



EDGAR DEGAS

THE PRIVATE IMPRESSIONIST

Works on Paper by the Artist and His Circle

EDGAR DEGAS: THE PRIVATE IMPRESSIONIST

Works on Paper by the Artist and His Circle

The great French artist Edgar Degas (1834–1917) once said, “I would like to be illustrious and unknown.” To a large degree, his wish has been granted. By the time of Degas’ death, more than ninety years ago, his art had become famous; his reputation since then has only grown. Yet the individual who was so accomplished in many artistic endeavors—from drawing, painting, and printmaking to sculpture and photography—has remained elusive.

Unjustly labeled a misogynist because of his frank depiction of women, and a cynic because of his biting wit, Degas was, rather, arguably the keenest artistic observer of human nature since Rembrandt. And, although often aloof to strangers, Degas shared warmth and loyalty with his family as well as with a wide circle of friends, which included some of the greatest writers and artists of the epoch.

The works by Degas in this exhibition consist of twenty-four drawings, twenty prints, eight photographs, three monotypes, one sculpture, and a letter, all from a single private collection. The collection endeavors to illuminate the background and personality of Edgar Degas the man, as well as to present his genius as an artist. The subject matter of these works by Degas is often quite personal. In addition to three rare self-portraits, the collection includes depictions of his father, his brother Achille, an Italian niece, his loyal housekeeper Sabine Neyt, and the wife of a patron, Madame Ernest May; three portraits of Édouard Manet and two of Mary Cassatt; and drawings after antique sculpture and Old Masters such as Mantegna and Michelangelo. Works touch upon three notable themes of Degas’ oeuvre: the human body, horse racing, and the ballet. Also included is a group of brilliant color aquatints after Degas monotypes by Maurice Potin, which were commissioned shortly after the artist’s death by the owner of the original monotypes, Degas’ friend and dealer, Ambroise Vollard.

An additional selection of more than forty rare works of art on paper enriches the exhibition. These pieces are by well-known artists, many of whom were friends of Degas, including Giovanni Boldini, Mary Cassatt, Paul Cézanne, Marcellin Desboutin, Jean-Hippolyte Flandrin, Jean-Léon Gérôme, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, Alphonse Legros, Adolph von Menzel, Gustave Moreau, Henri Regnault, William Rothenstein, Alfred Stevens, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, and Joseph-Gabriel Tourny. The exhibition is further enhanced by several drawings by Pierre-Georges Jeannot, one of Degas’ closest friends during the final decades of his life. The group of Jeannot drawings comprises portraits of the sculptor Albert Bartholomé and Degas’ younger disciple Jean-Louis Forain, three self-portraits, and two exceedingly rare portraits of Degas himself, who was famous for his reluctance to pose.

All the compelling works in this exhibition come from the private collection of Robert Flynn Johnson, Curator Emeritus of the Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. These works have never before been exhibited together publicly and provide a delightful exploration into the art and personality of one of the most skilled, intelligent, and complex artists in the history of art. Johnson’s introduction to the exhibition discusses his admiration for Edgar Degas and his circle, and his own forty-year pursuit of their works as a collector.

A VERY PRIVATE COLLECTION

Ann Dumas

Robert Flynn Johnson is a true connoisseur. For more than thirty-eight years, with passion, persistence, deep knowledge, and an unerring sense of when to seize an opportunity, he has been assembling a unique collection, starting with his first acquisition, a sensitive and modest monotype of two trees by Degas—the kind of work that at the time was of little interest to collectors of greater means and more obvious taste. That purchase demonstrates two key aspects of Robert’s collecting: his eye for the unusual and less familiar, and his love of the private, intimate side of the artists he admires.

Degas is at the heart of the collection and of this exhibition. Over the years Johnson has acquired drawings, prints, photographs, and sculpture by his favorite artist, one of the greatest draftsmen of the nineteenth century. The collection is especially strong in Degas’ drawings and includes outstanding works from the beginning of his career in the 1850s, many of them unpublished and exhibited here for the first time. A group of portrait drawings and figure studies shows the artist’s debt both to Ingres and to the Italian Old Masters. After his first acquisition, Johnson pursued his interest in Degas the printmaker, purchasing a substantial number of notable etchings and monotypes. The collection includes fine impressions of several of Degas’ most famous prints, such as his friends’ portraits, *Édouard Manet* and *Mary Cassatt at the Louvre: The Paintings Gallery*, and the important etching *At the Café des Ambassadeurs*.

Degas was a daring experimenter, a side of him that particularly appeals to this collector. In his early sixties, the artist tried his hand at photography. Johnson, with characteristic appreciation of the unexpected, has managed to find exceptional photographs that are striking for their complex orchestration and emotive lighting, as in *Jules Taschereau Seated in Front of a Window*, as well as delightfully informal outdoor groupings of his friends, including the composers Debussy and Chausson.

Johnson’s enthusiasm for Degas has led him to pursue the works of lesser-known but highly interesting artists who were the artist’s friends and associates. These include a group of beautiful drawings by Pierre-Georges Jeanniot, an artist who shared Degas’ fervor for printmaking. One of his two portraits of Degas is a particularly moving drawing executed shortly before the artist’s death in 1917. Degas’ great friend and printmaking collaborator, Mary Cassatt, is represented by a fine etching. Other works by Degas’ friends Lepic, Legros,



Edgar Degas, *Self-Portrait*, 1857

Desboutin, and Manet (whose famous etching of Baudelaire is included) all appear in the collection. Outstanding among the drawings are a head of the Virgin by Degas' artistic idol, Ingres; a fine portrait by Gustave Moreau drawn in the 1850s when he and Degas were in Rome together; a strikingly informal study by the German artist Menzel, whose drawings Degas admired; a self-portrait by Cézanne; and a brilliant, lightning sketch by Toulouse-Lautrec.

Edgar Degas: The Private Impressionist; Works on Paper by the Artist and His Circle provides an exceptional opportunity to explore the treasures in this very private collection and to enlarge our understanding of Degas and his world.

ENCOUNTERS WITH MONSIEUR DEGAS

Robert Flynn Johnson

Don't deprive me of the little copy by Ingres; don't affront and afflict me over it. I really *need* it. I'll go look at it again by daylight. It is a little lacking in vigor, but it pleases me. I have been thinking about it all night.

—Edgar Degas, in an 1898 letter to the art dealer Paul Durand-Ruel

How I empathize with Degas! Many times I have found myself in a similar position, close to but not yet certain of securing a coveted work of art for my collection. The world is made up of people who collect and those who consider such activity pointless. Sir Kenneth Clark, another former museum professional who collected, concisely summarized his thoughts on the subject:

Why possess works of art when one can see much better ones in a public gallery? One might answer that this is the only way to have the direct, daily contact with an object which no amount of gallery going can supply. But this is not the whole truth, because, while the impulse to collect is strong, it becomes an almost totally irrational obsession; and it has given me as much pleasure as almost any form of self-indulgence I have known.¹

Collecting has always carried an undercurrent of one-upmanship, social status, and investment, but in recent decades the activity has escalated into a degree of shrillness and excess that would make even the robber baron collectors of the turn of the last century blush. In its purest form, however, collecting is a way of attempting to understand the work of art in question, the artist who fashioned it, and, in turn, oneself as the collector ponders what qualities the work possesses that make one want to own it.

Collecting is based on knowledge, experience, and judgment, the combination of which sometimes evolves into that most elusive of qualities—taste. Although some financial means are necessary, wealth is not as important as the public perceives. The most crucial characteristic a collector can possess is

curiosity, an ability to be intrigued by the unfamiliar. Art of great quality is at times underappreciated because much of the art world is driven by fashion and the status consciousness of the moment.

Another aspect of collecting that should be mentioned is the role of time. The majority of collections formed over a relatively short period by rich, impatient collectors reveal themselves to be safely predictable, and often mediocre. In contrast, collections formed over an extended period of time allow the knowledge and taste of the collector to grow and mature, reflecting the advice and friendship of experts and offering opportunities to obtain important works that only infrequently appear on the market. The works in this exhibition were collected over four decades.

Not only because of limited funds but also because of the medium's inherently beautiful qualities and the relative abundance of interesting works then available on the market, I made drawings a focal point of my collecting. Most drawings' diminutive scale and delicate nature demand thoughtful attention from the viewer. As A. Hyatt Mayor, the former curator of prints at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (my mentor while I attended the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University), wrote, "The intimacy of drawings explains why they are the last works of art that one comes to appreciate. Any painting jumps at you from across the room as no drawing can . . . a wall full of drawings cannot overpower like a gallery of paintings."² The appreciation of drawings is not subject to the hype that too often overwhelms other art forms.

DEGAS' CIRCLE

Selecting works for this exhibition has been a personal task. Since the exhibition derives from a single collection, a number of artists who played a significant role in the life of Degas are not represented. Artists such as Corot and Gauguin would have been included if affordable works of quality had come my way over the years. Other artists such as Caillebotte, de Nittis, and Zandomenighi do not appear due to the excessive rarity of their art on the market. Finally, there are artists—such as Renoir, Forain, and Raffaëlli—to whose work I am not drawn and had no desire to collect. What is surprising is not who is missing but how many artists in Degas' circle of colleagues are present. I made no conscious effort to collect artists associated with Degas; my collection simply happened to evolve in that direction. By necessity, a few artists (Daumier, Manet, Pissarro, and Cassatt) are represented by prints rather than drawings, and several (Delacroix, Whistler, Forain, and Bartholomé) are represented by portraits rather than by their own work. This selection that represents the circle of Degas is gratifyingly rich, and it contains the work of various individuals whose association with the master is rarely noted except by scholars.

DEGAS

A logical question to be asked is, why Degas? I have several answers. I first became aware of Degas when I was a student poring over standard art histories that used his ballet, horse racing, and nude compositions to emphasize his Impressionist credentials. Only later did I come to believe that Edgar Degas was the most intelligent artist of his era. His art seemed to possess the humanism of Rembrandt observed through a modernist viewpoint. As the artist Michael Ayrton perceptively wrote,

It is a remarkable paradox that the Impressionists were all known to one another as men of goodwill and this reputation has descended to posterity, yet they were none of them fundamentally



Edgar Degas, *Plough Horse*, ca. 1860–1861

concerned with the human condition, whereas Degas, a morbid hypochondriac and in later years an embittered recluse, who deliberately formed about himself a reputation for cynicism, bigotry, and anti-Semitism, was in fact more deeply involved in mankind than any of his peers. He alone pursued the observation of human behavior at the expense of pictorial felicity, he alone concerned himself deeply with human beings as human beings, rather than as objects of purely sensual or optical interest. . . . There was in Degas something of Zola's realism but Degas, unprejudiced as he was by liberal morality, was also unfired by moral indignation. He regarded his subjects with the detachment of a surgeon.³

With subtle tension of emotional discord played out across the canvases, Degas' paintings such as *The Bellelli Family*, ca. 1858–1867 (Musée d'Orsay); *Interior* (also called *The Rape*), ca. 1868–1869 (Philadelphia Museum of Art); and *Sulking*, ca. 1869–1871 (Metropolitan Museum of Art), absorbed my attention and convinced me of his genius. They appeared to me to be the visual equivalent of a drama by Eugene O'Neill or Edward Albee. In the early 1970s, the idea that I might be able to collect this master seemed out of the question. However, several historical and art-world factors of the Degas market were to accrue to my advantage, although I was unaware of them at the time.

First, the greatest collector of Degas, up to his death in 1917, was Degas himself. At one time he had hoped to found a museum for his art and work by other artists he collected, but nothing came of this dream, and the works in his atelier were eventually sold after his death in four large public auctions in 1918 and 1919. In fact, so many works by Degas entered the market in those sales that the heirs canceled their plan for a fifth sale.

Second, Degas is most clearly associated with the Impressionists through his subject matter of the

ballet, horse racing, and the female nude. Other subjects such as portraiture, life drawings, and copies after antiquities and Old Masters were considered of secondary importance.

Finally, other media that Degas explored, such as monotypes and photography, were not yet fashionable to collect. This was the situation when I purchased my first Degas. Everything about the work I acquired in 1973 from David Tunick, a New York dealer, was wrong—except its beauty. *Les Deux Arbres*, ca. 1878, was a monotype (a medium not well understood by collectors at the time); it was small; and it was a landscape (not a subject generally associated with Degas). I did not care. Although the work was not expensive, it still took me six months to pay for it. But at last I owned a Degas.

Arguably the most important Degas in my collection, *Mlle Dembowska*, ca. 1858–1859, was also my greatest acquisition challenge. In the spring of 1976, Galerie Arnoldi-Livie in Munich had sent me a catalogue of their holdings, including a number of beautiful early Degas drawings. Unfortunately, when I contacted them about my interest for the museum's collection, they had all been sold. The gallery said they would keep me in mind if something similar became available. In early summer of that year, I returned from a successful buying trip to Europe, having acquired numerous important works on paper for the museum, including a Guercino drawing and a Richard Dadd watercolor. Toward the end of June an envelope arrived from the Munich gallery, offering this enchanting Degas drawing for sale. I was stunned—the work was more beautiful and more important than any in their earlier catalogue, and I immediately brought it to the attention of the museum director. He was impressed, but his concern about my department's acquisition funds (our recent purchases left little available) led him to tell me that we would not be able to pursue its acquisition.

Crestfallen, as I left his office, I impulsively inquired if I could attempt to purchase it myself, since the museum could not. He laughed and said, "Go ahead." I understood the humor in my request—by today's standards the drawing was not expensive, but at the time it was more than my yearly salary! I had a few thousand dollars in the bank and approached the gallery with a proposition: I would send them a deposit if they would send me the drawing, and if by the end of the summer I was unable to raise the agreed-upon purchase price, I would send the drawing back and recover my deposit. Angelika Arnoldi and Bruce Livie are now dear friends, but at the time we had never met or done business. They agreed to the arrangement. Over the next eight weeks, I proceeded to sell numerous works on paper from my collection, some at a profit and others at a loss, all in the effort to secure the Degas drawing. I felt like David Niven in *Around the World in 80 Days*, tossing things out of his balloon to gain altitude. I was ultimately successful; the struggle made the drawing all the more beautiful in my eyes.

I have no illusions concerning my collection. It is an assemblage by a scholar acquired on a scholar's income. From the beginning I was aware that many important Degas works were simply beyond my means. Nevertheless, I had two advantages over other collectors: my knowledge and my ability to quickly seize opportunities. In any endeavor, fortune smiles on the bold. But in collecting, one must take chances—and be willing to occasionally make mistakes. To be overly cautious, and to believe that every choice must be perfect, is to stumble over the fatal flaw of collecting: indecisiveness. As Delacroix said, "The artist who aims at perfection in everything achieves it in nothing."⁴

I have had my share of good fortune. I acquired four Degas horse drawings from the collection of the Baron de Chollet in a single day at a minor Christie's auction in New York. I purchased Degas' portrait of Achille when the French franc was trading at a historic low. And one afternoon in 1984 at Christie's, London, I was waiting out an endless sale in order to bid on a beautiful, if slight, double-sided Degas drawing. In the next room was a viewing of an upcoming sale of important Old Master prints from



Edgar Degas in collaboration with Walter Barnes, *The Apotheosis of Degas*, 1885

Chatsworth. A number of museum colleagues were present, and I got into a long, scholarly discussion with them and lost track of time. Suddenly, I remembered my lot and rushed to the salesroom—only to discover the sale was now several lots past “my” Degas. Disconsolate, I asked someone in the room what it had brought and was surprised to hear that it had been bought in (it had not reached its reserve and thus did not sell). I made an after-sale offer on the drawing and, amazingly, acquired it for considerably less than I had been prepared to bid. Sometimes it is better to be lucky than smart.

I have a special affinity for photography, a medium that Degas worked in. Concerning the artist’s interest, Sir Kenneth Clark wrote, “Only the bad artists of the nineteenth century were frightened by the invention of photography; the good ones all welcomed it and used it. Degas liked it not only because it provided an accurate record, but because the snapshot showed him a means to escape from the classical rules of design.”⁵ Although Degas’ obsessive interest in taking photographs during the 1890s was well known, he never exhibited them in his lifetime; their study and exhibition has taken place only in recent decades. Nevertheless, their importance in the study of the artist cannot be underestimated. As Michael Ayrton has written,

[Degas] was interested in snapshot photography and took many photographs himself and found in the arbitrary pictorial boundaries imposed by the lens a convention which added greatly to the sense of *the event* with which his pictures are concerned. By his use of this synthetic, visual technique, he created a mode of composition almost without precedent. Only Vermeer, as Lawrence Gowing has pointed out, evolved a comparable pictorial method in his “intricate observation of optical accident.”⁶

I am gratified that three provident acquisitions have enabled me to acquire eight rare photographs by Degas to represent this medium in my collection.

Sir Kenneth Clark felt that every work by Rembrandt, down to his slightest sketch, was of importance. I feel the same about Degas. As an artist, he is easy to respect, and even revere. As a man, however, Degas is far more complex. One can attempt to understand his serious character flaws, but they should not be overlooked, or easily forgiven. Still, many of the friends he slighted or hurt ultimately forgave him. If they could, I can.

Degas once said, "I would like to be illustrious and unknown."⁷ This exhibition grants him his first request, but not his second. Through his art, his words, and the circle of his friends and colleagues represented here, the private persona of this elusive artist may emerge.

NOTES

1. Kenneth Clark, *Another Part of the Wood* (Boston: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1974), 193.
2. A. Hyatt Mayor, "The Flexibility of Drawings," in *Vassar College Centennial Loan Exhibition* (Poughkeepsie, N.Y.: Vassar College, 1961).
3. Michael Ayrton, *The Rudiments of Paradise* (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1971), 182–183.
4. John Winokur, ed., *Friendly Advice* (New York: Plume Books, 1992), 41.
5. Kenneth Clark, *The Romantic Rebellion* (Boston: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1973), 313.
6. Ayrton, *The Rudiments of Paradise*, 189.
7. Richard Kendall, ed., *Degas by Himself* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1987), 319.

CHRONOLOGY

1834

19 July Hilaire-Germain-Edgar de Gas is born at 8 rue Saint-Georges, Paris, into a prosperous banking family based in Naples and Paris.

1838

16 November Birth in Paris of Achille de Gas, brother of the painter.

1840

8 April Birth in Naples of Thérèse de Gas, sister of the painter.

1842

2 July Birth in Passy of Marguerite de Gas, sister of the painter.

1845

6 May Birth in Paris of René de Gas, brother of the painter.

1845–53

Degas attends the Lycée Louis le Grand, where his friends include the future librettist, novelist, and dramatist Ludovic Halévy (1834–1908) and Paul Valpinçon (1834–1894); they and their families will become close friends of the artist.

1847

5 September Degas' mother dies at the age of thirty-two.

1853

7 April Degas registers as a copyist at the Louvre (carte no. 611: "de Gas Edgar; age 18½; adresse: rue de Mondovi, 4; maître: Barrias").

9 April Degas registers as a copyist at the Cabinet des Estampes, Bibliothèque Impériale.

11 December Degas executes his first dated drawing, which is of his brother Achille.

1855

6 April Degas enrolls at the École des Beaux-Arts as a student in the painting and sculpture section, as pupil of Louis Lamothe (1806–1869).

? May Degas visits the studio of Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780–1867) in the company of Édouard Valpinçon, an important collector and father of his schoolfriend Paul.

July–September Degas visits Lyons, where Neoclassical artist Jean-Hippolyte Flandrin is working on the frescoes of Saint-Martin-d'Ainay, assisted by Louis Lamothe.

1856–59

Degas arrives in Naples by sea from Marseille, his first visit to Italy. He visits relatives in Florence and Rome.

He meets the painter Gustave Moreau (1826–1898).

Degas makes an etching of artist Joseph-Gabriel Tourny (1817–1880).

1859

End of March Degas leaves Florence for Paris. He has been in Italy since July 1856—almost three years of self-chosen apprenticeship, unconnected to a particular

master, although much influenced and affected by the personality, ideas, and practice of Gustave Moreau.

10 October Degas takes his own studio at 13 rue de Laval, which he will retain throughout the 1860s.

1861

January René de Gas writes to his uncle Michel Musson (1812–1885) in New Orleans, "Edgar is so absorbed by his painting that he does not write to anyone."

21 November Auguste de Gas writes to his brother-in-law Michel Musson in New Orleans, "Our Raphael works all the time but has not yet finished anything, and the years pass."

1862

April (?) Degas meets Édouard Manet (1832–1883), who is copying Velázquez's *Infanta María Marguerita* directly on to the copper plate.

1863

6 March René de Gas writes, "[Edgar] works furiously and thinks only of one thing, his painting. He hasn't even time to amuse himself, so much does he work." But still he submits no picture to the Salon.

1864

22 April René de Gas writes to the Musson family in New Orleans about Degas the artist: "What ferments in his head is frightening. For my part I believe—and am even convinced

that he has not only talent, but genius, but will he express what he feels? That is the question.”

1865

1 May For the first time, Degas, now aged thirty, exhibits a work at the Salon.

1866

1 May Degas exhibits *Scène de Steeplechase* (Collection Mr. & Mrs. Paul Mellon) at the Salon. It receives little comment from the critics.

1868

Spring Degas begins frequenting the Café Guerbois, 11 grande rue des Batignolles (now 9 avenue de Clichy), where he meets the writer and critic Edmond Duranty (1833–1880). The Café Guerbois becomes the lively center of discussion for protagonists of “La vie moderne” in literature and painting. Among the habitués are Manet, Monet, Pissarro, Bazille, Renoir, Fantin-Latour, and Zola.

1869

Late May Degas, who must have met the painter Berthe Morisot (1841–1894) in 1868, becomes closer to her in 1869. (He accompanies her around the Salon.) Unlike Manet, however, he never paints her portrait.

1870

19 July France declares war on Prussia.

September Degas enrolls as a volunteer in the National Guard.

October Degas is under the command of Henri Rouart (1833–1912). Henceforth, Henri Rouart and his brother Alexis (1839–1911) become close friends and patrons of Degas.

November–December Degas continues to serve, with Manet, in the artillery.

1871

18 March Proclamation of the Commune in Paris.

30 September Degas writes to his artist-friend James Tissot, now living in exile in London, saying he hopes to visit London; he has exhibited *L'Orchestre de l'Opéra* in the rue Lafitte; and he complains of trouble with his eyesight.

October Degas goes to London, probably his first visit. He stays at the Hotel Conte, Golden Square.

1872

January Paul Durand-Ruel (1830–1922), the renowned Paris art dealer, makes his first purchase from Degas, buying three paintings.

Spring Degas moves from 13 rue de Laval, his studio since 1859, to 77 rue Blanche.

12 July His brother René writes again to Michel Musson, saying that he lunches every day with Edgar, whose eyes are weak, and

who is practicing English, repeating “turkey buzzard” for a whole week.

Early October En route to New Orleans, Degas and René leave Paris for London, where they briefly meet James McNeill Whistler (1834–1903).

12 October Edgar and René arrive in New York, staying only thirty hours before going to New Orleans.

1873

End of March Degas returns from New Orleans to his Paris studio at 77 rue Blanche. Around this time Degas probably begins frequenting the Café de la Nouvelle Athènes in Place Pigalle. His friends from the Café Guerbois all tend to gravitate toward this café. A new habitué is the painter-engraver Marcellin Desboutin (1823–1902), who returned to Paris in 1872 after a long stay in Italy.

7 May The opera singer Jean-Baptiste Faure (1830–1914) acquires, through Charles W. Deschamps, manager of Durand-Ruel's London gallery, three race-course paintings by Degas; Faure probably commissions *Un examen de danse* from Degas at this time.

27 December With the future “Impressionists” Monet, Pissarro, Renoir, Sisley, Cézanne, Morisot, and other artists, Degas joins “La Société anonyme coopérative des artistes peintres, sculpteurs et graveurs, etc.,” with the object of organizing exhibitions of their work without a jury, selling their exhibited work, and publishing an art journal. Degas had not submitted works to the Salons of 1872 and 1873. He would never again exhibit at the Salon, preferring to be “independent.”

1874

12 February The novelist, art historian, and collector Edmond de Goncourt (1822–1896) visits Degas' studio at 77 rue Blanche, almost certainly in the company of his friend the art critic Philippe Burty (1830–1890).

23 February The artist's father dies.

1875

19 August Achille de Gas is attacked at the Paris Stock Exchange by Victor-Georges Legrand, the husband of his former mistress, Thérèse Mallot. Achille fires two revolver shots in retaliation, slightly wounding Legrand.

December There are indications of disturbing financial difficulties in the de Gas family, largely caused by René's unpaid debts to the bank.

1876

30 March Opening of the 2^e *Exposition des artistes indépendants* at the Galerie Durand-Ruel, 11 rue Le Peletier. Degas lists twenty-four works in the catalogue. Of these,

only seven are dance or theater pictures—perhaps a deliberate attempt on his part to play down the sobriquet, “Degas, painter of dancers,” that was already threatening him.

20 April Degas leaves his apartment at 77 rue Blanche, moving to 4 rue Frochot.

1877

4 April Opening of the 3^e *Exposition des artistes indépendants* at 6 rue Le Peletier. Degas lists twenty-five works in the catalogue. The remarkable variety of subject matter and techniques, already noted in 1876, is continued.

October Degas finds a new apartment at 50 rue Lepic, Montmartre.

1878

13 April René de Gas abandons his work and family in New Orleans; he and Estelle divorce in January 1879. He later settles in New York, where he eventually marries Mme Léonce Olivier and starts a second family. Degas greatly disapproves of his brother's conduct; the two lose contact for almost twenty years.

Summer Degas probably begins using Marie van Goethem as a model, then aged fourteen; this Belgian-born dancer was to pose for Degas' famous sculpture, *Petite danseuse de quatorze ans*. Mlle van Goethem also poses for other drawings, pastels, and paintings, all of them connected with the dance.

1879

10 April Opening of the 4^{me} *Exposition des artistes indépendants* at 28 avenue de l'Opéra. Degas lists twenty-five works in the catalogue. Five of these are fans, a new element in the exhibition.

1880

1 April Opening of the 5^{me} *Exposition des artistes indépendants*. Degas lists twelve works: eight paintings and pastels; two groups of drawings (“*dessins*”), some probably of café-concert subjects; a group of etchings; and one sculpture, *Petite danseuse de quatorze ans* (*statuette en cire*).

1881

2 April Opening of the 6^{me} *Exposition des artistes indépendants*. Degas lists eight works in the catalogue, including four portraits, the sculpture of *Petite danseuse de quatorze ans*, and two studies of Abadie and Knobloch, the adolescent murderers he sketched in court in August 1880.

1882

1 March Opening of the 7^{me} *Exposition des artistes indépendants* at 251 rue Saint-Honoré. Degas does not exhibit.

1 May Degas attends the opening of the Salon; he praises Whistler unreservedly but Puvis de Chavannes and Manet with some reservations.

15 June Degas gives a housewarming party at his new apartment, 21 rue Pigalle, where Sabine Neyt continues to serve him as housekeeper and cook. Among the guests are Charles Ephrussi, Alexis Rouart, and Durand-Ruel.

1883

March The Irish writer and playwright Oscar Wilde (1856–1900) and the English artist Walter Sickert (1860–1942) stay in Paris at the Hôtel du Quai Voltaire. Sickert meets Degas for the first time.

30 April Death of Édouard Manet at the age of fifty-one.

1885

22 August–12 September Degas spends three weeks at Dieppe as a guest of the Halévys.

1886

15 May Opening of the 8^e Exposition des artistes indépendants, without Caillebotte, Monet, Renoir, and Sisley. Although Degas lists fifteen works in the catalogue—two pastels of milliners, dating from 1882, three portraits, and a series of ten nudes—he exhibits only ten of these fifteen, and only seven of the ten nudes.

30 November Having returned to Paris after his first sojourn in Brittany, Gauguin renews his friendship with Degas.

1887

15 February Degas' housekeeper, Sabine Françoise Neyt, dies at 21 rue Pigalle, aged sixty-seven. With him since his return from New Orleans in 1873, she from time to time had posed for him. Soon afterward, Zoë Clozier joins Degas and will remain with him until his death.

December Death of Bartholomé's wife, Périe. Bartholomé, grief-stricken, abandons painting and begins to work on sculpture, encouraged by Degas.

1888

January Almost certainly at the instigation of Theo van Gogh, the artist Georges William Thornley (1857–1935) begins a series of fifteen lithographs after Degas' paintings and pastels executed earlier in the year.

8 September Degas and Boldini arrive in Madrid at 6:30 a.m. and stay at the Hôtel de Paris. From 9:00 a.m. to midday they visit the Prado. Degas writes, "Nothing, but nothing, can give an idea of Velázquez." At 4:30 p.m. they go to a bullfight.

18 September Degas writes to Bartholomé from the Continental Hotel, Tangiers. He and Boldini spend several days in Morocco, recalling that "Delacroix has passed by here." He will return to Paris via Cádiz and Granada.

1890

8–9 September Degas meets Bartholomé at Dijon, then visits the small village of Dienay on the Côte-d'Or to spend a day or two with

the artist-illustrator Pierre-Georges Jeannot (1848–1934) and his family.

1891

6 July Degas writes a long letter to his friend the painter Évariste de Valerne (1817–1896), excusing his bad eyesight (his maid Zoë has to read the newspaper to him). Nonetheless, he is planning to do a suite of lithographs, a first series on nudes at their toilet, and a second suite on nude dancers.

1893

13 October Death of Degas' brother Achille after a prolonged illness that started in 1889 with a slight stroke, followed two years later by another, which left him semi-paralyzed and unable to speak.

1895

22 December Ludovic Halévy's son, Daniel, quotes Degas on the works by Cézanne, Delacroix, and van Gogh that he has recently acquired: "I buy! I buy! I can no longer stop myself!"

1896

4 December Bartholomé writes to Paul Lafond of Degas' collecting mania: "Degas buys and buys; wonders in the evening how he will pay for the day's purchases, and begins again the next morning: works by Ingres always, Delacroix, an El Greco this week [i.e., *Saint Dominique*]."

1898

20 March Degas invites the painter Louis Braquaval (1854–1919) and his wife to dinner, together with his brother René and his family. Estranged from René since the late 1870s, Degas now begins seeing him quite often, perhaps ready to be reconciled after the recent deaths of Achille and Marguerite.

November Degas' relationship with the Halévys becomes increasingly uneasy because of the artist's growing anti-Semitism and anti-Dreyfus sentiments, a marked contrast with the liberal beliefs of the Jewish Halévy family.

23 December Degas dines with the Halévys for the last time. The rift is too deep for comfort; Degas severs the close, lifelong friendship.

1899

28 January Julie Manet requests a drawing from Degas to illustrate a publication of Mallarmé's poems; he refuses because the publisher is a Dreyfusard.

19 September Dreyfus is pardoned; Degas finds it difficult to accept the judgment.

1904

September Degas writes to Alexis Rouart, "One is always here, in this studio, working on the waxes. Without work, what a sad old age!"

1907

6 August Degas writes to Alexis Rouart that he is always working, having taken up drawing and pastel again: "I should like to finish some

articles." He no longer enjoys travel, but at 5:00 p.m., he takes a tram for Charenton and other suburban destinations. He is suffering from pain in his kidneys.

1908

May Hearing of the death of his old friend Ludovic Halévy, Degas visits the house for the first time since 1898 to pay his last respects.

1910

11 March Degas writes to Alexis Rouart, then staying in San Remo: "I am no longer one of those artists who runs to the Italian frontier. I stay here, in the dampness, directly opposite the Bal Tabarin. . . . I never finish with my damned sculpture."

1911

May Degas visits a large exhibition of Ingres at the Galerie Georges Petit, Paris. Daniel Halévy observes him in front of the paintings, "feeling them, running his hands over them."

1912

10 December Degas is present at the sale of the collection of his late friend Henri Rouart. Daniel Halévy, also present, hears someone say, "Degas is there," and then sees him, "seated, motionless like a blind man." They leave the salesroom together, and Degas remarks: "You see, my legs are still good, I am well. . . . But I no longer work since my move. . . . It's all the same to me, I just leave everything. . . . It's astonishing, old age, how one becomes indifferent."

1915

17 November René de Gas writes to Paul Lafond of his brother's health: "Given his age, his physical condition certainly is not bad: he eats well, suffers no infirmity except deafness which can only get worse, and which makes conversation very difficult. . . . When he goes out, he can hardly walk farther than the Place Pigalle; he spends an hour in a café and returns painfully. He is admirably cared for by the incomparable Zoë."

1916

At the request of Mary Cassatt, Jeanne Fevre comes to Paris to help take care of Degas, her uncle.

1917

27 September Degas dies at the age of eighty-three.

28 September Degas is buried in the family vault in Montmartre cemetery. Around one hundred mourners attend, including Paul-Albert Bartholomé, Mary Cassatt, Joseph and Georges Durand-Ruel, Jeanne Fevre, Jean-Louis Forain, Louise Halévy, Claude Monet, Alexis and Louis Rouart, Ambroise Vollard, and Federico Zandomenighi. Degas had told Forain that he did not want a funeral oration: "If there is to be one, you, Forain, get up and say: 'He greatly loved drawing. So do I.' And then go home."

Glossary of Graphic Art Terms

INTAGLIO: A technique in which the image is incised directly onto the surface of the printmaking plate, as in aquatint, drypoint, etching, and photogravure.

AQUATINT: An etching process in which tone is created by treating a plate with fine particles of acid-resistant material (such as powdered resin) and then placing the plate in an acid bath. The acid bites into the plate between the grains of resin. When printed, the mass of tiny spots produces a textured area with tonal effects similar to watercolor wash.

DRYPOINT: An intaglio process in which a plate is marked or incised directly with a needle. The drypoint line can look very much like an etched line but is usually lighter and characterized by the existence of burr.

ETCHING: An intaglio process in which a plate is treated with an acid-resistant ground. The artist then draws through the ground with various tools to expose the metal. The plate is immersed in an acid bath, where the acid bites or chemically dissolves the exposed lines. The metal plate is therefore “etched” by the acid rather than by a tool directly in the metal.

PHOTOGRAVURE: An intaglio process in which an image is produced on an etching plate by photographic means.

LITHOGRAPH: A planographic printing process in which a drawing is made directly on a stone or other smooth matrix with greasy materials, such as lithographic crayon. The surface is then dampened with water, which is repelled by the greasy areas. Next, the surface is rolled with greasy printing ink, which adheres only to the greasy areas and is repelled by the areas that have water. The drawn image is then printed.

MONOTYPE: A unique image printed from an unworked, smooth metal or glass surface painted in ink by the artist.

MONOPRINT: An impression of a print that has been uniquely altered by monotype coloring, unique inking, or choice in paper color.

This exhibition is co-curated by Robert Flynn Johnson and Louise Siddons.

ANN DUMAS is Curator at the Royal Academy of Arts, London. Ms. Dumas, a respected scholar of Impressionism, has curated numerous exhibitions, including the exhibition at the Royal Academy, *Degas and the Ballet: Picturing Movement*, which presents Degas’ dancers in the context of contemporary photography and film.

ROBERT FLYNN JOHNSON was Curator in Charge of the Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco for thirty-two years until his retirement in 2007, at which time he was named Curator Emeritus. His publications include *Lucian Freud: Works on Paper* (W. W. Norton); *Peter Milton: Complete Prints, 1960–1996* (Chronicle Books); *Plant Kingdoms: The Photographs of Charles Jones* (Thames and Hudson); *Leonard Baskin: Monumental Woodcuts, 1952–1963* (Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco); *Artists’ Books in the Modern Era, 1870–2000: The Reva and David Logan Collection of Illustrated Books* (Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco); *Reverie and Reality: Nineteenth-Century Photographs of India from the Ehrenfeld Collection* (Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco); *Anonymous: Enigmatic Images from Unknown Photographers* (Thames and Hudson); *The Child: Works by Gottfried Helmwein* (Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco); *Judging by Appearance: Master Drawings from the Collection of Joseph and Deborah Goldyne* (co-author; Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco); and *The Face in the Lens—Anonymous Photographs* (University of California Press).

LOUISE SIDDONS, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor and Curator of Collections at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater. Ms. Siddons was previously Visiting Assistant Professor and Adjunct Curator at Michigan State University (2007–2009); and, earlier, Assistant Curator at the Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.

Exhibition organized by Landau Traveling Exhibitions, Los Angeles, CA | www.a-r-t.com
in association with Denenberg Fine Arts, West Hollywood, CA

GRAPHIC DESIGN BY WILSTED & TAYLOR PUBLISHING SERVICES