

National Gallery of Art

NEWS RELEASE

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FIRST EXHIBITION OF EDGAR DEGAS' HORSE AND RACING SUBJECTS
ON VIEW AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, APRIL 12 - JULY 12, 1998

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Degas at the Races is the first museum exhibition ever devoted to Edgar Degas' lifelong fascination with the theme of the horse and the racetrack, which inspired many of his most striking and innovative works. A remarkable ensemble of more than 120 works, including 40 paintings and pastels, 60 drawings, and 20 works of sculpture, shows the full range of Degas' art influenced by the equine form. The National Gallery of Art is the sole venue for the exhibition, which is on view in the West Building from April 12 through July 12, 1998.

First Union Corporation is proud to make this exhibition possible. It is the company's first exhibition sponsorship at the National Gallery and its first national arts sponsorship.

While the other impressionists saw the racetrack primarily as a distinctly modern form of entertainment, for Degas it was much more: he loved the social spectacle and the excitement of the races, and was intrigued by the controlled nervous tension of the thoroughbred horses in the same way he was fascinated by the lithe agility and

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discipline of ballet dancers.

The exhibition is organized by the National Gallery of Art. It is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities. United Airlines is the official carrier for the exhibition.

"It is singularly appropriate that we celebrate Degas' horses and riders at the National Gallery. This unique exhibition presents master paintings and sculpture in the Gallery's founding collections and twenty loans from Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon, as well as generous loans from others," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "We are also grateful to First Union Corporation for its support."

"In addition to its sponsorship, First Union is supporting educational initiatives for Degas at the Races through its 'Excellence in Education' program, the cornerstone of the company's charitable involvement," stated John Georgius, president of First Union Corporation. "First Union is dedicated to helping students reach their full potential. Giving our time and resources to improving education, in this case through the experience of the fine arts, is the best legacy we can leave for future generations."

PAINTINGS

Major paintings are being loaned by museums and private collections worldwide, including the Musée d'Orsay, Paris; the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; and the Hiroshima Museum of Art, Japan, among others. The entire range of Degas' equestrian subjects is included, from his earliest history paintings and copies after the old masters to his last elaborate pastels. One of the highlights is

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Degas' great masterpiece, Scene from the Steeplechase: The Fallen Jockey (1866, reworked 1880-1881 and c. 1897) from the Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon. Degas first exhibited the painting in the Paris Salon of 1866 and kept it in his possession until his death. Since then the painting has been exhibited rarely. This is the first time in more than thirty years that it is being seen in public, and for the first time ever with a group of related drawings and paintings, including a dramatic late variation of the subject, The Fallen Jockey (c. 1896-1898) from the Kunstmuseum Basel.

Also on view is the well-known, beautiful pair of paintings from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston: The Carriage Leaving the Races in the Countryside (Carriage at the Races) (1869-1872) and Racehorses at Longchamp (1871; reworked in 1874).

DRAWINGS

One of the most prolific draftsman of the nineteenth century, Degas worked in virtually every graphic medium throughout his career. Often he used these drawings over long periods of time as preparatory studies for multiple paintings and sculpture. The drawings on view range from very fine early ones, such as At the Races (c. 1865) from the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts, to later dynamic, energetic works, such as Horse Galloping (1885-1890) and two Studies of Horses (1885-1890) from the Nasjonalgalleriet, Oslo.

SCULPTURE, WAXES, AND BRONZE CASTS

Another major highlight is the important series of sixteen wax sculptures of

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horses and riders being loaned by Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond. Artists' waxes are often destroyed during the casting process, but those made by Degas were discovered intact in 1955. Rarely seen by the public, these fragile waxes are being exhibited for the first time alongside three master bronze casts made after Degas' death: Horse Standing (late 1860s/early 1870s), Horse Galloping on Right Foot and Jockey (1890s), and Rearing Horse, 1880s, from the Norton Simon Art Foundation, Pasadena, California.

EXHIBITION ORGANIZATION

The exhibition has been organized by the noted Degas scholar Jean Sutherland Boggs, guest curator; Philip Conisbee, senior curator of European paintings, National Gallery of Art; and Kimberly Jones, assistant curator of French paintings, National Gallery of Art. They have worked in collaboration with Shelley Sturman, head of sculpture conservation, and Daphne Barbour, sculpture conservator, National Gallery of Art.

CATALOGUE

Accompanying the exhibition is a catalogue with essays by Jean Sutherland Boggs on Degas and his depictions of the horse in his art. The catalogue also includes an essay by Shelley Sturman and Daphne Barbour on Degas' technique in the making of his wax sculpture as well as their casting into bronze, and an essay by Kimberly Jones, on the history of horse racing in nineteenth-century France. The catalogue is published by the National Gallery of Art and distributed by Yale University

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Press, New Haven and London.

The National Gallery of Art, located on Constitution Avenue, between Third and Seventh Streets, N.W., is open Monday through Saturday, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Sunday, from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Admission is free. For general information, call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176 or visit the National Gallery of Art's Web site at <http://www.nga.gov>.

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