

Edgar Degas

(deh-GAH) French Painter

1834 – 1917

83



Self Portrait, 1855 (21), oil.



The Dancing Class, 1871 (37)



Edgar Degas, was born into a moderately wealthy family in Paris who encouraged his art career, so he didn't need to earn a living wage initially. He started out to be a history painter, but in his **early 30's** changed to classically painting modern life. Regarded as an Impressionist, he preferred "realist."

Dancers and horse racing were favorite subjects. He studied movement, and he preferred "snapshots" of life, not portraits. He took a deep interest in the invention of the camera. He photographed friends, as in his double portrait of **Renoir** and **Mallarmé**. The influence on his work by photography is shown in off kilter looks and occasional lack of color.

He created over 100 small sculpture models. *Ballet Girl in Bronze* was the only one publicly displayed during his life; the rest were discovered after he died.

During rifle training for the Franco-Prussian War in 1870 (36), (defended Paris), his eyesight was found to be defective, and from then on it was a constant worry. Failing eyesight caused him to switch from oil painting to easier mediums: pastels and charcoal. In 1912 (78), he quit doing art because of blindness.

After his father died in 1874 (40), it was discovered that his brother René had amassed enormous debts. Edgar sold his house and some inherited art to pay them.

Dependent for the first time on sales of his artwork for income, he produced much of his greatest work during 1874-84 (40-50).

Degas joined other artists to begin an independent exhibiting society from the Paris Salon. He took a leading role in organizing the "Impressionist Exhibitions," showing his work in all but one of them. He mocked **Monet** and other landscape painters for painting outdoors, and had persistent conflicts with others in the group.

As his finances improved, he was able to collect works by **Gauguin**, **El Greco**, **Manet**, **Pissarro**, **Cézanne**, and **Van Gogh** and others. After he died it took two days to auction the collection.

Portrait of the Bellelli Family, 1858-67 (24-33). Photograph of Renoir and Mallarmé. Ballet Girl in Bronze, 39 inches, 1880 (46).

Portrait of Miss Cassatt, Seated, Holding Cards, 1876-78 (42-44).

Amateur Jockeys by a Carriage, 1876 (42).



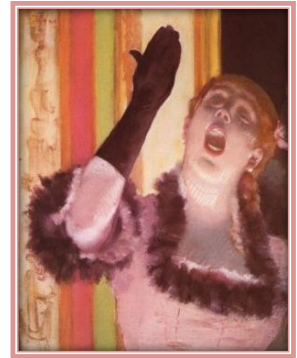
(39-41), oil
Racehorses at Longchamp, 1873-75



*A Cotton Office in New Orleans, 1873 (39).
The Singer with the Glove, 1878 (44).
Self-portrait (photograph), 1895 (61).
Dancing Peasant Girls, 1895 (61).*

Degas was known as difficult and selfish. He lived alone, never married and had no children. As the years passed, he became isolated, due in part to his belief that a painter could have no personal life. Degas had anti-Semitic leanings and he rejected all his Jewish friends.

His argumentative nature was deplored by Renoir, who said, "What a creature he was, that Degas! All his friends had to leave him; I was one of the last to go, but even I couldn't stay till the end."



What do you remember?

1. Edgar Degas is associated with what artist movement (but don't tell him that)? _____.
2. He lived in (City, Country)? _____, _____.
3. How many artists can you name that he was an acquaintance or friends with? _____.
4. Degas' favorite subject? _____. Next favorite? _____.
5. His spiritual life? _____.



What

Who

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| 1844 – Morse's telegraph used for first time | 1812 – 1870 – Charles Dickens |
| 1851, 52 – Sewing machine, Elevator (Elisha Otis) | 1833 – 1897 – Johannes Brahms |
| 1857 – Germ theory of disease | 1833 – 1896 – Alfred Nobel |
| 1861 - 65 – U.S. Civil War | 1853 – 1890 – Vincent van Gogh |
| 1867 – Nobel invents dynamite , Strauss <i>Blue Danube Waltz</i> | |
| 1870 – Franco – Prussian War | 1868 – 1960 – W.E.B. Dubois |
| 1875 – Alexander G. Bell invents telephone . | 1869 – 1948 – Mahatma Gandhi |
| 1880 – Edison's electric light | 1879 – 1955 – Albert Einstein |
| 1881 – Red Cross founded | 1879 – 1953 – Joseph Stalin |
| 1889 – Eiffel Tower opens | 1883 – 1945 – Benito Mussolini |
| 1891 – Zipper invented | |
| 1893 – Ford's first automobile , Sprague invents Electric Trolley | |
| 1896 – Marconi invents the radio , First modern Olympic games (Athens, Greece) | |
| 1909, 12 – Peary reaches the North Pole , Titanic sinks | |
| 1914 – 1917 – The Great War (WWI) | |