

SCHOLASTIC

ART

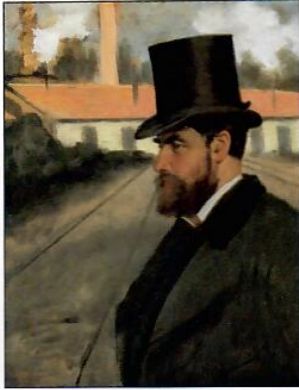
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Edgar Degas

Working with
Composition

 SCHOLASTIC



COVER: Edgar Degas (1834-1917). *Portrait of Henri Rouart*, 1875. Carnegie Museum of Art. Acquired through the generosity of the Sarah Mellon Scaife family.

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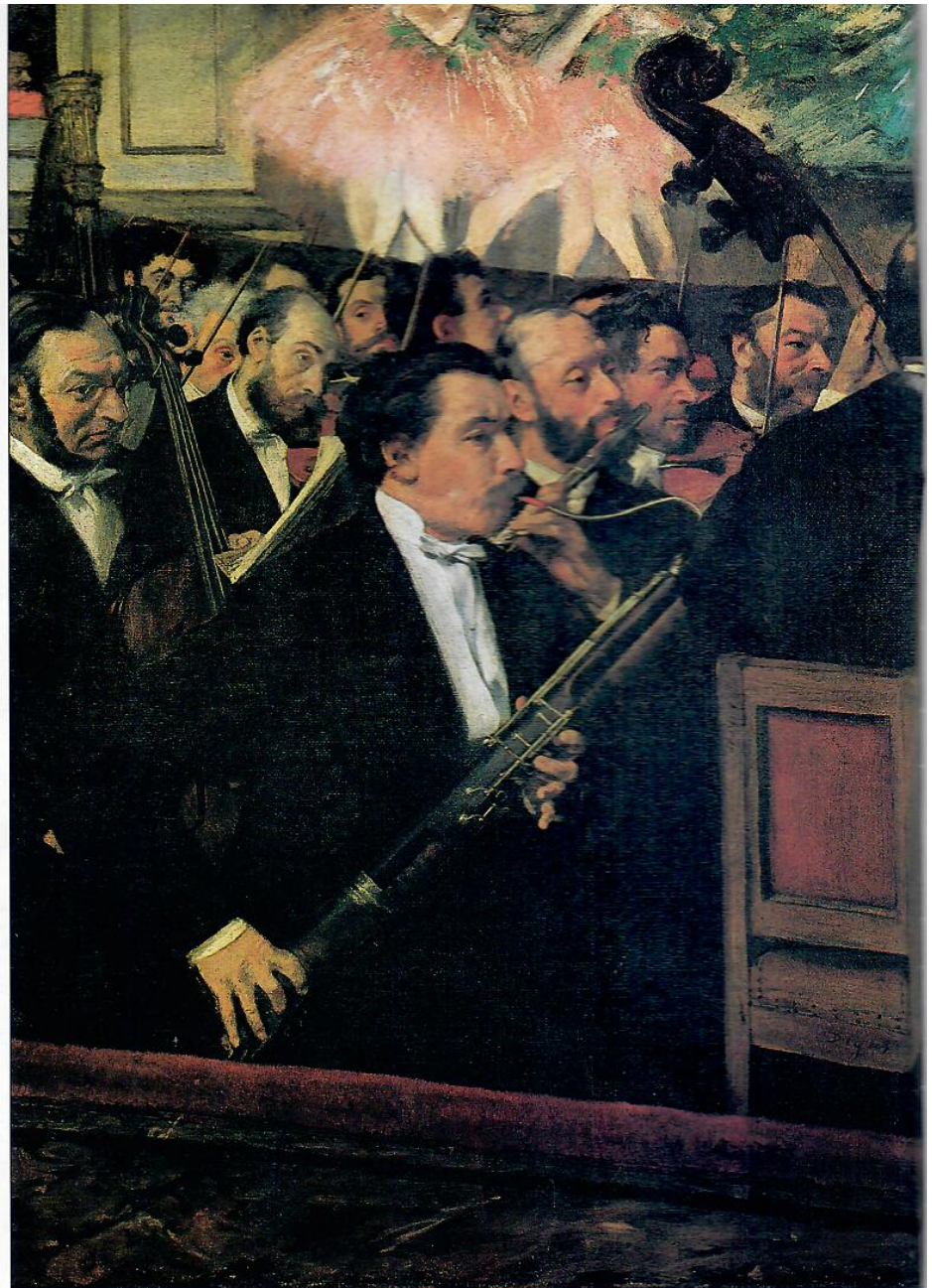
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Each of Edgar Degas' portraits
was composed to reveal
his subject's personality.

The Orchestra of the Opéra, 1868-69. Oil.
21" x 13 3/4". Louvre, Paris.

Edgar Degas transformed the ordinary

A Personal



At the end of the 19th century, a few artists were changing the way people looked at the world. The works shown here and on the cover by French artist Edgar Degas [Day-GA] don't look unusual today, but

when they were created over a century ago, they were considered very radical.

During the 1870s, Paris was the center of the art world. At that time art was controlled by a powerful organization, the French Academy, and artists had to follow strict rules in order to get their work shown. Paintings had to be huge, detailed, and carefully planned, and the results were usually artificial and lifeless. At the same time, a new invention—photography—was beginning to compete with this kind of painting.

Discouraged by what they saw in the Academy shows, a group of young artists — among them Claude Monet [Mo-NAY], Auguste Renoir [Ren-WAR], and Edgar Degas — decided to create images based on the world they saw around them. Monet and Renoir and other Impressionists took their canvases outdoors in order to paint nature directly. Degas chose to express the world he saw through his inventive and unusual compositions.

Born in Paris in 1834, Degas was the son of a wealthy banker. In high school, his grades were “satisfactory,” but he was often criticized by his teachers as “having his head in the clouds.” He entered law school to please his father, but spent much of his time in museums sketching. He quit the law to paint, and by the end of the 1860s had several works accepted by the Academy. But Degas didn't want to follow the Academy's rules, so in the 1870s and 1880s, he and a number of other Impressionist artists started to organize their own exhibitions.

Degas wanted to show life as we experience it, minute by minute. In “real life” people aren't always in the center of our vision; we see them from many angles. Our eye se-

lects certain objects and crops others out. Degas composed his portraits so as to tell us more about his subjects. The man on the cover in top hat and suit is shown in profile, hurrying to his factory. The singer (right) is in a corner of the frame, while her black-gloved arm in the center emphasizes the drawing's focal point, her large, open mouth. Degas has placed his portrait of a musician friend (left) in the middle of a row of faces. He is framed by the orchestra surrounding him and the line of headless dancers above him.

Toward the end of his life, Degas began losing his sight. His lines grew heavier, his colors brighter, and his compositions simpler and bolder. In 1907, Degas became totally blind and had to stop painting. By then his work was well known and his paintings were selling for large amounts. Degas, who could no longer see, said, “I feel like a horse who has just won the biggest race of the year and gets fed the same old bag of oats.” The artist died 10 years later, in 1917.



What is unusual about the composition of this portrait?

Singer With a Glove, 1878. Pastel. Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. Bequest—Collection of Maurice Wertheim, Class of 1906.

into extraordinary



Edgar Degas at 29.

works of art.

Point

of View



Painting Mot

"People call me the painter of dancers, but wish to capture movement itself." —EDGAR DEGAS



Edgar Degas was fascinated by the quality of *movement*, which he expressed through his dynamic **compositions**. Degas went to many theatrical performances, but his favorite was ballet. He painted this theme over and over, always searching for new ways to capture dancers' movements.

The artist went to dance classes and rehearsals, standing backstage where he was able to see the dancers up close. How many different activities are going on at the same time in the drawing on the left? This pastel, done in 1874, is called *Rehearsal on Stage*. But can you pick out the only two figures on the stage that are actually practicing dance steps? Most of the people are doing other things—yawning, stretching, scratching, tying shoes, or just sitting. As in “real life,” everyone is thinking of something different and paying little attention to other people.

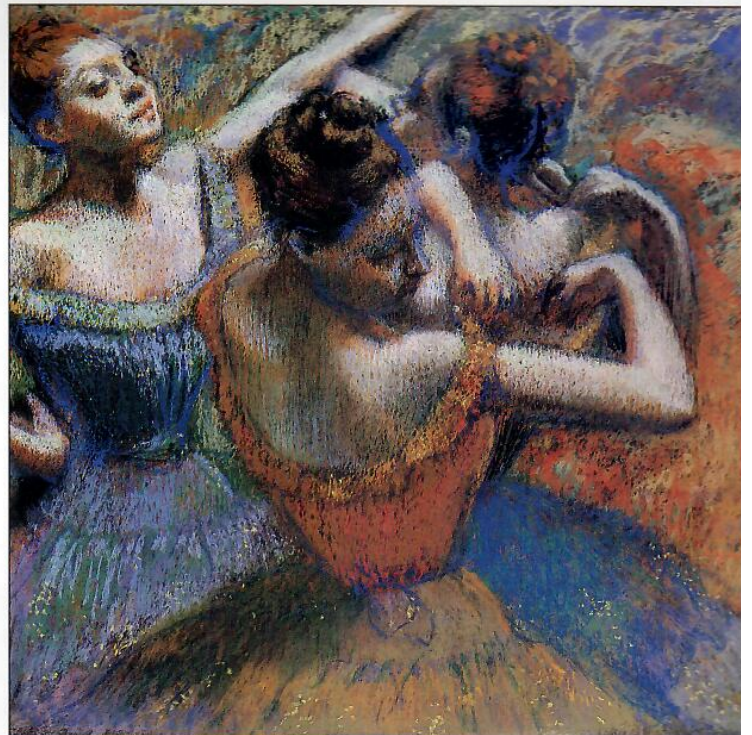
Degas and the Impressionists wanted to present a realistic view of the world with nothing edited out—a “slice of life” as they called it. *Rehearsal on Stage* depicts a casual scene, but the work is carefully composed. Degas does not show the stage from the audience's viewpoint. He has chosen an unusual point of view—above, from one side—giving the scene a diagonal and distorted look. Degas' asymmetrical arrangement squeezes the figures to the left, then balances the composition with empty or negative space on the right. The dancers on the far left are abruptly cropped,

giving the feeling they are walking out of the drawing. The scene is framed by stage sets and part of an instrument that appears in the lower left. Dramatic **spotlighting** emphasizes the three-dimensional quality of the scene.

When Degas first began depicting the ballet, his works—like the one on the left—were realistic, filled with figures, and set in large, complex spaces. As his art developed and his eyesight grew worse, his compositions became **simplified**, his shapes **abstract**, his colors **brighter**. In the 1899 pastel below, the dancers appear to be bursting out of the frame. The composition is based on **criss-crossing diagonals**, closely cropped at each edge. The space is flat and the colors (such as the purple faces and red skin) are more expressive than realistic. In his last works, like this one, Degas' dance pictures became flat, abstract patterns of motion.

Compare Degas' pastel drawing of dancers (left) with his pastel (below) of the same subject, done 25 years later.

The Dancers, c. 1899. Pastel, 24 1/2" x 25 1/2". The Toledo Museum of Art.



ion
I really

Edgar Degas is best known for his images of ballet dancers.

Above, left: *The Rehearsal on the Stage*, 1874. Pastel and ink, 21" x 28 1/2". Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, NY.

A Day at the Ra

"It is the movement of people and things
captures my a

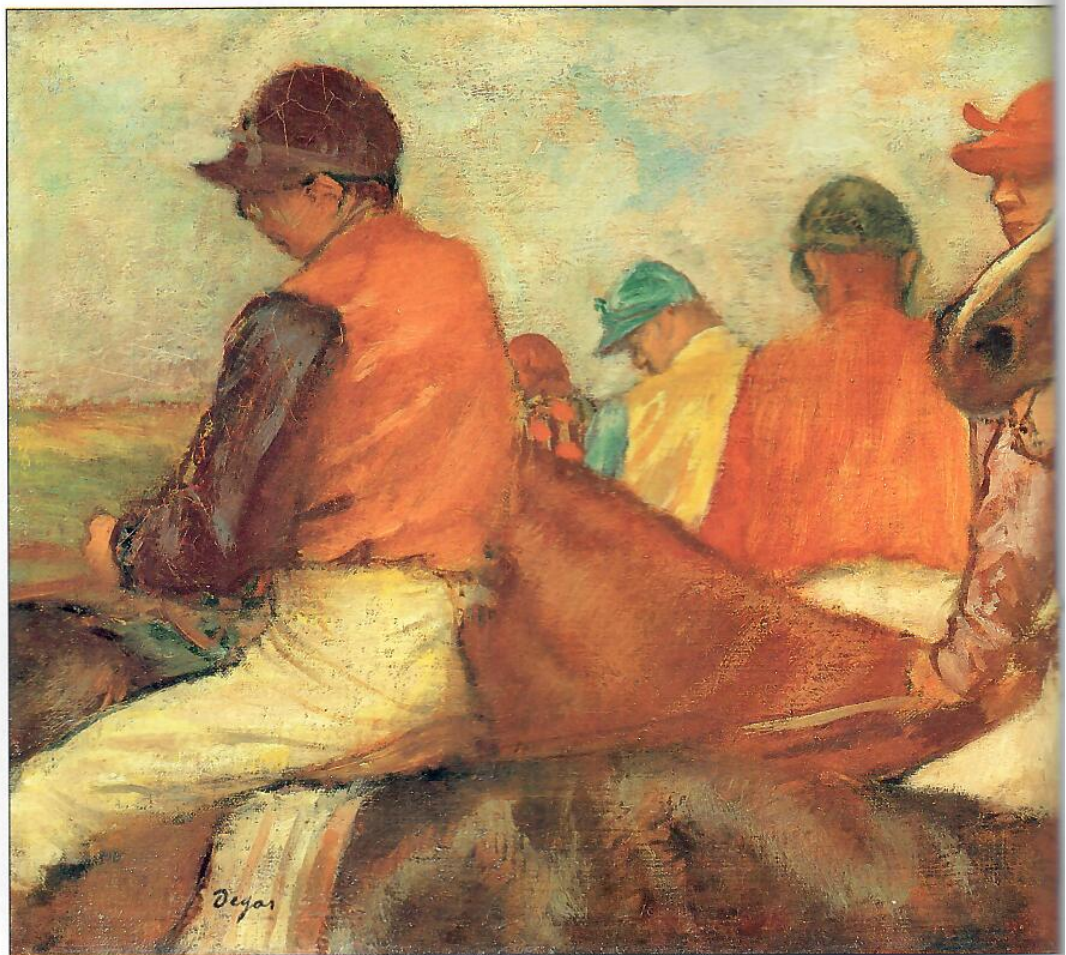


MASTERPIECE
OF THE MONTH

Preview

Degas went to the races
with friends who
are shown in the carriage
above.

Carriage at the Races, 1869. Oil.
14 3/8" x 22". Museum of Fine
Arts, Boston.



Compare the points
of view in the
painting on the right
and the one above.

Jockeys, c. 1882-85. Oil.
10 3/8" x 15 11/16". Yale
University Art Gallery.

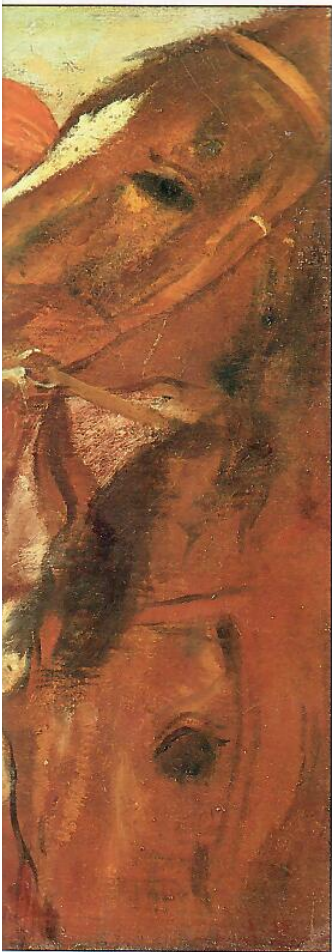
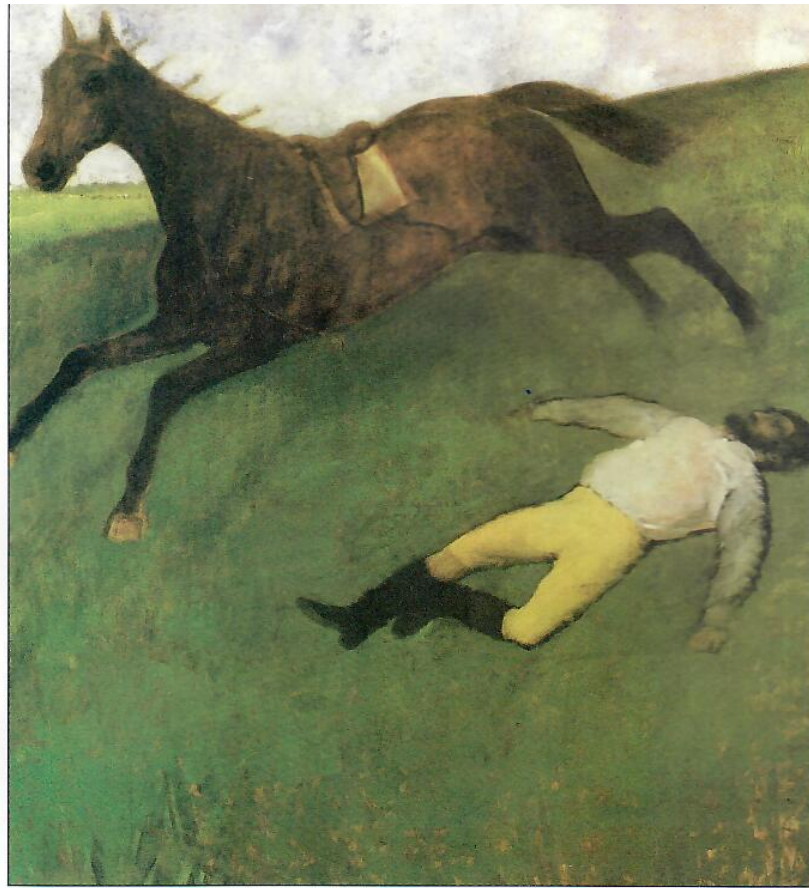
ces

that
attention."

—EDGAR DEGAS

Does this scene (*right*)
look as "real" as others
in this issue by Degas?

Fallen Jockey, c. 1896-98. Oil.
Basel Art Museum.



Degas spent most of his time working in his studio, but sometimes even he needed a change of scene. It was during the early 1860s that he began visiting a school friend outside Paris, who lived near a racecourse. Soon, horse racing became one of the artist's favorite activities. The races themselves—who won and in what time—meant little to Degas. He liked the moments between races when he could do informal sketches. He used horses and riders in the same way that he used ballet dancers—to show *movement* through composition.

Compare the compositions of these racing pictures and the one on pages 8-9. Degas presents each from an **unusual point of view**. In many of his paintings, such as *Race Course Scene* (8-9), shadows create **long diagonals**. These diagonals echo the more **static verticals** of the horses and riders, suggesting the **dynamic action** of the races to come.

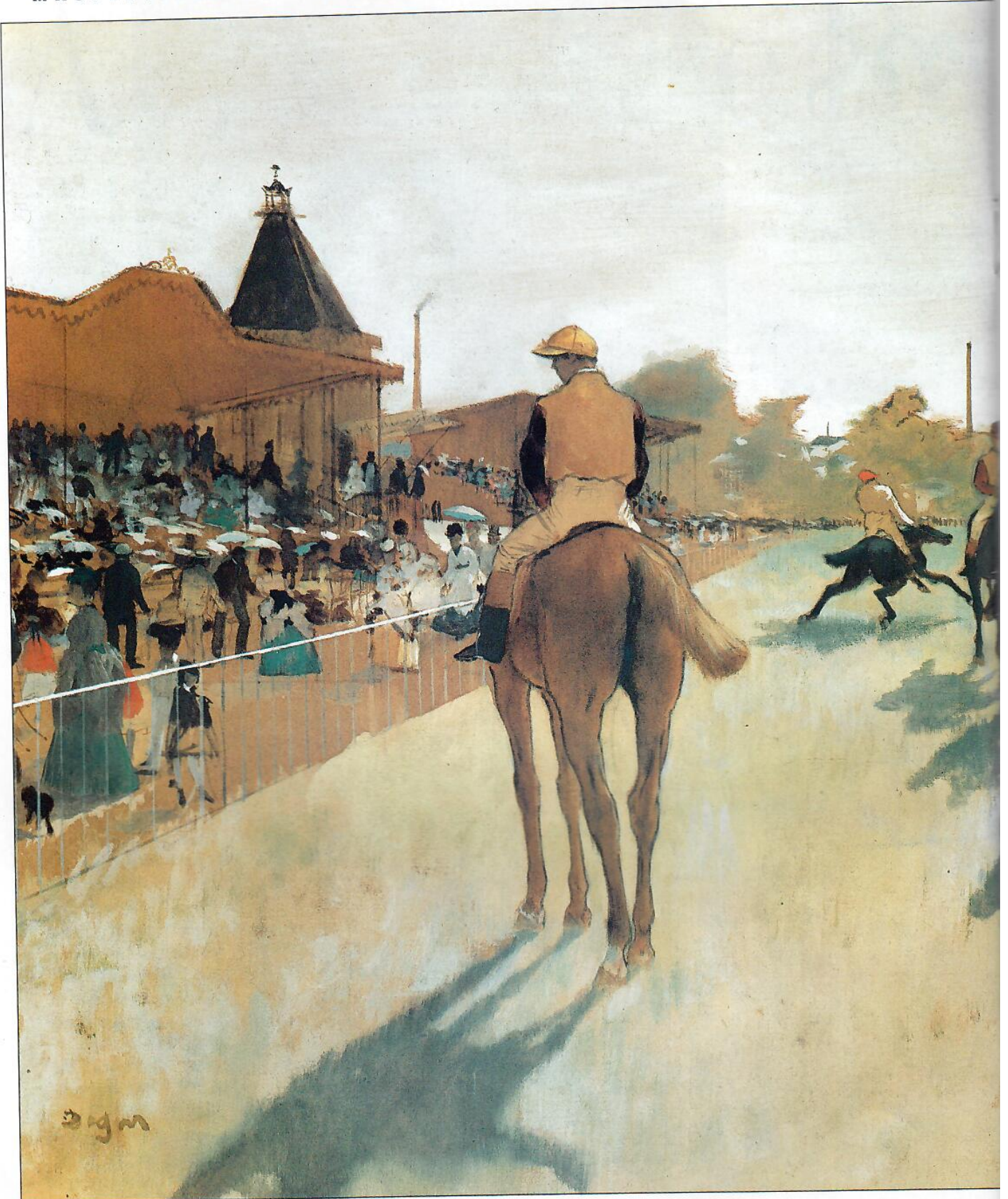
Degas got many of his compositional ideas from the new art of photography. Many of these works are **abruptly cropped**; the action seems to extend beyond the frame, as it would in a camera viewfinder. In which of these paintings does Degas use photograph-like **close-ups**; in which does he use **long shots** (the subject is seen from a distance)?

We seem to be **close** to and on the same **eye level** as the horses and riders in the painting on the left. Here, Degas uses an inventive compositional device to enhance the feeling of action. The two horses' heads that have been **abruptly cropped** on the left appear to enter the composition on the right, creating an added feeling of motion.

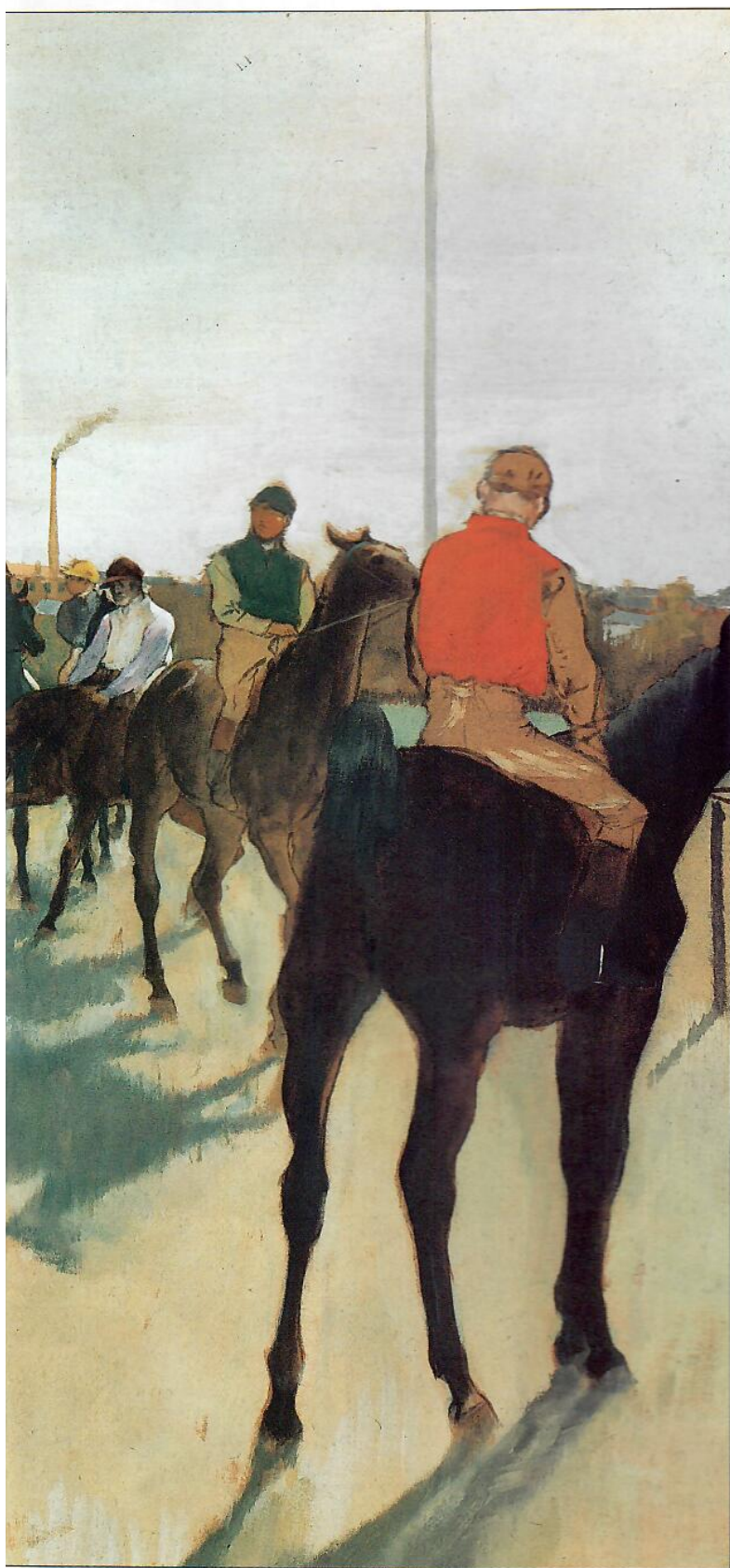
Sometimes Degas painted the races from a **great distance**. In the painting on the far left, you can barely see the two tiny racing horses in the background. The horses and riders are framed by the **negative space** of the sky, the small carriage on the left and the large carriage in the right **foreground**.

In the race pictures Degas did toward the end of his life, his work became more **abstract** (simplified; stylized). In *Fallen Jockey* (above), a black horse seems to hover over a crumpled gold figure. The background no longer resembles a field but has become a flat area of green paint. When he did this work, the artist could hardly see, so he had to paint motion purely from imagination.

MASTERPIECE OF THE MONTH # 1



Edgar Degas (1834-1917). *Race Track Scene With Jockeys*. 1869-72. Musée d'Orsay, Paris. Scala/Art Resource, NY, NY.



"Conversation in
real life is full
of half-finished
sentences
and overlapping
talk. Why shouldn't
painting be too?"

—EDGAR DEGAS

SCHOLASTIC
ART

Edgar Degas

Race Track Scene

“These Japanese artists have shown us a new world.”

—EDGAR DEGAS

Keisai Eisen (1790-1848). *Woman at a Mirror*, c. 1820. Private Collection.



Reflections From the East

During the 19th century, Degas and other French Impressionists discovered a “new” art form that completely changed the kind of work they were creating. The country of Japan, whose ports had been closed to the rest of the world for hundreds of years, had recently begun trading with Europe.

Among the items sent were the kinds of wood block prints Japanese artists had been creating for over 200 years.

Japanese prints (above), were usually based on *small, uneventful scenes* such as a woman looking in a mirror. They were often composed from an **unusual point of**

view. The woman’s figure on the right is seen from behind and is **abruptly cropped.** The **simplified, stylized shapes; patterned areas; bright, flat colors; faces framed in mirrors; and negative space** are all compositional features that Degas borrowed from Japanese prints.

ART SPOTLIGHT

UNUSUAL ANGLES
These three artists look at everyday subjects in inventive new ways.

Can you pick out a theme that links all three of the pictures on these pages?

Audrey Flack, b. 1931. (*Vanitas*), 1977. University of Arizona Museum of Art, Tucson. Museum purchase with funds from Edward J. Gallagher Jr. Memorial Fund.



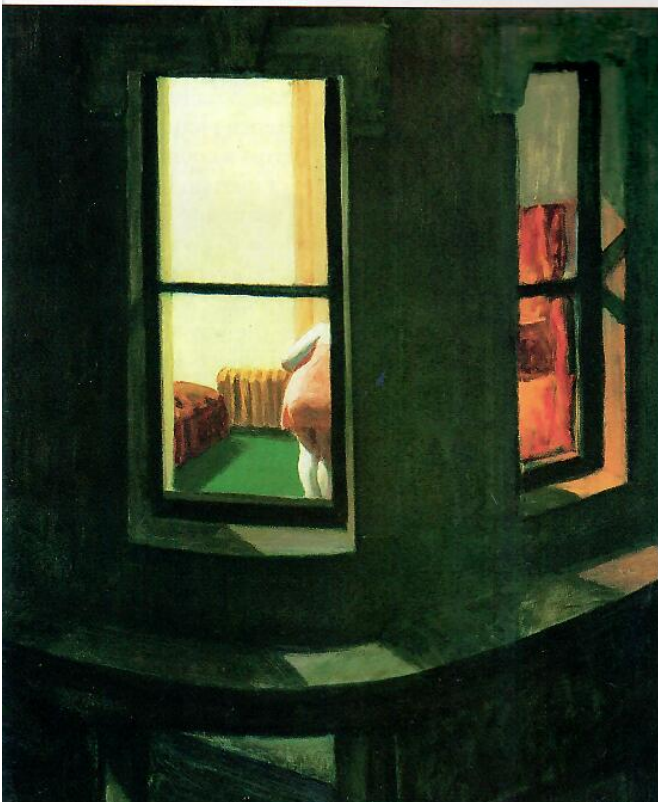


Modern Viewpoints

As you read in this issue, the art of photography influenced many of Edgar Degas' best-known compositions. Today, a number of artists like contemporary painter Audrey Flack use photos as part of their compositions. In *Marilyn* (left), the artist features a photograph of Marilyn Monroe as the painting's focal point.

The point-of-view is from above, looking down on a table crowded with mirrors, glasses, jewelry, cosmetics. These objects fill the frame and are cropped on all sides. The woman's face is repeated in the mirror as it is in the Japanese print. But could this mirror actually reflect Marilyn's picture? Like Degas, Flack uses a mirror to "open up" the composition and give it a feeling of depth.

In this work, Flack suggests the passage of time. Marilyn Monroe looks happy and glamorous here. But she died young, just as the fruit in the picture will decay, the hourglass will run out, the candle will burn and its flame will disappear.



Inside and Outside

Where do you think the viewer is located in the work on the left? Do we see this scene from the street, from a building, or from the window of a train?

Like Degas, 20th-century American artist Edward Hopper wanted to show ordinary places in a new way. To do this, both artists have used some of

Would this painting be as effective if the artist had shown the scene from inside the room?

Edward Hopper (1882-1967). *Night Windows*, 1928. 29" x 34". The Museum of Modern Art, NY, NY.

the same compositional devices. *Night Windows* is painted from the point of view of an observer outside a building. The bright, artificial light inside contrasts with the darkness of the world outside. Each of the three windows frames a different scene. The diagonals of the curtains and the light patterns draw the eye to the painting's focal point, a woman whose figure is abruptly cropped on one side. The negative space of the yellow wall in the center of the composition heightens the feeling of loneliness and isolation.

Jeana Baumgardner: CAPTURING MOTION

While Degas drew horse races, this month's artist—Jeana Baumgardner—draws bicycle racers. Jeana did this Scholastic Art Award-winning drawing when she was a 17-year-old senior at Buffalo Grove High School in Arlington Heights, Illinois. Jeana is entering her freshman year at the University of Iowa, where she may major in art or business. "If I major in both," she says, "I could open an art gallery. I know an art career isn't easy, but I'm still going to go for it. It's something I love so much, I'll never quit."



■ **How did you first get interested in art?**

My grandfather introduced me to art. As long as I can remember, he would sit me down and have me draw. I didn't get serious about art until I got to high school. I discovered that the art room was just perfect for me. If I was in a bad mood, it changed when I walked into that room. I was glad to be there. I felt comforted by the place, the people in my classes, and my teachers.

■ **What made you do this award-winning work?**

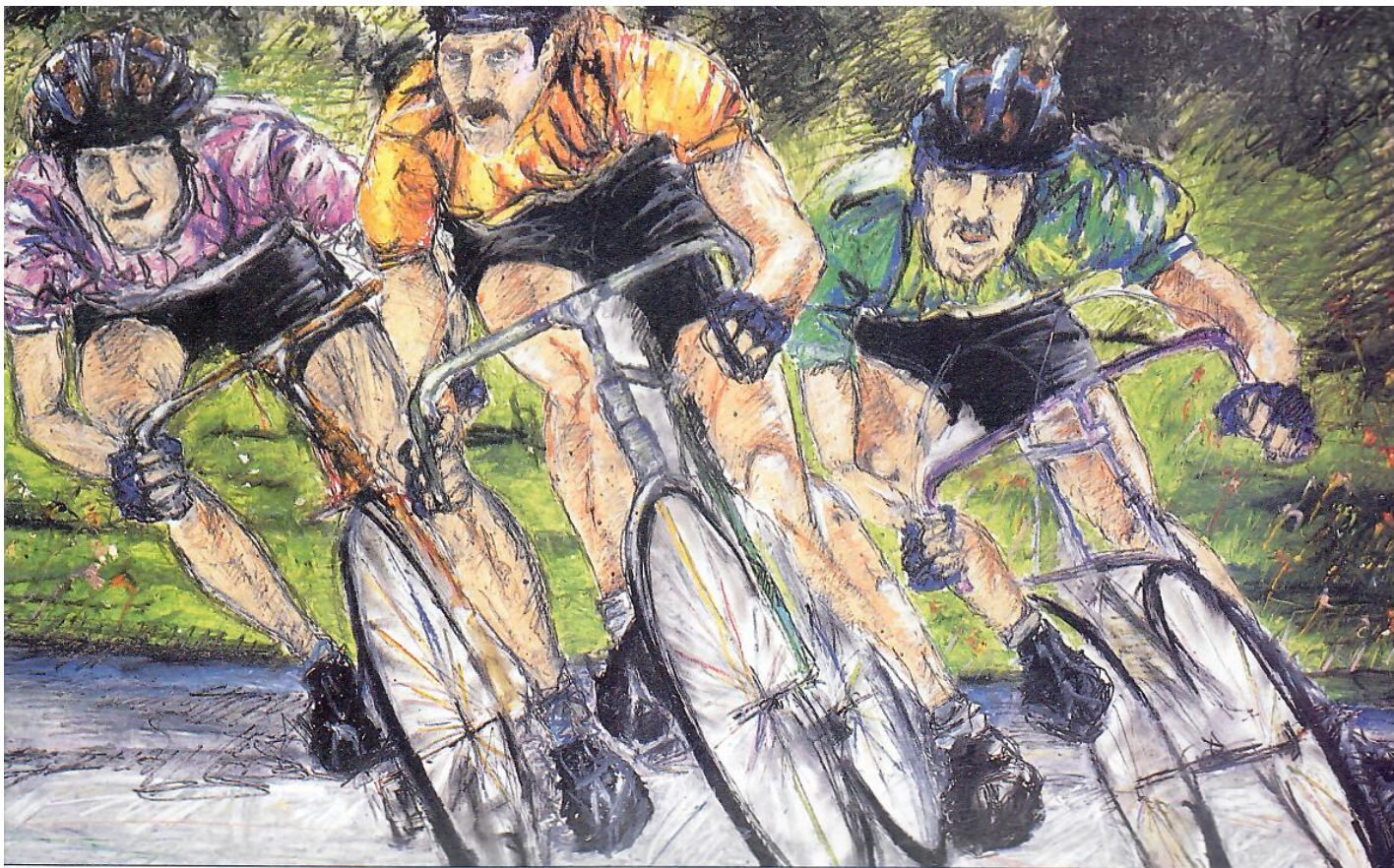
It was a class assignment in junior year for a final grade in drawing. There were no rules—the medium, the paper, and the subject were all up to us. The idea was to create a drawing in your own style and make it as interesting and expressive as possible.

■ **Where did you get your idea?**

My sister was into mountain bikes, and I had been wanting to do something for her dorm room at college. Our teacher told us to look through magazines for our reference pictures. I came across a couple of images of men on bicycles. What I wanted to do in my picture was to give it motion. So every time I drove in a car, I started noticing the way all the trees and objects looked as I went past them.

■ **What kind of materials did you use?**

I used Craypas and ebony pencil on styrene, a sort of wax paper. I had never used this combination before and I just wanted to experiment. I know Craypas are oil based and I



I thought that placing the figures off center and on a diagonal would suggest the feeling of movement.

thought they would smear when they were put on wax paper. This technique really seemed to work well in terms of conveying motion.

■ **How did you make your drawing?**

I sketched two of the figures on paper, then used Craypas to trace them onto the styrene. I drew the third figure right on the styrene, overlapping it and making it bigger so it would seem to be in front. After that, I took the Craypas and started defining the bicycles and the riders. I used the ebony pencil to create the muscles in the legs and outline the shapes of the bicycles. I did a lot of crosshatching, which is a type of shading that's very time consuming. But it's worth the work because crosshatching gives your picture texture and richness. I finished the figures and

used color on the spokes of the wheels to add to the feeling of motion. Toward the end, I felt the drawing needed more color, so I added flowers to the background.

■ **How did you compose the drawing to show movement?**

I tilted the figures so they would look as though they were coming around a curve. I thought that placing the figures off center and on a diagonal would suggest the feeling of movement. The positions of the figures—bent over the handlebars and the way they are moving their legs—adds to the idea of speed. I also wanted the viewer to feel closer to the figures, so I made it look like the bicycle riders are going out of the frame. The background is blurred so the figures stand out. And they're not looking directly ahead. Their heads are

down and they're looking out of the frame toward where they're going. I tried to make their faces very intense—like they're struggling with the race and the competition. I smeared some of the trees in the background and kept others definite to give more of an effect of motion—as if you were looking at one part of the picture and the rest was moving.

■ **Do you have any advice for other art students?**

This drawing was an experiment. I did it with materials I'd never used before. From my experience, I'd say remember that in art there's always something new to learn. Never limit yourself. Experiment with as many mediums and techniques as possible. There are so many that eventually you'll come on a few that you really love to work with.

We select our Artist of the Month from among Scholastic Art Award winners. To enter, ask your teacher to write to the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, 555 Broadway, New York, NY 10012-3999 for entry deadlines and rules books. Scholastic Art magazine does not have a separate competition.



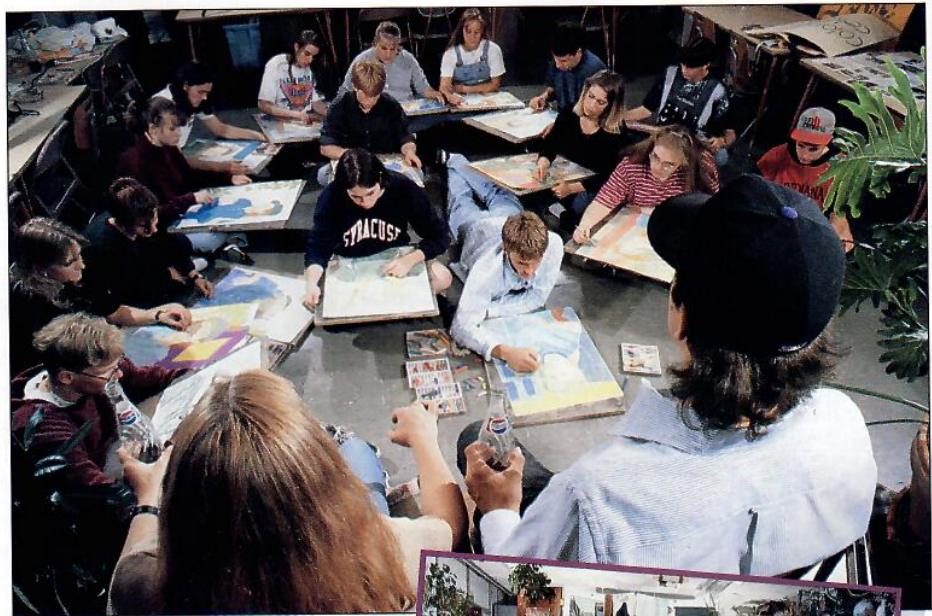
WORKING WITH COMPOSITION

Create a dramatic figure drawing using some of Degas' compositional techniques.

Degas did a number of portraits which were composed in a way that would tell the viewer more about his subject. If you look at this issue's cover, you'll see that everything is organized around the composition's focal point—the figure.

The railroad tracks in the background lead the eye to the subject's face, the factory buildings fit around his head, and his hat echoes the verticals of the smokestacks and windows.

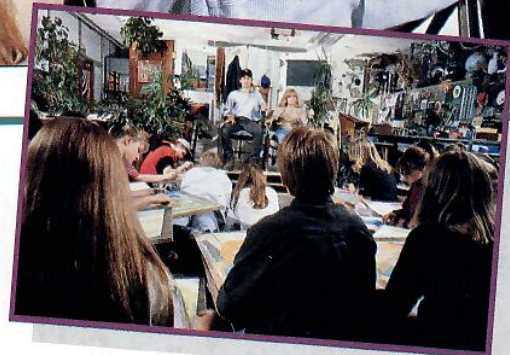
In this workshop, you'll employ some of the compositional devices that Edgar Degas used to turn a familiar figure into a successful pastel drawing.



Prepared by Ned J. Nesti, Jr.
Photos by Larry Gregory.
Drawings by Brenda L. Buikema (above); Elizabeth M. Bramm (top right); Michael J. Damihoff (bottom right).

Materials

- 8-color, 12-color, 24-color sets of pastels
- 18" x 24" 60-80 lb. white sulfite paper
- No. 2 school pencils
- Drawing boards
- Paper stumps
- Inexpensive hair spray or fixative
- Paper toweling
- Clamp floodlights



Starting Out

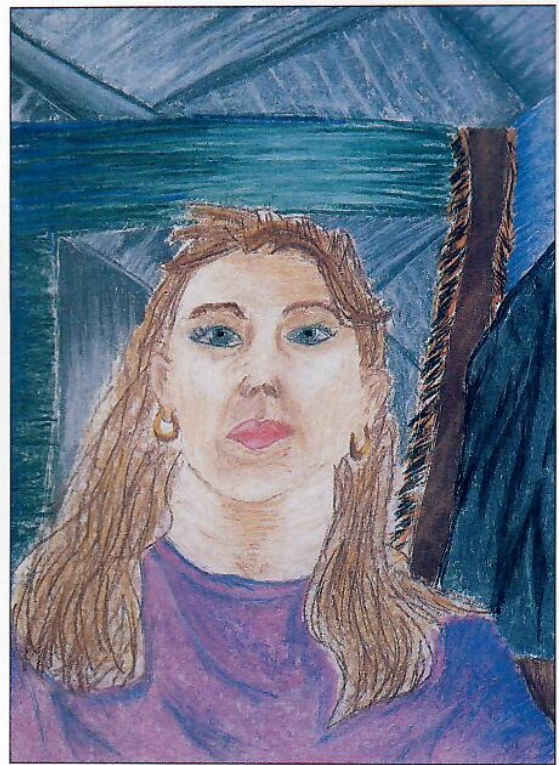
1. Arrange one or more seated model(s) on a raised platform and simplify the background area as much as possible. Students should stand, sit, or lie down on floor around models so the **point of view** is unusual or exaggerated. Practice a few blind contour drawings and plan your arrangement before you begin sketching. Decide what kind of **format** you will use and where your figure will be—top, bottom, center of the frame, or placed in a corner. The composition should be large and bold and emphasize the exaggerated angle. Background shapes should become part of your composition.

Step 2.

Plan your composition, integrating figure and background. Do a very light contour drawing of the figure, focusing on correct proportions. Emphasize simple shapes and patterns and work large to accommodate the wide marks pastels make. Draw quickly and accurately, saving details for later.

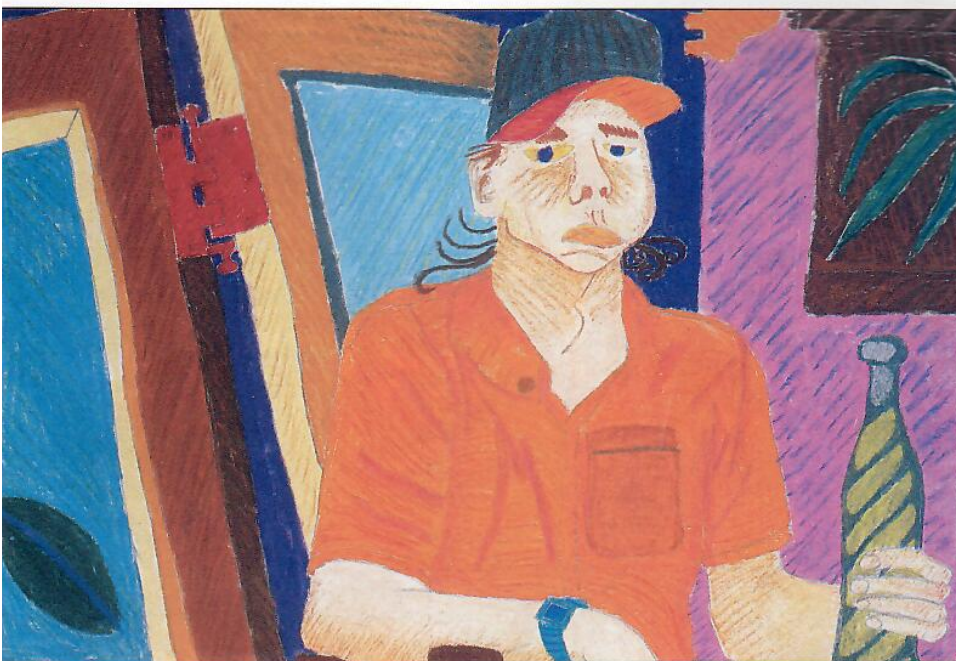
Step 3.

Using the pencil drawing as a guide, begin working with pastels. Determine color scheme. Be aware of the different marks you can make with the *sides*, *edges*, and *corners* of your pastels. You can *blend*, *shade*, *hatch*, and *crosshatch*. The entire surface of the paper should be covered with pastel. Working very carefully, turning paper frequently, and using paper towels under your hand will prevent smudging. When your drawing is complete, spray in a *well-ventilated* area with hair spray or fixative. Remember that your drawing cannot be reworked after being sprayed.



Some Solutions

Will you choose a **vertical** or a **horizontal format** for your portrait? What will be your **point of view**—from above, below, or eye level? Will you **enlarge and crop** your figure; how will you use **negative space**? Is your composition going to be **symmetrical** (the same on both sides) or **asymmetrical** (different on each side but visually balanced)? Do you want the shapes in your drawing to be **simplified, stylized, and flat** (like the work on the left), or would you like your figure to appear more **three-dimensional** with **highlights and shadows** (like the drawing, top left)? How will you incorporate background areas into your composition—will you use **diagonal lines** or **simplified shapes** to contrast with or enhance the figure? What about your color scheme—will your colors be **bright or dull, warm, or cool, light or dark**?

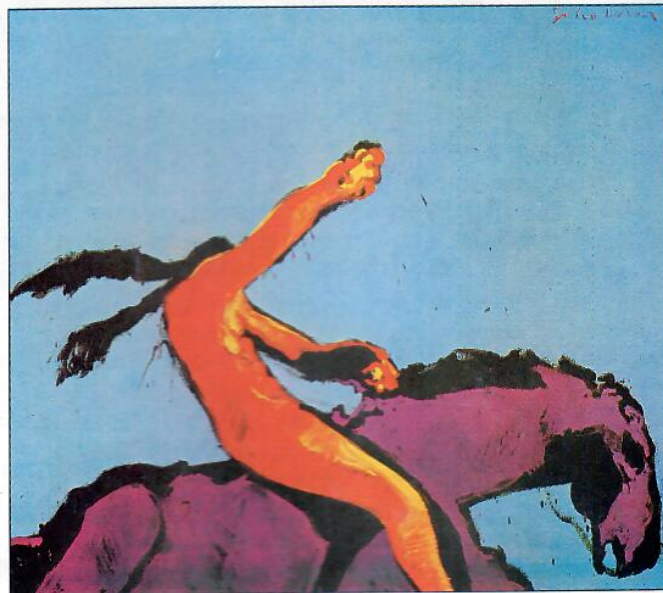


Two contemporary Americans update a favorite Degas theme

Horses From the Past

American painter Fritz Scholder, a Mission Indian, creates works based on the conflict between Native American traditions and popular American culture. In *Indian Power* (above), a bright orange figure is silhouetted against a blue sky. The low angle makes the figure look larger than life. The

dynamic diagonals of his raised arm and hair add to the heroic feeling. The sharp cropping of the horse and rider, placed at the bottom of the frame so they seem overwhelmed by the negative space of the sky, suggests a feeling of struggle. The intensity of the bright, opposite colors expresses powerful



What do you think the artist is saying in this work? How does his composition help to convey the message?

Fritz Scholder, b. 1937. *Indian Power*, 1972. Private Collection.

emotions, reinforcing the work's theme—the clash of two cultures.



Ghostly Horses

Contemporary American artist Susan Rothenberg first became known for her unusual paintings of horses. Like Degas, Rothenberg was not especially interested in horses. But also like Degas, she wanted to capture motion, or as the artist put it, “to catch a moment in time, a dream, an emotion.” To visualize these qualities, Rothenberg worked with a single image—the horse.

In *Pontiac* (left), we see the simplified, stylized figure of a running horse from an unusual point of view. The horse gallops right at the viewer, but is stopped by a dark form that keeps it from moving forward. The form and the horse's blue head (blue objects appear to

recede) seem to stop the forward motion, creating a visual tension. The flat, linear outline of the horse is cropped on the bottom, which suggests it is trying to break out of the white background. The basic composition of the painting—made up of the opposing diagonals of the horse and the dark form—also adds to the feeling of movement.

Susan Rothenberg says, “Having a single theme allows me to do everything I can to one subject.”

Susan Rothenberg, b. 1945. *Pontiac*, Acrylic on canvas. 88" x 61". Private collection. Courtesy, Sperone Westwater Gallery, NY, NY.