

EDGAR DEGAS

This work is *Woman in the Bath*, 1886, oil on canvas.



Biography

- NAME: Edgar Degas
- OCCUPATION: Painter
- BIRTH DATE: July 19, 1834
- DEATH DATE: September 27, 1917
- EDUCATION: Lycee Louis-le-Grand, University of Paris, Ecole des Beaux-Arts
- PLACE OF BIRTH: Paris, France
- PLACE OF DEATH: Paris, France

Edgar Degas was born Hilaire-Germain-Edgar de Gas on July 19, 1834, in Paris, France. His father, Auguste, was a banker, and his mother, Celestine, an American from New Orleans.



Degas came from a very musical household; his mother was an amateur opera singer and his father occasionally arranged for musicians to give recitals in their home. Degas attended the Lycée Louis-le-Grand, a prestigious and rigorous boys' secondary school where he received a classical education.

Degas also displayed a remarkable skill for drawing and painting as a child, a talent encouraged by his father, who was a knowledgeable art lover. In 1853 at the age of 18, Degas received permission to "copy" at the Louvre in Paris. (During the 19th century, aspiring artists developed their technique by attempting to replicate the works of the masters.) Degas produced several impressive copies of Raphael as well as studying the work of more contemporary painters such as Ingres and Delacroix. In 1855 he gained admission into the Ecole Des Beaux-Art in Paris. However, after only one year of study, Degas left school to spend three years traveling, painting and studying in Italy.



Upon returning to Paris in 1859, Degas set out to make a name for himself as a painter. Taking a traditional approach, he painted large portraits of family members and grand historical scenes. He gradually developed a disdain for the presiding art establishment as well as his belief that artists needed to turn to more modern techniques and subject matter.

Returning to Paris near the end of 1873, Degas, along with Monet, Sisley and several other painters, formed the Société Anonyme des Artistes, a group committed to putting on exhibitions free of art establishment's control. The group of painters would come to be known as the Impressionists (although Degas preferred the term "realist" to describe his own work). Degas' paintings were modern portraits of modern women — milliners, laundresses and ballet dancers — painted from radical

perspectives, his paintings portray the growth of the bourgeoisie, the emergence of a service economy and the widespread entrance of women into the workplace. In 1886, at the eighth and final Impressionist exhibition in Paris, Degas exhibited 10 paintings of nude women in various stages of bathing. These nude paintings were the talk of the exhibition and also the source of controversy; some called the women "ugly" while others praised the honesty of his depictions.

Degas lived on well into the 20th century, and although he painted less during these years, he promoted his work tirelessly and became an avid art collector. He was never married although he did count several women, including the American painter Mary Cassatt, among his intimate friends. Degas passed away on September 27, 1917, at the age of 83.

One thing remains indisputable about Degas: His were among the most painstakingly polished and refined paintings in history. An obsessive and careful planner, Degas liked to joke that he was the least spontaneous artist alive. "If painting weren't difficult," he once remarked. "It wouldn't be so fun."

Note: excerpts from <http://www.biography.com/people/edgar-degas-9269770?page=1>

Personal Style and Motivation

This sculpture is *The Little Fourteen-Old Dancer*; cast in 1922 from a mixed media sculpture modeled ca. 1879-89.

Degas rejected the typical subjects that were made popular by the academies, such as scenes from history and myth, and instead he explored modern life. Like the Realists and Impressionists, he often painted images of middle class leisure in the city.

Degas' academic training encouraged a strong classical tendency in his art, which conflicted with the approach of the Impressionists. While he valued line as a means to describe contours and to lend solid compositional structure to a picture, they favored color, and more concentration on surface texture. As well, he preferred to work from sketches and memory in the traditional academic manner, while they were more interested in painting outdoors (*en plein air*).

Degas' enduring interest in the human figure was shaped by his academic training, but he approached it in innovative ways. He captured strange postures from unusual angles under artificial light. He rejected the academic ideal of the mythical or historical subject, and instead sought his figures in modern situations, such as at the ballet.

Like many of the Impressionists, Degas was significantly influenced by Japanese prints, which suggested novel approaches to composition. The prints had bold linear designs and a sense of flatness that was very different from the traditional Western picture with its perspective view of the world.

- "I would have been in mortal misery all my life for fear my wife might say, 'That's a pretty little thing,' after I had finished a picture."
- - Degas responding to a question on why he never married

- "It is all very well to copy what one sees, but it is far better to draw what one now only sees in one's memory. That is a transformation in which imagination collaborates with memory."
- "One must do the same subject over again ten times, a hundred times. In art nothing must resemble an accident, not even movement."
- "No art is less spontaneous than mind. What I do is the result of reflection and study of the great masters."

- See more at: <http://www.theartstory.org/artist-degas-edgar.htm#sthash.kyxxRGaU.dpuf>