

Edgar Degas 1834-1917

- Hilaire-Germain-Edgar Degas was born on July 19th, 1834, in Paris, which is where he grew up.
- His father was a banker and the family were quite wealthy.
- After he left school he was sent to study law however he wanted to be an artist so, in 1855, he went to study at the famous École des Beaux-Arts (School of Fine Arts) in Paris.
- Degas travelled to places such as Rome and Florence in Italy so he could study the work of Renaissance painters.
- In 1861 Degas returned to Paris and began painting pictures that represented stories from the Bible and copies of paintings on display in the Louvre Museum in Paris.
- Soon people began asking him to paint portraits of them and he quickly became famous however, Degas decided he wanted to paint pictures of real life as it was in Paris at that time.
- He painted scenes at the racecourse, both of the horses and their jockeys and the spectators in their fashionable costumes.
- Degas also became interested in painting groups of ballet dancers and these became some of his most famous paintings.
- Degas became interested in depicting a sense of movement in his paintings and experimented with painting scenes from different angles to represent this.
- Many of his compositions were almost like a photograph in the way they seemed to capture a figure from the side, or from above or even half way off the edge of the canvas, as if they were caught in motion.
- This was a revolutionary way of painting scenes, particularly of people, which until then had always been quite posed and rigid with figures centred in the middle.
- Degas was friends with many of the Impressionist artists such as Claude Monet and Pierre-Auguste Renoir and often exhibited his paintings with theirs even though his style was quite different.
- During the 1870's Degas' eyesight began to fail and as he found it more difficult to paint he began to create sculptures instead. Many of these sculptures are now among his most famous works.
- Degas died in Paris on September 27th, 1917, aged 83.

Want to know more?

- Try browsing the web to find websites about the life and work of Edgar Degas.
- Visit your local or school library for books about Edgar Degas and other Impressionist artists.
- Find out if there are any art galleries near you which have paintings or sculpture by Edgar Degas on display and visit them.