

MELBOURNE MASTERCLASS:

DEGAS

A NEW VISION
MELBOURNE WINTER MASTERPIECES

A NEW VISION...
A NEW BEGINNING

Monday 18, 25 July and
1 & 8 August, 6–8.30pm

Cover image detail from:
Edgar Degas
Finishing the arabesque 1877
oil and essence, pastel on canvas 67.4 x 38 cm
Musée d'Orsay, Paris (RF 4040)
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• This exhibition is organised by
the National Gallery of Victoria
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
and Art Exhibitions Australia

NATIONAL GALLERY
OF VICTORIA NGV



FACULTY OF
ARTS

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In partnership with the National Gallery of Victoria's exhibition *Degas: A new vision*, the Faculty of Arts is proud to present a four-part masterclass series on the life and art of Edgar Degas, one of the most recognizable grand masters of French modernism. Drawn from across the globe and with over 200 artworks, this exhibition represents one of the most internationally significant retrospectives of Degas, highlighting his influential contribution across the different mediums of painting, sculpture, drawing, printmaking and photography.

This masterclass will reflect the breadth and diversity of the exhibition as we explore the development of Degas' art from its beginnings. We will contextualise his work within the dramatic social and political change that occurred during his lifetime, which made Paris the centre of the art world, and inevitably provided the backdrop for his innovative and creative depictions. Join us as we revisit the much celebrated artist through a new lens, and consider him to be more than just a painter of pretty ballet dancers and frivolous café scenes.

Each session includes evening lectures by some of the University of Melbourne's finest scholars and NGV's senior curators, light refreshments and the privilege of exclusive after-hours exhibition viewing, showcasing tailored pop-up talks and performances in the exhibition space.

COST:

Individual session: \$60 Alumni & NGV Members/
\$65 Non alumni & NGV Members

Series Pass: \$220 Alumni & NGV Members/
\$240 Non alumni & NGV Members

MONDAY 18 JULY: DEGAS' PARIS

- **The Paris of Edgar Degas**
Emeritus Professor Peter McPhee, The University of Melbourne
- **Attack of the Green Fairy?**
Dr Ted Gott, National Gallery of Victoria

MONDAY 25 JULY: DEGAS' WOMEN

- **From Dancer to Courtesan: Prostitution in 19th century Paris**
Dr Sylvia Sagona, The University of Melbourne
- **Reality effects: Degas and the working woman**
Dr Sophie Matthiesson, National Gallery of Victoria

MONDAY 1 AUGUST: PERFORMANCE AND MOVEMENT

- **Rendering movement and painting pretty clothes: Degas, the painter of dancing girls**
Professor Rachel Fensham, The University of Melbourne
- **Snap, the frozen moment.**
Laurie Benson, National Gallery of Victoria

MONDAY 8 AUGUST: NEW MARKETS, NEW VISIONS

- **An artist meets a disruptive technology**
Prof Glyn Davis, Vice-Chancellor, The University of Melbourne
- **From 'petit rat' to grand masterpiece: Degas and the art market**
Dr Christopher Marshall, The University of Melbourne

REGISTRATIONS: <http://alumni.online.unimelb.edu.au/mmdegas2016>

Questions? Contact Caterina Sciacca at caterina.sciacca@unimelb.edu.au or 03 8344 3996

PROGRAM

SESSION ONE Lectures

6.00 – 7.00pm Clemenger BBDO Auditorium, NGV

The Paris of Edgar Degas

Degas' long life (1834-1917) coincided with dramatic social change and political instability in the French capital. Not only did its population treble to almost 3 million, but the city took on the physical appearance familiar to us. In the process, there was a profound change in the social composition of the city, its more 'bourgeois' nature reflected in new 'department stores'. As a youth, Degas experienced two revolutions and three political regimes. While the Third Republic was consolidated in the 1870s, its authority was repeatedly challenged by scandals and crises, especially the Dreyfus Affair in the 1890s. Then Degas' physical decline coincided with the industrial-scale killing of World War I.

Emeritus Professor Peter McPhee has published widely on the history of modern France, most recently *Robespierre: a Revolutionary Life* (2012) and *Liberty or Death: The French Revolution 1789-1799* (2016). He was appointed to the position of Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) at the University of Melbourne in 2003 and was the University's first Provost in 2007-09. He is a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities (1997) and the Academy of Social Sciences (2003). He was awarded a Centenary Medal for services to education in 2003 and became a Member of the Order of Australia in 2012.

Attack of the Green Fairy?

Titled simply *In a Café (Dans un café)* by Edgar Degas, but popularly known as *Absinthe*, this 1873 study of what seems to be alcoholic stupor remains one of the artist's most famous works. That it depicts the effects of absinthe on one level is without question – but there is more to this enigmatic painting than meets the eye at first. This talk examines the many layers of *In a Café* -- part social commentary, part pantomime and amicable role-play (the sitters for the work being close friends of Degas), part bravura composition and 'stage direction'.

Dr Ted Gott is Senior Curator of International Art at the National Gallery of Victoria. He has curated and co-curated 26 exhibitions, including *The Impressionists: Masterpieces from the Musée d'Orsay* (2004), *Kiss of the Beast: From Paris Salon to King Kong* (2005), *Modern Britain 1900-1960* (2007), *Salvador Dalí: Liquid Desire* (2009) and *Napoleon: Revolution to Empire* (2012). He has published widely on Australian, British and French art, and co-authored a cultural history of the gorilla in nineteenth and twentieth-century art, literature, scientific discourse and cinema, *Gorilla*, Reaktion Press, London (2013).

7.00 – 7.15pm Break | Light refreshments served in Gallery Kitchen

SESSION TWO Exhibition Spaces

7.15pm – 8.30pm Enjoy the privilege of exclusive independent after-hours exhibition viewing.

The exhibition will be activated with short pop-up talks by **Professor Charles Sowerwine** and **Associate Professor Susan Foley**, University of Melbourne on Degas' representation of the feminine and prostitution respectively, and tailored performances by musicians from the Victorian College of the Arts, the University of Melbourne.

PROGRAM

SESSION ONE Lectures

6.00 – 7.00pm Clemenger BBDO Auditorium, NGV

From Dancer to Courtesan: Prostitution in 19th century Paris

The City of Light was famous for its dazzling *Grand Horizontals* who often had begun their career as the little dancers portrayed by Degas. However prevalent theories of Social Darwinism put forward the idea that prostitutes belonged to a lower level of evolution which was evident in their low foreheads and cunning monkey like expressions. A closer look at Degas' work reveals a reliable depiction of this underworld of exploitation and struggle which we often mistake for glamour.

Dr Sylvia Sagona is a well-known speaker and specialist on the art, literature and society of nineteenth century France. Her particular interests are in the Napoleonic era and the role of women under the Second Empire. Sylvia has written and presented for French television on the invention of shopping in Second Empire Paris and has been a lecturer in the Department of French, Italian and Spanish studies at the University of Melbourne, and the Université d'Aix-Marseille. She has also collaborated with the French Government in developing courses on the urban development of Paris in the nineteenth century.

Reality effects: Degas and the working woman

The identity of the sitter in Melbourne's painting of the *Head of a woman* by Degas has long been a mystery. In this talk curator Sophie Matthiesson brings together a range of new visual and technical evidence which offers fresh clues on the possible purpose of the painting, and identity of the woman depicted. This evidence, she will argue, yields new insights into Degas's working methods and his private relationships with working women.

Dr Sophie Matthiesson is Curator of International Art at the National Gallery of Victoria. She has contributed to many of the Melbourne Winter Masterpieces exhibitions since 2007. She is a specialist in eighteenth-century French art and her doctoral research was on 'The prison-made object in the French Revolution'. Sophie was co-ordinating curator of the 2014 MWM exhibition, *Monet's Garden*.

7.00 – 7.15pm Break | Light refreshments served in Gallery Kitchen

SESSION TWO Exhibition Spaces

7.15pm – 8.30pm Enjoy the privilege of exclusive independent after-hours exhibition viewing.

The exhibition will be activated with short pop-up talks by **Dr Bertrand Bourgeois, University of Melbourne**, and **Susan van Wyk, Senior Curator of Photography at the National Gallery of Victoria** on poetry and photography respectively; and tailored performances by musicians from the Victorian College of the Arts, the University of Melbourne.

PROGRAM

SESSION ONE Lectures

6.00 – 7.00pm **Clemenger BBDO Auditorium, NGV**

**Rendering movement and painting pretty clothes:
Degas, the painter of dancing girls.**

Known as the painter of ballet dancers and washerwomen, Degas made a lifelong study of the ballet studio and his numerous sketches and canvasses of 'dancing girls' are among his most skilful and endearing images. In this talk I will consider his contribution to our understanding of the declining years of the French romantic ballet and its influence on today's perceptions of the art of ballet. In consideration of Degas' own claim that he was more interested in the study of 'movement' and 'pretty clothes', I will suggest that his animation of the flesh, and fleshing's, of the dancer are what makes his work importantly the precursor to a modern mode of seeing dance.

Professor Rachel Fensham is a Professor of Dance and Theatre Studies and Head of the School of Culture and Communication at the University of Melbourne. She writes on dance, cultural history and the digital humanities, and co-edited *Dancing Naturally: nature, neo-classicism and modernity in early twentieth-century dance* (2011).

Snap, the frozen moment.

For decades Degas watched how horses moved and much like his study of dancers, this developed into an obsession. Degas rendered this obsession in paint, pastel and even wax, freezing forever the motion of these powerful animals. His desire to be both original and accurate saw him not only rely on his powers of observation but embrace the work of Eadweard Muybridge whose photography forever changed perceptions of movement. This fed Degas' uncanny ability to capture his subjects in seemingly awkward, unexpected and at times disturbing poses.

Laurie Benson is Curator of International Art at the National Gallery of Victoria. He has been at the NGV since 1999 and has worked on a number of major exhibitions including *The Impressionists*, *Dutch Masters*, *Salvador Dali Liquid Desire*, *Italian Masterpieces from Spain's Royal Court*, *Museo del Prado*, *Medieval Moderns: The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, *The Horse* and last year's Melbourne Winter Masterpieces exhibition *Masterpieces from the Hermitage: The Legacy of Catherine the Great*. Laurie has also co-authored three of the handbooks on the NGV International Art collection and is currently working on the MWM for 2016 *Degas: A New Vision*.

7.00 – 7.15pm **Break |** Light refreshments served in Gallery Kitchen

SESSION TWO Exhibition Spaces

7.15pm – 8.30pm Enjoy the privilege of exclusive independent after-hours exhibition viewing.

The exhibition will be activated with short pop-up talks by **Cathy Leahy, Senior Curator of Prints and Drawings at the National Gallery of Victoria** and **Alojz Babic, specialist researcher for the National Gallery of Victoria**, on prints and *A Cotton Office* (1873), respectively; and tailored performances by musicians from the Victorian College of the Arts, the University of Melbourne.

PROGRAM

SESSION ONE Lectures

6.00 – 7.00pm Clemenger BBDO Auditorium, NGV

From 'petit rat' to grand masterpiece: Degas and the art market

The story of the hostile response of the hide-bound French art establishment to the ground-breaking innovations of the Impressionists has become standard to most histories of the movement. One might even say it has become a kind of art historical topos – or archetypal theme – that is found repeated again and again in histories of avant-garde art – be it Picasso and the Cubists or Tucker and the Angry Penguins. In the case of the Impressionists, however, more recent studies have significantly modified this conventional narrative by showing that the Impressionists were, in fact, far from the neglected and misunderstood geniuses that they are often made out to be. Instead, they were, in reality, highly proactive and strategic in their attempts to find new ways to market and sell their work to the public – including to the increasingly significant legions of foreign buyers who would ultimately go on to seed the great collections of Impressionist art found today in art museums outside France – from the USA to Latin America, Japan, and all points in between. This lecture will consider the issue of Degas and the art market, with particular reference to the apparent conundrum of how an artist with such a seemingly narrow and obsessively repeated range of interests – dancers, the denizens of the cafés, the racetrack, women at the bath, etc. – could be successfully marketed as one of the most desirable and ultimately 'canonical' grand masters of French modernist art.

Dr Christopher R. Marshall is Senior Lecturer in Art History and Museum Studies at the University of Melbourne. His publications on museums and curatorship include *Sculpture and the Museum* (Ashgate, 2011) and contributions to *Museum Making: Making Art History and Reshaping Museum Space* (Routledge, 2005, 2007 and 2012). His publications on Neapolitan Baroque art and the art market include *Baroque Naples and the Industry of Painting* (Yale University Press, 2016) and a chapter contribution to *The Economic Lives of Seventeenth-Century Italian Painters* (Yale University Press, 2010).

An artist meets a disruptive technology

In his influential meditation *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes said that photography "has been, and is still, tormented by the ghost of Painting". How then do we respond to an image like Degas' *Self-portrait with Zoe Closier* in this exhibition – a gelatin silver print from 1895, in which one of the most distinguished founders of Impressionism confronts what is, in his day, the 'disruptive technology' of photography? Glyn Davis will reflect on how an artist who spent his time capturing the fleeting passage of time by hand might deal with a new medium that calls into question everything he has done.

Professor Glyn Davis is Professor of Political Science in the Faculty of Arts, and Vice-Chancellor, at the University of Melbourne. He is a Director of the Grattan Institute and the Melbourne Theatre Company.

7.00 – 7.15pm **Break** | Light refreshments served in Gallery Kitchen

SESSION TWO Exhibition Spaces

7.15pm – 8.30pm Enjoy the privilege of exclusive independent after-hours exhibition viewing.

The exhibition will be activated with short pop-up talks by PhD candidate, **David Challis, University of Melbourne** and **Holly McGowan-Jackson, Senior Conservator of Frames and Furniture, at the National Gallery of Victoria**, on the art market and conservation framing, respectively; and tailored performances by musicians from the Victorian College of the Arts, the University of Melbourne.