

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, *Junior Milliners*, 1882

Artist	Edgar Degas, French, 1834–1917
Title	<i>Junior Milliners</i>
Object Date	1882
Alternate and Variant Titles	<i>L'Atelier de la Modiste; The Milliner's Shop; Petites modistes; Little Milliners</i>
Medium	Pastel on beige, medium-weight, wove paper wrapped onto original cardboard mount
Dimensions (Unframed)	19 1/4 x 28 1/4 in. (48.9 x 71.8 cm)
Signature	Signed and dated upper left: 1882 / Degas
Credit Line	The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. Purchase: acquired through the generosity of an anonymous donor, F79-34

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Catalogue Entry

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*A hat is quite a poem; it's a symphony, it's a melody, it's always a masterpiece to create.*¹

—Maurice Praslières, 1904

In *Junior Milliners*, Degas shows his affinity for the milliners of Paris, the hat-making capital of the world.² Two women are absorbed in their work, putting the finishing touches on exquisite chapeaus. With her eyes cast down and to the left, the woman in navy blue studies the placement of a frilly blue ostrich feather, perhaps sewing it into place. Her colleague, dressed in olive green, watches her progress. Degas depicts the interiority of the women as they elevate plain orbs of beige straw—like the one perched on a slender hat stand in the middle of the table—to confections of blue and yellow silk and feathers. Degas equates the milliners' craft to that of an artist; the women stand statuesque, absorbed in creating beautiful objects for consumption.

Degas composes a harmonious arrangement of negative and positive space, repeating the shapes of the almost-

hovering hats over a green-striped wallpaper background and the dark columns of the women's bodies. The picture is divided in half vertically, with the hat on the *champignon* (hat stand) sitting just to the right of center. Horizontally, the top half of the pastel is the most active. In the uppermost register, roughly the top 25 percent of the composition, the crowns of the women's heads touch the very edge of the paper. In the next register down are the hats. Seen together, the hats and heads of the two assistants lead the viewer's eye from left to right in a zigzag pattern. Especially when the pastel is viewed in its frame, the women seem squeezed within this creative world. Degas may have designed the passepartout frame, with its fluted top edge and wide frieze painted in cream-colored gesso. He probably intended the frieze to continue the visual line of the picture plane, allowing the composition more room to breathe; the gilded spacers may have been added later.³

Degas revels in the details of the hats in *Junior Milliners*. In the hat on the left, Degas creates the appearance of blue-dyed straw with diagonal hatch marks in light blue. The wild lines of the dark blue feather provide a strong contrast to the white decorations encircling the brim. Degas also carefully renders the plaited straw bonnet in the other woman's hands, with its spiral crown and a profusion of colorful silk flowers. The contemporary French milliner Madame Heitz-Boyer advertised a similar hat shape in *La Modiste Universelle* in March 1882 (Fig. 1; see no. 4). The brim is broad at the front, narrowing at the back to a turned-up tip. The fully decorated hat (Fig. 2) seems more appropriate than Degas's version for the cooler weather of early spring, with its brown feathers and a warm, velvet-lined interior. Called a *bonnet fermière* (farm bonnet) in the journal, the hat is described as "beige colored straw. The trimming consists of moiré and *côtelée* [ribbed] ribbon made into loops. The same ribbon forms the strings. A bunch of feathers, otter-brown color, the same shade as the velvet which lines the bonnet."⁴ Degas's hat, on the other hand, is more verdant, with orange and blue blooms contrasting with the chocolate-brown chin ribbon. Another summery bonnet, this one with sunflowers, perches on the head of a model in the April edition of *La Mode Actuelle: Journal professionnel des couturières et des modistes* (Fig. 3). It is described simply as a "Black straw hat garnished with flowers and feather plumes."⁵ Both journals were published in the early spring, when Degas was probably working on the pastel.⁶ He was clearly attuned to the fashion magazines and up-to-the-minute styles worn on the streets or seen in shop windows.

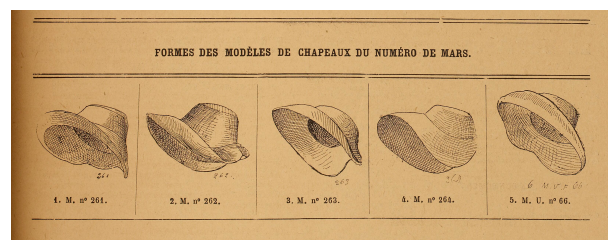


Fig. 1. "Formes des Modèles de Chapeaux du Numéro de Mars" by Madame Heitz-Boyer, from *La Modiste Universelle*, March 1882, lithograph on paper, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, département Réserve des livres rares, FOL-V-832



Fig. 2. "Bonnet fermière" by Madame Heitz-Boyer, from *La Modiste Universelle*, March 1882, lithograph on paper, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, département Réserve des livres rares, FOL-V-832

Indeed, as Simon Kelly says, "fashion was in his blood."⁷ Degas was born in 1834 in Paris to an upper-middle-class family deeply invested in the textile industry. His mother, Célestine Musson, was born in New Orleans to a cotton exporter, and her brother continued the family trade by operating a cotton brokerage in the city, which Degas visited in 1872–73.⁸ The artist's father, Augustin De Gas, was a wealthy banker whose forebears emphasized their supposedly aristocratic lineage by spelling their patronym as two words. Degas was linked to cotton

production not only through his family's economic interests and social aspirations but also in the textiles he admired and even the paper supports he chose for his drawings and pastels.⁹ In addition, the artist always presented a dapper persona and wore stylish hats throughout his life.



Fig. 3. "Confections en Gros pour Dames et Enfants: Cyprienne" (detail), from *La Mode Actuelle: Journal professionnel des couturières et des modistes*, April 1, 1882, lithograph on paper, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, département Sciences et techniques, FOL-V-1514

Millinery subjects especially appealed to the artist, given the opportunity to represent women in a realistic moment and capture a slice of modern life.¹⁰ His colleagues Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919) and Edouard Manet (1832–1883) shared Degas's fascination with hats, fabrics, trimmings, and their creators.¹¹ Renoir mostly shied away from portraying the hatmakers themselves, with the notable exceptions of *At the Milliners* (1878; Harvard Art Museums) and *The Milliners* (ca. 1879; Metropolitan Museum of Art). Usually, Renoir depicted young women or girls trying on or trimming their own hats (see, for example, *Pinning the Hat*, 1890 or 1893). Degas, on the other hand, focused intently on the subject of milliners in the early 1880s (with one earlier work from 1876).¹² By the end of his life, Degas had created a total of twenty-seven works on the theme of milliners: five paintings (four of which were in his studio

at his death), nineteen pastels, two drawings, and the unidentified 1876 *Modiste*.¹³

Junior Milliners is one of Degas's first dated works of a millinery subject. The artist signed and dated it "1882" in the upper left corner, probably just before he sold it to his dealer, Paul Durand-Ruel, in June of that year. Just over a year later, Durand-Ruel sold it to Alexis Rouart (1839–1911), the brother of the artist Henri Rouart (1833–1912), whom Degas had convinced to exhibit with the Impressionists.¹⁴ From Alexis, Degas borrowed *Junior Milliners* for the eighth Impressionist exhibition in 1886.¹⁵ Of the ten works Degas showed, two were "modistes," or milliners. *At the Milliner's* (Fig. 4), also dated 1882, depicts a fashionably dressed woman (actually Degas's friend, the artist Mary Cassatt, 1844–1926) trying on hats. A sales assistant stands to her left. The assistant's face and half of her body are obscured by a large freestanding mirror, and she holds two colorful chapeaus as alternate options.



Fig. 4. Edgar Degas, *At the Milliner's*, 1882, pastel on pale gray wove paper (industrial wrapping paper) laid down on silk bolting, 30 x 34 in. (76.2 x 86.4 cm), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, H. O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929, 29.100.38

Critics at the exhibition treated the two works as a pair, and the similarities and contrasts are elucidating. Both pictures feature the same hat: the bonnet with brown ribbons from the Kansas City picture is the same one tied under the chin of the customer in the New York pastel.¹⁶ One can imagine that the *prémière* (shop owner) has retrieved the hat from the workroom, proclaiming how it had only been finished that morning. The two pictures also offer a complementary contrast of

blue-green in *Junior Milliners* and orange and brown in *At the Milliner's*.

However, the critics also noted a contrast of social classes.¹⁷ Some readings are more inscrutable for modern viewers, but one easily observable difference is between the simple costumes of the three shopgirls versus the more sumptuous olive-brown street dress and lace- or fur-trimmed cape of the customer. The anarchist critic Jean Ajalbert¹⁸ imagined an entire story for *At the Milliner's*, where the customer had either eyed the hat in the shop window for a long time, or her jealousy of another behatted woman overtook her, and in either case she hurried to the milliner's in her wrinkly clothes.¹⁹ Ajalbert praised the women's creations in *Junior Milliners*—"Under their fingers, the hats [are] fabulous, garnished with flowers and birds, becoming gardens or aviaries"—while reminding his readers that the women earn only two francs per day.²⁰ As such, he deems the women too skinny, with rumpled faces and anemic complexions as a result of their straitened circumstances. Gustave Geffroy took a less sympathetic view, describing the movements of the junior milliners as "simian" or "monkey-like," whereas he praised the client in *At the Milliner's* as "an astonishing silhouette" and a "dream of a frescoed profile against a gold ground."²¹ The comparison to apes is particularly unjust and reveals the racism and classism endemic to nineteenth-century France, and particularly to Geffroy.²²

Perhaps one can see the purported anemic complexion in the worker on the left in *Junior Milliners*, but formally, her blue and yellow tinge probably has more to do with the light reflected from the blue-green wallpaper and the yellow straw hat beside her. Indeed, Degas likely intended a naturalistic effect of her blue veins showing through her translucent skin. Her companion has a ruddier complexion, not unlike the customer in *At the Milliners*. The hand of the leftmost woman in *Junior Milliners* is finely rendered with pink and white highlights and sharp black lines, perhaps indicating a thread for sewing on a trim or feather. The other woman, in olive green, holds a straw hat aloft in a movement that seems somewhat physically impossible. Is she flattening the crown of the hat between her thumb and fingertips? Both women arch their little fingers, lending an air of delicate grace to their movements. Degas might have agreed with contemporary French writer Marie-Louise Alquié de Rieupeyrous, known as Louise d'Alq, when she said, "Is there anything more graceful than a girl trimming her hats with her dainty fingers?"²³

The interpretation of these paintings is complicated by the cultural understanding of milliners within the class hierarchy of nineteenth-century Paris.²⁴ It was well known that the bottom ranks of millinery staff earned very low wages. Junior trimmers like those in the pastel generally made less than a fifth of what the premières made in a month. Indeed, premières were among the highest paid workers in the garment industry.²⁵ Nevertheless, their compensation paled in comparison to that of a successful artist. Degas earned more than sixteen thousand francs for work sold to Durand-Ruel in 1882,²⁶ selling *Junior Milliners* for 2,500 francs in June²⁷ and *At the Milliner's* the following month for the same price. He made four times as much as the premières and twenty times as much as the junior trimmers.

With such low wages, junior staff sometimes resorted to sex work to supplement their income, a fact that Gustave Coquiott did not miss in his 1924 book on Degas, in which he rhapsodizes about modistes as coquettes and prostitutes.²⁸ Later art historians like Hollis Clayson and Eunice Lipton have also read Degas's works as a representation of clandestine prostitution.²⁹ However, a detail in *Junior Milliners* makes it doubtful that Degas intended the women to be seen in this context: there on the fourth finger of the leftmost woman's raised left hand is a gold ring. It could be a wedding ring, indicating that the woman may have had a spouse's income, lessening her need for supplementing her livelihood.

Nevertheless, Degas was accused of misogyny for the first time at the 1886 Impressionist exhibition.³⁰ The criticism was primarily focused on his series of nude bathers (in works similar to the Nelson-Atkins *After the Bath*), but commentary like Geffroy's about the "simian movements" of the junior milliners is blatantly contemptuous and seems to detect a misogyny in Degas that may not have existed.³¹ A comparison between Degas's quiet, statuesque artisans in *Junior Milliners* and the contemporaneous criticism makes it evident that while Degas's depictions were not particularly classist or anti-feminist, the critics certainly were. As Martha Ward has argued, "in images like *Petites Modistes* [*Junior Milliners*], Degas exposed or exploited society's own seemingly 'unwillful' debasement of women: the sort of bias that permeated culture through its colloquial representations and insidiously appropriated the ranks of 'natural affinities' for social orders."³²



Fig. 5. Paul Boyer, *Maison Alphonsine: Le Salon Empire, Mme Alphonsine and her "Premières,"* 1904, from *Les Modes*, October 1904, photograph, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, département Sciences et techniques, FOL-V-4312

Junior Milliners is not visually anti-feminist. However, its historic title, *Petites Modistes*, under which it was exhibited in 1886, has confused the issue. Translated literally as "Little Milliners," it seems to give a pejorative meaning to the workers, especially since the women do not seem particularly young or small. Indeed, they are probably adults in their twenties, and one of them appears to be married. The millinery profession encompassed many roles, and businesses were rarely one-woman operations (although some smaller shops did function that way). Larger establishments had many employees. For example, a photograph of the salon of the modiste Alphonsine shows at least nine women huddled together in a back room, with hats and flowers on their laps (Fig. 5). The millinery staff usually included, from the lowest ranks, the apprentice, sometimes also called the *trottin* (or runner), who, beginning at the age of thirteen, would deliver packages and run errands; the *formière* (or former), a girl of about sixteen who created the framework for the hat; the *apprêteuse* (or preparer), a girl ranging in age from sixteen to twenty-two who draped fabric over the hat frames and would eventually learn to sew straw and fabrics into shape; the *garnisseuse* (or trimmer), a woman of about twenty-two who was responsible for decorating the hat; the *seconde*, who supervised her colleagues; and finally the *première*, who was the creative lead of the shop, responsible for designing new styles, assisting clients in trying on the merchandise, and overseeing all the other assistants.³³ In larger establishments, there were several *premières*, who supervised various subdepartments, and several

preparers and trimmers, including the *petite* (or junior) and the *bonne* (or accomplished) *apprêteuses* and *garnisseuses*. Therefore, the women in Degas's pastel who are placing ribbons, feathers, and flowers on straw hats are doing the work of the trimmers, and they are not "little" per se but instead fulfilling the specific job rank of "junior."³⁴

Degas equated the creation of beautiful hats by milliners with the creation of his pastels and other compositions. Their use of straw, velvet, silk, ribbons, and plumes elevated a utilitarian object to art, just as his depictions of the everyday workers of Paris became high art through careful color contrasts, expertly applied pastel, and finely rendered textures of fabric and skin. This masterful pastel of young women thoughtfully selecting and sewing ribbons and feathers highlights their creativity and positions them as experts in their chosen trade.

Meghan L. Gray
October 2023

Notes

1. Maurice Praslières, "Un Grande Modiste au XXe Siècle," *Les Modes*, no. 46 (October 1904): 20. "Mais c'est tout un poème qu'un chapeau; c'est une symphonie, c'est une mélodie, c'est toujours un chef-d'oeuvre à créer." All translations by Meghan L. Gray, unless otherwise noted. Written to advertise the modiste Alphonsine's new headquarters, the article emphasizes all her best qualities, including her ability to speak six languages and her extensive travels, and pays particular attention to her appreciation of great eighteenth-century artists like Jean Marc Nattier (1685–1766), François Boucher (1703–1770), and Antoine Watteau (1684–1721). The author likens Alphonsine's expertise to the highest echelons of the artistic hierarchy.
2. Of nearly one thousand millinery shops in Paris in 1870, about 86 percent were women-owned businesses. Francoise Tétart-Vittu, "The Milliners of Paris, 1870–1910," in Simon Kelly and Esther Bell, *Degas, Impressionism, and the Paris Millinery Trade*, exh. cat. (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 2017), 52.

3. For more on the frame, see the technical entry by Rachel Freeman accompanying this essay. A photograph of a room of *Loan Exhibition of Masterpieces by Old and Modern Painters*, M. Knoedler and Co., New York, in 1915 seems to show the pastel framed without the spacers; reproduced in Frances Weitzenhoffer, *The Havemeyers: Impressionism Comes to America* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1986), 224.
4. "Description des Chapeaux," *Modiste Universelle* 6, no. 6 (March 1882): 2, under no. 4, model no. 264. The publication was offered in five languages, including English.
5. "Confections en Gros pour Dames et Enfants: Cyprienne," *La Mode Actuelle: Journal professionnel des couturières et des modistes* (April 1, 1882): 9. "Chapeau de paille noire garni de fleurs et plumes."
6. The pastel is dated to 1882 and must have been made before June, when Degas sold it to his dealer Paul Durand-Ruel, meaning that he worked on it between January and June of that year.
7. Kelly, "'Silk and Feathers, Satin and Straw': Degas, Women, and the Paris Millinery Trade," in Kelly and Bell, *Degas, Impressionism, and the Paris Millinery Trade*, 20.
8. Michelle Foa, "In Transit: Edgar Degas and the Matter of Cotton, between New World and Old," *Art Bulletin* 102, no. 3 (September 2020): 54–76. Degas's family owned and made money from enslaved people.
9. Foa, "In Transit," esp. 64–67.
10. Degas and his colleagues were influenced by the writings of Charles Baudelaire, whose essay "Le Peintre de la vie moderne" (The Painter of Modern Life; published in *Le Figaro* in 1863) encouraged artists to blend in as observers (*flâneurs*) of modern life and to depict the common scenes of the city and its people in a spontaneous and seemingly unstudied manner.
11. Despite his fascination, Manet seems to have only treated the subject formally in one painting, *At the Milliners* (1881; Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco) and two watercolors (both 1880; Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon).
12. He exhibited a pastel entitled *Modiste* at the second Impressionist exhibition in 1876, but it has not been identified. Degas's earliest recorded sale of a millinery subject is a pastel, *At the Milliners* (1881; Metropolitan Museum of Art). Durand-Ruel bought it from the artist in October 1881, and it is therefore dated to that year. See Kelly, "Silk and Feathers," 42n5.
13. Kelly, "Silk and Feathers," 18.
14. Henri exhibited in all but one of the eight Impressionist exhibitions.
15. See Edgar Degas to Alexis Rouart, early May 1886, in Theodore Reff, ed., *The Letters of Edgar Degas* (New York: The Wildenstein Plattner Institute, 2020), 1:400–401 (original French), 3:100 (English translation), as *Petites modistes*.
16. Kelly also makes this connection between the two pastels; Kelly, "Silk and Feathers," 37.
17. For an excellent overview of the criticism of the millinery pair, see Martha Ward, "The Eighth Exhibition 1886: The Rhetoric of Independence and Innovation," in Charles S. Moffett, ed., *The New Painting: Impressionism, 1874–1886*, exh. cat. (Geneva: Richard Burton SA, 1986), 430–39.
18. Jean Ajalbert was a French poet, journalist, art critic, and lawyer. For Ajalbert's friendship with Paul Signac, see Brigid M. Boyle, "Paul Signac, Portrieux, The Bathing Cabins, Opus 185 (Beach of the Countess), 1888," in this catalogue. See also "Jean Ajalbert," Angkor Database: A Social Responsibility Project by Templantation Angkor Resort, Siem, accessed November 10, 2023, <https://angkordatabase.asia/authors/jean-ajalbert>.

19. Jean Ajalbert, "Le Salon des Impressionnistes," *La Revue Moderne: Littéraire, Politique et Artistique* 3, no. 30 (June 20, 1886): 386. "A cette série, nous préférons les deux pastels de modistes. Une femme essaie un chapeau devant la psyché qui nous dérobe obliquement la modiste. Ce chapeau, elle l'a guetté longtemps à la devanture, ou l'a jalosé à une autre femme: elle s'oublie à scruter sa nouvelle tête; elle imagine des changements, un ruban, une épingle. . . . Quelle pose naturelle, quelle vérité dans cette demi toilette hâtée pour courir chez la modiste" (Of this series, we prefer the two pastels of milliners. A woman tries on a hat in front of the psyche mirror [a tall, adjustable dressing room mirror], which obliquely reveals the milliner. She watched for this hat for a long time in the window, or was jealous of another woman: she forgets herself scrutinizing her new head; she imagines some changes, a ribbon, a pin. . . . What a natural pose, what truth in this half-dress, as she hurried to run to the milliner).
20. Ajalbert, "Le Salon des Impressionnistes," 386. "Un autre pastel montre l'atelier ou deux ouvrières travaillent; sous leurs doigts les chapeaux fabuleux, se garnissent de fleurs, d'oiseux, vont devenir jardins ou volières, et les chlorotiques modistes, enserrées dans leurs corsets, minces et la figure chiffonnée, et les cheveux frisés à la chien, sont bien de celles qui gagnent deux francs par jour, et édifient des chapeaux a vingt louis, en attendant de les porter" (Another pastel shows the workshop, where two workers are working; under their fingers the fabulous hats, adorned with flowers and birds, will become gardens or aviaries, and the anemic milliners, squeezed in their corsets, thin and with rumpled faces, and hair curled *à la chien* [French for "as the dog"], are indeed among those who earn two francs a day, and make hats for twenty louis, while waiting to wear them).
21. Gustave Geffroy, "Salon de 1886: VIII, Hors du Salon. Les Impressionnistes," *La Justice* 7, no. 2324 (May 26, 1886): 2, as *Petites Modistes*. "—des *Petites Modistes*, sèches, noires, acides, qui touchent à des chapeaux avec la grâce faubourienne de leurs mouvements simiesques ; —une *Femme essayant un chapeau chez sa modiste*, vêtue de couleurs d'une richesse sourde, levant les deux bras du même geste simplifié, étonnante silhouette qui fait songer à un personnage de fresque profile sur fond d'or" (—*Little Milliners*, dry, black, acidic, who touch hats with the Faubourian [or suburban] grace of their simian movements; —a *Woman trying on a hat at her milliner's*, dressed in muted rich colors, raising both arms in the same simplified gesture, an astonishing silhouette reminiscent of a frescoed profile against a gold background). For an analysis of his commentary, see Anthea Callen, *The Spectacular Body: Science, Method and Meaning in the Work of Degas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 31–35.
22. For example, Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso published a famous treatise *L'Uomo delinquente* (The Criminal Man; 1876) on "biological criminality," which claimed that the physiognomy of people indicated their likelihood of breaking the law. The popular French science periodical *La Nature* reviewed his findings in January 1879. See Callen, *The Spectacular Body*, 1. Callen uses Geffroy's lens for her reading of *Junior Milliners* to perpetuate the long-held misconception of Degas as misogynist and classist; she described the rightmost woman in *Junior Milliners* as having a "protruding lower face and large ears" and a "seemingly dull-witted face." Callen, *The Spectacular Body*, 33.
23. "Est-il rien de plus gracieux qu'une jeune fille chiffonnant ses chapeaux de ses doigts mignons?" Louise d'Alq, *La Lingère et la modiste en famille* (Paris: Bureaux des Causeries Familiales, 1883), 81–82, trans. in Esther Bell, "Edouard Manet, *At The Milliner's*," in Kelly and Bell, *Degas, Impressionism, and the Paris Millinery Trade*, 138.

24. In the 1880s, authors found fertile ground in newly developed department stores, milliners, and social classes. For example, Émile Zola's novel on the department store, *Au bonheur des Dames* (The Ladies' Paradise, 1883), tells the story of the recently orphaned Denise, who is sent to work at a department store rivaling her uncle's draper shop, and the women who become obsessed with shopping to the detriment of their families' livelihoods. Although the novel was published a year after Degas's pastel was made, Iskin proposed that the artist may have heard of the novel beforehand, since he knew Zola's publisher. See Ruth E. Iskin, *Modern Women and Parisian Consumer Culture in Impressionist Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 79. Another author, Guy de Maupassant, describes the character Mme de Guilleroy enjoying the shops of the dressmaker, the milliner, or corset-maker in his novel *Fort comme la mort* (Strong as Death, 1889). And Pierre Giffard writes about the department store in *Les Grands Bazars: Paris sous la Troisième République* (Paris: V. Havard, 1882). Maria d'Anspach's 1841 essay describes a day in the life of a milliner's shopgirl: "La Modiste," in *Francais peints par Eux-mêmes* (Paris: L. Curmer, 1841), 3:105–12.
25. Charles Benoist, *Les Ouvrières de l'Aiguille à Paris: Notes pour l'Étude de la Question Sociale* (Paris: L. Chailley, 1895), 87–88; Kelly, "Silk and Feathers," 23. According to Benoist, junior trimmers might make between fifty and one hundred francs per month, while premières could make up to five hundred francs per month, or at a large establishment, sometimes as much as seven hundred francs per month.
26. Rebecca A. Rabinow, *Cezanne to Picasso: Ambroise Vollard, Patron of the Avant-Garde*, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2006), 161.
27. Jean Sutherland Boggs et al., *Degas*, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1988), 376.
28. Gustave Coquiot, *Degas* (Paris: Librairie Ollendorff, 1924), 130–36.
29. Hollis Clayson, *Painted Love: Prostitution in French Art of the Impressionist Era* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 113–32; and Eunice Lipton, *Looking into Degas: Uneasy Images of Women and Modern Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 151–86.
30. Boggs et al., *Degas*, 385.
31. Norma Broude first rebutted the idea of Degas's contempt for women in Broude, "Degas's 'Misogyny,'" *Art Bulletin* 59, no. 1 (March 1977): 95–107. Kelly uses the series of millinery pictures to further Broude's argument for a more nuanced and positive reading of Degas's portrayal of women; see Kelly, "Silk and Feathers," 17–41.
32. Ward, "The Eighth Exhibition 1886," 433.
33. Arsène Alexandre, *Les Reines de l'Aiguille: Modistes et Couturières (Étude Parisienne)* (Paris: T. Belin, 1902), 143–44; Benoist, *Les Ouvrières de l'Aiguille à Paris*, 87–88; Kelly, "Silk and Feathers," 22–23; and Tétart-Vittu, "The Milliners of Paris," 53.
34. Kelly first made this point in "Silk and Feathers," 22–23.

Technical Entry

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Junior Milliners was completed during a period when Edgar Degas depicted both the Parisian well-to-do and the working classes in both canvas and pastel paintings. *Junior Milliners* focuses on two young female shop assistants as they decorate fashionable hats. In addition to the pastel painting materials and technique, this entry focuses on the frame, which is original to the artwork and appears to have been designed by Degas.

At 48.9 x 71.8 centimeters, the primary support is within range of the Marine 20 size standard-format support.¹ The primary support is a gray-toned, medium thickness,

wove paper. Prior to media application, the corners were trimmed, and the edges are turned over a paperboard² and attached, at the edges only, to the verso, with a 3.5 to 4.5 cm overlap. Chromatically, the paper reads as beige to brown;³ however, close inspection reveals that it was manufactured from a mixed furnish with longer and shorter fibers in both light and dark blue as well as black and brown fibers scattered throughout.⁴ The rough paper texture suggests that it was produced specifically for charcoal, chalk, or pastel. There is no watermark or other indication of either a mill or colorman's shop where the drawing paper was attached to the paperboard. The paperboard is gray in tone, and the back of the board was sealed with a blue-gray paint prior to application of the drawing paper (Fig. 6).⁵

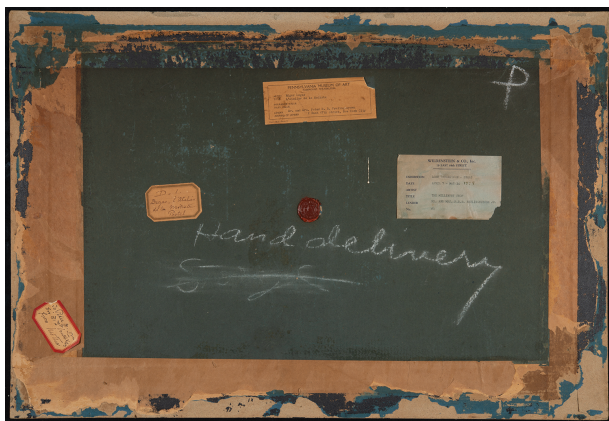


Fig. 6. Verso of *Junior Milliners* (1882). At the lower right, one of the trimmed corners and folds is visible. The blue-gray toning in the center of the artwork is paint applied to the paperboard. Later additions to the back of the artwork are the brown paper packing tape and blue paper dustcover, which obscure the edges of the remainder of the paper.

The image of the two young milliners is created with a complicated layering of media. Degas applied a dark layer of pastel, smudged with a brush, to the right side of the paper. The paper tone shows through at the center and left side of the sheet. There is a lightly applied charcoal underdrawing below the women and the hats they hold. The underdrawing lacks significant detail, which suggests that Degas was tracing or working from a sketch. The placement of fingers, hat brims, and the shoulder of the milliner at left was slightly altered as the drawing approached completion (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7. Digital infrared photograph showing the original lines of the upper left corner of the composition with two pastel strokes that indicate the original placements of the milliner's arm and hat brim, *Junior Milliners* (1882).

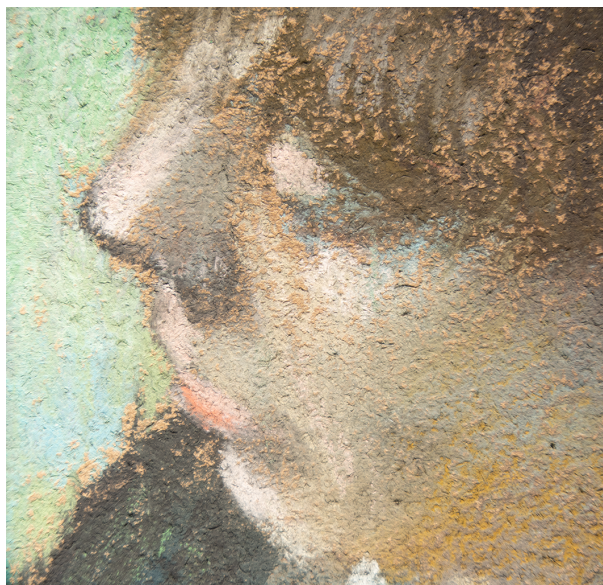


Fig. 8. The face of the milliner at left, *Junior Milliners* (1882). Degas records the yellow of the hat on the woman's jaw and contrasts the color with the blue shadow below her cheek bone.

The two milliners were painted with contrasting color themes and media application techniques. Degas used a dark, almost monochromatic palette for the woman at right and blended and smudged the pastel into the paper, causing her to visually recede behind the colorful hat that she is working on. The woman at left draws the viewer's eye with the varied palette and texture in her gown. The skin tones in her jaw reflect the yellow of the hat on the stand at center, and light blue on the cheek creates simultaneous contrast (Fig. 8). The other area of notable simultaneous contrast is in the blue and orange on the hat at right. The striped wallpaper in the background was applied late in the composition process

and seems to have begun with blue and white vertical strokes. These were sometimes blended before Degas added strokes of purple and green in the uppermost layers.

Elements of the composition display varying degrees of completion. The woman at left is the most finished part of the drawing, followed by the woman at right, and then the hats held by each woman. The least finished areas correspond to the less important portions of the composition, for example the hat and hat stand at center, where Degas worked quickly. Degas appears to have laid in the table even more quickly and very late in the composition, overlapping the outline of the milliner's skirt and the vertical stripes of the wallpaper. Last of all, he added the white ostrich feathers on the table, which are reduced to a poof of squiggles, all applied with the pointed end of a pastel stick. To avoid disturbing the underlying pastel layers, Degas may have dampened the stick used to draw the feathers.

There is no evidence of fixative, and, possibly in a complement to the colors of the wallpaper, the artist signed and dated the drawing at upper left with the tip of a blue pastel: "1882 Degas" (Fig. 9).

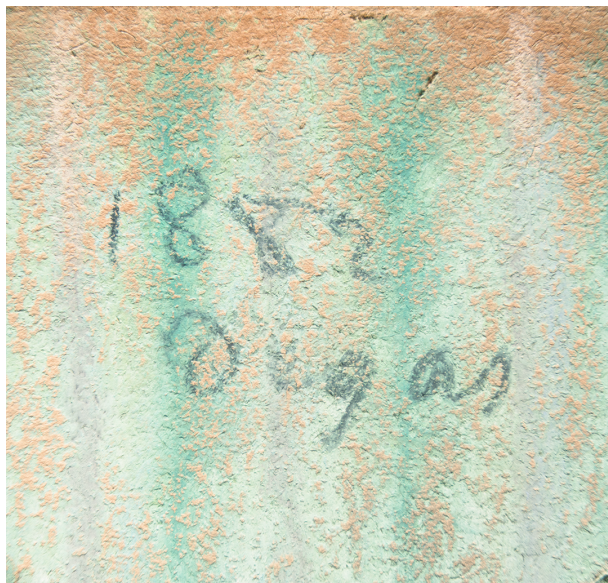


Fig. 9. Degas's signature and date at upper left, *Junior Milliners* (1882).

The frame (Fig. 10) appears to be original to the artwork and was likely designed by Degas. It is a passepartout frame and resembles the mat and narrow frame construction historically used for the presentation of works on paper. The profile consists of a wide, flat frieze

leading to a narrow gilded ogee at the exterior. Gilded wooden strips surround the image. The finish on the flat frieze is the original polished gesso.



Fig. 10. The passepartout frame, likely designed by Degas and of French construction, *Junior Milliners* (1882)

One of the early owners of the pastel was Louisine Havemeyer (1855–1929), who supported the women's suffrage movement by lending the artwork to an exhibition at Knoedler Gallery in New York. An image of the 1915 exhibition⁶ includes the artwork in the current frame; however, the exterior ogee is not as reflective as it is today. This suggests that the ogee was gilded, or regilded and burnished, at a later date. In "Pictures Properly Framed," Elizabeth Easton and Jared Bark⁷ link the frame's profile to drawings by Degas and describe a frame of similar construction on *The Collector of Prints* (1866; Metropolitan Museum of Art).⁸ Havemeyer, who also owned *The Collector of Prints*,⁹ had similar frames fabricated for other Degas artworks that she acquired. However, this is likely not the case with the *Junior Milliners* frame, as the back of the frame has splines (Fig. 11) in the corners, and the fluted rail is glued to the flat frieze, both hallmarks of French construction.¹⁰ In the years between the museum's acquisition and the present, the frame has been built up by conservation staff to better accommodate the thickness of modern framing packages. This ensemble is composed of glazing, spacers, and backing boards that accommodate the concave deformation of the support and the raised wax stamp of the Alexis Rouart collection located at the center of the verso.



Fig. 11. The back of the frame with the spline at at lower left and upper right indicated with arrows. The large metal pieces on the lower corners and at upper left and lower right are old metal repairs to the miters. The conservation department at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art built out the back of the frame with beveled wooden strips to accommodate a modern framing package and lined the rebate to better protect the artwork, *Junior Milliners* (1882).

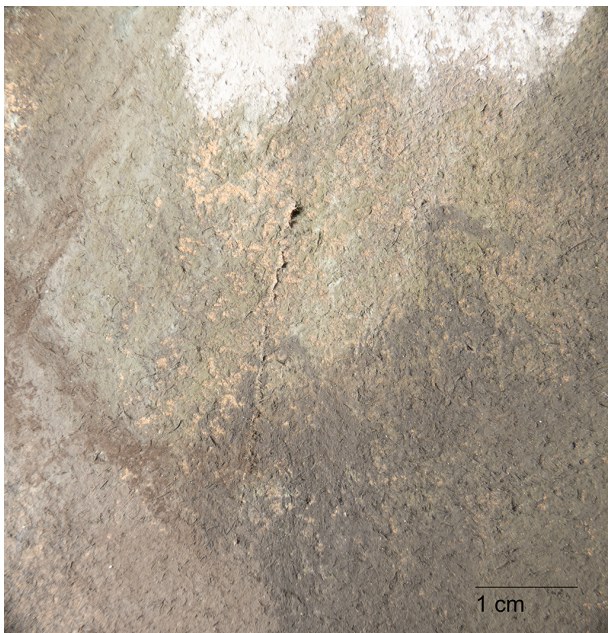


Fig. 12. Photomicrograph of the area at right, *Junior Milliners* (1882). The white is the collar of the milliner at right. The photomicrograph shows randomly scattered, short, and very fine cuts in the surface of the paper. This is a damage pattern caused by glass shards when glazing shatters.

The pastel is in good and stable condition for its age. Although both the drawing paper and the paperboard appear to be slightly brittle, there is little other evidence of acidic degradation. Holes and abrasion at the edges of the image may be from wood spacers that separated the artwork from the frame rebate.¹¹ The wax seal protrudes outward by approximately 3 mm (see Fig. 6). The

paperboard was likely not supported by a secondary board for the majority of its life, causing a concave warp. The artwork might have been the victim of a previous glass break, since there are numerous short and very fine cuts and scratches scattered throughout the paper support (Fig. 12).

Rachel Freeman
October 2023

Notes

1. David Bomford, Jo Kirby, John Leighton, and Ashok Roy, *Art in the Making: Impressionism* (London: Yale University Press, 1991), 46.
2. Paperboard refers to “stiff and thick ‘paper’ which may range from a ‘card’ of 0.20 mm or 1/125th of an inch or more and vary in composition from pure rag to wood, straw, and other substances having little or no affinity with ‘paper’ beyond the method of manufacture.” See E. J. Labarre, *A Dictionary of Paper and Paper-Making Terms* (Amsterdam: N. V. Swets and Zeitlinger, 1937), 208–09. The board may also be a panel. Panels or panel boards are stiff and tough multiply boards composed of leather and/or waste papers. They were saturated with oils and hardened with heat. E. J. Labarre, *Dictionary*, 182.
3. The description of paper color, texture, and 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. In this case, there is no good color match for the paper: it is between the darkest beige and the brown.
4. “Mottled” papers were composed of mixed furnish taken from various sources such as dyed linen, cotton, Union (fabric made from a linen, wool, or cotton warp and a wool weft), and wool rags or fibers as well as jute fibers and dyed or bleached sulphite wood pulps. See Julius Erfurt, *The Dying of Paper Pulp* (London: Scott, Greenwood and Co., 1901), 141–52.

5. Nineteenth-century Parisian colormen's catalogues list "Panneaux et Cartons d'Etudes" (Panels and Boards for Studies), fabricated specifically for pastel. See *Fabrique de Couleurs et Vernis, Toiles à Peindre, Carmin, Laques, Jaunes de Chrome de Spooner, Couleurs en Tablettes et en Pastilles, Pastels, et Généralement Tout Ce Qui Concerne la Peinture et les Arts, Encres Noires et de Couleurs Pour la Typographie et la Lithographie, Fabrique à Grenelle* (Paris: Le Franc, 1862), 40. The advertised sizes do not correspond to the artwork's dimensions. However, it is difficult to dismiss the possibility that the artist modified a panel to fit his qualifications.
6. The photograph is published in Frances Weitzenhoffer, *The Havemeyers: Impressionism Comes to America* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1986), 224.
7. Elizabeth Easton and Jared Bark, "'Pictures Properly Framed': Degas and Innovation in Impressionist Frames," *Burlington Magazine*, no. 1266 (September 2008): 603–11.
8. Edgar Degas, *The Collector of Prints*, 1866, oil on canvas, 20 7/8 x 15 3/4 in. (53 x 40 cm), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929, 29.100.44, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/436122>.
9. See provenance information. Havemeyer also owned *Rehearsal of the Ballet*, and her autobiography includes detailed accounts of Degas's frames and the meaning he attached to them. Louisine W. Havemeyer, *Sixteen to Sixty: Memoirs of a Collector*, ed. Susan Alyson Stein, 2nd ed. (New York: Ursus Press, 1993), 250.
10. Easton and Bark, "'Pictures Properly Framed,'" 607.

11. The author has documented wooden spacers, attached with brads, to other Impressionist pastels. Rachel Freeman, "Manet, Cat. 21, *The Man with the Dog*: Technical Report," in *Manet Paintings and Works on Paper at the Art Institute of Chicago* (Art Institute of Chicago, 2017), para 25, <https://publications.artic.edu/manet/reader/manet>: In the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art collection, *Daydreaming* by Berthe Mosisot (F79-47) has similar brad holes and wear. See Rachel Freeman, "Berthe Morisot, *Daydreaming*, 1877," technical entry, in *French Paintings and Pastels, 1600–1945: The Collections of The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art*, ed. Aimee Marcereau DeGalan (Kansas City: The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 2022).

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Provenance

Purchased from the artist by Galerie Durand-Ruel, Paris, stock no. 2421, as *Les Modistes*, June 5, 1882–July 10, 1883 [1];

Purchased from Durand-Ruel by Alexis Rouart (1839–1911), Paris, 1883–January 2, 1911 [2];

Purchased at his posthumous sale, *Tableaux par Baron (H.), Bonvin (F.), Boudin (E.), Cabat (L.), Cals (A. -F.), Chintreuil, Ciceri (E.), Colin (G.), Corot (C.), Couture (T.), Daumier (H.), Dehondencq, Devéria (E.), Dreux (A. de), Drolling (M.), Dufeu (e.), Fantin-Latour, Forain (J.-L.), Gavarni, Granet, Heim (F.-J.), Helleu, Jongkind, Jannot, Lepaulle (F.-G.), Lépine (S.), Noel (J.), Pissaro [sic] (C.),*

Roqueplan (C.), Rousseau (T.-H.), Tassaert (O.), (Vernet H.), etc., *Aquarelles, Pastels, Dessins, Miniatures par Cassatt (Mary), Daumier (H.), Forain (J.-L.), Gavarni, Guérin (P.), Hervier, Millet (J.-F.), Monnier (H.), Raffet. Œuvres Importantes d'Eugène Lami, Pastels et Gouache, par Degas, Composant la Collection de Feu M. Alexis Rouart*, Hôtel Drouot, Paris, lot 214, as *L'Atelier de la modiste*, by Durand-Ruel, Paris, for Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer (née Louise Elder, 1855–1929), New York, May 9, 1911–no later than January 6, 1929;

To her daughter, Mrs. Peter Hood Ballantine Frelinghuysen (née Adaline Havemeyer, 1884–1963), Morristown, NJ, and Palm Beach, FL, by April 10, 1930–January 17, 1937 [3];

Her gift to her son, Peter Hood Ballantine Frelinghuysen, Jr. (1916–2011), Morristown, NJ, 1937–September 24, 1979 [4];

Purchased from Frelinghuysen by The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO, 1979.

Notes

1. See email from Paul-Louis Durand-Ruel and Flavie Durand-Ruel, Durand-Ruel et Cie., Paris, to Nicole Myers, NAMA, January 11, 2016; and email from Paul-Louis Durand-Ruel and Flavie Durand-Ruel, Durand-Ruel et Cie., Paris, to Meghan Gray, NAMA, February 5, 2016, NAMA curatorial file.
2. Ibid.
3. It is possible that Mrs. Havemeyer gave the pastel to her daughter when she married on February 7, 1907; see Louise Havemeyer, "Notes to My Children," undated, Box 3, Folder 23, Havemeyer Family Papers relating to Art Collecting, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York. Mrs. Frelinghuysen must have had the pastel by the time Havemeyer's art collection was sold on April 10, 1930.
4. See paper label on the pastel's verso, which is inscribed: "To Peter Jr. on / his 21st birthday / from Mother."

Related Works

Edgar Degas, *At the Milliner's (Femme essayant un chapeau chez sa modiste)*, 1882, pastel on pale gray wove paper, laid down on silk bolting, 30 x 34 in. (76.2 x 86.4 cm), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. H. O. Havemeyer

Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929, 29.100.38.

Exhibitions

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Possibly *Exhibition of Paintings by the Master Impressionists*, Durand-Ruel, New York, April 8–20, 1929, no. 3, as *L'atelier de la modiste*.

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