

Artist Technique Research - Library based. Colour- Edgar Degas

- Research the **pastel drawings** of Edgar Degas and his **drawing and colour mixing methods** of using **pastel**.
- Choose two examples of his work to demonstrate his technique and approach to **colour mixing** and the **themes** he is concerned with.
- **500** words typed with **bibliography** required.

Research:

- **Pastel: Color Mixing Techniques**
- **His Themes.**

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edgar_Degas

- Regarded as one of the founders of impressionism - though he preferred to be labelled realist.
- The majority of his works depict dancers (ballet), a subject he is commonly identified with.
 - From 1870 Degas increasingly painted ballet subjects, partly because they sold well and provided him with needed income after his brother's debts had left the family bankrupt.^[29]
- It is evident in these works, his mastery at representing movement.
- Art.
 - psychological complexity
 - depth of **human isolation**.

Reputation:

- was both praised for his contemporary work and lauded for his impressionistic work.

Personality & Politics:

- Degas, who believed that "the artist must live alone, and his private life must remain unknown"
- he deliberately cultivated his reputation as a misanthropic bachelor.
- He remained an outspoken anti-Semite
- He was characterized as an "old curmudgeon"

Artistic Career

- At the outbreak of the **Franco-Prussian War** in 1870, Degas enlisted in the National Guard, where his defense of Paris left him little time for painting. During rifle training his **eyesight was found to be defective**, and for the rest of his life his eye problems were a constant worry to him.
- *By now thoroughly disenchanted with the Salon, Degas joined forces with a group of young artists who were intent upon organizing an independent exhibiting society. The first of their exhibitions, which were quickly dubbed Impressionist Exhibitions, was in 1874.*
- He had little in common with **Monet** and the other landscape painters, **whom he mocked for painting outdoors**.

- In the late 1880s, Degas also **developed a passion for photography**.^[16] He photographed many of his friends, **often by lamplight**, as in his double portrait of [Renoir](#) and [Mallarmé](#). Other **photographs, depicting dancers and nudes, were used for reference** in some of Degas's drawings and paintings.^[17]

Artistic Style

- Technically, Degas differs from the Impressionists in that he "never adopted the Impressionist color fleck",^[23] and he continually belittled their practice of painting *en plein air*.^[24]
- Degas's style **reflects his deep respect for the old masters** (he was an enthusiastic copyist well into middle age)^[27] and his great admiration for [Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres](#) and [Eugène Delacroix](#).
- He was also a collector of **Japanese prints**, whose **compositional principles influenced his work**, as did the **vigorous realism** of popular illustrators such as [Daumier](#) and [Gavarni](#).
- Degas already evidenced the mature style that he would later develop more fully by **cropping subjects awkwardly and by choosing unusual viewpoints**.
- His paintings often hinted at **narrative content in a way that was highly ambiguous**; for example, *Interior* (which has also been called *The Rape*) has presented a conundrum to art historians in search of a literary source—*Thérèse Raquin* has been suggested^[30]—but it may be a depiction of prostitution.^[31]
- Paintings such as *Place de la Concorde* read as "snapshots," freezing moments of time to portray them accurately, imparting a sense of movement.
- The changes to his palette, brushwork, and sense of composition all evidence the influence that both the **Impressionist movement and modern photography**, with its **spontaneous images** and **off-kilter angles**, had on his work.^[26]
- Art historian Charles Stuckey has compared the viewpoint to that of a distracted spectator at a ballet, and says that "it is Degas' fascination with the **depiction of movement**, including the **movement of a spectator's eyes as during a random glance**, that is properly speaking 'Impressionist'".^[32]
- Degas's mature style is distinguished by conspicuously unfinished passages, even in otherwise tightly rendered paintings. He frequently blamed his eye troubles for his inability to finish, an explanation that met with some skepticism from colleagues and collectors who reasoned, as Stuckey explains, that "his pictures could hardly have been executed by anyone with inadequate vision".^[33] The artist provided another clue when he described his predilection "to begin a hundred things and not finish one of them",^[34] and was in any case **notoriously reluctant to consider a painting complete**.
- His interest in portraiture led Degas to study carefully the ways in which a **person's social stature** or **form of employment** may be revealed by their **physiognomy, posture, dress**, and

other attributes.

- Degas had attended their trial with sketchbook in hand, and his numerous drawings of the defendants reveal his interest in the **atavistic** features thought by some 19th-century scientists to be evidence of innate criminality.[35]
- paintings of dancers and laundresses, he reveals their occupations not only by their dress and activities but also by their body type: his ballerinas exhibit an **athletic physicality**, while his laundresses are **heavy and solid**. [36]
- By the later 1870s Degas had mastered not only the traditional medium of **oil** on **canvas**, but **pastel** as well. The dry medium, which he applied in **complex layers and textures**, enabled him more easily to reconcile his facility for line with a growing interest in **expressive color**.
- He **always painted indoors**, preferring to work in his **studio**, either from **memory**, **photographs**, or **live models**. [39]
- It was not unusual for him to **repeat** a subject many times, varying the composition or treatment.
- Degas himself explained, "**In art, nothing should look like chance, not even movement**". [29]

http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/dgsp/hd_dgsp.htm

- [many more links here.]
- His interest in ballet dancers intensified in the 1870s, and eventually he produced approximately 1,500 works on the subject. These are not traditional portraits, but studies that address the movement of the human body, exploring the physicality and discipline of the dancers through the use of contorted postures and unexpected vantage points. In *Dancer Adjusting Her Slipper* (1873; 29.100.941), the figure's pose is difficult to decipher, viewed from a steep angle with both her feet and her head at the bottom of the picture, yet it conveys a sense of the dancer's flexibility.
- Degas abstracted from these prints their inventive compositions and points of view, particularly in his use of cropping and asymmetry.
- Degas experimented with an array of techniques, breaking up surface textures with hatching, contrasting dry pastel with wet, and using gouache and watercolors to soften the contours of his figures.

<http://www.degas-painting.info/degasstyle.htm>

Apart from the portraits it is almost impossible to find a Degas where movement and action are not inherent, yet his method was the exact opposite of the Impressionists. He did not attempt to capture moment in a quick stroke of the brush there is nothing impulsive about Degas. **Everything is studied, planed and executed** in the studio in the controlled conditions.

Degas would **endlessly experiment with unusual techniques**. He would sometimes mix his pastel so heavily with liquid fixative that it became amalgamated into a sort of paste. He

would do a drawing in charcoal and use layers of pastel to cover part of this. He would combine pastels and oil in a single work.

In the 1880s, when his eyesight began to fail, Degas began increasingly to work in two new media that did not require intense visual acuity: sculpture and **pastel**. ... His pastels are usually simple compositions containing only a few figures. He was **obliged to depend on vibrant colors and meaningful gestures rather than on precise lines and careful detailing** ...

The relationship of Degas' work to the other Impressionists was to be marked both by his experiences in Italy and by his abiding interest in the human form as opposed to the landscape.

Degas was especially attracted by the spectacle of the ballet with its elegance of costume and scenery, its movement which was at once spontaneous and restrained, its artificial lighting, and its unusual viewpoints. Usually he depicted the ballerinas off guard, showing them backstage at an awkward moment as they fasten a slipper or droop exhausted after a difficult practice session. He strip his dancers of their glamour, to show them without artifice.

His choice of subject was unfashionable. He favored distinctly posed interior portraits, and cared little about the quality of prints, which he entrusted to a local photographer. He used artificial light to photograph friends such as Renoir, Verhaeren, and the Mallarmé and Halevy families, and made numerous self-portraits. **Photography offered relaxation for his tired eyes.**

<http://www.explore-drawing-and-painting.com/pastel-techniques-1.html>

The Art Supply List

The materials I am using to emulate Degas' pastel techniques:

- [Canson Mi-Teintes drawing paper-brown color](#) (Degas liked to use **cardboard and cards** for his pastel paintings)
- Charcoal pencil
- [NuPastel Color Sticks](#) to **sketch out and add** feathering touches during the final stages
- [Rembrandt Soft Pastels](#)
- [Sennelier soft pastels i](#) (along with Rembrandts, these are my favorite soft pastels)
- [Matte fixative](#) (Degas used fixative or **steam heavily** in his pastel paintings)

Conclusions here:

- He usually used a **dark brown surface** for his pastel drawings--sometimes with a lot of texture (like cardboard). I am afraid that the supports for his stunning pastel paintings would not meet modern archival standards. This explains why some of his

pastel paintings have become darker over the years since they were not acid free.

- He used **fixative or steam liberally** to darken and/or seal the pigments. Hence, some of his pastel works seem quite dark and the colors are dull. I suspect that the fixative he used was not archival quality, either.
- **Hatching and crosshatching** are his main techniques for mixing colors on the paper. He uses scumbling (light opaque colors over dark colors) to unify the colors and mix colors optically.
- He **sometimes used tools like a knife** to scratch the painting for a scraffitto effect.

Looking at his pastel techniques, you can see that Degas was quite ruthless with this very forgiving medium.

As long as you follow the general rule of '**soft over hard**' (using hard or semi-hard pastels first, then semi-soft and soft pastels later), then the sky is the limit!

Maheux, Anne F; Boggs, Jean Sutherland, Degas Pastels 1992, ISBN 0500015538, 191 p

<- http://books.google.com.au/books?id=kAtQAAAAMAAJ&q=degas+pastels&dq=degas+pastels&hl=en&sa=X&ei=mLuMUlrdMueviQfKnYDICw&redir_esc=y

Werner, Alfred, Degas Pastels, 1969, ISBN 9780214667770, 88 p <-

Werner, Alfred, Degas Pastels, 1984

http://books.google.com.au/books?id=chPYAAAAMAAJ&q=degas+pastels&dq=degas+pastels&hl=en&sa=X&ei=mLuMUlrdMueviQfKnYDICw&redir_esc=y

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