

Degas's Ladies



Edgar Degas

The Gek Contemporary

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Cover Photograph

Edgar Degas, 1834 - 1917

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Solo Oil Painting Exhibition of Degas's Ladies in Miniature.

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Foreword

The miniatures of Degas's bathers and dancers are some of the first miniatures Gek painted on our return to South Wales from the Far East. They were executed on cotton canvas as opposed to the finer linen canvas, which she subsequently used for copies of other Old Masters.

This exhibition has given us a chance to find out more about Degas, the man as well as his art. Apart from the 'Bathers and 'Dancers' copied by Gek, he had four additional subjects which interested him – Horses and Jockeys, Modern Life, Male Portraits and Women in Society.

About Edgar

Edgar de Gas was born in Paris, France, into moderately wealthy family. Degas adapted this less grandiose family name when he began his schooling at the age of eleven. By the time he graduated from Lycee at the age of 18, he had already turned a room in his home into an artist's studio. Although he registered as a copyist at the Louvre Museum, on his father's insistence he enrolled at the Faculty of Law of the University of Paris in late 1853, but he applied little effort to his studies, and eighteen months later he was admitted to the Ecoles des Beaux-arts. In July 1865, Degas travelled to Italy, where he remained for the next three years. The rest, as they say, is history.

Degas is often identified as an Impressionist, an understandable but insufficient description. Impressionism originated in the 1860s and 1870s and grew, in part, from the realism of other painters works. They painted the realities of the world around them using bright, dazzling colours, concentrating primarily on the effects of light. Technically, Degas differs from the Impressionists and he continually belittled their practice of painting *en plein air*.

“You know what I think of people who work out in the open. If I were the government, I would have a special brigade of gendarmes to keep an eye on the artists who paint landscapes from nature. Oh, I don't mean to kill anyone; just a little dose of bird-shot now and then as a warning.”

I think we get the message!

(Wikipedia)

The Bathers

Some fifty monotypes of brothel scenes survive. It is possible that others were destroyed by Degas heirs. They are not blatantly pornographic, nor are his observations of the women cruel or caricatural. He is amused and amusing, aware of their humanity and the inherently comic aspects.



Figure 1 - Oil on Canvas, 2.75 x 2.25 in



Figure 2 - Oil on Canvas. 2.75 x 2.25 in



Figure 3 - Oil on Canvas, 2.75 x 2.25 in



Figure 4 - Oil on Canvas, 2.75 x 2.25 in

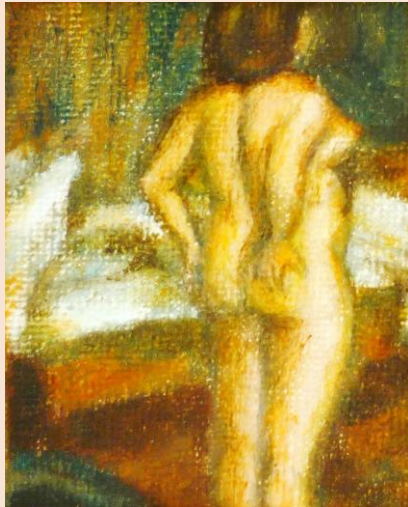


Figure 5 - Oil on Canvas, 2.75 x 2.25 in



Figure 6 - Oil on Canvas, 2.75 x 2.25 in

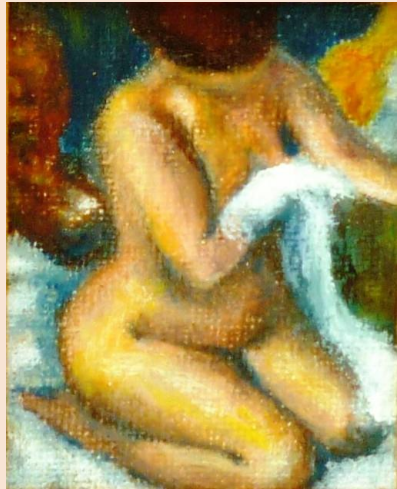


Figure 7 - Oil on Canvas, 2.75 x 2.25 in



Figure 8- Oil on Canvas. 2.75 x 2.25 in



Figure 9 - Oil on Canvas, 3. x 2.5 in



Figure 10 - Oil on Canvas, 2.75 x 2.25 in



Figure 11 - Oil on Linen Canvas, 2 x 1 in

Dancer in front of window, circa 1874-77

Considered to be a founder of Impressionism, Degas nonetheless rejected the movement's penchant for painting outdoors and portraying natural light. Intent on capturing poses as natural and spontaneous as a photograph, his studies of female dancers are celebrated as supreme masterpieces and mark him as an innovator in his own right.

Dancer with tambourine, 1882

Degas completed paintings in his studio that originated as sketches of living models, strongly influencing later artists such as Picasso and Toulouse-Lautrec.



Figure 12 - Oil on Linen Canvas, 2 x 1 in



Figure 13 - Oil on Canvas, 2.75 x 2.25 in

Dancer, 1882-9

Obsessed by the ballet, Degas created hundreds of paintings and sculptures which captured the harsh realities of 19th century dancers' lives and hinged on his voyeuristic fascination with the pain ballet inflicted on female bodies.

Blue Dancers, c 1899

The lowly state of the ballet enabled Degas to capture the reality, in contrast to the artifice, of a dancer's working life, above all the blood, sweat and tears that permeated the rehearsal rooms.



Figure 14 - Oil on Canvas, 2.5 x 3.5 in



Figure 15 - Oil on Canvas, 3.5 x 2.5 in

Two Dancers, c 1896

Another phenomenon of the ballet world that fascinated him was the presence of a number of men in top hats and fur collared overcoats who were permitted to pay court to the dancers in the *foyer de la danse* (a kind of greenroom), as long as they took out a subscription for three seats a week

Singer with a Glove, 1878

During the late 1870s, Degas and his friend, the American artist Mary Cassatt were both working on pastels that depicted scenes from theatres in Paris. These public sites of urban leisure embodied the values France's newly established Third Republic, including the importance of secular entertainment, although French women did not get the right to vote until 1945.



Figure 16 - Oil on Canvas, 2.75 x 2.25 in

Acknowledgements

Reference

1. Degas His Life and Works in 500 Images by Jon Kear, for copies of Degas originals for Gek to copy in miniature.
2. Degas 1879 exhibition brochure published by the Edinburgh International Festival 1979 organisers.
3. Wikipedia, as always, for information on Degas, his art and the period in which he lived.

Thank you for visiting the Gek Contemporary. Hope to see you again soon.