

QUOTES FROM THE EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

A fully illustrated catalogue published by the American Federation of Arts and Harry N. Abrams, Inc., accompanies this exhibition. Degas and the Dance features a comprehensive text by Richard Kendall and Jill DeVonyar on Degas' relationship with dance and the dance world, and the historical circumstances of the ballet in mid-to late 19th-century Paris.

“Their legs savagely cut by the edge of the stage, their coral and silver dresses suppressed by shadow or ablaze with light, the background figures in *Orchestra Musicians* (Frankfurt) were among the very first dancers to be painted by Edgar Degas. It was a startling debut for an obscure thirty-five-year-old, one of a cluster of ballet scenes he began around 1870 that were soon to launch his career as ‘the painter of dancers.’” (Page 13)

“New evidence in this volume emphasizes and extends Degas' attachment to the Paris Opéra, rooting it in the earliest years of his career and pushing it into the late decades.” (Page 15)

“However knowledgeable about the ballet or the Paris Opéra [Degas] was, his pictorial engagement was neither passive nor merely documentary, just as his other preoccupations of the day—with the cabarets, cafés, laundries, hat shops, and brothels of the city—were marked by a radical reinvention of current visual modes. The more we learn about Degas' familiarity with the Opéra and its dancers, the more ruthlessly selective his vision appears to be.” (Page 15)

“In an extraordinary burst of inventiveness between the late 1860s and the early 1870s, Degas produced fifteen or more oil paintings of ballet subjects that are, quite literally, fundamental to his achievement. . . . These are astonishingly original pictures, mastering new kinds of spaces and a bold vocabulary of pose and gesture in a way that seems effortless. Together they spelled out—and have continued to define—Degas' professional identity for many of his admirers, demonstrating his prodigious accomplishments as well as his ambitions as an artist of modern urban experience.” (Page 29)

“Mary Cassatt proclaimed that *Dance Class* [Metropolitan Museum of Art] was ‘more beautiful than any Vermeer I ever saw,’ speaking for several generations who have found in the work the charm and innocent vitality of the ballet itself.” (Page 121)

“Degas’ critics frequently remarked on the ungainliness of the models in his ballet pictures, describing them as ‘bizarre and ugly rather than graceful,’ or as ‘skinny girls with uncertain shapes and repulsive features, whose movements lack harmony.’ Much of this resentment can be traced to the disparity between public image and private reality, between the dancers who Degas most often represented—those engaged in ‘bizarre and ugly’ classroom activities—and idealized notions of the ‘graceful’ ballerina. As in his other studies of the working women of Paris, from laundresses to prostitutes, Degas was evidently committed to making art for his fellow citizens out of the raw material that nourished their luxury and pleasure. At the Opéra, this necessarily involved what Eunice Lipton has called the ‘demystification of the dance,’ a matter-of-fact engagement with long hours in class and rehearsal rooms, where youthful physiques were tuned for their fleeting roles in the footlights.” (Page 137)