

Race Horses (?)

by Edgar Degas

Print Facts

- Facts about this print are very limited. If you find any concrete evidence about the actual name, date, size and location of this print, please let the Art Masterpiece coordinator know. Degas made several drawings of race horses that are very similar and many of them are named the same name. A best guess has been made to fill in the blanks on this fact sheet.
- Medium: Pastel Drawing on Panel (mahogany) or maybe Pastel on Wood (cigar box lid?)
- Because this is a pastel, it is called a drawing not a painting. You can tell it is not a painting because there are not brush strokes. You can see the texture and the lines from the pastels if you look closely.
- Date: 1885-1888 ish
- Size: 11 7/8 X 16" maybe
- Location: Unknown
- Style: Impressionism
- Genre: Genre Painting
- Even more than dancers, Degas was obsessed with horses.
- Degas remained faithful to racing scenes throughout his career, stepping up their production in the 1880s. He manipulated his horses and jockeys from one picture to the next—enlarging, reversing, or reducing them to fit the background. Many of the figures here appear in other works.

Artist Facts

- Edgar Degas: Pronounced (Edgar Day-Gah)
- Born July 19, 1834
- Died 1917 (age 83)
- He was a famous French artist who created paintings, drawings, sculpture and photography.
- Degas lived his whole life in a neighborhood in Paris called Montmartre.
- Degas came from a rich family. He was the oldest of five children.
- As a boy, his father often took him to visit art galleries.
- Degas was very smart and his father wanted him to become a lawyer, but in his early years he was drawn to art and by 18 he had already turned his bedroom into an art studio. To appease his father he went to law school, but skipped class in order spend hours copying art at the Louvre.
- With the support of his father, he went on to study art. Part of his education included three years studying in Italy.
- He wanted to show real life as he saw it happening. He always carried a sketchbook with him, and he used it to write about and draw the things he saw.
- When Degas was 38 he visited the United States. Degas painted the cotton office where his relatives worked in New Orleans. This was his first painting that was bought by an art gallery. (See *The Cotton Exchange in New Orleans*, 1873.)
- Degas was said by some to have had a brash and argumentative personality. Some said he believed an artist shouldn't have a personal life. He never married and was alone until his death.
- Initially Degas was sufficiently wealthy and did not need to sell his paintings to make money. Thus, he was uninhibited and often did things in paintings to shock or surprise the viewer. However, after the death of his father it was discovered that he owed people money and for the first time Degas needed to sell paintings. Unlike the other Impressionists that he was associated with, people liked Degas' art and he became a very successful artist during his lifetime.
- Degas lost his eyesight sometime between 1909-1912 due to an injury he had suffered in war many years earlier. After he lost his eyesight he continued to sculpt.
- Degas was considered a master at drawing lines.

- He had a deep respect for hard-working women, and he painted them in their day-to-day work.
- Some of Degas' favorite subjects were women working, women bathing, ballerinas and horses.
- Degas is probably best known for his ballerinas. He painted ballerinas at work, in rehearsal or at rest, and he tirelessly explored the theme with many variations in posture and gesture. More than the stage performance and the limelight, it was the training and rehearsals that interested him.
- Some say Degas hated the fact that he was known as the "painter of dancers." Still, he did return to this theme throughout his career.
- Photography was invented during his lifetime. When he was about 60, he bought a camera and began taking photographs. Sometimes he would trace over the photographs to get the movements of the dancers right.
- Degas studied photographs to figure out the correct way to paint a horse running.
- Degas only ever exhibited one sculpture, but after his death about 150 wax sculptures were discovered in his studio.
- Degas preferred to work in his studio rather than outdoors like most Impressionists at the time.
- Degas collected artwork from painters such as Pissarro, Cezanne, Gauguin and Van Gogh.
- Degas was a perfectionist and never seemed satisfied with his art. He was known to keep working on some paintings even after he sold them. One story claims that a friend chained his Degas painting to the wall to stop Edgar from taking it back to his studio whenever he came to visit.
- Degas is one of the most beloved artists of all time.

Key Element of Design to Teach

- **Texture** is the quality of the surface, for example smooth, rough, shiny or dull. Texture may be defined as being real or implied. Real texture is the actual texture applied to the surface of the artwork that could be really experienced by the senses. For example, some artists employ the use of certain materials such as wood, stone, metal, glass, cloth, thick paint or other materials to give the surface a desired textural quality. Texture may also be implied. An implied texture is drawn or painted on the surface of an artwork to give it the appearance of having certain textural quality.

Possible Questions and Suggestions to Teach Texture

- Do you see any textures in this painting? (The horses seem to be sleek and shiny. The clothes have wrinkles in them. The mustaches and grass seem rough. Etc.)
- What do you think the artist used to create this work? (Pastel) Does it look like paint? Do you see brushstrokes?
- This would be a good print to talk about different mediums. Check out the extra resources to show students the tools that artists use to create their artwork.

Keywords

- Balance, Texture, Color, Medium

Other Possible Questions and Suggestions

- What are the people doing with the horses? (The men are jockeys.)
- What do you see in the background?
- What colors do you see on the jockeys? What colors do you see in the sky? What colors are the horses? (Look closely, they are not just brown.)
- Have you ever seen a photograph with someone's head cut off? Degas painted a jockey and his horse with parts of them cropped off. Can you see them? Why do you think he did this? (Photography had just been invented and Degas was very interested in it. He often made his painting seem like snapshots and that the people were in the middle of something rather than posing and saying "cheese". Notice that the men and horses are not looking directly at the viewers, but rather we see their profiles.)