

COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

Edgar Degas
(Paris 1834 – 1917)

Danseuse rajustant son collant

Stamp of the *vente* Degas (Lugt 658) in red at the lower right
Inscribed with the Durand-Ruel stock numbers *9b1164 / 2566* in blue chalk on the verso
Pastel and charcoal on paper
24.2 x 31.9 cm. (9 ½ x 12 ½ in.)

Provenance:

The Degas Atelier, Paris, with the atelier stamp (Lugt 657) on the verso;
Galleries George Petit, Paris, 3^{ème} vente Degas, 7-9th April 1919, lot 138/d;
Georges Durand-Ruel (purchased at the above the sale);
Private Collection, Paris (acquired from the family of the above on 11th April 1935);
Thence by descent in a private collection, France, until;
Sotheby's London, 25 June 2002, lot 114;
Where acquired by Jean Luc Baroni;
By whom sold, Private Collection, UK.

Literature:

L. Browse, *Degas Dancers*, London 1949, p. 381, under no. 130;
L. Schacherl, *Edgar Degas: Dancers and Nudes*, Munich and New York 1997, illustrated p. 26;
J. Gross (ed.), *Edgar Degas: Defining the Modernist Edge*, exhibition catalogue, New Haven
2003, p. 50, under no. 13, note 7 (entry by J. DeVonyer and S.D. Greenberg).



No artist is so closely associated with the ballet as the Impressionist painter Edgar Degas. In the early 1870s, Degas began to frequent the Paris Opéra, observing young ballerinas rehearsing in dance classes, waiting in the wings, or performing on stage. He produced a large, wide-ranging series of dynamic, multi-figural oil paintings, pastel drawings, and monotype prints. By the 1880s, Degas began to isolate small groups or individual dancers for closer observation, sketching these figure studies in paint, pencil, chalk and especially pastel.



Although there's a seemingly unprompted quality to his drawings and pastels, Degas often analysed each dancer's movement intently, as he began working increasingly with models in his studio (fig. 1), rather than working directly from live rehearsals. Degas was particularly interested in capturing the preparation and tension prior to performance, and the more relaxed moments that followed. The artist also favoured unusual angles in his composition, drawing the viewer in with innovative perspectives inspired by Japanese prints. Deviating from traditional Western perspectives, Degas' dramatic cropping produces a cinematic and sometimes confounding effect of transience.

Fig. 1, Edgar Degas, *Danser adjusting her shoulder strap*, c. 1895-96, Bibliothèque Nationale de France

All of this is exemplified by the present sheet, most likely dating to the 1880s.¹ A fine example of Degas' draughtsmanship and mastery of colour, the drawing has the immediacy of a snapshot and encapsulates the dancer's immersion in her preparation, seated and adjusting her tights. That said, Degas' search for such intimate moments completely belied the amount of effort that the artist devoted to his craft. 'I can assure you that no art was ever less spontaneous than mine', he himself protested. 'What I do is the result of reflection and study of the great masters'.²

A resting dancer in an identical pose is to be found in three paintings by Degas, where she serves as a counterpoint to the dancers who are in the midst of their exercises. These three canvases, each now in an American museum, are part of a distinctive group of dance scenes with prominently horizontal, frieze-like compositions that have generally been dated from around 1880 to the early 1890s. They are *La Leçon de Danse* of c.1880, in the Clark Art

¹ The drawing was one of four drawings of dancers of identical dimensions, sold as one lot in the third *Vente Degas* in April 1919.

² Degas quoted in R. Kendall (ed.), *Degas by Himself: Drawings, Prints, Paintings, Writings*, London 1987, p. 311.)

Institute; *Le Foyer de la Danse* in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, datable to c.1890-1892; and *La Salle de Danse* of c. 1891 (fig.2) in the Yale University Art Gallery. Of these, the present drawing is particularly close to the pose of the seated dancer in both the Yale and Washington paintings, with the bent left arm of the dancer in the drawing associating it most closely with the latter.



Fig. 2, Edgar Degas, *La Salle de Danse*, c.1891, oil on canvas, 37.9 x 87.9 cm, Yale University Art Gallery

Degas worked on this series of horizontal paintings for over more than a decade, and during this period seems to have made several drawings of individual dancers, which were used for different variants of the painted compositions. A number of drawings of a dancer in a similar pose are known, most of which are less highly- finished than the present sheet. Among these is a drawing in the Fitzwilliam Museum (fig. 3), which included a separate study of the dancer's left arm and another in the Nathan collection in Zurich, which shows a secondary study of both arms and in which the dancer's leg is slightly more elevated.³



Fig. 3, Edgar Degas, *Danseuse rajustant son collant*, 1880s, black chalk and graphite on paper, 24.2 x 31.3 cm, Fitzwilliam Museum

³ J.S Boggs, *Drawings by Degas*, exhibition catalogue, Saint Louis 1967, pp. 186-187, no. 122.

Also related to the present sheet is a drawing in a private collection in Munich, which incorporates a sketch of the dancer's left hand,⁴ while two further studies for the figure were on the London art market in the 1970s.⁵ A nude study for the pose was on the art market in London in 1988,⁶ and a preparatory study for the two seated dancers in the Washington and New Haven paintings also shows both figures in the nude.⁷ A sheet of studies of each of the dancer's legs alone was sold at the third *Vente Degas* in April 1919.⁸

⁴ Browse, *op. cit.*, p. 381, no. 130, pl. 130.

⁵ Sotheby's London, 29 November 1972, lot 38 and Sotheby's London, 30 March 1977, lot 185.

⁶ Sotheby's London, 29 June 1988, lot 303.

⁷ J. S. Boggs et al, *Degas*, exhibition catalogue, Paris, Ottawa and New York, 1988-89, p. 511, fig. 290.

⁸ Third *Vente Degas*, 7-8 April, lot 81A.