COURSE DESCRIPTION

The paintings, prints, and sculpture of Edgar Degas (1834-1917) have been used to characterize Naturalism, Impressionism, and Symbolism, both during the artist’s lifetime and later. The oddity and sophistication of his work and his penchant for privacy and prevarication nonetheless have made him especially difficult to define, despite his fame and the intense debate surrounding him even while alive. Both the man and his oeuvre became vital lightning rods for art-historical polemics—and remain fertile subjects for ongoing study. This seminar investigates Degas from various perspectives in order to confront a complex artist and period; to consider the methodologies applied to Degas studies; and to develop research skills by working with primary sources (for example, nineteenth-century exhibition catalogues and letters). Field trips to examine works in nearby museum collections, both during class and on weekends, are essential. Background in art history is strongly advised.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Group discussions of readings; informal workshop: comparing notes on small research projects assigned by the instructor; 3 field trips; 4 page comparative formal analysis essay of a Degas and another work based on direct examination; a 20 minute oral presentation and final paper, 10 pages with endnotes, based on the talk.

Readings

All required readings are in English and on Reserve in the Fine Arts library.
Papers
Formal-analysis essay due no later than Nov. 1; final research paper due no later than Dec. 20.

COURSE SCHEDULE

September

6 Introduction.


20 Overview of Degas’ life and career. Lecture and workshop.
Readings: Druick and Zegers; Kendall “Degas and the Market-Place. . . ;” Lewis “On Not Explaining Late Degas.”

Workshop: Looking Closely at a Hot Spot: Degas’s Public Career (Exhibitions and Sales). [investigation of exhibition catalogues; documented Chronology of Degas’ life, etc.]

27 Art and Biography I. How has Degas’ artistic “oddity” been explained so far?: from “Romantic” paradigm (misfit) to psycho-biography (obsessive, ambiguous sexuality). Lecture and discussion of readings.
Readings: Havemeyer; Lipton “Introduction;” Armstrong “Introduction.”

October

4 Art and Biography II. A Constant Theme: Degas’ Views of Women: Was he a Misogynist? Lecture and workshop.
Reading: Broude.

Workshop: Views of misogyny and sources on Degas’ attitude toward women (investigation of correspondence, memoirs, etc.)

11 The most hotly debated subject in Degas’ work: his Bathers. Lecture and discussion of readings
Readings: Callen; Kendall “Art of Renunciation;” Lesser.

18 Famous “pure” art suddenly scrutinized for subject matter: Horses and Dancers. Lecture and discussion of readings.
Readings: Jones; Lipton “The Racing Paintings” and “At the Ballet;” Muehlig; Reff “Degas and the Dance.”
25 The “oddity” of Degas’ pictures: How are they seen to work? Lecture and discussion of readings.

Readings: Sidlauskas; Armstrong “Reading the Work of Degas;” Parry.

WEEKEND FIELD TRIP: PMA. Specific picture looking based on lectures and readings.

November

1 Preliminary discussion of talk topics. FORMAL ANALYSIS ESSAY DUE

8 Degas and craft: Obsessive master, careless technician, or obsessive, incapable of closure? Lecture and discussion of readings.

Readings: Reff “The Artist as Technician;” Bomford et al; Barbour and Sturman 2002.

15 Degas’ wax statuette, Little Dancer: Aged Fourteen: His most scandalous and elusive work.

Readings: Druick; Shackelford; Callen.

WEEKEND FIELD TRIP: National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Close looking at his paintings and sculpture.

22 Thanksgiving Eve: Talks/Discussion or no class.

29 Student Talks/Discussion

December

6 Student Talks/Discussion: Last class Dinner at Dr. Lindsay’s

13-20 Semester end FINAL PAPERS DUE
READINGS AND WORKING BIBLIOGRAPHY


Kendall, Degas: Beyond Impressionism (Exh. cat., National Gallery et al) (Great Britain,1996)


