

## Artist Resources – Edgar Degas (French, 1834-1917)



Degas, 1855-1865

[Degas at the MET](#)

“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 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.” Degas is often labeled as an Impressionist, but he hated the term. Art historian Katie Price writes about Degas as an [“Anti-Impressionist.”](#)

The [exhibition catalogue](#) for *Impressionism: A Centenary Exhibition* (1974-1975) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art is available online.

Degas is most famous for his depictions of French Ballet Dancers. Read Smithsonian Magazine’s in-depth discussion of this theme in the 2003 exhibition [Degas and the Dance](#). In recent years, scholars have pointed to Degas’ controversial role in [the sordid truth of the ballet scene](#): “Sex work was a part of a ballerina’s reality, and the city’s grand opera house, the Palais Garnier, was designed with this in mind... it also served as a kind of men’s club, where *abonnés* – wealthy male subscribers to the opera – could conduct business, socialize, and proposition the ballerinas.”

*Little Dancer Aged Fourteen* (1878-1881) is one of Degas’ most famous works. See how the [Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Costume Conservator](#) helps care for the sculpture.

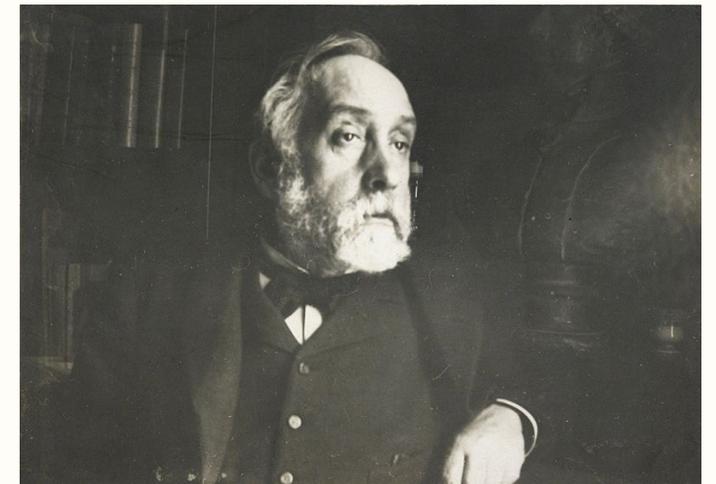
A [2014 exhibition](#) at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. explored the relationship between Degas and artist [Mary Cassatt](#) (1844-1926). Both artists were proponents of [Japonisme](#), a movement in Europe inspired by traditional Japanese pictorial modes.

In 2016, [Edgar Degas: A Strange New Beauty](#) surveyed Degas’ experiments with printmaking. See [video](#) and [audio guides](#) from the Museum of Modern Art.

Listen to [an interview](#) with Musée d’Orsay curator emerita, Anne Pingeot, about Degas on the 100-year anniversary of the artist’s death.

Degas was a conservative, anti-Semite. Read art historian Linda Nochlin’s fiery 2019 article, [“Degas and the Dreyfus Affair”](#) for more on Impressionist artists and their political leanings in the nineteenth-century.

Two weeks before COVID-19 closures, the National Gallery of Art opened [Degas at the Opéra](#). See a [virtual tour](#) of the exhibition in 3D space.

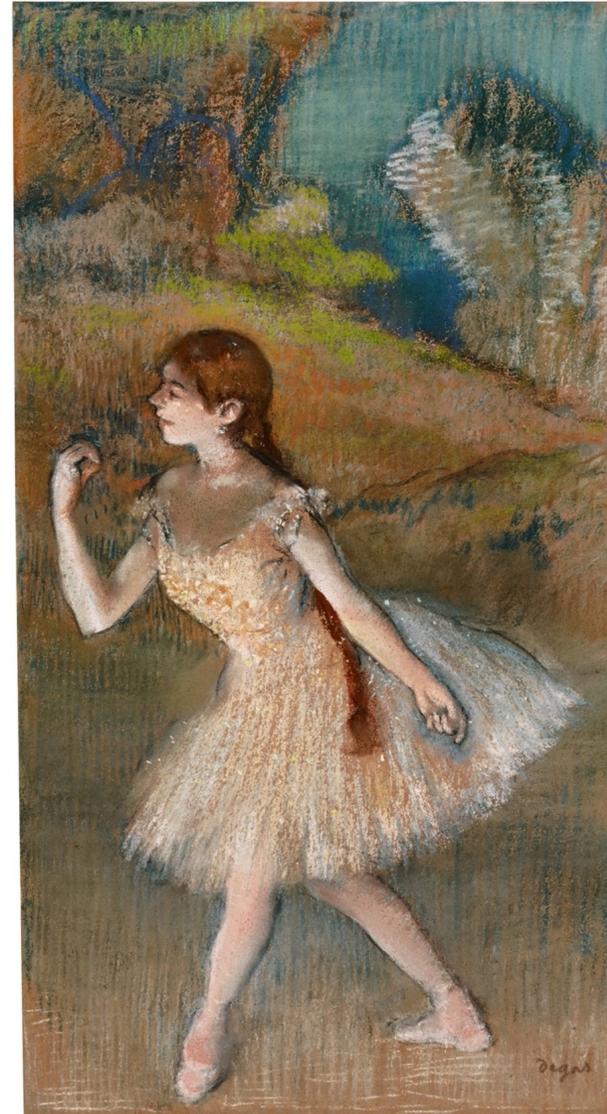


Degas, *Self-Portrait in Library*, 1895

Edgar Degas (French, 1834-1917)  
**Danseuse**, ca. 1880-1887  
 Pastel on paper mounted on board

Private Collection; L2021:77.1

In the late-nineteenth century, painter Edgar Degas began frequenting the Palais Garnier, the most prestigious theatre in Paris and home to the Parisian ballet. Degas was fascinated with the dancers' delicate costuming and graceful body movements, once saying: "People call me the painter of dancing girls. It has never occurred to them that my chief interest in dancers lies in rendering movement and painting pretty clothes." Degas came to know the ballet community well over years of careful observation and attendance at the theatre. **Danseuse** is an iconic example, with a front-row view of the young dancer Marie van Goethem. Marie lived with her parents a few blocks from Degas' studio at the time, and she was the model for the artist's famous sculpture *Petite danseuse de quatorze ans* some years prior. In this widely exhibited pastel, Marie's long hair, expressive features, and gauzy tutu offer an intimate glimpse into the nineteenth century world of ballet.



*Petit danseuse de quatorze ans*  
 (Little Dancer Aged Fourteen),  
 1878-1881

On view June 16 – September 26, 2021