the dock, they were presented as part of a semi-scientific examination of contemporary society—a theme that can also be seen in such other works of this period as the *Absinthe Drinker* (1875-6; Paris, Mus. d'Orsay), *Dancer Bowing with Bouquet* (c. 1877; Paris, Mus. d'Orsay) and the *Dancing Lesson* (1881; Philadelphia, PA, Mus. A.).



Edgar Degas: Absinthe Drinker, oil on canvas, 921×679 mm, 1875–6 (Paris, Musée d'Orsay); photo credit: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY

#### 4. Independence and security, 1882–9.

By the start of the 1880s Degas was well-established as a major figure in the Parisian art world. His financial troubles were largely over, and by the end of the decade he was able to be highly selective about selling his work. During this period he became increasingly interested in a variety of women workers: dancers, milliners, café-concert singers and laundresses. The human figure acquired even greater importance in a series of pastels of women washing themselves, including *After the Bath* (1885; Pasadena, CA, Norton Simon Mus.) and *Woman in a Tub* (1885–6; London, Tate). In these works the figures dominate the picture, filling a shallow space, and are shown in intimate surroundings with a naturalism that Degas had sought since the beginning of his career; typically, a low point of view brings the viewer right into the scene. In these works Degas studied the gestures and movements of his subjects in a process of research that was described by Félix Fénéon (Fénéon, p. 30):



It is an art of Realism which however does not stem from a direct vision; as soon as a person knows they are being observed, they lose their naive spontaneity of behaviour. Degas therefore does not copy from life but accumulates a large number of sketches on a single subject from which he derives the indisputable veracity with which he endows his work. Never have paintings evoked so little the painful image of the 'model' who 'poses'.



Edgar Degas: *At the Milliner's*, pastel on pale gray wove paper, industrial wrapping paper, laid down on silk bolting, 30 x 34 in. (76.2 x 86.4 cm), 1882 (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, H. O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929, Accession ID: 29.100.38); photo © The Metropolitan Museum of Art <http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/110000564>

After the last Impressionist exhibition, in 1886, Degas stopped presenting works at group shows and instead sold his works to a small number of dealers including DurandRuel, Boussod & Valadon, Bernheim-Jeune, Hector Brame and Ambroise Vollard. He also made a considerable number of purchases for his own collection of ancient and modern art, including works by Manet (*The Ham*; Glasgow, A.G. & Mus.), El Greco (*St Ildefonso*; Washington, DC, N.G.A.) and Gauguin (*the Moon and the Earth*; New York, MOMA). In 1889 he travelled to Madrid with Giovanni Boldini and then to Tangiers, returning to France by way of Cádiz and Granada. The major works of this period are mainly pastels,



variations on the themes of milliners, ironers and women at their toilette, including *At the Milliner's* (1882; New York, Met.), *Ironer* (c. 1884–6; Paris, Mus. d'Orsay) and *Bather Lying on the Ground* (1886–8; Paris, Mus. d'Orsay).



Edgar Degas: *Bather Lying on the Ground*, pastel, 480×870 mm, 1886–8 (Paris, Musée d'Orsay); photo credit: Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY

## 5. The late works, 1890–1912.

During the last years of Degas's career, his work moved away from Naturalism; his use of colour grew more strident and brilliant and his line more expressive and independent. At this time the artist was close to Gauguin, and such works as the *Return of the Herd* (c. 1898; Leicester, Mus. & A.G.) are almost Fauvist in their colouring. Paradoxically, as his work became increasingly non-naturalistic, he launched into a series of landscapes in colour monotype inspired by a journey through Burgundy by horse-drawn caravan with the family of his friend the artist Pierre-Georges Jeannot (1848–1934). Imaginative re-creations done from memory, they were exhibited by Durand-Ruel in 1892 (*Landscape*, 1890–92; New York, Met.). Towards the end of the 1890s new and still more intense colours appeared in his work in such paintings as *Combing the Hair* (c. 1896; London, N.G.), in a range of flaming reds and oranges, and in the pastel series of *Russian Dancers* (e.g. of 1899; Houston, TX, Mus. F.A.), in electric blues, pinks and purples. His modelling became cursory and the figures more angular and distorted (e.g. *Fallen Jockey*, c. 1896–8; Basle, Kstmus.). After 1900 he began to use tracing paper as a support, treating familiar subjects with a strong black outline and searing colours (*After the Bath*, 1896–1907; Paris, Mus. A. Déc.). Other important works from this period include the *Morning Bath* (c. 1895; Chicago, IL, A. Inst.), *After the Bath* (c. 1896; Philadelphia, PA, Mus. A.) and *Two Bathers on the Grass* (c. 1896; Paris, Mus. d'Orsay). Depressed by failing eyesight and poor health and distressed by an enforced move from his lodgings of 20 years, he produced no more works after 1912.

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## II. Working methods and technique.

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### 1. Drawing.

Degas never forgot the emphasis on the importance of line that he had received during his early training. His use of a clear, hard outline distinguished his works from those of the other Impressionists. A consummate draughtsman, he worked with both energy and delicacy. While he sometimes indicated a desire to follow a specific working method (see Guérin, p. 219), in reality he allowed himself to be carried away by a spontaneous ardour, which can be seen in all his drawings. During the earlier part of his career he drew large numbers of preparatory studies for all his historical paintings. Starting with disparate elements of varied origins (Assyrian, Egyptian, Greek and Italian), he integrated them into his composition to achieve a genuine synthesis. While working on a piece, Degas would frequently recall an image he had seen previously and copy it; he would then go on to reinterpret it, often preserving the original movement or position but stylizing the details. This method, based on the progressive assembly of accumulated elements, conformed to the 19th-century academic tradition of Ingres and Moreau. In the drawings executed in his youth Degas showed a need to relate his work to that of his great predecessors and in addition revealed one of his most impressive abilities, the capacity for observation that enabled him to capture an image, a gesture or a movement, so evident in his later work. An attentive observer of the most diverse scenes, he took a passionate interest in everyday gestures. He would often draw a figure from several angles and execute various studies of the same subject on a single page (*Four Studies of a Dancer*, 1878–9; Paris, Mus. d'Orsay). The juxtaposition of these studies within the space of a single sheet, oriented in different directions, suggests movement. Degas invented many ways of breaking up his forms, isolating a detail in order to intensify perception and multiplying the facets of a figure the better to explore it. He always preferred pencils and pastels to such water-based media as watercolour, as opaque techniques allowed more spontaneity in working and were easier to change. In 1897 a series of 20 of his early drawings, *Degas: Vingt dessins, 1861–1869*, was published in Paris.

### 2. Printmaking.

Degas worked extensively in black and white (see Jacque, Charles(-Emile)) and in colour, producing etchings (e.g. *Aux Ambassadeurs*, 1875; Paris, Bib. N.), lithographs and, most importantly, monotypes (the application of black or coloured paint or ink with a high oil content to a zinc or copper metal-plate). He had been introduced to the monotype method by Ludovic Lepic in 1876; the *Ballet Master* (1876; Washington, DC, N.G.A.) carries the signature of both artists. Degas worked on the plate in a variety of intaglio techniques before applying a damp sheet of paper and placing the ensemble in a press. Normally only the first impression produced by this method is considered adequate; Degas, however, generally did not restrict himself to a single print but used the same plate until every trace of colour had been used up. He then used the last residual impressions as the basis of new compositions, which he picked out in pastel. Between 1876 and 1881 more than two-thirds of his works in colour were pastelized monotypes (e.g. *Women on the Terrace (A Café on the Boulevard Montmartre)*, 1877; Paris, Mus. d'Orsay). In the 1890s he executed a series of landscapes in this way; with a very distinctive, hazy texture, they have uneven patches made by the marks of the brushes, rag, inking pad and the artist's fingers when he applied the ink by hand (e.g. *Landscape*, 1892; Geneva, Gal. Jan Krugier).



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Degas was fired by the effects of the contrast between the basic image on the plate—reconstructed in the form of the inverted print—and the variations made possible by the use of pastels, which he applied directly to pick out the forms, creating a play between the image laid down indirectly on the plate and the line drawn directly on the paper. Sometimes he would wet the pastel embellishments copiously in order to obtain smooth areas and runs. Each colour was applied to the plate in a different manner, using a fine brush, a dry brush or a brushtip to suggest a clump of trees, or vertical lines to represent a mass of trees. These textural effects served to differentiate the elements. Degas's research was essentially into tactical perception, and he viewed these works as scientific experiments. His unremitting fascination with variations on a single theme led to the development of such monotype series as *Leaving the Bath*, which has 22 states (e.g. 14th state, 1879–80; Williamstown, MA, Clark A. Inst.).

### 3. Sculpture.

From the late 1860s Degas produced numerous small sculptures in wax. He concentrated on the subjects that feature in his two-dimensional works—horses, dancers and women washing. The combination of soft wax and frail armatures (often cork) meant that the sculptures were highly perishable: many crumbled during the artist's lifetime, and he often reworked them. His interest in sculpture increased from the mid-1880s and is often attributed to his failing eyesight.

Although these works were largely private and intended almost as sketches, some were quite elaborate: *The Tub* of 1889 (bronze version; Edinburgh, N.G.) originally included a real sponge in the bather's hand and a cloth frill around the bathtub. The only sculpture he decided to exhibit was the *Little Fourteen-year-old Dancer*, which he included in the Impressionist exhibition of 1881. He had thought of having his wax pieces cast in bronze, but in fact casts were only made in 1919, after his death (see fig.). The caster Adrien Hébrard used the lost-wax method to produce 22 or more copies of each sculpture.



Edgar Degas: Little Fourteen-year-old Dancer, painted bronze with muslin and silk, h. 984 mm, cast c. 1922 (London, Tate); photo credit: Tate, London/Art Resource, NY

#### 4. Pastel.

Pastel opened up several possibilities for Degas: contours could be defined by lines or by hatching, which could then be covered by layers of paint, concealing the strokes and blurring the forms. He used various techniques on a single sheet of paper, executing some elements sharply and leaving others blurred. His virtuosity in this medium appears in *The Star* (or *Dancer on Stage*, c. 1876–7; Paris, Mus. d’Orsay): the dancer’s body is lit from below by a spotlight, which marks her neck and chin with a flash of white. The composition is vertiginous and slants diagonally; Degas left a large empty space in the lower left-hand part of the picture, indicating the space occupied by the stage. Dazzling colours—red, ochre, green and turquoise—radiate across the picture in a series of brusque, informal and highly visible lines. In this work, the use of pastels made it possible to represent the swiftness and immediacy of the subject seized in mid-movement. Intense colours co-exist with sharply contrasting brown or



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black tones standing out against them, for example in the silhouette of the man in evening dress half-hidden behind the stage set, brushed in with a few brief strokes. This kind of framing became increasingly important in Degas's work from the 1870s onwards; he often accentuated the oddity of his compositions by framing them in such a way as to allow the viewer to see only part of a silhouette or a figure, a common Impressionist device that he used especially drastically to give an unsettling feeling to familiar scenes (*At the Café des Ambassadeurs*, 1885; Paris, Mus. d'Orsay). He also regularly used close-ups of faces lit from below, as if by footlights, in scenes connected with the stage—ballet, opera and café-concerts.



Edgar Degas: *The Star (or Dancer on Stage)*, pastel, 600×440 mm, c. 1876–7 (Paris, Musée d'Orsay); Photo credit: Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY



Edgar Degas: Dancer, pastel, charcoal, and chalk on paper, 489×318 mm, c. 1880 (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Walter H. and Leonore Annenberg Collection, Gift of Walter H. and Leonore Annenberg, 2001, Bequest of Walter H. Annenberg, 2002 (2001.202.2), Accession ID: 2001.202.2); image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art

As with his oils, prints and sculptures, Degas tended to produce series of pastels on a single subject. In 1869 he began a series of women ironing; often blended with charcoal and white chalk, these works may have influenced Picasso's Blue Period. Around 1876 dancers became his major theme (e.g. Dancer); he used pastels to capture moments of fleeting equilibrium with a rare dynamic intensity. In the 1880s more vigorous lines began to enclose the contours of the figures, and the forms were more clearly marked out against the surrounding space. Towards 1885 Degas obtained some innovative mixtures by superimposing layers of pastels; a linear structure delimited each different, densely textured area of colour, while stratifications, stripes, streaks and hatching created shades and hues of colour that were difficult to define. Most of the pastels executed during this period have daring layouts and show both skilful organization of line and accentuated schematization (e.g. *Dancers on the Stage*, c. 1882-4; Dallas, TX, Mus. F.A.). By c. 1886 Degas's pastels were more briefly sketched out than previously; they were worked in stripes and zigzags, displaying a more violent style of execution in a more acid range of colours (*Reclining Bather*, 1886-8; Paris, Mus. d'Orsay). Around 1895 Degas used the medium in a new manner. He was growing old, and his sight was deteriorating, but he succeeded in imbuing his works with a new power. His line was less precise; he reworked the outlines time after



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time, allowing layers of different colours to overlap; he varied his methods, using parallel lines, intersecting hatching, stripes, short and broken lines and white chalk highlights. The combination of different layers of colour, with their unexpected tonal interrelations, created unusual harmonies. Forms and colours melted into one another in these pastels, and Degas's figures were more fully integrated into backgrounds whose purely descriptive elements seemed as if absorbed into his colour and light, although he was still using the same subjects (*After the Bath*, c. 1896; Philadelphia, PA, Mus. A.).

Degas continued to work in pastels during the last period of his life as he pursued the theme of dancers resting. He made this the object of extensive research; every gesture of an arm or a leg was used in the play of curve and counter-curve. Around 1910 he began to work with increasing freedom, emphasizing colour with splashes and patches of luminous pastel powder, as in *Two Dancers Resting* (c. 1910; Paris, Mus. d'Orsay).

### III. Critical reception and posthumous reputation.

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Largely free from the financial pressures of his Impressionist colleagues, Degas was able to view public criticism of his works with a degree of detachment. Up to the New Orleans period, he produced few works for public exhibition, apart from the history paintings destined for the Salon, and spent most of his time working on portraits of his family and friends. Once he had begun to show in the Impressionist group exhibitions, he never returned to the Salon; unlike Monet and Renoir, who continued to hope for fashionable portrait commissions and positive reviews from establishment journals, he always maintained a certain independence. Within the group, Degas's works were usually singled out as substantially different in feeling from the other pictures on show. Charges of sloppy paintwork, incompetent drawing and lack of finish, which were the staple complaints about Impressionism, were not generally levied at Degas—Emile Zola indeed criticized the *Cotton Market at New Orleans* for excessive clarity and detail. Instead, it was the subject-matter of Degas's work that aroused critical ire; the ugliness of his models was a constant theme, and his fascination with Parisian low-life was either approved of or disliked according to the viewer's position on Realism. From the 1874 show onwards Degas was cited by the more discerning critics as the head of the Realist or Naturalist faction within the Impressionist group; the Realist novelist Edmond de Goncourt described him as 'the one who has been able to capture the soul of modern life'. Louis-Edmond Duranty, a close friend and eloquent advocate of the artist, singled out Degas and Gustave Caillebotte as representing the most vital tendency within the Parisian avant-garde in *La Nouvelle Peinture* (Paris, 1876), the first substantial publication devoted to the Impressionists. By the late 1880s Degas enjoyed a privileged position: he was able to choose his dealers, to exhibit only when he wished to and to lead a rather reclusive existence, secure in the knowledge that discerning buyers and respectful reviews were guaranteed. As he moved away from Realism to a style closer to Symbolism, he won the admiration of a new generation of painters, among them Gauguin and Odilon Redon, who recorded his view of Degas in a journal entry of 1889: 'Respect here, absolute respect' (*A Soi-même: Journal*, Paris, 1922, p. 93).

By 1917 Degas had become almost a public monument; after his death, his reputation mounted steadily. Many of his works entered public collections in Europe, the USA and Japan; most major museums of modern art have acquired at least one Degas. Since the publication (1946–9) of a catalogue raisonné by Lemoisne, there has been a constant stream of research and exhibitions devoted

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to Degas; a major retrospective (1988–9) in Paris, Ottawa and New York produced an authoritative catalogue and a spate of critical discussion, much of it focused on the issue of Degas's representations of women, which have been variously interpreted as misogynistic and as proto-feminist.

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Degas, Edgar: In a Caf (L'Absinthe), 1875, Muse d'Orsay (Paris) [http://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/collections/index-of-works/resultat-collection.html?no\\_cache=1&S=0&zoom=1&tx\\_damzoom\\_pi1%5Bzoom%5D=0&tx\\_damzoom\\_pi1%5BxmlId%5D=001147&tx\\_damzoom\\_pi1%5Bback%5D=en%2Fcollections%2Findex-of-works%2Fresultat-collection.html%3Fno\\_cache%3D1%26S%3D0%26sz%3D9](http://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/collections/index-of-works/resultat-collection.html?no_cache=1&S=0&zoom=1&tx_damzoom_pi1%5Bzoom%5D=0&tx_damzoom_pi1%5BxmlId%5D=001147&tx_damzoom_pi1%5Bback%5D=en%2Fcollections%2Findex-of-works%2Fresultat-collection.html%3Fno_cache%3D1%26S%3D0%26sz%3D9)

Degas, Edgar: Henri Rouart in front of his Factory, c. 1875, Carnegie Museum of Art (Pittsburgh, PA) <http://www.cmoa.org/CollectionDetail.aspx?item=1012610>

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Degas, Edgar: Young 14 year-old Dancer, Muse d'Orsay (Paris) [http://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/collections/index-of-works/resultat-collection.html?no\\_cache=1&S=0&zoom=1&tx\\_damzoom\\_pi1%5Bzoom%5D=0&tx\\_damzoom\\_pi1%5BxmlId%5D=000961&tx\\_damzoom\\_pi1%5Bback%5D=en%2Fcollections%2Findex-of-works%2Fresultat-collection.html%3Fno\\_cache%3D1%26S%3D0%26sz%3D9](http://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/collections/index-of-works/resultat-collection.html?no_cache=1&S=0&zoom=1&tx_damzoom_pi1%5Bzoom%5D=0&tx_damzoom_pi1%5BxmlId%5D=000961&tx_damzoom_pi1%5Bback%5D=en%2Fcollections%2Findex-of-works%2Fresultat-collection.html%3Fno_cache%3D1%26S%3D0%26sz%3D9)

Degas, Edgar: Little Ballet Dancer, 1880-81, Stiftung Sammlung E. G. Bhrle (Zurich) [http://www.buehrle.ch/works\\_detail.php?lang=en&id\\_pic=50](http://www.buehrle.ch/works_detail.php?lang=en&id_pic=50)

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Degas, Edgar: Madame La La at the Cirque Fernando, 1879, National Gallery (London) <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/cgi-bin/WebObjects.dll/CollectionPublisher.woa/wa/work?workNumber=NG4121>



Degas, Edgar: Carlo Pellegrini, c. 1876, National Gallery (London) <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/cgi-bin/WebObjects.dll/CollectionPublisher.woa/wa/work?workNumber=L699>

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Degas, Edgar: The Jockey, c. 1885-1900, Cleveland Museum of Art (Cleveland, OH) <http://www.clevelandart.org/art/1927.301>

Degas, Edgar: Paul Lafond and Alphonse Cherfils Examining a Painting, c. 1878-80, Cleveland Museum of Art (Cleveland, OH) <http://www.clevelandart.org/art/1958.25>

Degas, Edgar: Stefanina Primicille Carafa, Marchioness of Cicerale and Duchess of Montejasi, c. 1875, Cleveland Museum of Art (Cleveland, OH) <http://www.clevelandart.org/art/1958.28>

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[no\\_cache=1&S=0&zoom=1&tx\\_damzoom\\_pi1%5Bzoom%5D=0&tx\\_damzoom\\_pi1%5BxmlId%5D=002082&tx\\_damzoom\\_pi1%5Bback%5D=en%2Fcollections%2Findex-of-works%2Fresultat-collection.html%3Fno\\_cache%3D1%26S%3D0%26sz%3D9](http://www.vmfafa.state.va.us/collections/85_496.html)>

Degas, Edgar: Racecourse: Before the Start, c. 1880, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (Richmond, VA) [\\_<http://www.vmfafa.state.va.us/collections/85\\_496.html>](http://www.vmfafa.state.va.us/collections/85_496.html)

Degas, Edgar: Woman in a Tub, c. 1883, Tate (London) [\\_<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?cgroupid=999999961&workid=3706&searchid=11340>](http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?cgroupid=999999961&workid=3706&searchid=11340)

Degas, Edgar: Grand Arabesque, c. 1885-90, Tate (London) [\\_<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?cgroupid=999999961&workid=3700&searchid=9346>](http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?cgroupid=999999961&workid=3700&searchid=9346)

Degas, Edgar: Horse Clearing an Obstacle, c. 1887-8, Tate (London) [\\_<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?cgroupid=999999961&workid=3704&searchid=9346>](http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?cgroupid=999999961&workid=3704&searchid=9346)

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Degas, Edgar: Dancer Stretching, c. 1882-5, Kimbell Art Museum (Fort Worth, TX) [\\_<https://www.kimbellart.org/collection-object/dancer-stretching>](https://www.kimbellart.org/collection-object/dancer-stretching)

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Degas, Edgar: The Tub, 1889, National Gallery of Art (Washington, DC) [\\_<http://www.nga.gov/cgi-bin/pinfo?Object=65269+0+none>](http://www.nga.gov/cgi-bin/pinfo?Object=65269+0+none)

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Degas, Edgar: The Tub, 1886, Musee d'Orsay (Paris) [\\_<http://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/collections/index-of-works/resultat-collection.html?no\\_cache=1&S=0&zoom=1&tx\\_damzoom\\_pi1%5Bzoom%5D=0&tx\\_damzoom\\_pi1%5BxmlId%5D=002086&tx\\_damzoom\\_pi1%5Bback%5D=en%2Fcollections%2Findex-of-works%2Fresultat-collection.html%3Fno\\_cache%3D1%26S%3D0%26sz%3D9>](http://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/collections/index-of-works/resultat-collection.html?no_cache=1&S=0&zoom=1&tx_damzoom_pi1%5Bzoom%5D=0&tx_damzoom_pi1%5BxmlId%5D=002086&tx_damzoom_pi1%5Bback%5D=en%2Fcollections%2Findex-of-works%2Fresultat-collection.html%3Fno_cache%3D1%26S%3D0%26sz%3D9)

Degas, Edgar: The Millinery Shop, 1884-90, Art Institute of Chicago (Chicago, IL) [\\_<http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/artwork/14572>](http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/artwork/14572)

Degas, Edgar: Dancers in the Foyer, c. 1889, Stiftung Sammlung E. G. Bhrle (Zurich) [\\_<http://www.buehrle.ch/works\\_detail.php?lang=en&id\\_pic=48>](http://www.buehrle.ch/works_detail.php?lang=en&id_pic=48)

Degas, Edgar: Waiting: Dancer and Woman with an Umbrella, c. 1882, J. Paul Getty Museum (Los Angeles, CA) [\\_<http://www.getty.edu/art/collections/objects/o829.html>](http://www.getty.edu/art/collections/objects/o829.html)

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Degas, Edgar: Ludovic Lepic Holding his Dog, 1889, Cleveland Museum of Art (Cleveland, OH) [\\_<http://www.clevelandart.org/art/1988.93>](http://www.clevelandart.org/art/1988.93)

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Degas, Edgar: Jockeys on Horseback before Distant Hills, 1884, Detroit Institute of Arts (Detroit, MI) [\\_<http://www.dia.org/the\\_collection/overview/viewobject.asp?objectid=87627>](http://www.dia.org/the_collection/overview/viewobject.asp?objectid=87627)

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Degas, Edgar: Woman at her Toilet, 1894, Tate (London) [\\_<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?cgroupid=999999961&workid=3698&searchid=11370>](http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?cgroupid=999999961&workid=3698&searchid=11370)

Degas, Edgar: Dancer Putting on her Stocking, c. 1900, Tate (London) [\\_<https://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=3701&searchid=10515&roomid=2639&tabview=work>](https://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=3701&searchid=10515&roomid=2639&tabview=work)

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Degas, Edgar: After the Bath: Woman Drying Her Hair, c. 1895, Kimbell Art Museum (Fort Worth, TX) [\\_<https://www.kimbellart.org/collection-object/after-bath-woman-drying-her-hair>](https://www.kimbellart.org/collection-object/after-bath-woman-drying-her-hair)

Degas, Edgar: Combing the Hair (La Coiffure), c. 1896, National Gallery (London) [\\_<http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/cgi-bin/WebObjects.dll/CollectionPublisher.woa/wa/work?workNumber=NG4865>](http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/cgi-bin/WebObjects.dll/CollectionPublisher.woa/wa/work?workNumber=NG4865)

Degas, Edgar: Four Dancers, c. 1899, National Gallery of Art (Washington, DC) [\\_<http://www.nga.gov/collection/gallery/gg89/gg89-46314.0.html>](http://www.nga.gov/collection/gallery/gg89/gg89-46314.0.html)



Degas, Edgar: Before the Ballet, 1890-2, National Gallery of Art (Washington, DC) <http://www.nga.gov/cgi-bin/pinfo?Object=1161+0+none>>

Degas, Edgar: Dancers in Repose, 1898, Detroit Institute of Arts (Detroit, MI) [http://www.dia.org/the\\_collection/overview/viewobject.asp?objectid=42277](http://www.dia.org/the_collection/overview/viewobject.asp?objectid=42277)>

Degas, Edgar: After the Bath, 1896-8, Stiftung Sammlung E. G. Bhrle (Zurich) [http://www.buehrle.ch/works\\_detail.php?lang=en&id\\_pic=49](http://www.buehrle.ch/works_detail.php?lang=en&id_pic=49)>

Degas, Edgar: Ballet Dancers, c. 1890-1900, National Gallery (London) <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/cgi-bin/WebObjects.dll/CollectionPublisher.woa/wa/work?workNumber=NG4168>>

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Degas, Edgar: Estérel Village, c. 1890, Cleveland Museum of Art (Cleveland, OH) <http://www.clevelandart.org/art/1966.177>>

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