



Edgar Degas Sculpture (National Gallery of Art Systematic Catalogues)

Suzanne Glover Lindsay, Daphne S. Barbour, Shelley G. Sturman

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As an artist, Edgar Degas (1834-1917) defies easy description. Allied with the French impressionists through his commitment to portraying modern life, he also took an independent course, preferring line over color and the visible brushstroke, and working in a studio instead of out-of-doors. He is perhaps best known as a painter, but his most widely known work is a sculpture, *Little Dancer Aged Fourteen*. Executed in wax, near life-sized, dressed in a ballerina's tutu, with real ballet slippers and real hair, the sculpture caused a sensation when it was exhibited in 1881. It is the only sculpture Degas ever showed publicly, though more than one hundred--of dancers, horses, and bathers--were found in his studio after he died, all dusty, some fallen apart. For almost forty years after his death, these works were known only through the bronzes his heirs had cast from the originals. Then, in 1955, the waxes themselves appeared on the art market. Thanks to the discernment and generosity of Paul Mellon, the majority are now preserved at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, most on permanent display.

This groundbreaking volume honors this extraordinary gift by linking art and science. It brings together the insights of a distinguished art historian of nineteenth-century painting and sculpture and the specialized knowledge of National Gallery conservators and scientists who have published pioneering technical studies. Including essays on Degas' life and work, his sculptural technique and materials, and the story of the sculptures after his death, it features art-historical and technical discussions of every work in the collection as well as indispensable concordances and bibliography. The richly illustrated text is intended for both art lover and specialist. Was Degas the sculptor technically inept or unusually inventive? How do we understand his sculpture in light of his paintings, prints, and photographs? These questions and many others are explored with originality and depth, adding immeasurably to our understanding of the artistic avant-garde in the late nineteenth century and to our appreciation of this controversial artist.

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