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**THE MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM TO EXHIBIT SUPERB  
SELECTION OF DRAWINGS AND SKETCHBOOKS  
BY EDGAR DEGAS**

***SHOW INCLUDES WORK FROM SEVERAL PERIODS OF DEGAS' LIFE AND  
FEATURES PORTRAITS, LANDSCAPES, AND STUDIES OF HIS SIGNATURE  
DANCERS AND PERFORMERS***

***Degas: Drawings and Sketchbooks Opens September 24, 2010***

**\*\*Press Preview: Thursday, September 23, 2010, 10 a.m. until noon\*\***

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**New York, NY, July 20, 2010**—Edgar Degas (1834–1917), founding member of the Impressionist group who was distinguished by his Realist tendencies, is renowned for his vigorous images of dancers, performers, and theater scenes in paintings, sculptures, and works on paper. Throughout his career, he used drawing in dynamic and varied ways to explore these recurring subjects.



Edgar Degas, *Three Studies of a Dancer*, ca. 1880, black chalk, Conté crayon (?), and pink chalk, heightened with white chalk, on blue paper faded to light brown. Gift of a foundation in honor of Eugene and Clare Thaw, 2001.

The exhibition at The Morgan Library & Museum opens September 24, 2010, and features some twenty exceptional drawings by Degas, along with two of his sketchbooks, demonstrating the iconic artist's characteristic daring and inventiveness. The show includes works depicting quintessential Degas subjects—from his earliest portraits of himself, family members, and friends to his later intensive studies of dancers and performers. *Degas: Drawings and Sketchbooks* is on view through January 23, 2011, in the Morgan's Clare Eddy Thaw Gallery.

“As a medium, drawing often provides a more personal and intimate glimpse of an artist's creative process than either painting or sculpture, and the works on view in this exhibition are no exception,” said William M. Griswold, director of The Morgan Library & Museum. “The artist is known for his bold

experimentation with subject matter and artistic technique, and the drawings and sketchbooks in this show underscore Degas' willingness to push himself in new directions."

### EXHIBITION HIGHLIGHTS

Degas began studying law in Paris in 1853, though he soon turned his attention to copying works in the Louvre. Later, he entered the studio of Louis Lamothe, who was a pupil of Ingres and also studied at the *École des Beaux-Arts*. He left Paris in July 1856 to study independently in Rome, where he filled sketchbooks and sheets with studies of models and copies of old masters. *Study of a Male Nude* dates from his first year in Rome and reflects the artist's early academic efforts.

Thirty-eight sketchbooks by Degas have survived essentially intact. They cover the period between 1853 and 1886 and constitute the most significant sustained record of any Impressionist artist. The show includes two sketchbooks: one from early in Degas' career, during his first trip to Italy, the other datable to the height of his fame in Paris. The early sketchbook contains diligent student work, such as sketches of antique statuary and copies of Renaissance frescoes and paintings. The subjects range from the whimsical to the thoughtful, with quick portraits of dinner guests, sketches of dancers, and scenes from a Turkish bath in the later notebook.

Also on view from Degas' early years in Italy are *Self-Portrait and Details of Hand and Eye* (ca. 1856) and *Self-Portrait* (ca. 1856). These two studies in black chalk were private exercises in proficiency and discipline and remained in portfolios in the artist's studio until after his death. Another work, *Self-Portrait in a Brown Vest* (1856), a more tentative exploration in oil on paper, reveals Degas' continued use of himself as subject as he came to grasp the rudiments of portraiture.



Edgar Degas, *Self-Portrait in a Brown Vest*, 1856, oil on paper, mounted on canvas. Bequest of John S. Thacher, 1985.

In addition to self-portraiture, Degas depicted his friends and family throughout his career in works such as *Portrait of Paul and Marguerite-Claire Valpinçon* (1861) and *Rosa Adelaide Aurora Degas, the Duchess Morbilli* (ca. 1857). Paul Valpinçon was a friend of Degas from his school days, and Rosa Degas was the eldest sister of the artist's father.

Degas' much-heralded explorations of dancers—in rehearsal, on stage, and at rest—began in the 1870s and intensified during the ensuing decades. This period also marked the beginning of his success as an artist. One of Degas' principal concerns as a draftsman was analyzing the movements and gestures of the female body. On view are several drawings featuring dancers, including *Three Studies of a Dancer* (ca. 1880), easily

recognizable as the study for the celebrated wax sculpture *Little Dancer, Fourteen Years Old*, depicting the young dancer Marie van Goethem. In this large sheet, the artist studied her from three different angles, attempting to understand the figure in the round in preparation for sculpting it.

Other examples of drawings with dancers include *Seated Dancer* (ca. 1871), one of the studies for *Dance Class at the Opéra on the Rue le Peletier*, now in the Musée d'Orsay in Paris, as well as *Two Studies of Dancers* (ca. 1873), *Dancer with Arms Outstretched* (ca. 1878), and *Two Studies of a Ballet Dancer* (ca. 1872).

Though noted for his attention to the female figure, Degas executed many studies of grouped horses and jockeys from which he would use figures in later compositions. *Group of Four Jockeys*, with its play of intersecting lines of movement, conveys the tension and frequent conflicts in the paddock before a race. The drawing also provides an exceptional example of Degas' remarkable inventiveness as he reworked and revised a particular scene over a significant span of years. He initially executed this compositional study circa 1868 and then returned to it about a decade later to combine the elements in the last stages of preparation for the painting *Racecourse Scene*.



Edgar Degas, *Emilie Bécát at the Café des Ambassadeurs*, 1877–85, pastel over lithograph. Thaw Collection.

Later in his career, Degas experimented with mixing drawing media and printmaking techniques as seen in *Emilie Bécát at the Café des Ambassadeurs*. He began the drawing in 1885 using an impression from his 1877–78 lithograph of a concert at Café des Ambassadeurs, which he extended along the bottom and right edges, and drew over in dense strokes of pastel. Significantly altering the composition of the print, he added the three female spectators in the foreground. The women's dark silhouettes, in shades of blue and ochre, are contrasted against the bright pink dress of Emilie Bécát. Degas used the range of pastels to capture the effects of various light sources in this nocturnal scene and suggests the difference between the mundane and the magical world of the theater.

*At the Theater; the Duet* (1877–79) is another example of how the artist expertly combined pastel and print. Degas first produced a monotype—a unique print made from drawing in ink on a metal or glass plate—of two singers on stage, seen from behind, with a view to the audience. He then enlivened the print with richly colored pastels. The subject in this work is again Emilie Bécát, who appears with another of Degas' favorite performers, Theresa (Emma Valadon).

Also on view is *Landscape with Path Leading to a Copse of Trees* (ca. 1890). While Degas is not known as a landscape artist, this work demonstrates how he further explored the medium of monotype. This sheet was

made during the artist's visit to the painter and printmaker Georges Jeannot (1846–1934) in the village of Diénay near Dijon. There Degas recalled scenery from the drive through the Burgundian countryside and produced about fifty monotype landscapes. To create this drawing, he used oil paint (and apparently his fingers) to indicate a few lines of landscape on the plate and printed one or two proofs, hanging them to dry. Later, he completed the composition with a rich layer of pastel.

*Degas: Drawings and Sketchbooks* is organized by Jennifer Tonkovich, Curator in the Department of Drawings and Prints at The Morgan Library & Museum.

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### **The Morgan Library & Museum**

A complex of buildings in the heart of New York City, The Morgan Library & Museum began as the private library of financier Pierpont Morgan, one of the preeminent collectors and cultural benefactors in the United States. Today, more than a century after its founding, the Morgan serves as a museum, independent research library, musical venue, architectural landmark, and historic site. Located at Madison Avenue and 36th Street, with a world-renowned collection that ranges from Rembrandt to Picasso, Mozart to Bob Dylan, Dickens to Hemingway, and Gutenberg Bibles to Babar the elephant, The Morgan Library & Museum maintains a unique position among cultural institutions in New York, the nation, and the world.

### **General Information**

The Morgan Library & Museum  
225 Madison Avenue, at 36th Street, New York, NY 10016-3405  
212.685.0008  
[www.themorgan.org](http://www.themorgan.org)

### **Hours**

Tuesday–Thursday, 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.; extended Friday hours, 10:30 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.; closed Mondays, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day. The Morgan closes at 4 p.m. on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve.

### **Admission**

\$12 for adults; \$8 for students, seniors (65 and over), and children (under 16); free to Members and children, 12 and under accompanied by an adult. Admission is free on Fridays from 7 to 9 p.m. Admission is not required to visit the Morgan Shop.