

EDGAR DEGAS

Biography



Birth: July 19, 1834 in Paris, France

Death: September 27, 1917 in Paris, France

Edgar Degas was born on July 19, 1834, in Paris, the son of a well-to-do banker. From an early age Edgar loved books, especially the classics, and was a serious student in high school. His father hoped his son would study law, but Edgar enrolled at the School of Fine Arts in 1855, where he studied under Louis Lamothe, a pupil of J. A. D. Ingres, whom Degas greatly admired.

In 1856 Degas went to Naples, where his sister lived, and eventually he settled in Rome for three years. He admired the Early Christian and medieval masterpieces of Italy, as well as the frescoes, panel paintings, and drawings of the Renaissance masters, many of which he copied. Back in Paris in 1861, he painted history paintings and copied the works of the Old Masters in the Louvre, a practice he kept up for many years.

From 1862 until 1870 Degas painted portraits of his friends and family. In 1870, during the Franco-Prussian War, he served in the artillery of the national guard. Two years later, he went to New Orleans to visit members of his family, who were in the cotton business. While in New Orleans, he painted *The Cotton Exchange at New Orleans*, his first painting to be acquired by an art museum. Between 1873 and 1883 Degas produced many of his paintings and pastels of the horse race course, music hall, café, and ballet. He had no financial problems, and even prior to the 1870s he had established his reputation as a painter. Degas stopped exhibiting at the respected Salon in 1870 and displayed his works with those of the less well-established Impressionists until 1886. Although he was associated with the Impressionists, his preoccupation with draftsmanship and composition was not characteristic of Impressionism.

From 1870, he increasingly painted ballet subjects. *Dance Class* (1871), *Dancing Examination* (1874) and *The Star* (1876-77) were some of his most famous ballet paintings. Many people still associate Degas with ballerina paintings to this day.

Beginning in the mid-1870s Degas suffered from failing eyesight. From the 1890s on he became increasingly reclusive. In the last years of his life he was almost totally blind and wandered aimlessly through the Parisian streets. He died on September 27, 1917, in Paris.