DEGAS'S PREGNANT WOMAN: VISION AND TOUCH

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Hilaire Germain Edgar Degas once said *On voit comme on veut voir*[1] or "One sees as one wishes to see." Degas' perception of the world around him played a large role in his art. Degas suffered from vision problems throughout his life, and it may be that his unique response to these problems was to create art that reflected an unusual and idiosyncratic approach to vision and perception. Degas's lifelong struggle to accommodate his failing vision culminated in his late sculpture *Femme Enceinte* or *Pregnant Woman*, which shows a figure gazing down at her pregnant belly which she holds with both hands: touch supports vision and inward perception. In an earlier oil portrait of his cousin, Estelle, who was pregnant, Degas had explored this theme of touch and inward perception. Other late sculptures show various depictions of vision and touch, but are not as concerned with inward perception. *Woman Taken Unawares* or *Femme Surprise*, which is an earlier title,[2] explores vision with a sharp look, and self-protective touch; movement is also important as she twists on her base. In *The Tub*, a woman gazes at her body as she washes it. These three sculptures, which are extant in wax, show Degas's preoccupation with vision, and touch, which often supports vision, or is suggestive of perception, in the art discussed in this paper.

Degas's sculptures *The Tub* and also probably *Femme Surprise* are bathing figures. From the 1870s on Degas explored the motif of nude women bathing in sculpture, pastel and other media. Vision and touch are often important themes in these images also, like the sculpture. A series of pastels of nude bathers exhibited in the Impressionist exhibition of 1886 caused a stir among viewers and critics. The figures' poses were unconventional as was the artist's viewpoint, often above and near the figure.

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[1] Richard Kendall, "Degas and the Contingency of Vision," *The Burlington Magazine* (March 1988): 193.
[2] Suzanne Glover Lindsay, Daphne S. Barbour and Shelley G. Sturman, *Edgar Degas Sculpture* (Washington, D. C.: National Gallery of Art, 2010), 274.

The bathers are shown alone, their backs to the viewer as they reach, bend and crouch, bathing themselves from small, portable tubs on the floor. One pastel that was exhibited in 1886, and was also called *The Tub*, shows a woman crouched in a small tub. She is washing the nape of her neck, similar to figures in the other exhibited pastels who are mostly blindly washing themselves. So their vision or perception can be inferred as being elsewhere; their folded bodies indicate introversion. They seem unavailable to the viewer.

Degas and the nude

The bathers' unconventional and inverted poses probably seemed unusual and unexpected to the viewing public. In nineteenth century French art, most female nudes were shown frontally, completely open and exposed in erotic poses like Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres's *Odalisque and Slave* (figure 1). She lies or writhes on a carpeted floor, legs and lower torso partially facing forward, her upper back slightly twisted to lie back, her arm thrown back to display her breasts. Her face is averted and partially hidden from the viewer, and one wonders if she seems ashamed of her wanton pose. Ingres celebrates the luscious, curving flesh laid out as expected in classical anatomical sequence from foot to leg to torso to head, in an exotic setting. She is displayed frontally, open to view, available to the audience to possess and embrace. She exists only for erotic pleasure.

In contrast, sexuality is not suggested in Degas's nude bathers; rather, they seem androgynous. Also they are not classically beautiful. Inverted, with head near feet, and bent over, much of the body hidden, they would have to be turned around and pried open to become available to the amorous viewer. Unavailable for engagement with another person, they are working and caring for themselves, engaged in their task, physically and

mentally occupied. Huysmans, after viewing Degas's entry of bathers in the 1886 Impressionist exhibition, described the artist as an idol-toppler and iconoclast, an idol being a classical nude, like *Odalisque and Slave* by Ingres. Huysmans saw the nudes as animal-like, their poses degrading and humiliating. Also they were not images of pampered, idle women. From Huysmans' criticisms Degas acquired the label of misogynist.[3]

Throughout his career, Degas frequently depicted the female figure, often in series, showing them working, like ballerinas, prostitutes, laundresses, bathers, to name a few. Most, if not all, of his bathers are nude. All of the images in this paper show the female form, and most are nude. Whether or not Degas was a misogynist, he was fascinated with the female body. The artwork discussed in this paper shows his interest in vision and touch in depictions of the female body. The touch of the bathers upon their own body suggests inward reflection and perception. This is most fully realized in his sculpture *Pregnant Woman* who, like the bathers, is not sexually available to the viewer. But since she is of the female gender, her body is capable of bearing new life, which began with a sexual act. Degas's sculptures *Femme Surprise* and *The Tub* also explore a relationship between surface vision and touch which is not as profound as the inward contemplation evident in *Pregnant Woman*. Sculpted in wax, these statuettes,[4] as Degas called them, share an immediate and tactile link with the artist who envisioned and formed them, and who struggled with and adapted to his own failing eyesight.

Degas's vision problems

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[3] Carol Armstrong, *Odd Man Out Readings of the Work and Reputation of Edgar Degas*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 189-192.
[4] Ibid., 10.

Degas' problems with vision were documented fairly early in his career, and though he never did go blind, they affected his artwork. According to Degas scholar Richard Kendall, in 1870, when Degas volunteered for the National Guard during the Franco Prussian War, it was discovered that he could not see out of his right eye. He blamed this on sleeping in a damp attic, where he may have contracted an infection[5] which would have been left untreated since there were no antibiotics. Doctors suspect that he may also have been myopic, had areas of blurred vision, and later, a 'blind spot'; he also complained of intolerance to bright light, known as photophobia.[6] Degas had vision problems throughout his life, and was afraid that he would become blind.

Rather than becoming disabled from his ailments, Degas seemed to adjust to his difficulties. Degas' art was not simply a re-creation of the physical appearance of the world as seen by someone with these particular visual afflictions.[7] Instead he seemed to turn them into assets and approached vision from the point of view that there are many ways of seeing.[8] In a photograph parodying *Apotheosis of Homer* by Ingres (figure 2 and 3). who Degas greatly respected, Degas is shown at center, playing the role of the blind poet.

Many of the symptoms of Degas's ocular disabilities seem to have been present by the early 1870s, and references appear in his letters and art from that period. After the Franco-Prussian War, during his 1872-1873 visit to New Orleans, Degas's eyes seem to have been greatly impaired by the natural light. In his letters during his visit he complained of intolerance to the bright southern sun. In November he wrote to Tissot that

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[5] Richard Kendall, "Degas and the Contingency of Vision," *The Burlington Magazine* (March 1988): 184-185.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid., 188.
[8] Martin Schwander, *Edgar Degas The Late Works* (Ostfildern, Hatje Cantz, 2012), 26.

on the streets in New Orleans there is "...a brilliant light at which my eyes complain."[9] In a letter to Henri Rouart, "My eyes are so greatly in need of care that I scarcely take any risk with them at all."[10] And again to Tissot in February, "What lovely things I could have done, and done rapidly if the bright daylight were less unbearable for me. To go to Louisiana to open one's eyes. I cannot do that. And yet I keep them sufficiently half open to see my fill."[11] Degas adapted by painting exclusively indoors, confining himself to family portraits and scenes, writing in his letters that he did not do justice to the exotic surroundings of New Orleans, as Manet would have done.[12]

Rather than paint the lush former colonial city of New Orleans, his artwork begun there shows empathy and awareness of the emotional and psychological state of his sitters. He painted his cousins indoors in their family home. Generally throughout his career Degas did not paint *en plein-aire*. he worked in a darkened studio and occasionally wore tinted glasses (figure 4). Degas planned his artwork and accommodated his studio and workspace according to the visual difficulties he was experiencing.

Degas's approach to sculpture

According to Kendall, Degas said that no art was less spontaneous than his.[13] He planned, worked and re-worked his paintings, pastels and sculpture. Degas used a combination of media for his sculpture, including beeswax and plastiline, which was a non-drying modeling clay. He may have kept in his studio a pot of this mixture ever-

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[9] Gail Feigenbaum, *Degas and New Orleans A French Impressionist in America* (New Orleans: New Orleans Museum of Art, 1999), 291.
[10] Ibid., 294.
[11] Ibid., 297.
[12] Richard Kendall, "Degas and the Contingency of Vision," *The Burlington Magazine* (March 1988): 188.
[13] Ibid., 188-190.

ready and malleable.[14] Therefore his sculptures could be re-worked frequently. Degas usually made his own armatures from wire, cork, match sticks, rope, cloth, paintbrushes and other objects found around his studio. He is described as wishing to work quickly and economically.[15] So, if a pose was not as he envisioned it, he would grab whatever happened to be nearby to adjust the sculpted form to his wishes. Judging that materials like plastiline, for instance, were too expensive, he used cork from wine bottles as bulk in his statuettes. These objects frequently caused sculptural instability, resulting in the loss of many works; also they worked their way to the sculptures' surface,[16] which forced Degas and later casters to repair these areas. The surface of his sculptures also bore the detritus of his studio.[17] showing that they were studio experiments and not for exhibition. His studio was reportedly filled with pieces and parts of wax sculpture that had fallen apart[18] due to his unconventional methods.

Degas greatly respected and learned much from Old Masters, their time-honored techniques and materials; he decried what he understood as the 'loss' of knowledge of painting craft during the Revolution, which is probably inaccurate.[19] His frequently unsuccessful experiments with homemade supports and found materials must have seemed bewildering and frustrating to his friends and business associates. One of Degas' dealers, Ambroise Vollard recalled visiting Degas' studio as he worked on his "twentieth transformation" of a dancer. Degas was excited, saying that the founder could come after one or two more short sittings. Vollard returned to the studio the next day to find the

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[14] Charles W. Millard, *The Sculpture of Edgar Degas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 37.
[15] Ibid., 37.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Martin Schwander, *Edgar Degas The Late Works* (Ostfildern, Hatje Cantz, 2012), 25.
[18] Charles W. Millard, *The Sculpture of Edgar Degas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 36.
[19] Theodore Reff, "The Technical Aspects of Degas's Art," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* (1971): 142.

sculpture reduced to a "ball of wax." Vollard expressed astonishment and Degas replied that all Vollard thought of was money, whereas even a "hatful of diamonds" would not equal his-Degas'-pleasure in destroying it and beginning again.[20] It seemed like nothing pleased him more than to work on something, and when it did not suit him, to roll it up into a ball and throw it back into the pot.

Pregnant Woman

Sculpted late in his career, between 1896 and 1911, Edgar Degas' *Pregnant Woman* (figure 5) is made of pigmented beeswax and plastiline over a homemade armature formed of various thicknesses of wire, and cork from wine bottles used as bulk in the belly.[21] A standing nude figure, she gazes down at her belly, around which her hands are wrapped. She seems timeless and serene. She lacks facial features: only a nose is barely suggested. Her round head is lowered as she gazes down towards her full belly. Her powerful arms form arcs as her hands fuse to the underside of her curved belly, fingers unformed and absorbed into the mass. Sturdy, grounded legs support this rounded figure. Her back is deeply arched which emphasizes her rotund belly. Possibly as a counterweight to her full front, her buttocks are formed large (figure 6).

Her heavy front makes her form unstable (figure 7) so she has an armature keeping her upright. In an inventory photograph from 1917 (figure 8), taken after Degas' death, the sculpture is shown with an armature attached to the top of her head. In later photographs she has an armature protruding from her left hip (figure 9). In order for this armature to slide easily into her wax hip, it would have been heated. But cork bulks the

[20] Charles W. Millard, *The Sculpture of Edgar Degas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 36.
[21] Suzanne Glover Lindsay, Daphne S. Barbour and Shelley G. Sturman, *Edgar Degas Sculpture* (Washington, D. C.: National Gallery of Art, 2010), 314.

interior, which would have made insertion difficult. So scholars believe her buttocks were probably re-worked[22] after the posthumous armature was added to her hip.

Vision and touch seem to be important here. The figure is gazing down at her swollen belly, which her hands are touching (figure 10), suggesting absorption in the physical changes happening to her body both without and within. The inward gaze records the physical changes within her body as her baby grows, and also the accompanying emotional and psychological changes as she realizes the dependent life in her belly. Rounded forms and curves of the sculpture reiterate the cycles of exterior and interior change, physical and psychological growth.

The figure shows complementary aspects of vision and touch. She is gazing down at her swollen stomach which she is holding in a protective sling-like way, as if the belly was the baby. Her touch symbolizes and refers to her inward gaze which seems to be deeply focused on the changes occurring, and the new life growing, in her body. While the sculpture is fundamentally static, by focusing on the pregnant stomach, Degas is focusing on the area of movement in the sculpture. The figure is not moving its body in a traditional sense, but the stomach is growing every minute and the baby is growing and moving within the stomach. This figure is essentially in a transitional state because her appearance was subtly different before the moment depicted, and in the moment after this depiction, her appearance will have changed again. The theme of time and movement seems conflicted in this sculpture. While the lack of individually recognizable features, and the simplicity of the nude, standing figure lends a sense of timelessness and abstraction to the sculpture; in contrast, the viewer's knowledge of the natural state of pregnancy, and growth of a baby, presupposes change and growth.

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[22] Ibid., 316.

Degas' facture is apparent in the fairly rough surface of the object. In his old age his vision may have worsened, and he may be seen as an artist who searched for resolution of the figure through touch as well as through vision. Degas' fingerprints and handling of the wax are evident in the sculpture's seemingly unfinished quality, especially in the hands, face, feet, legs and stomach. Degas seems to have thrown himself into this sculpture. His fingerprints are everywhere. He is searching and creating form just as the pregnant woman is creating new life in her stomach. As a young man he had the opportunity to visit his pregnant cousin, Estelle, and to paint portraits of her in which her condition, and inward reflection, is subtly suggested.

Portraits of Estelle

Earlier in his career, between 1872 and 1873, Degas painted a portrait of his cousin and sister-in-law, Estelle Musson Degas, who is thought to have been pregnant at the time. The portrait was begun during Degas' visit to his extended maternal family in New Orleans when Estelle was pregnant with a baby who was delivered during Degas' stay, and who would be Degas' godchild.[23] While Degas began the portrait of Estelle in New Orleans, he brought it back with him to Paris where he later re-worked it.[24]

Estelle was almost completely blind when this portrait was begun,[25] (figure 11) so, while she appears to gaze forward, she can be construed as gazing within, like the sculpture of a *Pregnant Woman*. Seated on a chaise longue with an empty wall behind her, her body and face slightly turned away from the viewer, she gazes placidly ahead. Her polka dot dress billows around her, hiding her pregnant stomach. Like the sculpture,

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[23] Gail Feigenbaum, *Degas and New Orleans A French Impressionist in America* (New Orleans: New Orleans Museum of Art, 1999), 207.
[24] Ibid., 198.
[25] Ibid., 207.

Estelle's arms are curved, her hands resting near the base of her belly, encircling the unborn baby. All of the colors in the painting are soft: the wall is pale gold, the chaise longue pale blue and white, her dress off-white. Darker areas form her eyes, hair and belt, cinched above her waist. The polka dots seem to repeat the black circles of her corneas. Therefore, like *Pregnant Woman*, her perception seems to be inward, contemplating the changes and growth occurring in her body which will significantly change her life. The picture is quiet and meditative; emphasis is on the dark, flat area of hair behind her eyes, which is where contemplation occurs; emphasis is also on the dark horizontal band around her stomach, and finally on her dark, unseeing eyes.

A second portrait identified as Estelle (figure 12) by her husband René Degas, Edgar's younger brother, was also begun during Edgar Degas's visit to New Orleans, and is very different from the portrait described above. Communicating tension, Estelle's fingers lightly and eloquently grip the tall back of the chair on which she sits sideways. She is shown wedged between the chair back, a teal green background wall, and a round table in the foreground, pushed up against her, holding a tall blue vase with a red flower and dark green leaves. Threatening and breaking up her pale figure with their slashing, jagged shapes, the leaves almost dominate the composition, while in the background a somewhat diminutive Estelle perches with tense reserve on the chair. Her figure throws a shadow on the wall behind, adding to the somber tone. The side of her face closest to the wall is covered in a deep shadow, above which her dark hair seems strangely absent. Estelle's blindness is suggested only very subtly: her red-rimmed eyes remain fixedly open, unable to sense the intrusion of a thin slant of light shining on the eye[26] that is otherwise darkened in shadow. Her facial expression seems to echo the anxiety in her

[26] Ibid., 210.

fingers: her lips curl up at the edges, attempting a smile, her eyes have dark circles underneath; she gazes blankly toward the left.

Estelle seems trapped within her home and its familiar bourgeois furnishings. While the world outside her home may have seemed a threatening wilderness to the young blind woman, her family life held its dangers also. A few years after Degas's visit, Estelle's husband, René, would desert her and their children to live in Paris with the Mussons' neighbor. Edgar Degas would respond to his brother's behavior by severing communication with him for at least a decade.[27] In both portraits of Estelle, her sightlessness is subtly stated and her ability to compensate with enhanced inner perception is emphasized.

Inward reflection seems important to both portraits. In the first, Estelle cradles her unborn baby, focusing on his or her growth and the changes new birth will bring to her life. In the second portrait Estelle seems aware of anxiety which she expresses in her fingertips pressed to the back of the chair. In the portraits Degas communicates feelings that he ascribes to his cousin Estelle through her body language, and through the setting.

Degas may have been fascinated by his blind cousin since he was feeling similar visual ailments. In his letters Degas described how he admired Estelle's cheerfulness, independence and ease of movement around her home, in spite of her blindness. "She remembers the rooms and the position of the furniture and hardly ever bumps into anything. And there is no hope!"[28] He seemed to feel that no one would guess from her

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[27] Ibid., 86-88.
[28] Ibid., 290.

appearance or behavior that she was blind.[29] During his New Orleans visit he painted pictures of invalids, some of which may be Estelle.[30]

A small painting, *Woman with Bandage,* (figure 13) shows the half-length profile of a seated woman with a bandage over her left eye. Painted between 1872 and 1873, the sitter is unidentified and the setting-whether this was painted in New Orleans or Paris or elsewhere in France-is not known. Scholars speculate that the sitter could be Estelle Musson Degas, or a Parisian house servant, or even a casualty from the Franco-Prussian War.[31] The woman is seated in a teal green chair, and she wears a white bonnet holding a white bandage stretched across her head and over an eye. Her arms are crossed; her face is flushed and her lips bear a hint of a smile. A dark ledge against the wall at her side holds a glass and a dainty pink teacup. The intimacy of the scene, and Degas's sympathetic portrayal of the woman, with a charming pink teacup resting near her nose, could be arguments that the woman portrayed is Estelle having her eyes treated. Either way, it shows Degas's interest in depicting a woman with ocular ailments at a time when he was experiencing anxiety about his own vision, and had just recently, or would soon, visit his New Orleans cousin who was courageously coping with blindness.

While visiting his extended maternal family in New Orleans, Degas's visual disabilities, especially apparent in his reaction to the bright southern sun, greatly affected his capacity to create art. He adjusted by painting family portraits and other scenes indoors, and frequently his subjects showed his interest in their visual ailments. Portraits of his cousin Estelle show compensation for her blindness in her enhanced inward

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[29] Ibid., 207.
[30] Ibid., 212.
[31] Marni Reva Kessler, "Ocular Anxiety and the Pink Tea Cup: Edgar Degas's Woman with a Bandage," *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide a Journal of Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture* 5 (Autumn 2006): 1.

perception, suggested by the expressive touch of her hands. Estelle's introspection is especially apparent in the portrait of her seated in an empty room. Her hands, folded demurely in her lap, take on new significance if the viewer realizes she is pregnant and that her hands protectively surround the unborn baby. In contrast, pregnancy is evident in Degas's late sculpture *Pregnant Woman*, whose swollen belly is the focus of vision, touch and perception. Other sculpture like *The Tub* and *Femme Surprise*, from the later part of Degas's career, also show his interest in vision and touch. These figures are bathers, and they relate to series of bathers by Degas in other media, like pastel. The bathers discussed in this paper show suggestions of inward reflection through the portrayal of the figure's vision and touch.

The Tub

A late sculpture by Degas that links vision and touch is *The Tub* (figure 14, 15, 16) which shows a female figure lying on her back in a tub, holding her left foot. Unlike the intense focus of the pregnant figure, this bathing figure seems lighthearted, daydreaming, probably not focused on the object of her gaze: her foot. From the late 1870s and throughout his career, Degas explored the motif of female bathers. In many of these images, vision and touch are explored, often with an emphasis on inner reflection. Made ca. 1889 *The Tub* is formed of pigmented beeswax, plastiline, plaster, lead, wood, cloth, cork and wire on a wooden base (figure 17); the figure lies in a tub with lead sides (figure 18) and the water is a thin coat of plaster over the wax. The innovative base is formed of cloth soaked in plaster;[32] with the figure lying horizontally in the tub, (figure 19) the base serves as a floor for the tub, complementing the scene. Unlike the feature-

[32] Suzanne Glover Lindsay, Daphne S. Barbour and Shelley G. Sturman, *Edgar Degas Sculpture* (Washington, D. C.: National Gallery of Art, 2010), 253-254.

less face of the sculpted pregnant figure, this figure shows defined facial features and hair, which hangs over the back of the tub; feet and hands are also well-defined. Back of head and right foot anchored on either side of the round tub, her left ankle crosses over her right thigh as her right hand reaches forward to hold the area of her foot near the left big toe. Her left arm stretches across to the left side of the tub; her left hand holds a sponge and rests on the edge of the tub.

Her head turns subtly towards her foot in this oddly graceful pose (figure 20). So her vision is focused on her hand holding her foot, but deep contemplation of either foot or hand is probably not occurring. Instead, her gaze is light and transitional rather than profound; she may even be smiling. Similarly the pose is like a light, transitional step in a dance. A viewer can imagine that just previous to this position, the figure was looking at and washing a different area of her body, and in a second she will shift her focus, body and hands to washing another part of her body.

The figure is presented on her back, her body vulnerable and open to view, especially her upper torso. Her lower torso is hidden under her almost interwoven legs and arms that cross above her pelvis. The water in the small tub does not cover her body. Shallow, portable tubs like these were found in French homes that had no plumbing, heat or even space for a stationary tub. Bathers would be more likely to sit up or stand; the water would be poured over them, and they would get cold quickly. So bathing would be quick, not a leisurely experience as shown here. Common opinion was that extended bathing was indolent, led to daydreaming, and sensuality,[33] which was discouraged in moralistic late nineteenth century France. Interestingly Degas chose to show this sculpted bather in a tub that was normally not used for bathing as depicted, and in a playful and

[33] Ibid., 254-256.

sensual pose. She is caught in a moment of daydreaming, a smile curving her lips. Vision and touch combine to depict her whimsical gesture. On her back, she is exposed to view which is not the case for Degas's pastel suite of bathers from 1886.

Degas's bathers

A few years before sculpting *The Tub*, Degas exhibited in the last Impressionist exhibition in 1886 a suite of pastels showing nude women bathing in private, interior scenes. (figures 21, 22 and 23) Unlike the open, lyrical sculpture *The Tub*, the suite of pastels mostly show women's backs as they bend and crouch, washing themselves. These pastels caused a stir among the critics and viewing public. While some critics saw beauty in the bathing figures, others saw "debased" women "...in the humiliating poses of her intimate activities," and who resembled monkeys or frogs.[34] Degas listed his pastels in the exhibition catalogue as "*Suite de nus de femmes se baignant, se lavant, se séchant, s'essuyant, se peignant ou se faisant peigner.*" meaning suite of nudes of women bathing themselves, washing themselves, drying themselves, wiping themselves down, combing their hair, or having their hair combed.[35] These reflexive verbs emphasize that the bathers are engaged in action upon themselves: they are touching and cleaning their own bodies. In this group of approximately six bathers, the figures are shown crouching or bending in a tub, occasionally with head below buttocks, stretching their arms, engaged in active ablutionary poses common to washing oneself.

The nude bathers are not classically beautiful like Ingres's soft and voluptuous *Valpinçon Bather* (figure 24) who, even though her back is turned, seems to invite the viewer to lie with her on the bed. And she is portrayed in classical anatomical sequence

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[34] Carol Armstrong, *Odd Man Out Readings of the Work and Reputation of Edgar Degas*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 181-183.
[35] Ibid., 159.

of head to torso to leg to foot, unlike Degas's bathers, which may partially explain their varied critical reception. Instead many of Degas's bathers are shown folded upon themselves, inverted, heads frequently at the level of buttocks or feet. In many cases, legs and front torso are lost within the folded body, only the back is fully developed, and the face is not fully portrayed. Also their skin does not conform to smooth, soft, classically beautiful skin. The purples and blues in the skin of Degas's bathers may suggest cold, goose-pimpled flesh, since they are bathing alone in small, portable tubs often without the ministrations of a maid to frequently pour warm water over them. From their crouching poses to their pimply skin, Degas's bathers do not conform to classical beauty, as some critics wrote during the exhibition.

Degas, a master of suggesting through gesture, facial expression and setting a sitter's state of mind, chose in his bathing scenes to not show facial expression. Instead the bathers' gestures are intent on washing, drying and rubbing themselves, frequently in an area of the body that they cannot see. Often the artist's viewpoint, which may have been partially driven by Degas' myopia, is above and near the bather, seemingly dominant and suggesting possession. But the bather seems peacefully intent in her ablutions, serenely unaware or uninterested in the viewer. Her back is usually the focus; suggestions of her thoughts are hidden; she is an enigma. Since washing removes dirt that coats the body, perhaps Degas's bathers are removing the grime of their lives, returning to a state of purity, like Adam and Eve's unashamed nakedness before they ate the apple from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Degas's bathers' self-washing poses imply self-reflection.

In one image that was displayed as part of the suite, a woman is shown crouching in a shallow tub (figure 25) similar to that depicted in the sculpture *The Tub,* but the figure in the pastel is portrayed very differently from that in the sculpture. The pastel figure is bent over, her face and most of her body hidden by her fully-developed back, as she washes the nape of her neck which she cannot see. Conversely the sculpted figure lies on her back, her frontal body open for viewing, as she gazes toward and plays with her toe in a lighthearted gesture. The pastel figure's pose is intense and awkward, her facial expression unknown, her touch and pose suggestive of self-reflection. In contrast, the sculpted figure seems to luxuriate delightedly in her bath, daydreaming as she plays with her foot, her body on display for everyone to see.

One of the most immediately striking aspects of the pastel is the viewpoint above the bather and slightly to the side, implying power over the bather whose thoughts are hidden. The figure supports herself with one hand flat on the bottom of the tub, the other holding a sponge to her neck; she looks toward the bottom of the tub. She cannot see where she is touching herself and her body seems intensely engaged, straining and balancing to support her solitary act of washing herself. Her strong supporting arm and bent leg are barriers to the viewer. Although nude, her body is mostly hidden from the viewer. Her washing action is blind and is supported and guided by sense of touch; her vision which seems to be toward her supporting hand may help maintain balance. She may feel cold and cramped and may move out of this position soon.

As a result of the high viewpoint, a ledge holding a brush, hairpiece and two pitchers is vertical in the image rather than horizontal, which would be common to a more conventional viewpoint. The brush handle, hanging over the edge of the shelf,

seems jarringly phallic. The contour outlining her body is strong and sure. showing rippling muscles in the washing arm as she reaches back. Color in the bather's body is varied and seems true to the bather's presumed sensations: blues and purples may be hinting that she is cold. Degas's facture is also apparent in the pastel strokes that form her back, the tub, ledge, rug and the squiggly lines making up the hairpiece and parts of the rug and upholstery.

The viewer is presented with the bather's back and a curved body that does not welcome the audience into the bather's world. She seems only intent on washing her neck. Folded in upon herself, she keeps her thoughts to herself, while the artist's viewpoint dominates. Yet he cannot possess her since she is not engaged with him. Unseeing and unaware of his presence, she washes herself. Degas's touch is evident in the strokes of pastel that form her body. He cannot control the figure's actions, but his mark, his touch, is evident, creating the image. Unlike the sculpture of the Tub, which shows a figure lying vulnerably on her back in a luxurious bath, where the viewer is invited to view from all sides, here the figure's soft, intimate parts are closed from view.

In a later pastel of a bather from 1895 (figure 26), Degas's facture is more apparent, with strokes of pastel moving through the contours of the figure, abstracting the shapes. Vibrant blues, yellows and reds swirl around the woman. Degas may have used tools like the blunt end of a paint brush to scrape into the layers of pastel in this image. Evidence of Degas's facture in the strokes of pastel forming the image is similar to his fingerprints that remain in wax sculpture like *Pregnant Woman*. Like the 1886 pastel, the figure is folded over, her torso lying against her thighs, gaze focused on her hands, as she wipes her feet. The viewpoint is slightly above the bather: the back of her head is in the

foreground, focusing on her unknown thoughts. Like the earlier pastel, this is a private, intimate scene about the figure's self-touch and gaze toward herself: reflexive reflection.

Degas's pastels of bathers show women washing, bathing, drying, rubbing themselves. Their simple self-care of their physical bodies may be interpreted as self-reflection, their bodies folding upon themselves introspectively, cleaning the dirt and grime from their skin as they perhaps reach greater awareness of their real selves, hidden under layers of persona. Their touch is intent on their own bodies, they gaze away from the viewer: emphasis is on interiority. Degas's touch is apparent in his late sculpture and pastels and his focus seems to be on the figure's, and ultimately his own, introspection.

In Degas's sculpture of *Pregnant Woman* vision, touch and contemplation are all deeply focused on the stomach. In his sculpture *The Tub,* vision and touch are focused on the foot and hand, but probably the figure's contemplation is focused elsewhere: she may be day-dreaming. The figure's transitory focus gives the sculpture a light-hearted, delightful aspect. Whereas the pregnant figure seems solid and sturdy, the bathing figure seems vulnerable and fragile. A viewer walking around the sculpture may be able to imagine that the figure is actually moving in the tub.

Femme Surprise

Ready for confrontation, Degas's sculpted *Femme Surprise* wheels around sharply to visually identify a threat (figure 27). The nude female figure stands, feet facing forward and slightly apart, while the upper half of her body wheels around, her shoulders running parallel to her feet, and her face pointing parallel to her shoulders, resulting in her nose pointing in the opposite direction from her feet. Unlike *The Tub* and *Pregnant Woman*, here vision and touch occur in opposite directions. Vision is sharply outward, the

eyes and face seemingly prepared with the upper body to attack. Touch of the hands to the pelvis, in concert with the protective gesture of the legs, show a lower body prepared to protect vulnerable areas. There is no contemplation or daydreaming in this figure: she is identifying an unwelcome presence and seems prepared to protect herself. Touch is not the focus of vision but it is the result of vision: because of what is being seen, the purpose of touch is to instinctively protect, and therefore has an opposite purpose from vision, which is confrontational.

In about 1896, Degas made a drawing similar to *Femme Surprise* but did not draw the head; in fact, the drawing and the paper support ends at the figure's neck (figure 28). Probably in the drawing the facial expression was unimportant to Degas. While the drawing and sculpture were executed about the same time, they were not studies for the other. It is thought that the drawing was a study for a large pastel of women bathing that was never executed.[36] Bodily position and movement, with hands touching the pelvic area, seem to have interested Degas in this drawing. Degas is known to have copied the Old Masters and it may be that inspiration for both the drawing and the sculpture came from a painting *Susanna and the Elders* (figure 29) by Rembrandt van Rijn.

Degas is known to have said, "Two centuries ago I would have painted *Susannah at her Bath*, now I paint mere women in their tubs."[37] In the biblical story from the Book of Daniel of Susannah and the elders, Susannah is a beautiful, young, married girl who enjoys bathing alone in her garden. Two elders lust for her and secretly watch her bathe. One day they determine to force themselves upon her, but they tell her if she willingly

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[36] Jean Sutherland Boggs, Douglas W. Druick, Henri Loyrette, Michael Pantazzi and Gary Tinterow, *Degas*, (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1988), 558.

[37] Susan Rubin Suleiman, ed., *The Female Body in Western Culture*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 233.

submits they will not tell anyone. She screams, so the elders take her to trial and she is found guilty and sentenced to death. But Daniel exposes the elders as liars, so they are put to death instead.

Seemingly just startled by the elders, in Rembrandt's painting Susannah is shown in a side view, bent at the waist. Her left proper arm and shoulder curve away from the audience in a self-protective gesture. Her other hand holds a cloth hiding her pelvic area, and her knees and thighs are together as if protecting her vulnerable lower torso. Her head turns toward the viewer in surprise, as if looking toward the elders who startled her at a time when she thought she was alone.

Susanna's pose in the painting is similar to both the drawing and the sculpture: she is shown with her thighs and knees together, ankles apart, perhaps fearful and protecting vulnerable areas. But in the painting only one hand is on her pelvic area, which is different from both the sculpture and the drawing which show two hands protecting that area. The Rembrandt is similar to the sculpture in that the female figure's head is turned sharply. The figure's feelings of being startled and needing to protect herself, especially vulnerable areas, are communicated in both Rembrandt's painting *Susanna and the Elders* and Degas's *Femme Surprise*.

While Susannah's head, hands and arms move in Rembrandt's painting, vision motivates movement of the entire body in Degas's *Femme Surprise*. The audience knows that previous to this position the figure was facing forward. Something unknown and unwelcome caused the figure to instantaneously rotate her upper body drastically in order to face the startling presence. The audience also knows that in reality, a person in this pose would change it after a few seconds, because the position is awkward and cannot be

maintained for long. So, like *The Tub*, the position is transitory, and a viewer walking around the sculpture may imagine the figure moving.

Femme Surprise was sculpted in the late 1880s and early 1890s of pigmented beeswax with resin, and cork, which bulked up the thighs and abdomen. This was built over a commercially purchased armature, one of the few that Degas used. In a photograph from an inventory made in 1917-1918 (figure 30) after Degas' death, an armature protrudes from the figure's head. Later that armature was removed and a supportive one was added to her hip (figure 31). In order for this armature to be attached, the figure may have been split open at the side.[38] So, like *Pregnant Woman*, parts of the sculpture may have been re-made posthumously to accommodate the new armature.

Vision and touch

Like Degas' idiosyncratic armature and materials that formed *Femme Surprise*, *The Tub*, and *Pregnant Woman*, their gestures and poses may not have conformed to nineteenth century French ideas of proper feminine behavior. Social convention was that pregnant women should not show their condition, so it may have been unusual for a male artist to sculpt a nude pregnant woman. Degas had previously painted a portrait of his pregnant cousin and sister-in-law, Estelle Musson Degas, but her pregnant condition was well-concealed.[39] *The Tub* shows a woman luxuriating and daydreaming in a tub at a time when bathing nude was thought to induce indolence which was frowned upon. Degas's pastels of bathers were not shown in conventionally beautiful poses, and he was eventually accused of misogyny. *Femme Surprise* shows a woman in a confrontational

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[38] Suzanne Glover Lindsay, Daphne S. Barbour and Shelley G. Sturman, *Edgar Degas Sculpture* (Washington, D. C.: National Gallery of Art, 2010), 272-274.

[39] Gail Feigenbaum, *Degas and New Orleans A French Impressionist in America* (New Orleans: New Orleans Museum of Art, 1999), 208.

pose: the unwelcome visitor is about to be sharply questioned or maybe verbally attacked. The gesture depicted certainly does not fall into the range of gentle or passive feminine behavior which may have been more culturally acceptable in France in the nineteenth century.

Unusual expressions of vision, touch, and movement or growth can be found in late sculptures by Degas like *Pregnant Woman. Femme Surprise* and *The Tub,* and in pastels of bathers from the mid-1880s to the mid-1890s. In *Femme Surprise* Degas shows a nude figure hastily turning, while instinctively and protectively covering her pelvic area, as if startled. This figure may have been inspired by Rembrandt's painting *Susanna and the Elders.* She looks sharply toward an unseen visitor or disturbance, as if ready for confrontation.

However, in *The Tub,* Degas shows a peaceful, contemplative scene of a woman lying in a tub, leisurely washing her foot. This sculpture is particularly interesting because the format is presented horizontally, the figure lying on her back, vulnerable and partially submerged in a wide, circular tub having low sides. The openness to audience viewing of the figure's body in this sculpture is different from the introverted bathers in pastel from this period who seem folded in upon themselves. Their blind touch reinforces the interiority of their pose, and emphasis on reflection. Their faces cannot be seen and they present their backs to the viewer, as if asking to be left alone. Degas provides no suggestions of their thoughts. His late sculptures, Femme Surprise, The Tub, and Pregnant Woman, however, are more open and expressive. In each sculpture bodily gesture and facial expression seem mutually supportive and focused. While *Femme Surprise* shows emotion projected outwards, and touch, and *The Tub* portrays

contemplation and touch, neither show the complexity and levels of outward and inward vision and complementarily inquisitive touch displayed in *Pregnant Woman.* She gazes at her belly as if wondering about the growing baby, already loving it, a timeless mother.

Like the transitory nature of the poses discussed in these three sculptures, the medium used for them all, wax, is a transitory medium, as compared to the fixedness of bronze, fired ceramics, and plaster. During the casting of bronze, wax is often used in an intermediate stage. Degas is described as keeping a container of constantly malleable wax and plastiline mixed together with which he would make new and re-work old sculptures. Of the hundreds of sculptures Degas made, he only exhibited one. The three discussed in this paper were not exhibited during his lifetime. The rough finish of these late works may show that he did not plan to exhibit them and that the essential shapes and gestures were more important to him than a smooth finish. He seemed to be sculpting quickly and economically as he searched for the gesture he wished to express, and nothing pleased him more than to reduce to a ball of wax a sculpture that was not working.

While Degas did have three sculptures cast in plaster, probably about 1900: *Dancer Looking at the Sole of her Right Foot, Spanish Dance* and *Woman Rubbing Her Back with a Sponge, Torso*, and displayed them in a large cabinet in his studio, he reportedly did not wish for his sculpture to be cast in bronze, which was a material for eternity, he said, and was too much of a responsibility for an artist to leave behind. Albino Palazzolo, master founder from Italy, remembers the aged Degas visiting his foundry to watch his technique as he cast Degas' sculptures in plaster.[40]

History of Degas's sculpture after his death

[40] Charles W. Millard, *The Sculpture of Edgar Degas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 29-30.

The history of the wax statuettes after Degas' death is intricately interwoven with bronzes that were cast posthumously. Degas' heirs almost immediately decided to have his work cast in bronze, to the dismay of his friends who thought he wanted some of the smaller sculpture destroyed after his death. A photographer, Gauthier, documented for an inventory the artwork in Degas' studio in 1917-1918. These photographs are important records of the original appearance of the sculpture. The waxes were then crated and moved for protection from German bombs during late World War I to the cellar of founder A. A. Hébrard who was chosen by the heirs to be in charge of the casting project; Palazzolo was to cast the waxes in bronze. As soon as hostilities ended from World War I, Hébrard built a special studio for the casting,[41] and the work began around 1919.

First, Palozzolo had to make minor repairs to the sculpture from damage resulting from Degas experimental materials. Using a variation of the *cire perdu* process, he first covered the waxes with earth, then plaster, and then removed the earth, and replaced it with gelatin. He removed the original wax figure and poured wax into the gelatin mold, thereby making a duplicate wax figure. This duplicate figure was cast according to the ordinary lost wax process, and the original wax sculpture was preserved. The bronzes cast by Palozzolo are considered completely true to the originals. According to critic Thiébault-Sisson, the bronzes came out of the casting identical to the wax sculptures realized by Degas, as found in his studio. By 1932 the casting was finished and complete sets of bronzes were acquired by art museums around the world. [42]

The subsequent history of the original waxes, though, is mysterious and seems to still have gaps. In 1944 art historian John Rewald wrote that the original waxes had been

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[41] Suzanne Glover Lindsay, Daphne S. Barbour and Shelley G. Sturman, *Edgar Degas Sculpture* (Washington, D. C.: National Gallery of Art, 2010), 15-16.
[42] Charles W. Millard, *The Sculpture of Edgar Degas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 31-35.

lost during casting. However, in 1955 they were "found" in Paris by Palozzolo and sold to Paul Mellon through Knoedler and Co., New York. It turned out that they had been stored in crates in Hébrard's cellar for twenty years between their casting in the 1920s and sale in 1955.

While many were certainly delighted and surprised by the 'discovery' of the waxes, apparently the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D. C. had known about their existence and had been offered them by an unknown donor in 1953. The donation did not occur, and the potential donor is still unknown. Another mystery is that of Degas' sculpture, four are now known only in bronze. In 1955 Rewald claimed that these four original waxes disappeared after being hidden in Hébrard's cellar during World War II and the Nazi occupation. Later he said that they had been destroyed during bronze casting. Their fate is still unknown.[43]

The bronzes cast by Palozzolo were meticulously crafted; every mark by Degas on the wax originals was painstakingly reproduced, the wax carefully preserved. But ultimately Degas seemed not to have wanted his sculpture cast in bronze for posterity. His waxes were studio experiments. The tactile immediacy and vulnerable malleability of the humble waxes is lost in unyielding, permanent, conventional bronze. The waxes are fragile, some are oozing, and they will not survive forever like the bronzes will. Because of their intimate contact with Degas, their studio detritus, and their finite life span, I chose in this paper to show and discuss the original waxes.

Conclusion

[43] Suzanne Glover Lindsay, Daphne S. Barbour and Shelley G. Sturman, *Edgar Degas Sculpture* (Washington, D. C.: National Gallery of Art, 2010), 15-16.

For Degas sculpture was a means in itself. It was not a preliminary exercise to work out a dancer's pose, as a study for a painting, for example. Charles Millard, who wrote about Degas' sculpture, argues that Degas' drawing and painting was fundamentally sculptural, and that Degas had been sculpting all his life. Degas thought of sculpture as the best way to express "profound suffering." [44] He may have felt regret for not having had a family. During his visit to New Orleans he wrote in a letter to Tissot, "...it is really a good thing to be married, to have good children, to be free of the need of being gallant. Ye gods, it is really time one thought about it." [45] He was certainly fascinated by women since they were constantly portrayed in his art, although unconventionally.

Many of the women he depicted are shown working, like laundresses, prostitutes, ballerinas. While his unconventionally posed bathers are not being paid to work, they are caring for themselves as they clean their bodies reflectively. *Pregnant Woman* is also very introspective, and even though she is not working at a task, her body is working at nourishing and growing a child. She is among the simplest nude female figures created by Degas. Her stance is straightforward and static. The viewer can only imagine the changes occurring in the figure's belly. While Huysmans may suggest Degas is an idol-toppler with his unconventional depictions of female nudes, in contrast, *Pregnant Woman*, with her simple, straightforward stance and focus on her belly, seems an idol of fertility. Perhaps the elderly Degas was fascinated by the capacity of the female body to nourish and grow new life, and was searching for something as he formed her.

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[44] Charles W. Millard, *The Sculpture of Edgar Degas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 87-90.
[45] Gail Feigenbaum, *Degas and New Orleans A French Impressionist in America* (New Orleans: New Orleans Museum of Art, 1999), 292.

At the end of his life Degas has been described as a cantankerous elderly man who increasingly isolated himself. He became involved in the Dreyfus affair and lost some old friends.[46] He was reportedly afraid of death. In the last years of his life he walked constantly through the streets of Paris (figure 32) as if he rationalized that one cannot die while walking.[47]

Perhaps *Pregnant Woman* is Degas' attempt to explore issues of birth and creation as an antidote to death, as an exploration of immortality. This sculpture, like most of his sculpture, was not exhibited during his lifetime; he probably considered his sculpture to be studio experiments. One can imagine Degas alone in his studio, searching for the form with his hands as he molds the wax and non-drying clay mixture. His eyesight is worsening with age; he may believe that he is going blind, either way his vision is not good, and he is working with his hands. His experience is tactile, his body intimately involved in what he is creating, as if by making this figure he would be a little closer to understanding the mystery of human creation.

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[46] Martin Schwander, *Edgar Degas The Late Works* (Ostfildern, Hatje Cantz, 2012), 14.
[47] Charles W. Millard, *The Sculpture of Edgar Degas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 86.

Figure 1

Odalisque with slave; oil on canvas; 1842; J. A. D. Ingres; Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts

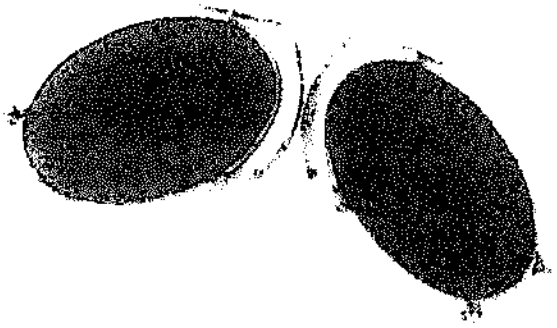
Figure 3

***The Apotheosis of Homer*; oil on canvas; 1827; by Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres; Musée du Louvre, Paris**

Figure 2

***Apothéose de Degas, parodie de "L'Apothéose d'Homère" par Ingres*; gelatin silver print; 1885; by Walter Barnes; Musée d'Orsay, Paris**

9. A pair of Degas's spectacles. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



10. A pair of Degas's *pince-nez* with tinted glass (Musée d'Orsay, Paris).

Figure 4

Degas's tinted glasses; Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Figure 5

***Pregnant Woman*; pigmented beeswax, plastiline, metal armature, cork, on wooden base; between 1896 and 1911; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.**
16 3/16" (h) x 5 3/8" x 6 7/8"

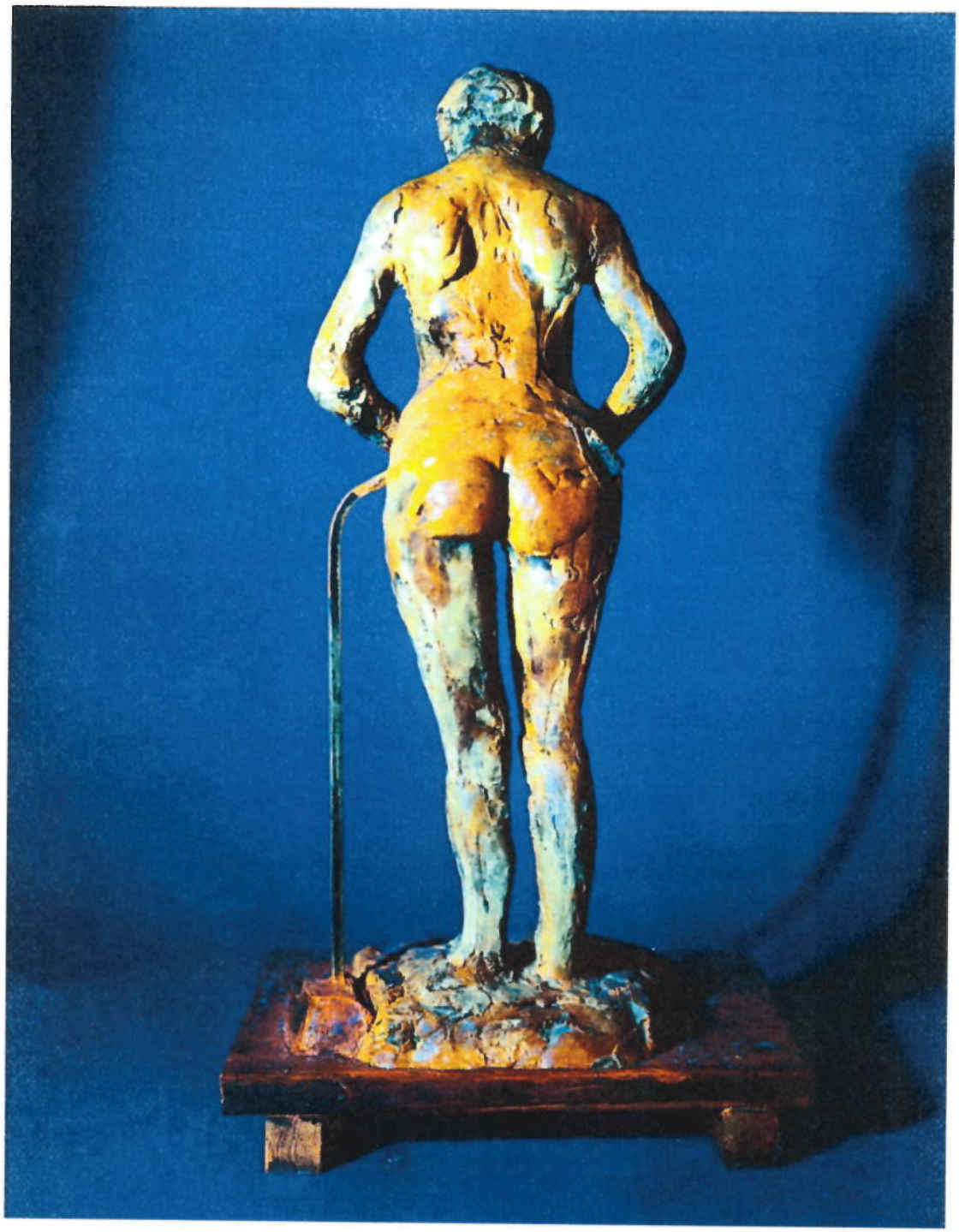


Figure 6

***Pregnant Woman*; back view**

Figure 7

***Pregnant Woman*, side view**

Figure 8

***Pregnant Woman*; photograph by Gauthier for the 1917-1918 Durand Ruel inventory**

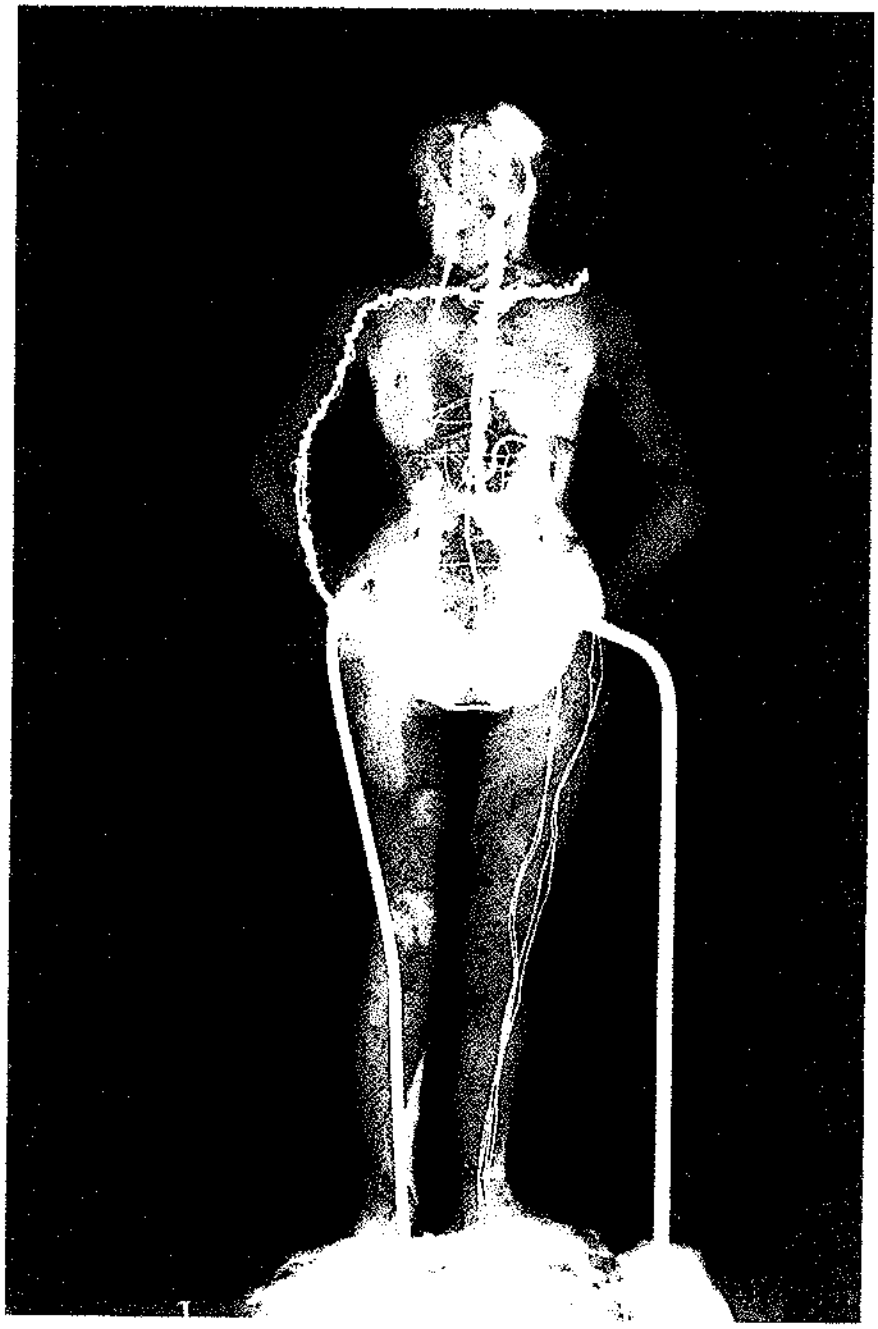


Figure 9

Radiograph of Degas's *Pregnant Woman*

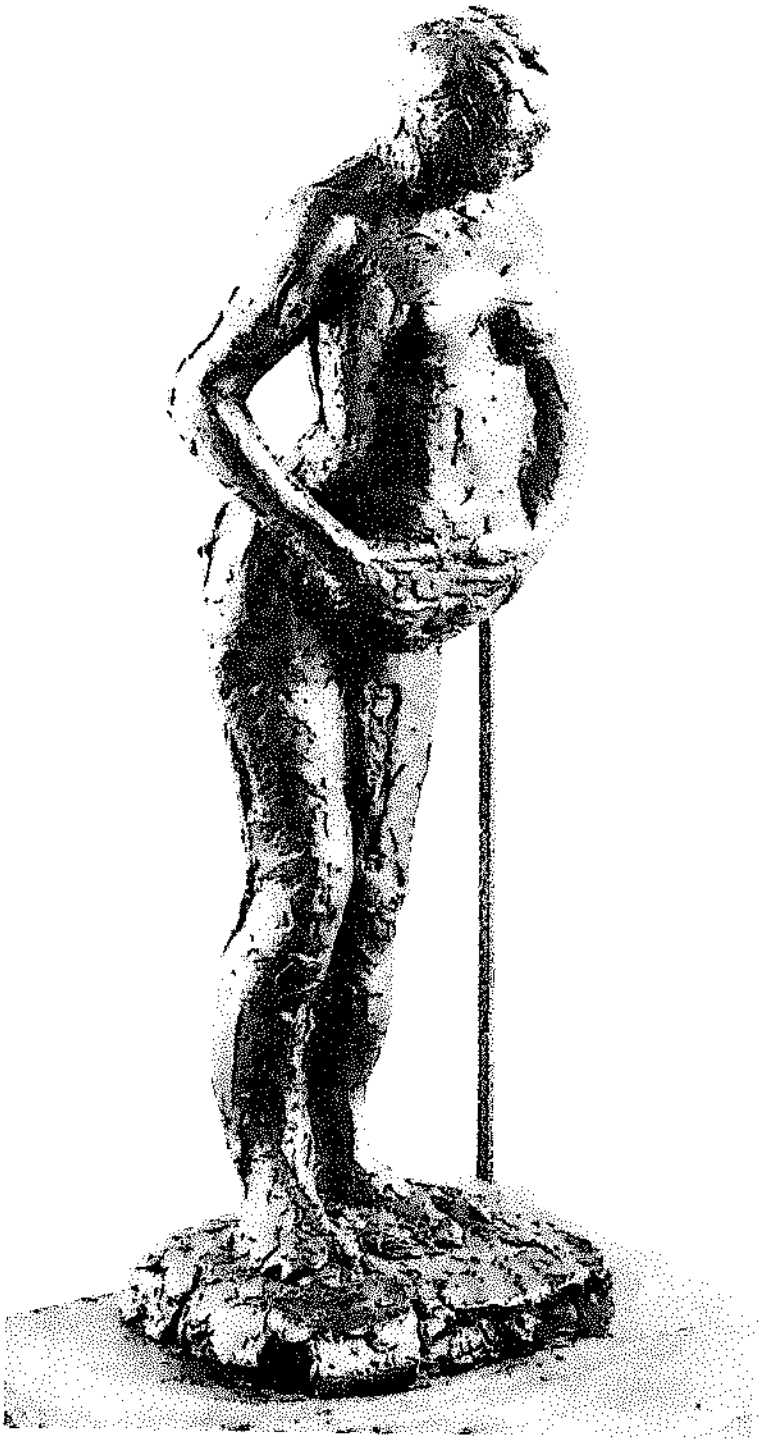


Figure 10

Pregnant Woman

Figure 11

***Madame René Degas*; oil on canvas; 1872-1873; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.**
28 ¾" x 36 ¼"

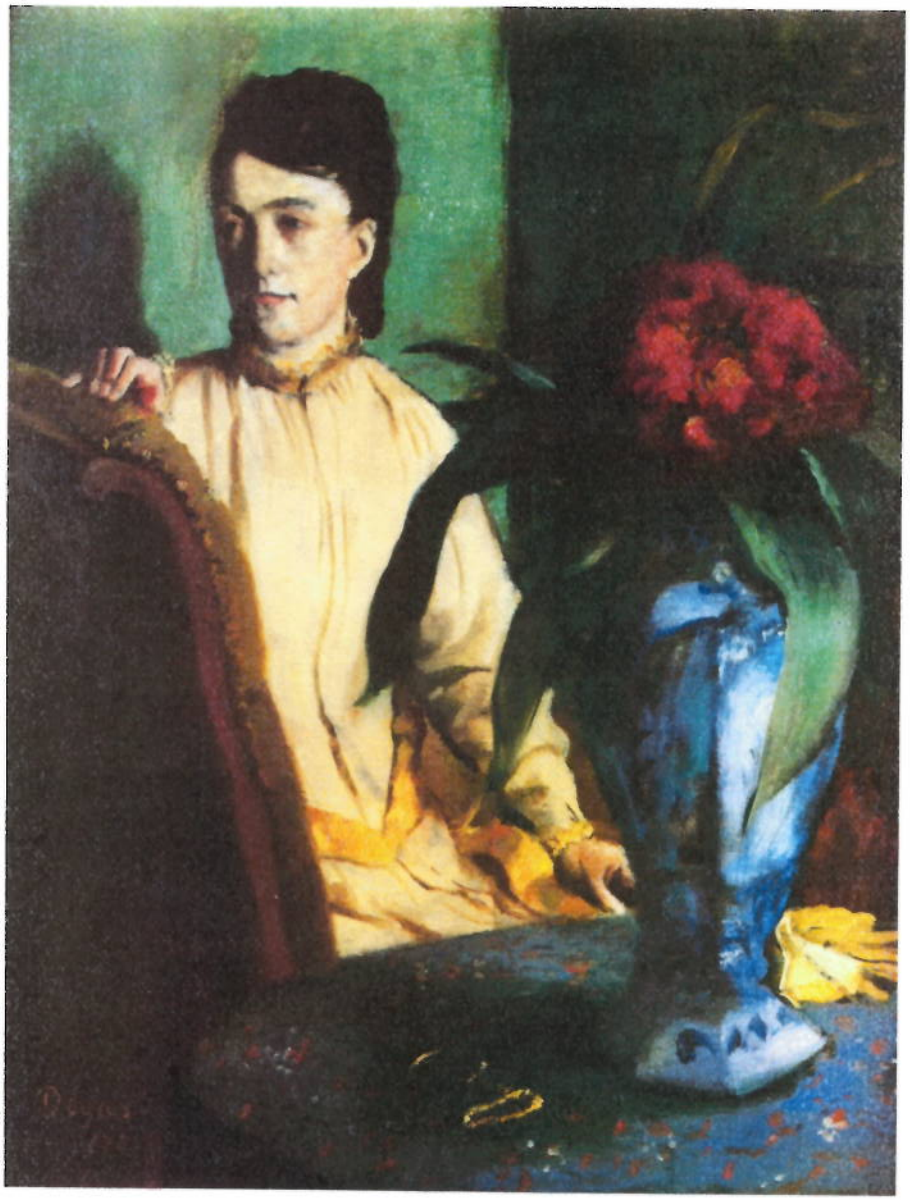


Figure 12

***Woman with a Vase of Flowers*; 1872-1873; oil on canvas; Musée d'Orsay, Paris**
25 5/8" x 13 3/8"

Figure 13

***Woman with a Bandage*; oil on canvas; 1872-1873; The Detroit Institute of Art, Detroit**
12 3/8" x 9 ½"

Figure 14

***The Tub*; pigmented beeswax, plastiline, plaster, lead, wood, cloth, cork, wire, on wooden base; c. 1889; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.**
8 7/8" (h) x 16 5/8" x 18 9/16"

Figure 15

The Tub

Figure 16

The Tub

Figure 17

***The Tub*, underside, showing red wax and pieces of cork**

Figure 18

***The Tub*; radiograph**

Figure 19

***The Tub*; detail of leg**

Figure 20

The Tub; photograph by Gauthier for the 1917-1918 Durand Ruel inventory

FIG. 92 Degas,
Woman in the Tub (Woman Bathing in a Shallow Tub), 1885

FIG. 93 Degas,
The Toilette (A Woman Having Her Hair Combed)
1885

Figure 21

Two of six pastels exhibited in Impressionist exhibition of 1886
***(Woman Bathing in a Shallow Tub)*; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York**
***(Woman Having her Hair Combed)*; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York**

FIG. 90 Degas.
Woman in an Tub. 1885

FIG. 91 Degas.
Woman in the Tub. 1884

Figure 22

Two of six pastels exhibited in Impressionist exhibition of 1886
***Woman in the Tub*; Tate Gallery, London**
***Woman in Her Bath*; The Burrell Collection, Glasgow**

FIG. 88 Degas, *The Baker's Wife (The Morning Bath)*, 1886

FIG. 89 Degas, *The Tub*, 1886

Figure 23

Two of six pastels exhibited in Impressionist exhibition of 1886
***The Baker's Wife*; on long-term loan to the Princeton University Art Museum**
***The Tub*; Musée d'Orsay, Paris**

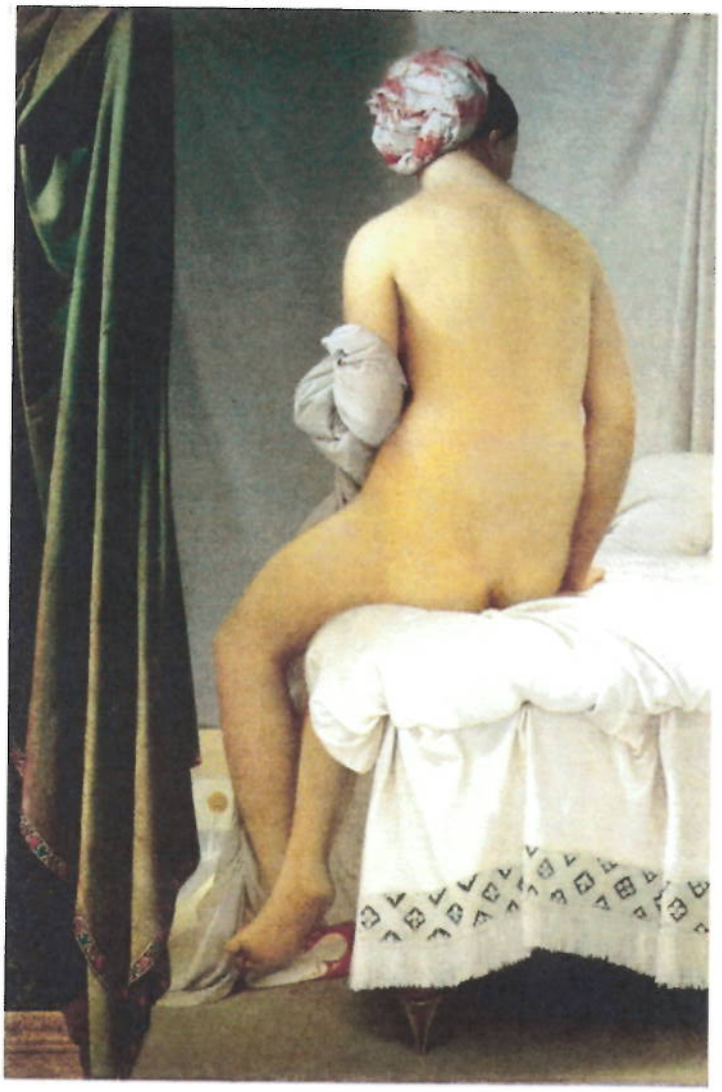


Figure 24

***The Bather*, called the *Valpinçon Bather*; oil on canvas; 1808; by Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres; Musée du Louvre, Paris**

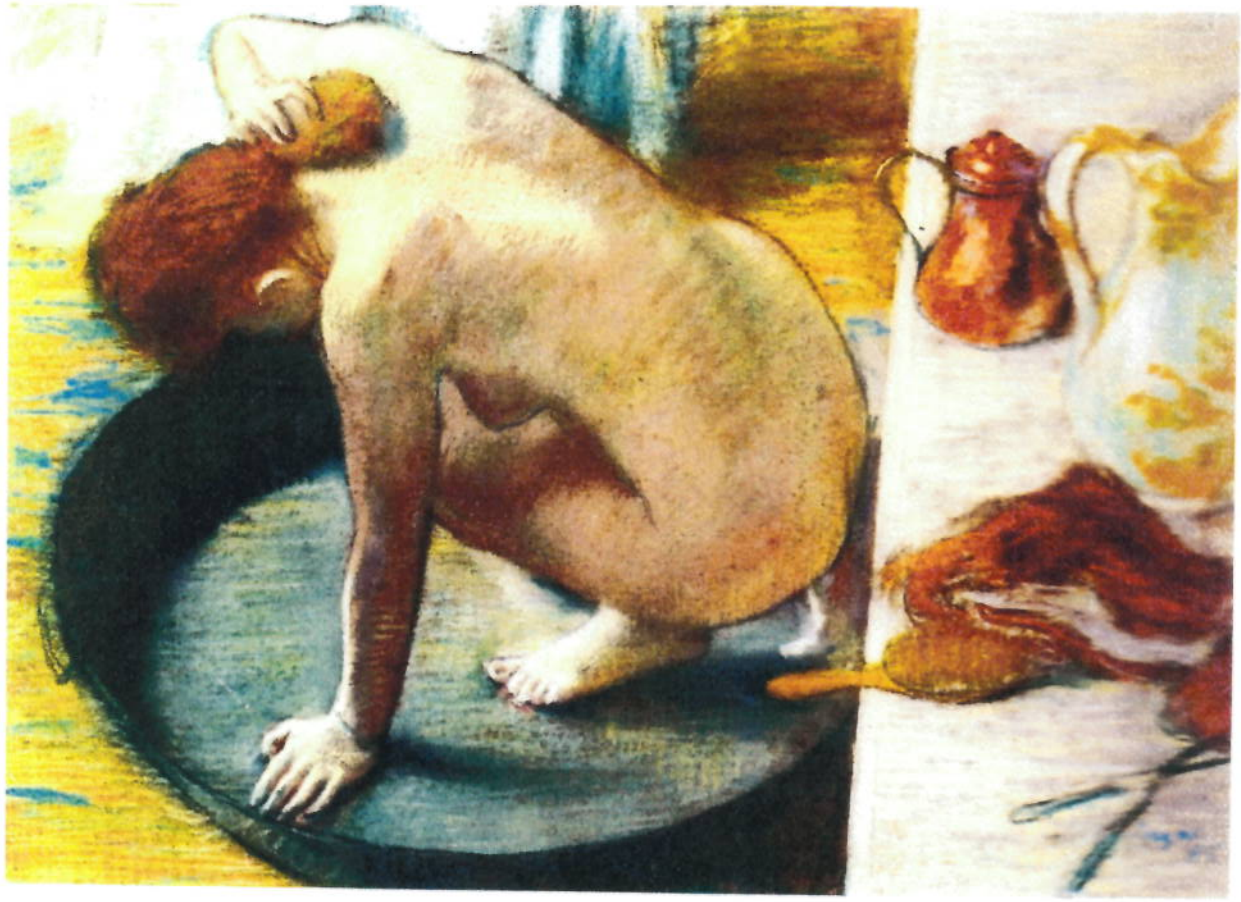


Figure 25

***Woman Bathing in a Shallow Tub*; pastel on heavy wove paper; 1886; Musée d'Orsay, Paris**
23 5/8" x 32 7/8"

Figure 26

***Nude Woman Drying Her Feet*; pastel; ca. 1895; Collection of Muriel and Philip Berman, Allentown, Pennsylvania**
18 1/8" x 23 ¼"

Figure 27

***Femme Surprise*; pigmented beeswax, metal armature, cork on wooden base; late 1880s to early 1890s; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.**
16 ¼" (h) x 9 ½" x 6 3/16"

Figure 28

***Bather*; charcoal and pastel on robin's-egg blue wove paper; ca. 1896; The Art Museum, Princeton University**
18 ½" x 12 5/8"

19
Rembrandt, Susanna und die beiden Alten, *1636, Mauritshuis, Den Haag.*

Figure 29

***Susanna and the Elders*; oil on panel; 1647; by Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn; Mauritshuis, The Hague**

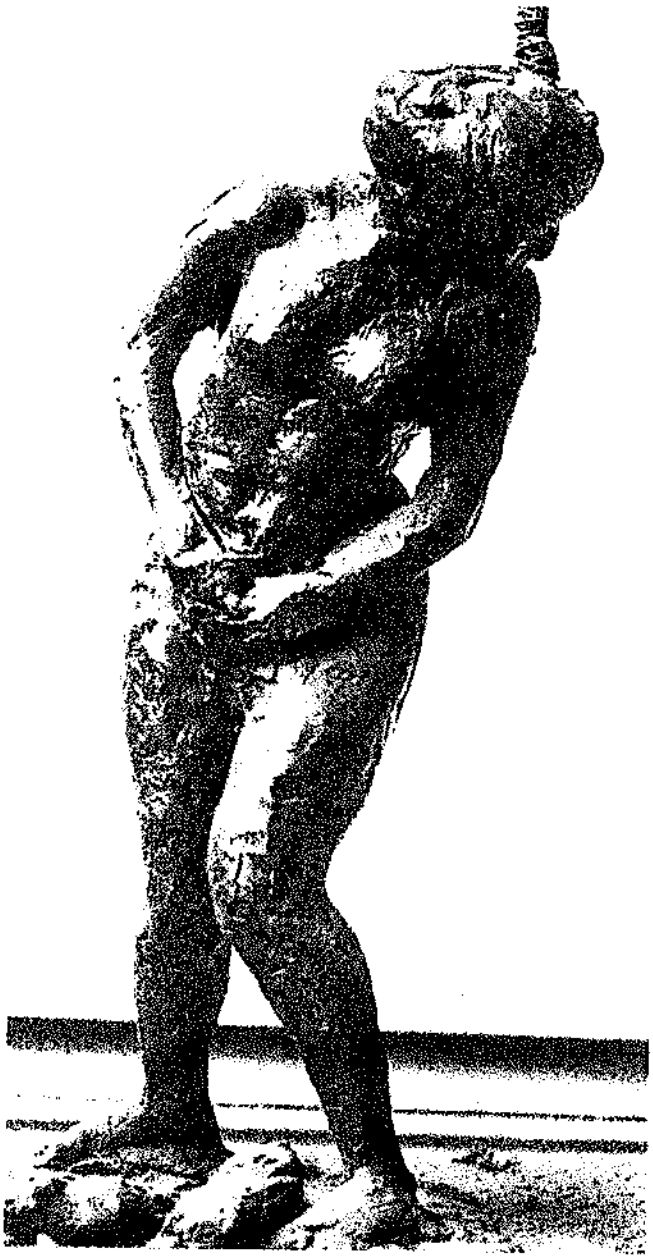


Figure 30

Femme Surprise; photograph by Gauthier for the 1917-1918 Durand Ruel inventory

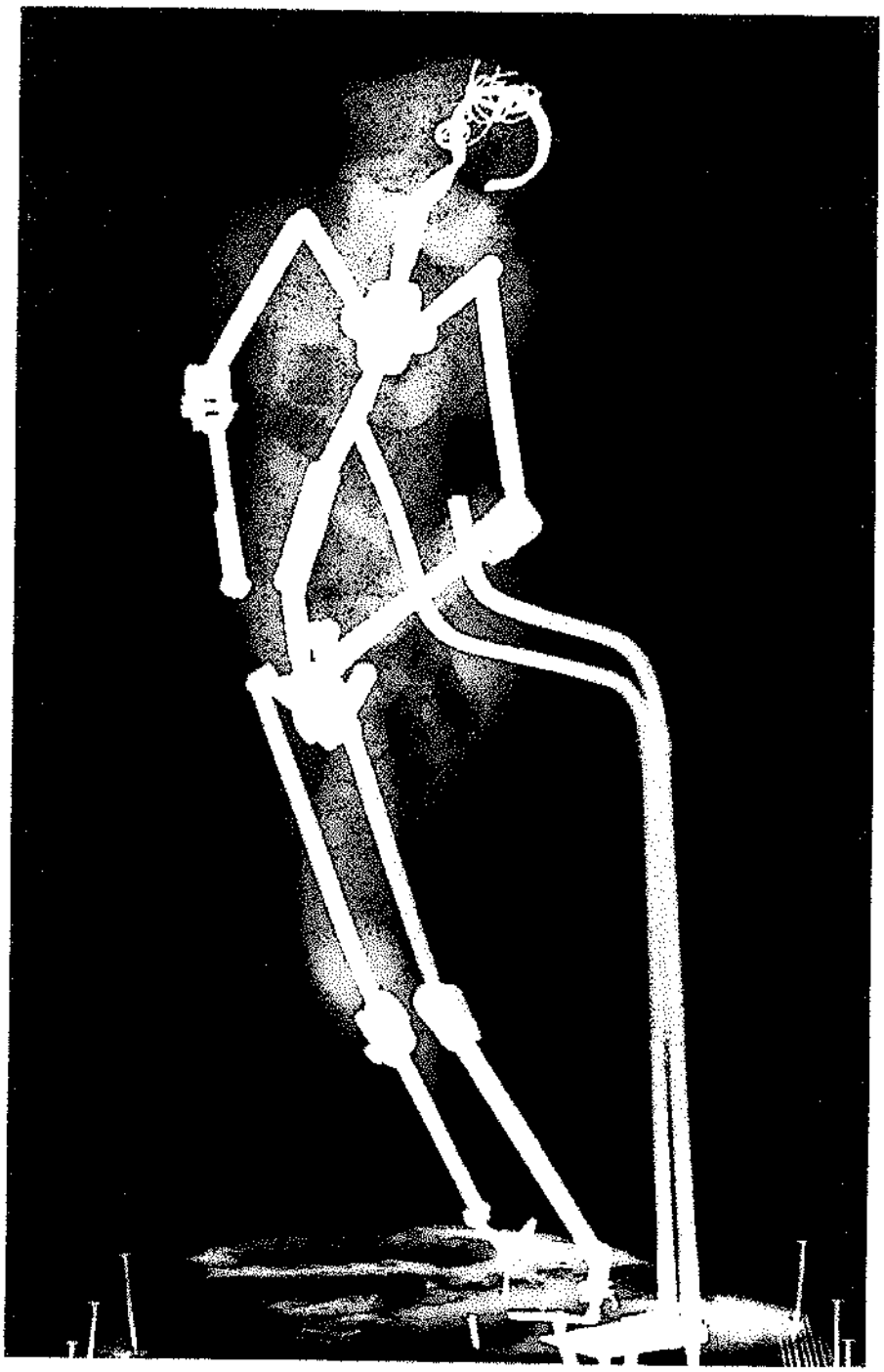


Figure 31

Femme Surprise; **radiograph**

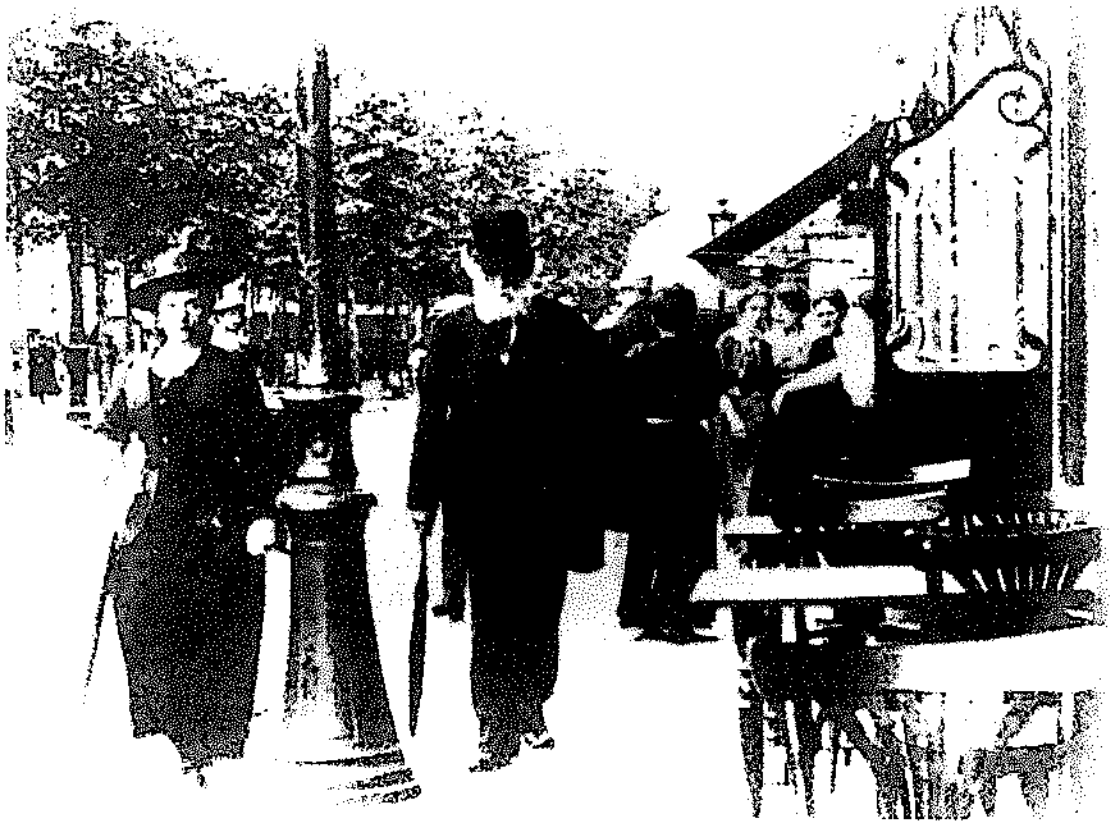


Figure 32

Degas in the Streets of Paris, 1912-1914; **photograph, modern print by Sasha Guitry; Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris**

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Biography

A native New Orleanian, Maclyn Thérèse Le Bourgeois Hickey was born on April 27, 1959 in Norfolk, Virginia where her father was a Lieutenant Junior Grade in the United States Navy for two years after which the family returned to New Orleans. She attended elementary, middle and high school at Louise S. McGehee School in New Orleans. After graduation she matriculated to Hollins College in Roanoke, Virginia, then the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, Virginia, and in 1981 received a B. A. in Art History from Newcomb College in New Orleans, Louisiana. She began working at The Historic New Orleans Collection in 1987 as an assistant in the Richard Koch Reading Room. She resigned in 1996 when her daughter was born, but returned to The Collection in 2000. While she worked full-time she also attended graduate school part-time from 2009-2015 at Tulane University earning a Masters of Liberal Arts in 2015. Mrs. Hickey lives in New Orleans, Louisiana with her husband and daughter, and works as Coordinator of Curatorial Conservation at The Historic New Orleans Collection.