

French Paintings and Pastels, 1600–1945

The Collections of The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

Aimee Marcereau DeGalan, Editor



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Edgar Degas, *Rehearsal of the Ballet*, ca. 1876

Artist	Edgar Degas, French, 1834–1917
Title	<i>Rehearsal of the Ballet</i>
Object Date	ca. 1876
Alternate and Variant Titles	<i>Répétition de ballet; A Ballet; Ballet Rehearsal</i>
Medium	Gouache and pastel over monotype on cream laid paper
Dimensions (Unframed)	Plate: 22 1/4 x 27 1/2 in. (56.5 x 70 cm) Sheet (irregular): 23 13/16 x 29 3/16 in. (60.5 x 74.2 cm),
Signature	Signed upper right in black pastel: Degas Signed upper right, partially obscured, in yellow pastel: Degas
Credit Line	The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. Purchase: The Kenneth A. and Helen F. Spencer Foundation Acquisition Fund, F73-30

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Edgar Degas's (1834–1917) unusual mixed-media composition shows a rehearsal for a ballet in an interior

stage setting. At the left, three dancers wait in the wings near the celebrated dance master Jules Perrot (1810–1892) while two others rehearse onstage. An *abonné* stands at the far right, almost completely obscuring one of the dancers, whose disembodied leg emerges from behind him. With the exception of the central dancer *en pointe*, nearly all the figures' legs and some of their bodies are truncated. One dancer at the far left adjusts her costume while another, with her back toward the viewer, bends over to tie her ballet slipper. The overall effect of the composition is as if Degas has captured a moment in time; yet, as his friend Paul Valéry once noted, Degas's work "was the result of a limitless number of sketches—and of a *whole series of operations*."¹ Indeed, the Nelson-Atkins painting is no exception.

Degas based Perrot's figure on two earlier sketches: one in the Fitzwilliam Museum (ca. 1873) and a second, more fully realized oil sketch at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (signed and dated 1875; Fig. 1). The figure also appears in an oil painting, *The Dance Class*, completed 1873–76 (Musée d'Orsay, Paris). However, in the Nelson-

Atkins composition and the monotype in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, upon which it is based (Fig. 2; discussed below), the transferring process of the print reversed the pose of the figure. Perrot also appears in a third sketch in a notebook Degas gave to his friend Ludovic Halévy (ca. 1877; J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles).



Fig. 1. Edgar Degas, *The Ballet Master, Jules Perrot*, 1875, oil paint on brown wove paper, sheet: 18 7/8 x 11 3/4 in. (47.9 x 29.8 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1986-26-15. The Henry P. McIlhenny Collection in memory of Frances P. McIlhenny, 1986

The ballerina en pointe and Perrot appear together (in reverse) for the first time in the National Gallery's *The Ballet Master*, a dark-field monotype (Fig. 2). This was probably Degas's first and largest monotype, executed with the help of the artist's friend and mentor, Ludovic-Napoléon Lepic (1839-1889). The Nelson-Atkins work began as a second impression, or cognate, which Degas alone completely worked over in brilliant strokes of pastel and colored gouache, using the monotype print as a point of departure.² (As argued in the accompanying

technical essay, there may be additional media present.) This hybrid technique, as scholars have argued, had no precedent in the artist's oeuvre, and became central to his creative activity at this early moment in his career.³ Lepic, an experimental printmaker, introduced Degas to the monotype process. A master at inking his own plates, Lepic probably performed the same role for Degas, inking the examples at the National Gallery and the Nelson-Atkins; the artists' dual signatures on the monotype plate serve as evidence of this important partnership.⁴ Lepic may also have let Degas use one of his own plates for the Nelson-Atkins and National Gallery monotypes, since Lepic often worked on a larger scale than Degas did in this medium.⁵



Fig. 2. Edgar Degas, executed in collaboration with Ludovic-Napoléon Lepic, *The Ballet Master*, ca. 1876, monotype in black ink heightened and corrected with white chalk or wash on laid paper, plate: 22 1/4 x 27 9/16 in. (56.5 x 70 cm), sheet: 24 7/16 x 33 7/16 in. (62 x 85 cm), National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Rosenwald Collection, 1964.8.1782

Rehearsal of the Ballet is much more ambitious in scope than its monotype starting point, *The Ballet Master*.⁶ As Eugenia Parry Janis first argued, monotype gave Degas the opportunity to experiment with compositional elements he previously realized through preparatory drawings alone.⁷ In the Kansas City picture, the view is slightly more elevated, and Degas adds in three additional ballerinas around the figure of Perrot at left, and two additional figures—an abonné and another dancer—to the right of the dancer en pointe. These elements, in particular the relationship between the central figure en pointe and her two male onlookers, arguably add a psychological dimension to a painting, which is already charged with an element of portraiture with the inclusion of Perrot.⁸

Jules Perrot was an acclaimed dancer, choreographer, and ballet partner to Marie Taglioni, whose method of dancing en pointe became the standard all ballerinas strived to emulate.⁹ Degas met Perrot possibly around 1873, long after the latter retired, but it is clear, based on the number of images Degas made of the aging star, that he admired him greatly.¹⁰ While Degas probably intended to base Perrot's figure in *Rehearsal of the Ballet* directly on his earlier drawings (see Fig. 1), it was only in the course of working on the National Gallery monoprint that what was going to be a replica became a variant. Perhaps most significantly, Degas shifted the direction of Perrot's gaze from *profil perdu*, or "lost profile," to full profile, focusing the ballet master's attention more squarely on the dancer at center stage, who assumes the position his former dance partner Taglioni made famous.¹¹



Fig. 3. Edgar Degas, *The Rehearsal of the Ballet Onstage*, ca. 1874, oil colors mixed with turpentine, with traces of watercolor and pastel, over pen-and-ink drawing on cream-colored wove paper, laid down on Bristol board and mounted on canvas, 21 2/8 x 28 3/4 in. (54.3 x 73 cm), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, H. O. Havemeyer collection, Gift of Horace Havemeyer, 1929, 29.160.26

Preparatory studies for other figures in the Nelson-Atkins pastel include a drawing, dated 1873, for the dancer adjusting her costume (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 29.100.187); she, too, is reversed in the Nelson-Atkins picture because of the printing process.¹² The dancer en pointe, also reversed and here dressed in a white practice tutu with a blue sash, derives from the figure who appears in stage dress in an oil painting, *Two Dancers on a Stage*, at the Courtauld Gallery, London (ca. 1874). She also appears again in white practice attire in a series of three *Rehearsal* pictures Degas realized around 1874: one,

painted in *camaïeu* (monochrome), is at the Musée d'Orsay, and the other two, a pastel and an oil, *The Rehearsal of the Ballet Onstage* (Fig. 3), are at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.¹³ Although the costuming is slightly different in this grouping of pictures, the pose of the dancer en pointe, in addition to the similar wooded and floriated stage sets, prompted scholars Jill DeVonyar and Richard Kendall to link the Courtauld painting and, by extension, the three *Rehearsal* pictures (all ca. 1874), to a performance of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's (Austrian, 1756–1791) *Don Giovanni*.¹⁴ This opera played more than two hundred times from the 1860s to the 1880s and realized two successful revivals during Degas's formative years: in 1866 at the Rue Le Peletier theater, with a new dance called the *Ballet des Roses*, about a romantic pursuit of flowers by butterflies, and in 1875 at the new Palais Garnier.¹⁵ DeVonyar and Kendall's analysis is based in part on the rose-encrusted costume and pose struck by Paris Opéra principal ballerina Maria Sanlaville (1847–1930) in a carte de visite (Fig. 4) advertising her role in Mozart's famed opera.¹⁶ In the photograph, Sanlaville stands in a resting position historically known as a *Croisé derrière* (also known today as a B plus position), because standing en pointe was an impossible position to hold due to the long camera exposure times.¹⁷ However, the position of her arms, as well as elements of her costume, albeit simplified, echo those seen in the Courtauld painting and the three *Rehearsal* pictures from around 1874.¹⁸ DeVonyar and Kendall's interpretation also rested on the inclusion of the dancer en pointe's companion dancer with outstretched arms, who appears in the Courtauld painting and all three *Rehearsal* pictures, but who is occluded in the Nelson-Atkins composition by the tall, dark figure of the abonné. Could this association with the amorous dance in the *Don Giovanni* opera and with Maria Sanlaville still hold in the Nelson-Atkins composition?

The abonné focuses his attention acutely on the dancer en pointe. Abonnés, or male subscribers to the ballet, were members of high society who enjoyed privileged access to the backstage spaces of the theater and to the dancers who occupied those spaces. Caricatured by Honoré Daumier (1806–1879) and many others during the period, abonnés frequently appear as tall, dark, and slender figures who lurk backstage to engage with the young ballerinas on a variety of levels.¹⁹ Degas heightens the stock characteristics of the abonné even further in the Nelson-Atkins composition, showing him

towering over the other figures. Abonnés found in other Degas compositions from the period appear more realistically scaled, making the physical disparity of the mustachioed gentleman in the Nelson-Atkins composition seem all the more noteworthy.²⁰



Fig. 4. Charles Reutlinger (German, 1816–1888), *Portrait of Marie Sanlaville in Costume for Don Juan*, ca. 1866–1870, carte de visite, 4 1/16 x 10 3/8 in. (10.3 x 6.2 cm), Bibliothèque-musée de l'Opéra, Paris, PF Sanlaville (4)

Described by many accounts as “tall, slender, [and] very dark,” Ludovic-Napoléon Lepic not only embodied the visual qualities of an abonné (Fig. 5), but he was also sufficiently well connected to go backstage and watch ballet instruction taking place.²¹ Lepic also fulfilled the part of the abonné romantically, as he was the suitor of Maria Sanlaville, eight years his junior, whose pose and costume in a carte de visite (see Fig. 4), as readers will recall, led some scholars to believe it inspired the figure

en pointe in Degas’s *Courtauld* painting and three *Rehearsal* pictures from around 1874. Could Degas have had Lepic and Sanlaville in mind as models for the figures in the Nelson-Atkins *Rehearsal of the Ballet*—like Mozart’s flowers and butterflies in his *Ballet des Roses*, amorously engaged in the pursuit of love?²²



Fig. 5. Nadar (Gaspard Félix Tournachon, 1820–1910), *Portrait of Ludovic-Napoléon Lepic*, ca. 1870s, salted paper print from glass negative, 8 5/16 x 13 7/8 in. (21.1 x 35.3 cm), Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, NA-235 (2)-FT4

Around 1876, when Degas collaborated with Lepic on the National Gallery monotype, Lepic was also busy on several other projects related to the Opéra, one of which included Sanlaville. In 1876, a small book entitled *L'Opéra: Eaux-Fortes et Quatrains, par un Abonnè* was dedicated by its anonymous author to Lepic.²³ It includes a portrait of Sanlaville, among other figures from the stage, and a pair of frontispiece etchings by Lepic

entitled *Chant and Danse*.²⁴ With the exception of the National Gallery monotype on which Lepic and Degas collaborated, the etching *Danse* (Fig. 6) represents Lepic's only other dance subject.²⁵ It shows a pair of dancer's legs en pointe, from just below the waist, in a multilayered and ruffled tutu not unlike the one in which Sanlaville appears in the aforementioned carte de visite. Was Lepic offering a nod to Degas and Sanlaville by replicating in his print the en pointe pose of the dancer in Degas's monograph?

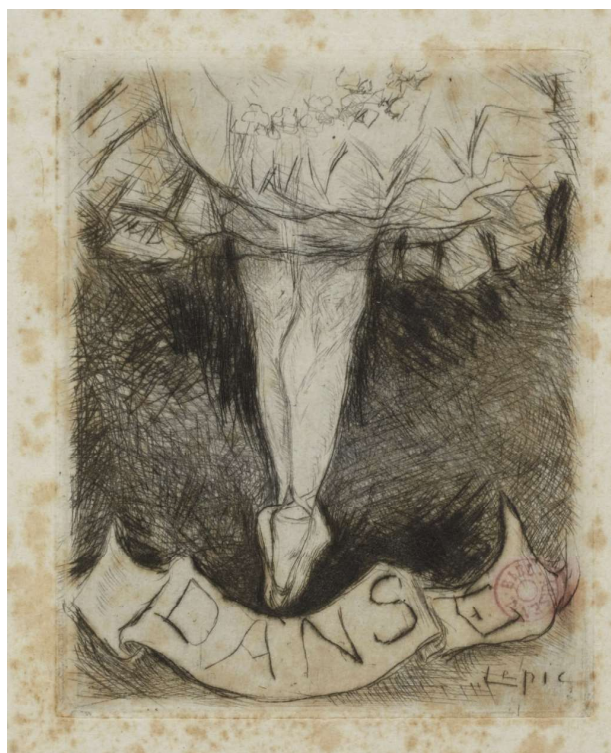


Fig. 6. Ludovic-Napoléon Lepic, *Danse*, ca. 1876, etching, 11 x 7 1/2 in. (28 x 19 cm), published in *L'Opéra: Eaux-Fortes et Quatrains, par un Abonné* (Paris: Librairie des bibliophiles, 1876)

Whether or not Lepic and Sanlaville are portrayed in the Nelson-Atkins composition, their association with Degas was close. Lepic appears in at least eleven works by Degas between 1859 and his death in 1889, making him the only individual except members of Degas's immediate family to be portrayed so frequently.²⁶ Sanlaville, for her part, appears in at least three compositions by Degas.²⁷ There are no known records of Degas having identified his models during his lifetime, so one is left to ponder whether the Nelson-Atkins composition could count as additional representations of

these two individuals—intimates of Degas, and of each other.

Due in part to the elusive identity of Degas's subjects, it can be difficult to assign specific dates to his dancer compositions completed between 1872 and 1876. There are no dated oils from this time period, and only a handful of his pictures in other media include a date.²⁸ Historically, the dating of the Nelson-Atkins composition has ranged from 1874 to 1877. While many of the studies from which its composition derives stylistically date to 1873, it was most likely completed after the three *Rehearsal* pictures (the *camaïeu* painting at the Musée d'Orsay and the pastel and oil at The Metropolitan Museum) that are dated circa 1874. The Nelson-Atkins picture shows an increased freedom in handling, a bolder approach to the poses of the dancers, and a more dramatically composed composition, with a greater use of foreshortening in the shallow space of the stage. Degas also uses the bold framing device of the dark-suited abonné along the right edge of the composition, an element he employs in at least three later compositions dated from 1876 to 1883; this further supports a slightly later date for the Nelson-Atkins composition.²⁹ The circa 1877 date of the Getty study of Perrot, however, acts as a *terminus ante quem* ("no later than") for the Nelson-Atkins composition. The Getty drawing was almost certainly done after the Kansas City picture, considering that it replicates not only Perrot's right-facing orientation but also his closed stance and his head in full profile. This, then, argues for a date of about 1876 for both the National Gallery monotype and the Nelson-Atkins composition.

There is much debate about precisely where and when Louisine Elder (later Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer) acquired the painting. Some scholars suggest she bought it from a color shop in 1875 on the advice of her friend Mary Cassatt (1844–1926), during Elder's first trip to Paris, while many others, including Jean Sutherland Boggs, believe it was purchased in 1877 during a subsequent trip to Paris.³⁰ We know for certain that Elder owned the painting before February 1878, when she lent it to the Eleventh Annual Exhibition of the American Water Color Society exhibition in New York, making it the first Degas ever exhibited in America.³¹

Aimee Marcereau DeGalan
August 2020

Notes

1. Paul Valéry, *Degas, Manet, Morisot*, trans. David Paul (Pantheon Books, New York, 1960), 50. Emphasis original.
2. Although there has been considerable debate over the order of the National Gallery (NGA) and Nelson-Atkins compositions, this author follows the early opinion (1968) of Eugenia Parry Janis, who argued that Degas would often work up the second, less inkier pull of a monotype in pastel and gouache. See her pioneering study, *Degas Monotypes: Essay, Catalogue and Checklist*, exh. cat. (Cambridge, MA: Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, 1968), xviii and cat. no. 1 (unpaginated). This opinion has been substantiated further through recent conservation examinations of both the NGA *Ballet Master* and the Nelson-Atkins *Rehearsal of the Ballet*, done in preparation for this publication. I am extremely grateful to NGA paper conservators Kimberly Schenck and Michelle Facini and to Nelson-Atkins paper conservator Rachel Freeman for sharing their learned insight on our respective pictures, resulting in a mutual agreement on this point. For alternative opinions, see Richard Kendall, "Degas and Difficulty," in "Degas," special issue, *Facture: Conservation, Science, Art History* 3 (2017): 14; and Jane R. Becker, "Catalogue Entry," *The Rehearsal of the Ballet Onstage*, Metropolitan Museum of Art website, 2016, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/436155>.
3. See Richard Kendall, "An Anarchist in Art: Degas and the Monotype," in Jodi Hauptman, *Degas: A Strange New Beauty*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2016), 24.
4. Janis, *Degas Monotypes*, xviii.
5. I am grateful to Kimberly Schenck for suggesting the possibility that this plate could be one of Lepic's, based on its size. Lepic often worked on large plates to create his etchings and monotypes. One example is *The Mill Fire* from the series *Views from the Banks of the Scheldt* (ca. 1870–1876, etching with variable inking on paper, plate: 13 1/2 × 29 5/16 in. [34.3 × 74.4 cm]; sheet: 17 11/16 × 31 7/8 in. [45 × 81 cm], The Baltimore Museum of Art, Garrett Collection). The Nelson-Atkins/NGA monotype is Degas's largest monotype, although *The Fireside* (ca. 1876–1877, monotype in black ink on white heavy laid paper, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), is nearly as large, at a plate size of 16 3/4 × 23 1/16 in.
6. For additional changes between the NGA monotype and its Kansas City cognate, see the accompanying technical essay by Rachel Freeman.
7. See Janis, *Degas Monotypes*, xviii and cat. 1. See also Richard Kendall, "An Anarchist in Art: Degas and the Monotype," in Jodi Hauptman, *Degas: A Strange New Beauty*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2016), 24.
8. George T. M. Shackelford uses this logic in his argument about Perrot's figure in Degas's *The Dance Class* (between 1873 and 1876, oil on canvas, 85 × 75 cm, Musée d'Orsay) in *Degas: The Dancers*, exh. cat. (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1984), 52.
9. "Filippo Taglioni," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, published February 7, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Filippo-Taglioni>.
10. Their meeting is based on the proposed date of the Musée d'Orsay composition *The Dance Class* (between 1873 and 1876, oil on canvas, 33 7/16 × 29 1/2 in. [85 × 75 cm]) and *Portrait of the Dancer Jules Perrot* (Fig. 1).
11. The Philadelphia drawing, dated 1875, shows Perrot's head turned slightly more in profile than the Fitzwilliam drawing and could represent an evolution in Degas's thinking, ultimately shifting it to full profile in the Nelson-Atkins composition. Degas made several other subtle changes to Perrot's figure in the Nelson-Atkins composition, notably in the cut of the dance master's coat, which in the Nelson-Atkins composition, rounds down from his lapels hiding more of the aging dance master's midriff, as opposed to falling straight down as seen in the NGA monotype. For an image of these changes, see Rachel Freeman's accompanying technical essay.
12. For a list of all the related works in which Perrot appears, see the "Related Works" section listed below this entry, researched by Nelson-Atkins Museum project assistant Danielle Hampton Cullen.
13. As in the two color versions of Degas's *Rehearsal* pictures at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Nelson-Atkins dancers appear in white practice

- tutus with pink and blue sashes, and black velvet ribbons worn around their throats. Lillian Browse stated that Degas took artistic license with the latter two sartorial elements. Browse interviewed former dancer Suzanne Mante and M. Jacques Rouché, former director of the Opéra. See Lillian Browse, *Degas Dancers* (New York: Studio Publications, 1949), 67.
14. See Jill DeVonyar and Richard Kendall, *Degas and the Dance*, exh. cat. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002), 158–59.
 15. DeVonyar and Kendall, *Degas and the Dance*, 158. Based on engravings, Lillian Browse first suggested that the three 1874 *Rehearsal* pictures (Metropolitan and Orsay) are of the stage in the Salle de la rue Le Peletier, the site of the Paris Opéra until it burned down on October 28, 1873. Although the ballet rehearsed after that point in a different location—first, temporarily, at the Salle Ventadour and then, from 1875 on, in Garnier’s new opera house—Browse suggests that Degas chose to present this scene as he first observed it, at the rue Le Peletier. See Browse, *Degas Dancers*, 67. While it is tempting to suggest that the Nelson-Atkins composition also represents the stage at the rue Le Peletier, as so many of its other elements are shared with the *Rehearsal* works, because of the tight cropping of NAMA image, it is difficult to tell with any certainty.
 16. Browse, *Degas Dancers*, 67; see also Richard Kendall and Jill DeVonyar, “Degas’ ‘Two Dancers on Stage’: The Mozart Connection,” *British Art Journal* 2, no. 2 (2000): 78–80.
 17. I am grateful to Kansas City classical ballet student Anne Bowser for identifying the position as “B-plus.” This term did not come into ballet parlance until the late 1940s. Historically, this position also went by names including *Attitude à Terre*, *Pointe Derrière Croisé*, and even *Sur le Coup de Pied*, according to Michael Langlois, former dancer with American Ballet Theatre and writer for *Ballet Review*. See Michael Langlois, “Origins of the term ‘B Plus,’” *Ballet Talk for Dancers*, January 19, 2019, <https://dancers.invisionzone.com/topic/65782-origins-of-the-term-b-plus>.
 18. Even this elevated arm position was difficult to hold in a photograph; note the string holding Sanlaville’s left arm aloft.
 19. See, for example, Honoré Daumier, *The Singer’s Mother*, 1856, lithograph, 8 x 9 1/2 in. (20.5 x 23.5 cm), private collection.
 20. See Edgar Degas, *Dancers Backstage*, 1876/1883, oil on canvas, 9 1/2 x 7 3/8 in. (24.2 x 18.8 cm) National Gallery, Washington, DC, <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.52169.html>.
 21. See Henri Loyrette, “Degas à l’Opéra,” in *Degas Inédit: Actes du Colloque Degas, Musée d’Orsay* (Paris: Documentation française, 1989), 48–50; Loyrette also discusses Degas’s access backstage. See also DeVonyar and Kendall, *Degas and the Dance*, 79.
 22. Lepic probably met Sanlaville backstage around 1867 at the Salle Le Peletier, which was the home of the Paris Opéra from 1821 until it was destroyed by fire in 1873. They were a familiar couple in Paris until Lepic’s death in 1889. For this and more biographical information on Lepic and Sanlaville, see Harvey Buchanan, “Edgar Degas and Ludovic Lepic: An Impressionist Friendship,” *Cleveland Studies in the History of Art* 2 (1997): 32–121.
 23. *L’Opéra: Eaux-Fortes et Quatrains, par un Abonné* (Paris: Librairie des bibliophiles, 1876).
 24. The anonymous author was most likely Henry de Fleurigny (pseudonym of Henri Micaud [1846–1916]), as cited in Buchanan, “Edgar Degas and Ludovic Lepic,” 91, 118n227. For another image of Sanlaville, see *Artistes de l’Opéra: Recueil de portraits*, ca. 1876, Bibliothèque nationale de France, <https://images.bnf.fr/#/detail/344436/48>.
 25. Buchanan, “Edgar Degas and Ludovic Lepic,” 92.
 26. Buchanan, “Edgar Degas and Ludovic Lepic,” 32.
 27. Degas represented Sanlaville as Zail, standing behind the title figure in *Mlle Fiocre in the Ballet “La Source”* (1867–1868, oil on canvas, 51 1/2 x 57 1/8 in. [130.8 x 145.1 cm], Brooklyn Museum of Art, 21.111). Sanlaville also participated in a sketching session in Degas’s studio in the early 1880s, and later she figured in at least one portrait: *Mlle Sanlaville* (or *Mlle S., Première Danseuse à l’Opéra*), ca. 1886, pastel on paper, 15 3/8 x 10 5/8 in. (39 x 27 cm), private collection.

28. See Ronald Pickvance, "Degas's Dancers: 1872–1876," *Burlington Magazine* 105, no. 723 (June 1963): 256–67, esp. 264n71, for his proposed dating of the Nelson-Atkins composition to 1875 on the basis of a presumed acquisition date by Louisine Elder. Scholars like Theodore Reff have also shown that Degas inadvertently misdated drawings on occasion. See Theodore Reff, "New Light on Degas's Copies," *Burlington Magazine* 106, no. 735 (June 1964): 250–59.
29. See Edgar Degas, *Pauline and Virginie Conversing with Admirers*, ca. 1876–80, illustration for *La famille Cardinal*, monotype on paper, sheet: 11 3/8 x 7 1/2 in. (28.7 x 19.1 cm), Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University; and Edgar Degas, *Dancers Backstage* (see n. 19).
30. The specific color shop is also debated. Frances Weitzenhoffer says Elder purchased the pastel in 1875, probably from Père Tanguy's; see Weitzenhoffer, *The Havemeyers: Impressionism Comes to America* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1986), 21. Susan Alyson Stein says Elder purchased the pastel in 1877, probably from Père Tanguy's shop; see Louisine W. Havemeyer, *Sixteen to Sixty: Memoirs of a Collector*, ed. Susan Alyson Stein, 2nd ed. (New York: Ursus Press, 1993), 331n291. Jean Sutherland Boggs says Elder probably purchased the painting in 1877; see Boggs et al., *Degas*, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1988), 258. I am grateful for the exhaustive provenance and backmatter research for this painting conducted by Danielle Hampton Cullen.
31. The painting belonged to Louisine Elder; however, in the exhibition catalogue, the lender is listed as G. W. Elder. These initials belonged to both Louisine's deceased father (d. 1873), and her younger brother, George (1860–1916). See *Illustrated Catalogue of the Eleventh Annual Exhibition of the American Water Color Society Held at the Galleries of the National Academy of Design*, exh. cat. (New York, 1878), 14.

Technical Entry

Citation

Chicago:

Rachel Freeman, "Edgar Degas, *Rehearsal of the Ballet*, ca. 1876," technical entry in ed. Aimee

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Rehearsal of the Ballet juxtaposes a muted background palette of green and gray gouache and pastel, applied dry and as a paste, with luminous foreground figures executed predominately in dry pastel. The gouache and pastel are liberally applied so that they cover an underlying monotype print. Both pastel and gouache are inherently unstable media, and thus the artwork has been through several conservation campaigns.

The artwork support is a cream colored, lightly textured, laid paper.¹ Technical reports by Anne Maheux² and Nancy Heugh³ have differed on the paper mold type, with Maheux noting that the paper is wove and suggesting the presence of a watermark at upper left, while Heugh identifies the paper type as laid. During a 2020 examination for treatment, infrared (IR) photography documented the presence of laid and chain lines, however a watermark was not observed. The edges of the paper are unevenly trimmed to within approximately two centimeters of the monotype's platemark.

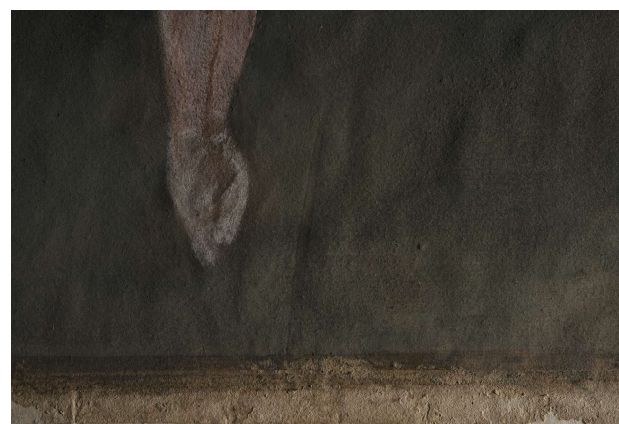


Fig. 7. Detail, in raking light, of the plate flaw along the lower edge of the image at right. The flaw is illuminated from the right for better readability. *Rehearsal of the Ballet* (ca. 1876)

The composition began with a monotype print. Nineteenth century monotypes were made by applying viscous oil-based ink or paint to a rigid, non-porous surface (Degas used intaglio plates in copper and zinc, daguerreotype plates, and celluloid films).⁴ Pressure from an intaglio press transferred the image to paper. Only a few prints could be produced from each inked surface, because the ink film was depleted with each subsequent pull. The underlying monotype for *Rehearsal of the Ballet* (Fig. 2) is a cognate pair⁵ with *The Ballet Master* (ca. 1876; National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC).⁶ The pair are dark-field monotypes where the ink was applied to the plate and then removed with brushes, rags, and fingers to create the image. It is likely that *The Ballet Master* was printed first, because fine details, like the whorls of Degas's fingerprints, are visible.⁷



Fig. 8. Reflected infrared digital photograph of the entire work. The dark band curving along the lower edge of the image is the back of the orchestra pit. *Rehearsal of the Ballet* (ca. 1876)

Rehearsal of the Ballet and *The Ballet Master* are among Degas's earliest monotypes and are thought to be created with technical advice from Vicomte Ludovic Lepic, who countersigned the work at upper right. On both works there are distinct similarities in the marks left by the plate. For example, the dimensions (56.5 x 70 cm) of the platemarks are identical, and both images bear a mild, burnished indentation at lower right from a flaw in the plate (Fig. 7). With infrared photography of *Rehearsal of the Ballet* (Fig. 8), it is possible to see a few elements of the monotype: the rounded edge of the stage along the lower edge of the print, the original outlines of the dance master's coat (Fig. 9), and Lepic's signature (Fig. 10).

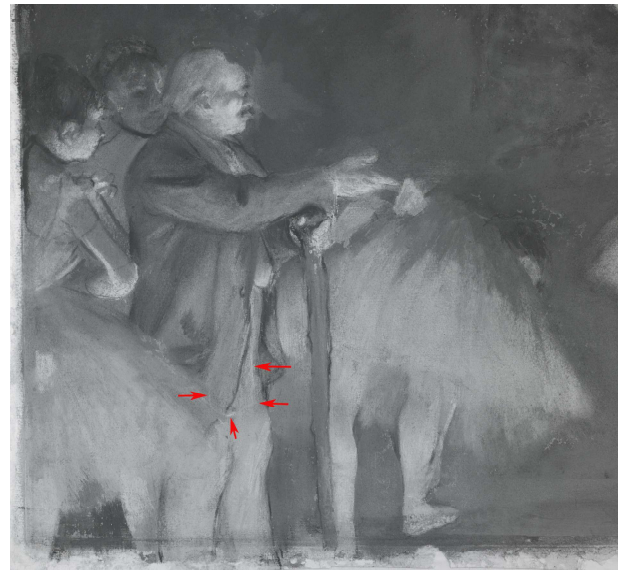


Fig. 9. Annotated reflected infrared digital photograph of Jules Perrot and dancers at lower left. The lines that describe the original outlines of the dance master's coat are indicated with arrows. *Rehearsal of the Ballet* (ca. 1876)



Fig. 10. Reflected infrared digital photograph of Vicomte Ludovic Lepic's signature, reading "Lepic." Without the aid of IR, only the "p" and "i" are visible. *Rehearsal of the Ballet* (ca. 1876)

As noted in the curatorial essay for this work, drawings for the dance master, Jules Perrot, and the dancer exist as separate compositions, and the monotype is based on these drawings.⁸ Degas frequently used his monotypes as underdrawings, enhancing or altering the composition with applied media. In the monotype, the viewer is above and to the left of the stage, and the orchestra pit is visible. The point of view changes in *Rehearsal for the Ballet*: the viewer is taking in the scene from the wings, or the lower left corner of the stage. Degas added dancers around Perrot and moves the group into the foreground, changing the drape of the dance master's coat in the process. By digitally superimposing the major forms of the monotype onto

the pastel it becomes clear that Degas lengthened the figure of the dancer (Fig. 11). He moved her to a lower position on the sheet, and transformed the curved back of the orchestra pit in the monotype into her shadow (Fig. 12). Perrot's figure follows the general intentions of the monotype, but the group of dancers and the *abonné* (a male subscriber to the Paris Opera, the curatorial essay for this work proposes that the identity of this *abonné* is Lepic) were executed in pastel and gouache. These appear to have been blocked in free hand, and a few gestural black pastel marks around the arms of the dancers are a quickly executed sketch to place the figures within the picture plane (Fig. 13). In an effort to draw to scale, legs of the group around the dance master extend past the lower edge of the plate mark and into the margin.



Fig. 11. In this image a tracing of the major forms in the National Gallery of Art's monotype are superimposed over a reflected infrared digital photograph of *Rehearsal of the Ballet* (ca. 1876), illustrating the enlargement of the dancer.

In *Rehearsal of the Ballet*, Degas applied the gouache and pastel over a series of painting sessions. Only the dancer's skirt and the upper left corner of the image have very little added media. The thickest media applications are in the upper right quadrant where pastel was ground with water and a small amount of binder to form a paste that could be layered with the gouache to form a mottled mass of color. The textures of *abonné's* garments are partially achieved by a scumble of powdered pastel over the gouache. Degas built up all areas of the composition simultaneously, using the background to define the limbs of the dancer on point and the legs of the dancer adjusting her shoe. Pointed

pastel sticks were used to emphasize the dancers and the dance master, defining the heads and features of the dancers and adding emphasis to the dance master's cane and garments. The final touch to the pastel and gouache painting is the artist's signature, which was applied twice, in the upper right corner (Fig 14). First in yellow pastel, which was covered by layers of gouache and pastel paste, and then in black pastel.



Fig. 12. Reflected infrared digital photograph of the dancer, at left, and a comparative image in normal illumination at right. In the final composition, Degas moved the dancer to a lower position on the page so that the back of the orchestra pit becomes her shadow. *Rehearsal of the Ballet* (ca. 1876)

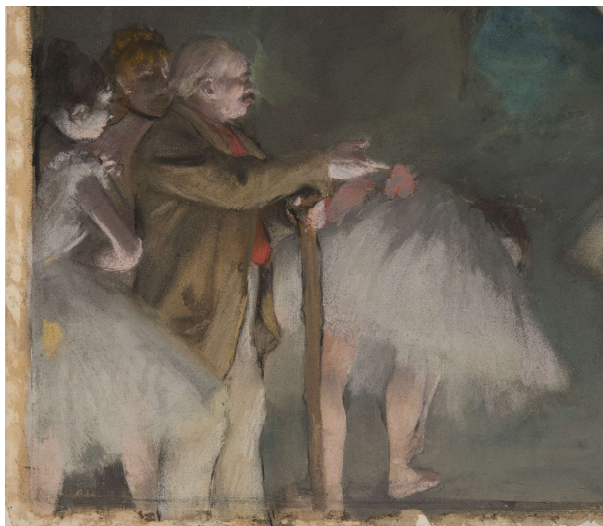


Fig. 13. Detail image of the dance master and dancers at lower left. The black pastel marks around the dancers indicate that Degas did a quick free hand drawing before applying color. The ankles of the group extend past the platemark, making the figures larger and bringing them into the foreground. *Rehearsal of the Ballet* (ca. 1876)

While the gouache and pastel are the most evident in *Rehearsal of the Ballet*, there is a thin, flexible, matte, brown paint film along the left, upper edge of the image.

The texture contrasts with the powdery appearance of pastel, and it shows none of the flaking and paint loss present throughout the remainder of the artwork. This area may be an intermediate layer of de-oiled paint. Identified by Maheux in *Degas Pastels as peinture à l'essence*, Degas produced this medium by placing wet oil paint on blotting paper or another absorbent material until the linseed and other oils wicked out. He then mixed the resulting pigment slurry with turpentine.⁹ Degas may not have been pleased with the brown paint as it is not visible anywhere else in the composition.

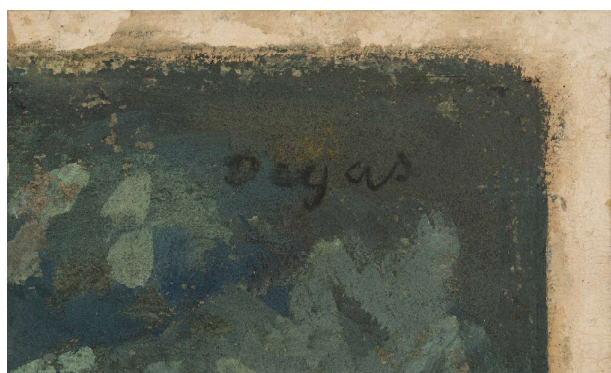


Fig. 14. Detail image of the Degas signatures at upper right, with the yellow signature, in pastel, partially covered by media. *Rehearsal of the Ballet* (ca. 1876)

Pastel is inherently friable, and pastel pastes and gouache form brittle paint films that powder, and crack, and flake away from the monotype as the paper support flexes or undulates. Media loss probably began soon after the composition was completed. Early in the lifetime of the artwork, casein was used as a fixative, forming a pattern of fine brown spatter marks across the entire image. The piece was subjected to multiple and substantial restoration campaigns prior to acquisition by The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. These include removal from a backing, which is described as “blue cardboard in the nineteenth century [French] manner.”¹⁰ This was likely a stiff paperboard, and the edges of the paper folded around this backing and were adhered into place. There is visual evidence that the paint layers were consolidated with a polyvinyl acetate, losses were inpainted with gouache, and the original frame, designed by Degas, was disposed of.¹¹ At the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Heugh pursued consolidation with a cellulose ether in the early 1980s, and in 1987 Christine Young undertook an extensive and successful treatment to release the paper from intermediate and

tertiary supports, “rag paper” and “kraft paper” respectively, consolidate the paint layers, and flatten undulations.¹² A part of this conservation treatment campaign included a modified strip lining technique, utilizing a Japanese paper to attach the work to a thick matboard. The treatment also included fabrication of a framing package sealed with a rubber gasket. During recent preparation for future display, pastel and gouache particles were noted along the silk wrapped mat, and the work was unframed for further examination and consolidation treatment.

Rachel Freeman

August 2020

Notes

1. The description of paper color/texture/thickness follows the standard set forth in Elizabeth Lunning and Roy Perkinson, *The Print Council of America Paper Sample Book: A Practical Guide to the Description of Paper* (Boston: Print Council of America, 1996), unpaginated.
2. Ann Meheux, September 27, 1984, Special Report for *Répétition de Ballet*, Nelson-Atkins conservation file, no. F73-30. On page 2 of the report, Meheux identifies the support as laid paper, and on page 3 she identifies the support as wove.
3. Nancy Heugh, 29 March 2013/25 May 2014, French Painting Catalogue Project Technical Examination and Condition Report, Nelson-Atkins conservation file, no. F73-30.
4. Karl Buchberg and Laura Neufeld, “Indelible Ink: Degas’s Methods and Materials” in *Degas: A Strange New Beauty*, ed. Jodi Hauptman (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2016), 47.
5. For a discussion of cognate pairs, see Buchberg and Neufeld in *Degas: A Strange New Beauty*, 48.
6. Edgar Degas and Vicomte Ludovic Lepic, *The Ballet Master*, ca. 1876, monotype (black ink) heightened and corrected with white chalk or wash on laid paper, the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, Rosenwald Collection, 1964.8.1782.
7. Personal communication from Kimberly Schenck, head of paper conservation, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, to the author, June 2020, Nelson-Atkins conservation file, F73-30.

8. See the accompanying catalogue essay by Aimee Marcereau DeGalan.

9. Jean Sutherland Boggs and Anne Maheux, *Degas Pastels* (New York: George Braziller, 1992), 92.

10. Forrest Bailey, Conservator, to Ralph T. Coe, Assistant Director and Curator of Western Art, both Nelson-Atkins, November 30, 1973, Subject line: A telephone call from Ben Johnson at 4:45pm, 11/30/73, Nelson-Atkins conservation file, no. F73-30.

11. Elizabeth Easton and Jared Bark, "'Pictures Properly Framed' Degas and Innovation in Impressionist Frames," *Burlington Magazine*, no. 1266 (September 2008): 10–11. A description of the original frame first appeared in Louise Havemeyer, *Sixteen to Sixty: Memoirs of a Collector* (New York: Ursus Press, 1943).

12. Christine Young, June 24, 1987, treatment report, Nelson-Atkins conservation file, no. F73-30.

Morristown, NJ, and Palm Beach, FL, by April 10, 1930–July 25, 1932 [2];

Given to her son, George Griswold Frelinghuysen (1911–2004), Beverly Hills, CA, 1932–April 14, 1965 [3];

Purchased at his sale, *Impressionist and Modern Paintings, Sculptures, Drawings: "La Glace Haute" and "Ma Maison à Vernon" by Bonnard; "La Barque à St. Jean" and "La Madone du Village" by Chagall; "Répétition de Ballet" by Degas; "La Baignade devant le Port de Pont-Aven" by Gauguin; "Femme à l'Ombrelle Verte" by Matisse; "Les Peupliers" and "Nymphéas" by Monet; "Volume de Choses" by Staël; "Les Déchargeurs" by Van Gogh; "Portrait de la Comtesse de Noailles" by Vuillard*, Sotheby's, New York, April 14, 1965, lot 49, as *Répétition de ballet*, through Stephen Hahn, New York, by Norton Simon (1907–1993), Beverly Hills, CA, 1965–May 2, 1973;

Purchased at his sale, *Ten Important Paintings and Drawings from the Private Collection of Norton Simon*, Sotheby's, New York, May 2, 1973, lot 7, as *Repetition [sic] de ballet*, by Marlborough Gallery, Vaduz, Liechtenstein, May 2–November 16, 1973;

Purchased from Marlborough Gallery by The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO, 1973.

Documentation

Citation

Chicago:

Danielle Hampton Cullen, "Edgar Degas, *Rehearsal of the Ballet*, ca. 1876," documentation in ed. Aimee Marcereau DeGalan *French Paintings, 1600–1945: The Collections of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art* (Kansas City: The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.37764/78973.5.614.4033>

MLA:

Hampton Cullen, Danielle. "Edgar Degas, *Rehearsal of the Ballet*, ca. 1876," documentation. *French Paintings, 1600–1945: The Collections of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art*, edited by Aimee Marcereau DeGalan, The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 2021. doi: 10.37764/78973.5.614.4033.

Provenance

Purchased by Louise Waldron Elder (later Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1855–1929), New York, by 1877–no later than January 6, 1929 [1];

By descent to her daughter, Mrs. Peter Hood Ballantine Frelinghuysen (née Adaline Havemeyer, 1884–1963),

Notes

[1] Elder wrote in her memoirs that she purchased the pastel at an unnamed color shop. Scholars have not been able to definitively identify which one, but Portier, Latouche and Père Tanguy have all been proposed. Tanguy's shop is cited by Susan Alyson Stein in Elder's memoirs. See Frances Weitzenhoffer, *The Havemeyers: Impressionism Comes to America* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1986), 21, and Louise W. Havemeyer, *Sixteen to Sixty: Memoirs of a Collector*, ed. Susan Alyson Stein, 2nd ed. (New York: Ursus Press, 1993), 331n291.

The date of Elder's purchase of the work is not certain, but it was one of Elder's first purchases, bought on the advice of her friend, artist Mary Cassatt (American, 1844–1926). Most scholars agree that Elder bought the pastel by 1877; see Havemeyer, *Sixteen to Sixty*, 331n291. Elder definitely owned the pastel before February 1878, when she lent it to the *Eleventh Annual Exhibition of the American Water Color Society*.

[2] Louise Havemeyer may have given the pastel to her daughter when she married on February 7, 1907. Havemeyer writes, "As each of you acquired a home of your own I gave to you works of art to beautify it, believing it would be the wish of Father to have me do

so. These objects are yours and the disposition you finally make of them, your responsibility.” Havemeyer also noted, “Degas: I have given Adaline...the one I bought when a girl.” This was probably in reference to the Nelson-Atkins’ pastel, which Havemeyer fondly recalled her in memoirs as her first Degas purchase when she was still a teenager. See Louisine Waldron Elder Havemeyer, “Notes to My Children” regarding disposition of Havemeyer art collection, Series II. Miscellaneous, box 3, folder 23, pp. 1, 7, The Havemeyer Family Papers relating to Art Collecting, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York. In any case, the pastel was not in Havemeyer’s will listing artworks to be donated to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and it was also not among the artworks donated by Havemeyer’s three children in 1929. It was published in the 1931 *H. O. Havemeyer Collection* catalogue as being in Frelinghuysen’s collection.

[3] Paper label on the pastel’s verso inscribed: “To George on his / 21st birthday / from Mother”.

Related Works

Edgar Degas, *The Ballet Class*, between 1871 and 1875, oil on canvas, 33 7/16 x 29 1/2 in. (85 x 75 cm), Musée d’Orsay, Paris.

Edgar Degas, executed in collaboration with Ludovic-Napoléon Lepic, *The Ballet Master (Le maître de ballet)*, ca. 1874, monotype heightened and corrected with white chalk or wash, sheet: 24 7/16 x 33 7/16 in. (62 x 85 cm), plate: 22 1/4 x 27 9/16 in. (56.5 x 70 cm), National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.

Edgar Degas, *Two Dancers on a Stage*, ca. 1874, oil on canvas, 24 1/8 x 18 1/16 in. (61.5 x 46 cm), The Courtauld Gallery, London.

Edgar Degas, *The Rehearsal Onstage*, ca. 1874, pastel on paper, 21 x 28 1/2 in. (53.3 x 72.4 cm), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Edgar Degas, *The Rehearsal of the Ballet Onstage*, ca. 1874, oil colors freely mixed with turpentine, with traces of watercolor and pastel over pen-and-ink drawing on cream-colored wove paper, laid down on bristol board and mounted on canvas, 21 3/8 x 28 3/4 in. (54.3 x 73 cm), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Edgar Degas, *The Dance Class*, 1874, oil on canvas, 32 7/8 x 30 3/8 in. (83.5 x 77.2 cm), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Edgar Degas, *Répétition d’un ballet sur la scène*, 1874, oil on canvas, 25 9/16 x 32 1/16 in. (65 x 81.5 cm), Musée d’Orsay, Paris.

Preparatory Works

Edgar Degas, *Two Dancers (Deux danseuses)*, 1873, dark brown wash and white gouache on bright pink commercially coated wove paper, now faded to pale pink, 24 1/8 x 15 1/2 in. (61.3 x 39.4 cm), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Edgar Degas, *Portrait of the Dancer Jules Perrot*, 1875, black chalk, conté crayon, charcoal highlighted with white on paper, 18 1/2 x 12 3/16 in. (47.0 x 31.2 cm), The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, United Kingdom.

Edgar Degas, *The Ballet Master, Jules Perrot*, 1875, oil sketch on brown wove paper, 18 7/8 x 11 3/4 in. (47.9 x 29.8 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Edgar Degas, *Danseuse vue de dos*, ca. 1877, oil on paper, 11 x 12 5/8 in. (28 x 32 cm), Private Collection, Paris.

Edgar Degas, *Sketches of a ballet master from an album of pencil sketches*, ca. 1877, pencil on paper, 9 3/4 x 13 in. (24.8 x 33 cm), The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

Edgar Degas, *Danseuse de trois-quarts a droite*, nineteenth century, pencil on paper, 12 3/4 x 6 3/4 in. (32.5 x 17.5 cm), location unknown, illustrated in *Impressionist and Modern Watercolors and Drawings and Contemporary Art* (London: Christies, March 29, 1988), 16–17.

Edgar Degas, *Study of a Ballet Dancer*, nineteenth century, pencil on paper, 12 7/8 x 9 1/16 in. (32.7 x 23 cm), location unknown, illustrated in Christopher Lloyd, “Nineteenth Century French Drawings in the Bryson Bequest to the Ashmolean Museum,” *Master Drawings* 16, no. 3 (1978): unpaginated.

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