Art is not what you see, but what you make others see.

- Edgar Degas
Little Dancer, Aged Fourteen (1881) is undoubtedly Edgar Degas’s best-known sculpture, and the only piece he exhibited in his lifetime. The wax original, currently in the collection of the National Gallery in Washington, D.C., was shown in the Impressionist Exhibition of 1881, where it received mixed reviews. Art critics and exhibition visitors were either amazed or dismayed by the visual veracity of Degas’s young ballerina. One critic praised Degas’s originality: “At the first blow, M. Degas has overthrown the traditions of sculpture, as he has long since shaken off the conventions of painting.” Yet another contemporary observer stated that the Little Dancer was “the very type of horror and bestiality,” and advised the artist to exhibit it “in a zoological, anthropological, or medical museum,” but not in an art museum. But more than thirty years after the exhibition, the American collector Louisine Havemeyer recalled that “artistic Paris was taken by storm . . . Was ever such a thing heard of! A ballerina with real hair and real draperies, one of the greatest works of art since the dynasties of the Nile!”

When this sculpture made its debut, it was truly an unconventional marvel: a wax figure dressed in a cloth bodice, a gauze tutu, wool stockings, satin slippers, a wig of real hair and a silk hair ribbon, all but the ribbon coated with a thin layer of tinted wax. Its bronze counterpart retains a real silk hair ribbon and a gauze tutu. After the exhibition of 1881 closed, the original wax remained in Degas’s studio for years, and he refused all requests to sell it. He reworked the piece in 1903, and it was cast in bronze in 1922.

The model for the Little Dancer was Marie Geneviève van Goethem. Born in Paris in 1865, she became a student of the Paris Opera Dance School. She modeled for Degas as did with her older sister Antoinette and her younger sister Charlotte, who were dancers as well. From accounts in Degas’s notebook, we know that he was sketching Antoinette as early as 1873. The van Goethem family was a typical Parisian working class family— the father was a tailor and the mother worked as a laundress, an occupation well-represented among ballerinas’ mothers. Marie and Charlotte both climbed the tiers of the ballet hierarchy, but by August 1882, at age seventeen, Marie was no longer on the roster for the ballet.
Edgar Degas was born in Paris in 1834, the son of an aristocratic French banker and his American-born wife. Like many would-be artists, the young Degas occupied himself copying masterworks at the Louvre. At age 21, he continued along this traditional path by enrolling in the École des Beaux-Arts, where he studied with a disciple of his artistic hero, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres. After one semester, however, he ended his classical training. His privileged background allowed him to travel through Italy for several years, honing his drawing skills and powers of observation.

Degas was part of a social circle that included famous artists such as Manet, Cézanne, Pissarro, Renoir, Monet and Cassatt. He became associated with a group of painters known as the Impressionists, who were more interested in the effects of light and color than in reproducing a scene exactly. Between 1874 and 1886, Degas exhibited his work at seven of the eight Impressionist exhibitions in Paris.

Degas did not care for the term Impressionist. He considered himself a realist, dedicated to capturing the nuances of figures in motion. His favorite themes were racehorses, ballet dancers, nude bathers, and cabaret performers. While Degas’s paintings were fairly popular during his lifetime, the reaction to his sculptures was generally negative. So harsh were the critics that after exhibiting the wax model for the Little Dancer of Fourteen Years in 1881, Degas never again showed his sculpture in public.

Poor eyesight plagued Degas for most of his life, and by the time of his death in 1917 he was almost blind. Long known for his cantankerous and judgmental personality, he kept all but a few friends at an emotional distance. He had never married, and so depended on a housekeeper to take care of him. In his last years, Degas was a sad and familiar figure walking through the Parisian streets, alone.
Edgar Degas: Figures in Motion
- What was the role of photography in Degas’s work? -

Edgar Degas had an experimental streak and was fascinated by technology. In the 1870s, the photographers Edweard Muybridge and Etienne-Jules Marey both devised a way to study animal locomotion by taking a series of pictures in rapid succession. For the first time, it was possible to prove that all four of a horse’s legs are momentarily off the ground at the same time during a gallop. This revolutionized the way both painters and sculptors depicted equestrian subjects. One of Degas’s closest friends, the poet Paul Valéry, noted that Degas “was among the first to study the real positions of the noble animal in movement, in the ‘instantaneous’ photographs taken by Major Muybridge. For he had a liking and appreciation for photography when artists still despised it, or dared not admit they made use of it.”

Degas himself became an enthusiastic amateur photographer, using his camera to study composition and investigate the effects of light on groupings of friends and family. He pursued this hobby most ardently in the period around 1895–96. From Mont-Dore, a spa town where he had gone for bronchitis treatments in 1895, he wrote a letter to his friend Henri Rouart confiding that “In the evenings I digest and photograph in the twilight.”

Most experts agree that Degas did photograph models at his studio, although not many of his negatives have survived. Given the technology of the time, each exposure would have required the model to hold a difficult position for several minutes. A few scholars dispute whether Degas himself operated the camera, suggesting that it was a friend instead. Either way, there is no doubt that Degas based some of his work on these photographs.
Edgar Degas: Figures in Motion
- What was Paris like when Degas lived and worked there? -

Paris, as Edgar Degas experienced it, was a city undergoing rapid change. On the one hand, horse-carts were more common than automobiles on the cobbled streets, children could be sent to work at age eight, and vineyards still dotted the northern slopes of the city at Montmartre. But over a thousand ancient dwellings were being knocked down every year to create the grand boulevards for which the City of Light is famous today. In the 1860s, the new urban sewer system became a tourist attraction and in 1889 the supremely modern Eiffel Tower changed the cityscape forever. By 1900, a subway system was transporting citizens to the Paris Exposition, which introduced astonishing wonders of science and technology to the world.

The Belle Epoque ushered in the flowing Art Nouveau style that redefined the look of the city’s architecture. The glittering Opéra Garnier, where Degas sketched many of his ballet dancers, became the hub of Parisian cultural life. Stephen Mallarmé and fellow Symbolist poets were baffling the public with their new style of writing, while composers like Claude Debussy were creating dreamy music unlike anything written before. The Impressionists were turning the art world on its head, and turn-of-the-century Paris reigned as the artistic, fashion and culinary capital of Western culture.
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Edgar Degas: Figures in Motion

- What was Degas’s art about? -

In this exhibit, you will find examples of Edgar Degas’s genius as a painter, printmaker, draughtsman and sculptor. Without a doubt, Degas is best-known for his paintings and pastels of young dancers, yet even he admitted that as subject matter they were primarily a means to an end: “They call me a painter of dancers without understanding that for me the dancer has been the pretext for painting beautiful fabrics and rendering movement.”

Throughout his life, Degas focused his attention on capturing movement. Within the parameters of this controlled agenda emerged three main themes: the depictions of dancers, bathers and horses. Whether observing a young dancer on the stage, a model at her toilette, or a horse just moments before a race, Degas was fascinated by figures in motion. He was not interested in the identity or thoughts of his subjects, but in their movements.

Degas was also a perfectionist, determined to communicate his passion for the figure—whether human or animal. To that end, he reworked his compositions incessantly and reintroduced the same pose time and time again in his drawings, paintings and sculpture. For Degas, repetition was a necessity, not a curse: “One must do the same subject over again, ten times, a hundred times. In art nothing must resemble an accident, not even movement.” Observing and sketching furiously at ballet rehearsals, Degas was privileged to witness constant and repetitive movements. As the dancers strove for perfection in their performances, Degas strove for perfection in his renderings and his sculpture.

Degas’s involvement with sculpture was an effective way for him to explore spatial relationships and understand movement. “The only way to get at the truth is through modeling, because it has a coercive effect on the artist: he must see to it that nothing essential is overlooked,” he said. In Degas’s sculpture, the ultimate goal was producing a succinct gesture that implied continuous movement: action was always stressed over emotion.
Edgar Degas: Figures in Motion
“The messiest subject alive . . .”?

Even the experts disagree about whether sculptures cast after an artist’s death should be classified in the same way as those produced during his lifetime. Kirk Varnedoe, former curator of painting and sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, calls this question “the messiest subject alive.”

The discussion certainly applies to the posthumous casting of Edgar Degas’s wax sculptures in bronze—the work you’ve seen in this exhibition. When Degas died in 1917, about 150 wax statuettes—some intact, others unfinished or falling apart—were found in his studio. The deterioration of some was so severe that only seventy-three of them were cast in bronze. Degas’s heirs and his dealer, Joseph Durand-Ruel, selected the A. A. Hébrard Foundry in Paris and master caster Albino Palazzolo to undertake this task.

The family authorized the foundry to mold and cast twenty-two sets of the seventy-three works. In order to preserve the original wax sculptures, Palazzolo cast a second set of waxes from them, and these were used to produce all subsequent authorized bronze casts. Palazzolo was instructed to create identical casts of Degas’s work, though he did make a few changes by removing large lumps of wax on the bases and removing or replacing fragile metal armatures.

The issue has produced some healthy, even heated, debate. Ultimately, however, the controversy need not alter our appreciation for Degas’s innovative and exciting search for a better understanding of figures in motion.

In many cases artists die before making their intentions known, or make their intentions known verbally instead of in writing, or decide to say nothing...Some heirs and executors are confronted with the serious responsibility of preserving from deterioration fragile sculptures in clay or wax or plaster and in such cases bronze casting might be construed as an appropriate discharge of that trust . . . .

College Art Association Statement on Standards for Sculptural Reproduction and Preventive Measures to Combat Unethical Casting in Bronze, 1974
It seems that something is missing in the castings of Degas’s work . . . the lack of external armatures and the absence of the shaped wooden bases make a profound difference in the way the originals and the bronzes function as sculpture.

John McCarty, sculptor

If they had not been cast after his death they would have disintegrated. Given the awesome prices Degas’ bronzes fetch—the cast of “Little Dancer, 14 years” sold for over $10 million at Christie’s in 1988 and $12.3 million recently—the fact they are posthumous seems to have had no negative impact on the market. There is however a controversy regarding their aesthetic value with the message of Degas being lost in the very medium that was employed to save it.

Adrian Darmon, editor, artcult.com

If you decide once the heart beats for the last time, that’s it—nothing ever produced after that is authentic—it makes your life much simpler.

Kirk Varnedoe, former curator,
Museum of Modern Art

Lots of artists had their works cast posthumously. The issue is whether you find that troubling or not. I don’t. This is what we have to deal with. They were done; they’re here . . . They were cast by the very best [foundry] in Paris, and the only thing you don’t have is the artist there saying “Fine.” It has to do with production and approval and really is more of a concern for the artist. But if the artist is dead, he doesn’t care.

Patrick Noon, curator, Minneapolis Institute of Arts
Museum Piece

The good gray guardians of art
Patrol the halls on spongy shoes,
Impartially protective, though
Perhaps suspicious of Toulouse.

Here dozes one against the wall,
Disposed upon a funeral chair.
A Degas dancer pirouettes
Upon the parting of his hair.

See how she spins! The grace is there,
But strain as well is plain to see.
Degas loved the two together:
Beauty joined to energy.

Edgar Degas purchased once
A fine El Greco, which he kept
Against the wall beside his bed
To hang his pants on while he slept.
Edgar Degas: Figures in Motion
- Related works in the Gallery’s collection -

**JULES CHERET**
French, 1836–1932
*Saxoléine Pétrole de Sûrete*, no date
Color lithograph
Memorial Art Gallery
Anonymous gift, 70.83

**EDGAR DEGAS**
French, 1834–1917
*Dancer, Seen from Behind*, no date
Black chalk and pastel on faded blue laid paper
Memorial Art Gallery
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. James H. Lockhart, Jr., 87.65

**EDGAR DEGAS**
French, 1834–1917
*Dancers*, about 1900
Pastel and charcoal on tracing paper, mounted on wove paper mounted on board
Memorial Art Gallery
Gift of Mrs. Charles H. Babcock, 31.21

**GEORGES WILLIAM THORNLEY,**
*after EDGAR DEGAS*
French, 1857–1935
*Les Jockeys*, about 1888
Transfer lithograph in brown ink on chine-appliqué
Memorial Art Gallery
Marion Stratton Gould Fund, 2001.4

**HENRI GABRIEL IBELS**
French, 1867–1936
*Le Théâtre Libre (The Free Theater)*, no date
Color lithograph
Memorial Art Gallery
Marion Stratton Gould Fund, 84.32

**HENRI DE TOULOUSE-LAUTREC**
French, 1864–1901
*Troupe de Mlle. Eglantine*, no date
Color lithograph
Memorial Art Gallery
Marion Stratton Gould Fund, 49.3

**HENRI DE TOULOUSE-LAUTREC**
French, 1864–1901
*Divan Japonais*, about 1893
Color lithograph
Memorial Art Gallery
Gift of the Corner Club of Rochester, 54.62

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500 University Avenue ♦ Rochester, NY 14610 ♦ (585) 473-7720, ext. 3025

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Edgar Degas: Figures in Motion

- How were the wax models made? -

Edgar Degas originally made all of the sculptures in this exhibit in either colored wax or a mixture of colored wax and plasticene (non-drying modeling clay), which was applied over wire armatures. The figures are referred to simply as “waxes,” but this is a misnomer. Even those comprised of pure beeswax also contain either an internal or external wire armature, and they were never intended to be melted down, or “lost,” during the casting process.

Degas preferred to work in the medium of wax, or a wax-clay combination, because the material was both malleable and forgiving. He could reposition and rework the figures indefinitely, and we know from contemporary accounts that he did so. Degas manipulated the material in his hands until it was soft and pliable, and formed the figures much in the way you might make any small figure from clay. The surfaces of the pieces could also be carved and reworked to produce different finishes.

Degas used a variety of materials in the creation of his figures. He would often incorporate objects from his studio into his sculpture, both for content and for structural support. The wax original for The Tub (see photo below) includes a strip of a lead-zinc alloy for the bathtub, plaster “water,” and plaster-soaked rags for the base. The underside of the sculpture (see photo below) reveals some of Degas’s working methods and the materials he used to add mass and strength to a piece. Pieces of large semi-circular corks and rectangular wooden pieces, in addition to the brownish red wax, are clearly visible.

Edgar Degas, The Tub, 1889/1890, wax, plaster-soaked rags, lead strip, and cork, National Gallery of Art, Washington

View of underside of The Tub, revealing the artist’s working methods and materials; note the large semicircular corks, rectangular wooden pieces, and balls of red wax
Edgar Degas: Figures in Motion
- How were the bronzes made? -

All of the sculptures in this exhibit were cast from the wax/clay models found in Edgar Degas’s studio at the time of his death. After much discussion between Degas’s friends and heirs, it was decided that the Parisian foundry of A. A. Hébrard would cast seventy-three of the sculptures in bronze, using a multi-step process that would preserve the wax originals.

Degas’s original sculptures were first covered in clay and then wrapped entirely in plaster. After the plaster dried, the mold was opened, the clay was removed, and the original wax was then covered with a special gel. The gel filled the space between the original model and the plaster mold, and hardened without the application of heat. Once hardened, the gel mold was opened and the original removed, safe and sound. Hot wax was poured into the gel mold, and once cool, this wax became the model that was cast according to the “lost-wax” process. This involved encasing the new wax model in a heat-resistant mold and exposing it to heat, causing the wax to melt and run out of the mold (thus the wax is “lost.”) Space then existed in the mold for the molten bronze to be poured in. After the bronze cooled, it was removed from the mold and the figure was finished through a series of steps involving cleaning, polishing and adding a patina (colored finish) to the surface. This complex process allowed the casters the added advantage of comparing the finished bronze cast with the wax original.

The initial contract between the Hébrard Foundry and Degas’s heirs stated that twenty-two complete sets of all seventy-three sculptures would be cast. One set would be reserved for the heirs, another for the caster, and the remaining twenty would be put up for sale. The casting process itself is costly and time-consuming. Casting did not begin until 1919 and it continued through 1932. Recent scholarship debates whether or not all twenty-two sets were ever completed, and the exact number of Degas’s sculptures in existence remains a question. These sculptures here comprise one of only four complete sets in existence. The other three sets can be found in the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York: the Musée d’Orsay in Paris; and the Glypoythek in Copenhagen.
Edgar Degas began his artistic career in the most traditional manner. Like generations of artists before him, he copied Old Master works in the Louvre, traveled through Italy copying in the Sistine Chapel and the Uffizi Gallery, and composed paintings based on historical narratives. However, as he matured as an artist, Degas made a conscious decision to turn his attention to the depiction of modern life.

Degas is often considered one of the most important painter-sculptors of the nineteenth century, as well as one of the first modernists. His paintings, drawings and prints incorporated the cropped images of the new medium of photography and the flattened forms of Japanese prints. His approach to sculpture, in both style and subject matter, rejected the accepted academic principles of perfection and romantic idealism; instead it captured the realities of unconventional and transitory movements.

Compare Degas’s sculptures with the piece illustrated in the photo below, *Bacchante with Infant Faun* (1894) by the American sculptor Frederick MacMonnies. The two artists were contemporaries, but they were working toward very different goals. MacMonnies created an ideal female nude based on a figure from Roman mythology. Conversely, Degas dedicated his vision to depicting women engaged in contemporary settings, with little concern for adhering to historical conceptions of beauty.

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Edgar Degas: Figures in Motion
- How did Degas’s poor eyesight affect his work? -

In letters and conversations, Edgar Degas complained frequently about his poor eyesight. During his military service in 1870, he discovered that his right eye was practically useless during rifle practice. When he visited New Orleans two years later, he found the light so strong that he was forced to paint indoors or in the shade of a balcony. By 1882 he needed a magnifying glass in order to read. And in 1896 he referred to himself as “a blind man, who wants to pretend that he can see.”

A modern analysis of his symptoms suggests that he endured multiple problems. Like many people, he was myopic, or near-sighted, from an early age. He was also amblyopic, meaning that because his left eye was stronger, the right one became weakened through disuse, resulting in monocular vision. He suffered from photophobia, a condition in which natural daylight or strong artificial light caused him physical pain. He described blurry patches and a “blind spot,” perhaps the result of macular degeneration, that gave him great trouble as he grew older. Finally, it’s likely that he developed presbyopia, a natural result of aging in which the lens of the eye becomes less flexible and therefore less able to focus at close range.

Scholars differ in their opinions about how Degas’s impaired eyesight affected his work. Some have suggested that it was the main reason he began sculpting in wax, since the tactile could replace the visual to some extent. But he was creating sculpture even before his vision became a major handicap. For this reason, other experts believe that the sculpture was simply an aspect of Degas’s well-known penchant for experimenting in a variety of media.

His poor vision may, in fact, have influenced the relatively small scale of his sculpture, as he could have worked comfortably on these at close range. Even more importantly, however, the resulting frustration and fear, plus the physical pain caused by light, may have contributed to Degas’s reputation as a cantankerous, reclusive individual.
Edgar Degas: Figures in Motion
- How did critics and the public react to Degas’s work? -

Like most artists, Degas had his fair share of both admirers and detractors. What was considered inventive by some was perceived as audacious by others. Few reviewers mentioned his sculpture and for good reason: the wax model for the *Little Dancer, Aged Fourteen* was the only one he exhibited during his lifetime. People accustomed to classic marble statuary were shocked by the ballerina’s real hair and clothing, the mottled tint of her skin, and her ungainly posture. In fact, the harsh public response may have been one of the reasons he never exhibited his sculpture in public again.

*Might not Degas become classic some day? No one can express with a surer hand the feeling of modern elegance. Moreover, this is a man whose capacity for observation, artistic subtlety, and taste reveal themselves in even his smallest works.*

Philippe Burty, *La République Française*, 1874

*Degas is strange and sometimes goes as far as being bizarre.*

Jules-Antoine Castagnary, *Le Siecle*, 1874

*In examining the works exhibited, one wonders whether one is seeing the fruit either of a process of mystification which is highly unsuitable for the public, or the result of mental derangement . . .*

Emile Cardon, *La Presse*, 1874

*An exhibition of so-called “paintings” has opened at the Durand-Ruel Gallery . . . Five or six lunatics, of whom one is a woman, a group of unfortunates, afflicted with the madness of ambition, have got together there to exhibit their works.*

*There are those who will roar with laughter in front of these works. For my part, I am heartbroken . . . Just try to make M. Degas listen to reason; tell him that there are in*
art a few realities called design, color, execution . . . he will laugh in your face and call you a reactionary.

Albert Wolff, *Le Figaro*, 1876

*M. de Gas paints in the delicate medium of pastel for those with delicate tastes, but he paints with passion and zest . . . The Salons are too hide-bound to exhibit these delicate studies, which in literature would be the equivalent of a short, incisive novel.*

Philippe Burty, *La République Français*, 1877

*The personality of M. Degas informs his most casual sketches, as it does his most accomplished works. This year, however, the curiosity of his exhibition is not to be found in his drawn or painted oeuvre; it is, on all counts, a wax statue entitled The Little Fourteen-Year-Old Dancer, which the dumbfounded and seemingly embarrassed public is giving a wide berth.*

*The terrible truthfulness of this statuette is a source of obvious discomfort for them; all of their notions about sculpture, about that cold inanimate whiteness, those memorable stereotypes replicated for centuries, are being overturned . . . Both refined and barbaric, with her complicated costume, and her painted flesh which throbs, furrowed by moving muscles, this statuette is the only really modern attempt I know in sculpture.*

Joris-Karl Huysmans, *L’Art Moderne*, 1881

*As for the expression of the face [of the Little Dancer, Aged Fourteen], it is obviously studied. Mr. Degas dreamed an ideal of ugliness. The happy man! He has achieved it . . . If he continues to model and if he keeps his style, he will have a little niche in the history of the cruel arts.*

Paul Mantz, *Le Temps*, 1881

*Who says anything about Rodin? I am talking about the first sculptor. Come now, it is Degas. I have seen a relief of his that he allows to crumble to pieces; it is as beautiful as a Greek statue. And that wax dancer . . .*

Auguste Renoir, in conversation, undated

*These pastels reek of the stumps of the maimed, the embrace of the prostitute, the sickening gait of the legless cripple.*
Joris-Karl Huysmans, *L’Art Moderne*, 1886

*The naked woman has become impossible in modern art; it required Degas’ genius to infuse new life into the well-worn theme . . . With cynicism Degas has rendered the nude again an artistic possibility.*

George Moore, *Confessions of a Young Man*, 1888

*The contemporary school owes a great deal to Degaz [sic], and even the traditionalists, though grudgingly, have to admire the incontestable qualities of his painting . . . He is a parlor revolutionary, the ironic modesty of his appearance saving him from the hate which firebrands draw on themselves . . .*

Armand Silvestre, *Au Pays du Souvenir*, 1892

*I have studied Degas’s bronzes for months. I believe he will live to be greater as a sculptor than as a painter.*

Mary Cassatt, letter to Mrs. H. O. Havermeyer, undated
Edgar Degas: Figures in Motion
- Why do some of these sculptures look unfinished or broken? -

We know from contemporary accounts that Edgar Degas was actively involved in making sculpture from early in his career, and he was known to rework his figures repeatedly. In one interview he described them as “warm-up exercises; preliminary documents, nothing more.” He seemed to pay little attention to making these works in progress appear finished or complete. It appears that he had little regard for their permanence, and he was conflicted about exhibiting his sculptures publicly, admitting once to fellow artist Aristide Maillol, “Yes, I model and perhaps one day I shall cast in bronze.”

Degas died in September of 1917. In December of that year Degas’s dealer Joseph Durand-Ruel, together with Ambroise Vollard, another dealer and friend of the artist, began an inventory of his studio. In a letter from 1919 discussing the inventory, Durand-Ruel mentions initially finding 150 small wax figures in various stages of completion and condition scattered throughout Degas’s studio. Those that were badly damaged were discarded. There was a heated and extended debate among Degas’s heirs and close friends regarding the proper path to follow in the preservation of the eighty remaining waxes deemed worth salvaging. If left untreated, it was only a matter of time before they completely disintegrated. The decision was made in 1918 to have seventy-three of the remaining eighty waxes cast in bronze, employing a series of complex steps that would preserve the wax originals.

Care was taken to minimize any differences between the original wax models and the bronze casts. Repairs and artistic interference by the foundry workers were discouraged (although both were sanctioned in certain circumstances, such as stabilizing a work). The finished bronze casts ultimately preserve the spirit of Degas’s original waxes, and the casting process ensured the survival of an important aspect of Degas’s life work.
Armature: a rigid framework, often of wood or steel, used to support a sculpture or other large work while it is being made

Art Nouveau: an asymmetrical decorative style popular in the 1890s which featured curvilinear shapes based on plant forms

Belle Époque: the years between 1890-1914, specifically the “gilded age” in France, which preceded the First World War, and were characterized by an atmosphere of gaiety, frivolity and great creativity

Bronze: an alloy of copper and tin used for sculpture

Casting: the process of making a sculpture or other object by pouring liquid material – clay, metal, plastic – into a mold and allowing it to harden

Debussy, Claude: French composer (1862-1918)

Impressionism: a theory or practice in painting especially among French painters of about 1870 of depicting the natural appearances of objects by means of dabs or strokes of primary unmixed colors in order to simulate actual reflected light

Lost-wax process: a bronze-casting method in which a figure is modeled in wax and covered with clay; the whole is fired, melting away the wax and hardening the clay, which then becomes a mold for molten metal. (Also known by its French name, cire perdue.)

Mallarmé, Stéphane: French poet (1842-1898)

Old Masters: artists whose work is considered classical, timeless and of great influence on what followed. Includes Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael and Rembrandt, among others.

Patina: the colored, oxidized layer that forms on bronze and copper; also, the creation of a colored surface on metal sculpture by the application of an acid solution.

Plasticene: a non-drying plastic paste used for models and sculptures

Salon: the government-sponsored exhibition of works by living artists held in Paris, first biennially and now (since the mid-eighteenth century) annually
Edgar Degas: Figures in Motion
- Bibliography for Educators -


Because Marie helps her poor parents by modeling for an ill-tempered artist, she becomes a famous ballerina but not in the way she had dreamed.


Written as a report by a fictitious student on her famous artist of choice. Includes biographical information on Degas, including his development as an artist and influences on his work. Wonderfully illustrated throughout.


Mirette learns tightrope walking from Monsieur Bellini, a guest in her mother’s boarding house, not knowing he is a celebrated tightrope artist who has withdrawn from performing because of fear. Set in Paris at the end of the nineteenth century. Caldecott Medal winner.


This story is drawn from the Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova’s 1922 autobiography, *Pages of my Life* (translated by Sebastien Voirol), published by Michel de Brunhoff, Paris. *I dreamed I was a Ballerina* was co-published by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and all works reproduced are in the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.


Three little kittens create a sensation when they join the dancers on-stage of a Parisian theatre known for its ballet and for the artist who paints there.


Examines the life and work of the nineteenth-century artist Edgar Degas, who loved to paint scenes of Paris and the people who worked and lived there.

Edgar Degas: Figures in Motion
- Bibliography: Teacher Resource Center Materials -


*Degas and the Dancer*. Devine Entertainment System. 1999 (Videotape)


EDGAR DEGAS (1834-1917)

*The Little Dancer, Aged Fourteen (ca.1878-1881)*
Bronze with gauze tutu and silk ribbon, 39 x 16 ½”
Collection of the Museu de Arte de São Paulo, Brazil
EDGAR DEGAS (1834—1917)

The Jockeys, ca.1888
GEORGES W. THORNLEY (1857-1935)  
*after* EDGAR DEGAS (1834-1917)

*The Jockeys (ca. 1888)*
Lithograph printed in brown ink on paper, 8 3/8 x 10”
Memorial Art Gallery, Marion Stratton Gould Fund