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Christopher Lloyd, *Edgar Degas: Drawings and Pastels*. London: Thames & Hudson / Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2014. 320 pp. 250 color illustrations and index. \$39.95 U.S. (hb) ISBN 978-1-60606-327-9.

Review by Heather J. Vinson, University of West Georgia.

To mark the occasion of Edgar Degas's passing in 1917, Roger Fry, editor of the *Burlington*, invited the novelist George Moore to share his personal memories of the modern master.[1] It is likely that Fry was as interested in stoking friendly rivalries as he was in honoring Degas. Weeks earlier, in fact, Walter Sickert had penned his own *in memoriam* to Degas, in which he wryly derided Moore as a commercial critic, more interested in selling books than in nurturing taste. Moore's reprisal to Sickert, published in January and February 1918, was actually a reprint of an earlier article from 1890, with an extensive preface crafted to redeem his own reputation.[2] In the final paragraph of the introduction, the Irishman dubs Sickert's article a "list of quips:" "a huge dish of Degas's table talk." In addition to humbling Sickert, Moore meant to desublimize art and art criticism. He derides Sickert's authoritative recitations, suggesting that the *Burlington* readers were fed a large helping of leftovers—hearsay fashioned into collective awe. In full attack mode, he relates another anecdote about Degas, which occurred in conversation with "a certain French nobleman, the Playboy of Paris," who goaded the artist to leave his beloved Montmartre and visit the modish Faubourg St. Germain. According to Moore, Degas rejoined, "Monsieur le comte de —, leave me upon my dunghill." [3]

Some ninety years after Degas's death, scholarship on the artist still relies on these precious morsels of memory. Moore, Sickert, Ambroise Vollard, William Rothenstein, Paul Valéry, Jeanne Fèvre, Daniel Halévy—these individuals provide anecdotal testament to Degas's idiosyncratic personality and convoluted artistic practice.[4] In the recent Getty publication, *Edgar Degas: Drawings and Pastels*, curator Christopher Lloyd summons and conducts these voices once again, orchestrating a neat narrative history from Degas's rather scrappy drawing practices. Spending time with Lloyd's text, what is most apparent is that art historical criticism on Degas still echoes Sickert and Moore's friendly banter; it dithers between commercial attraction and critical study. Lloyd evades the paradigm-changing analyses of the early 1990s by Richard Kendall and Griselda Pollock, Carol Armstrong, and Anthea Callen—to name only a few—which established an arsenal of methodological approaches to Degas's vast collection of works.[5] For these authors, the complex matrix of psycho-sexual relations and radical formal innovation in Degas's oeuvre provoked a sense of ultimate ambivalence for the informed viewer, perhaps codifying the master's modernity, but necessarily compromising the easy consumption of his subject-objects. More recently, we have witnessed a return to an interest in the material or technological quality of Degas's practice. Here Degas's experimentation in reproducible media instructs our understanding of his own endeavors as a modern subject. Dancers become pretext for studies of motion; drawing is a mode of actualization in flux; and Degas's repetitions are positioned as the forerunners of filmic vision.[6] While authors like Edwige Phitoussi and Jennifer Dyer examine how iterative draftsmanship affects the representation of the dancer or the female nude, Lloyd marries the study of draftsmanship to the traditional monographic narrative.[7] Lloyd's text explores Degas's shifting approaches to drawing as an analogy, or a kind of synecdoche, for the man's biography and "the evolution of his style" (p. 10). The backdrops for Lloyd's story are the traditions of the Académie des Beaux-Arts, the Salon, and French bourgeois society, more generally. His bibliographic support is made

of many “quips,” with vague allusions to recent scholarship. To return to the affable polemics set up by Sickert and Moore, Lloyd’s *Degas*, and his “constant search for perfection” in drawing, belongs more to the Faubourg St. Germain, than to the dunghill (pp. 14 and 188).

Edgar Degas: Drawings and Pastels is a thoroughly readable narrative history of an artist and his most essential technique as it developed within the contingencies of modern French society. Chapters are organized in a chronology familiar to Degas scholars. Lloyd deftly recounts Degas’s Lycée education, followed by a short history of copying at the Louvre and training at the Ecole. The artist’s three years in Italy are briefly treated, conjured out of his private memories in Notebooks, which read as sentimental poetics of youth compared to the sadomasochistic fantasies and walking phalluses that fill Notebooks from the late 1870s (not reproduced). In this way, Degas’s steady bourgeois disaffection from family and artistic regulations is given substantial weight in Lloyd’s analysis of the drawings. These hagiographic inclinations are balanced, however, by a larger argument that Degas operated outside the system, while remaining part of it (p. 20). Degas’s early copies of the Renaissance masters are reproduced, and his veneration of Ingres and Delacroix are evidenced in anecdotes and in the sketches for history paintings from the 1860s. Not surprisingly, Lloyd makes something of a theme from Degas’s vision of a future made from the past. Despite this emphasis, Degas’s nostalgia for tradition is left unexamined as either a telling personal or a larger cultural desire. Instead, Lloyd reproduces established dichotomies, such that copying and drawing the model (i.e. tradition) is a practice found in Degas early studies, while artistic imagination (i.e. innovation) is located in the later works. And yet, in a discussion of two jockey drawings, Lloyd makes the shrewd suggestion that Degas was “creating his own visual dictionary for future reference” (p. 82). Not unlike one of Degas’s most intuitive critics, Armand Silvestre—who saw a “simple alphabet” thrown into “the calligraphic workshop” at exhibition in 1879—Lloyd concedes Degas’s semantic repetitions.[8] However, Lloyd does not demonstrate or analyze the interrelations between the compositions, leaving the reader wondering about the artist’s need or justification for this private visual dictionary.

Chapter four, “Changing Directions (1865-1870),” presents a maturing, independent Degas. We read less of familial interactions and education and more about the artist’s formative relationships with Manet and the assorted Impressionists. Degas’s drawings are still positioned as preliminary works at this juncture. Lloyd focuses on several sketches of sitters and studies of horses, giving careful attention to Degas’s introduction of *essence*, commercially-colored papers, and multi-media works with pastel, gouache, ink, and wash. In the chapters that deal with Degas’s most well-known subjects, Lloyd compares the artist’s gridded preparatory drawings of dancers, which dominated the mid-1870s, to the more leisurely, less-academic charcoal sketches done later in the decade. Along the way, the author admirably assimilates the reader to multiple types of exhibition practice in France in the final decades of the nineteenth century, and he incorporates short histories of the Paris Opéra and its two different buildings—Le Pelletier and the Garnier—integrating details about the social history of ballet and its uncertain status as an art form. In the concluding chapters, Lloyd presents a proud Frenchman, making jokes at the expense of Monet, taking holiday at the seaside town of his childhood, and conducting still more experiments with wax, tracing paper, and pastel-paste (*pastel à l’eau*) in his last studio. In Lloyd’s assessment, these last experiments in pastel, often enlarged with additional pieces added to the support, “are comparable with paintings in terms of both scale and presentation”; they take “an honorable place in the history of French art,” in the great tradition of Chardin, de la Tour, and Perronneau (p. 278). Degas, the draftsman, is neatly aligned with great national and Western traditions of classical art, while maintaining his enlightened sense of individuality. Drawing is bestowed the status of painting because of its seemingly unmediated relationship to the artist’s body, place, and moment—its ability to claim the trace of a special, yet universal, individual, who was actually well-instructed at institutions and in the Grand Tour. In Lloyd’s terms, drawing created “a greater freedom for those artists who wanted to define art on their own terms. The liberation of drawing presented . . . new opportunities . . . [and] encouraged greater freedom of expression” (p. 279).

Lloyd's approach to Degas's drawing, and the larger history of the medium, is fairly straightforward: Degas helped morph drawing from a handmaiden (to painting or sculpture) into a self-expressive medium of the individual. To a great extent the unspoken narrative of *Edgar Degas: Drawings and Pastels* follows a trajectory described in scholarly accounts of the modern copy by Richard Shiff, Roger Benjamin, and Patricia Mainardi.^[9] The transition, from "replica-function" or preparatory-function to "author-function," allows a single drawing or print to act as a trace of authority and singularity of modern man. However, the above authors are intent on contextualizing this transition within the emergence of the private citizen in an industrial economy and/or art's expanding gallery system, which are both co-dependent on mythic discourses about artistic temperament, uniqueness of the individual, and national distinction. As noted above, Lloyd offers helpful summaries of the new exhibition systems, but he is not interested in examining relations between artistic processes and Capital or nationalism and art in fin-de-siècle France. Degas, in Lloyd's conceptualization, is an originator of the "originality of the avant-garde." The fraudulence of this myth is not Lloyd's concern—or rather, it is his privilege.

The book's 237 color illustrations are sumptuous, equal in quality to the best exhibition catalogue. Indeed, the reproductions of Degas's compositions sometimes dominate Lloyd's text, and it would appear that Lloyd has given careful attention to their order. Certain sequences of drawings (though not discussed as such in the text) encourage the reader to become a sort of curator. From one page to the next, reclining female nudes are specimens of Degas's most linear academic studies in black chalk; until the reader turns the glossy paper to find the women consolidated and transmogrified into a fallen jockey whose precise outline fades into a sketchy, amorphous ground of diffuse chiaroscuro (Figs. 52, 53, and 54). A similar experience occurs perusing the chalk and pastel sketches of the dancer adjusting her shoe, from the early 1880s (Figs. 155-157, 159, and 160). Slight modifications to the torso, costume, or hair offer little episodic meaning for the reader. It is the iteration, the practice of making the particular form again, that renders it different, and yet so similar. Between the pages of *Degas*, the reader's memory becomes enfolded in the artist's. We study the discrepancies of similar forms, the peculiarities of this or that viewpoint, or the innumerable ways a bow can fold. Lloyd often emphasizes Degas's keen interest in "performing the task" of drawing (p. 21), but the evidence he offers is made more of the art historical "dish" Moore bemoaned in 1917, and less of close attention to the alterations in the drawings themselves.

To understand Degas's draftsmanship as artistic ritual, research, and performance, we must query the repetition involved in looking at, and drawing, forms again and again: the interminable possibilities of a body or form in time and space. Degas made this difficult for the historian when he consciously chose to date only a handful of the hundreds of works produced after 1878. Concepts like evolution or development depend on linear timelines; Degas preferred the controlled experiment that folded into the past as it simultaneously conjured future variations. Some of Lloyd's keenest reflections come in his comparison between ballet and Degas's own practice. Here, Lloyd reveals a nuanced understanding of Degas's drawings of dancers around 1878:

"First of all, there were the technical aspects of positions, balance, routine exercises and movements, including turns, leaps and extensions. Secondly, there was the human aspect, observing the life of ballerinas Above all, there was the physical commitment of dancers working to the point of exhaustion, injury, or collapse. In these respects it might be said that ballet was a metaphor for Degas's own practices as an artist and this association became stronger the longer he engaged with the ballet" (p. 122).

The author effectively locates areas of identification or sameness between Degas and his most repeated subject, but the analysis could benefit from more specific comparisons. Exercises at the barre are about muscle memory and intuited knowledge that produce any single performance—which is always slightly different from, yet so similar to, the next. More to the point, routine and performance are not concrete entities located in the plastic arts; these are ephemeral qualities of time and space, the quotidian quality

of rehearsal. This is where Lloyd leaves the reader most wanting. While some scholarship has over-pathologized Degas's repetition, linking it to unfreedom, masochism, and death, as Freud would have it, Lloyd finds only "a highly personal record" of the ballet world, a reflection of the interior individual (p. 123). Similarly, he makes adept observations about Degas's predilection for the laundresses' or milliners' technical skill. Yet we might also think of how these skills are pictured in the drawings. The women in the milliner compositions have clear visual and tactile relations with their tools; they study the placement of the objects, feel the materials, and maneuver the ensemble. "Professional competence," as Lloyd describes it, is actually a kind of haptic and visual knowledge that comes with iterative relations between subject (milliner/shopper) and object (hat, ribbon, flowers). Degas, argues Lloyd, projected parallels between his own "endless toil and physical exertion" and the life of the milliner or dancer (pp. 187-88). But what characterizes or motivates this desire for knowledge? Why does he perpetually return to the everyday, material repetitions of women?

In other places Lloyd classifies Degas as a naturalist storyteller along the lines of Emile Zola, Jules and Edmond Goncourt, J.K. Huysmans, and Guy de Maupassant: "he was an acute observer, a consummate draughtsman and possessed remarkable powers of detachment" (p. 117). While Degas's fascination with modern life intersects with tendencies of these authors, Lloyd neglects the artistic empathies between drawing and dancing that distinguish Degas's exercises from contemporary novelists' sociological or literary investigations. Lloyd's ambivalence leaves a string of questions: Why the dedication to protracted routine, at once traditional and innovative? If we think beyond Degas's psyche, what might we learn from the artist's empathy with, or knowledge of, the "other?" Finally, what might the artist's brooding, anti-modern temporality of making and knowing tell us about the relationship between modernity, nostalgia, and craft?

Alas, Lloyd's ambitions are aimed elsewhere. *Degas: Drawings and Pastels* is a concise narrative of a bourgeois artist-subject: student, collaborator, innovator, traveler, Parisian, and, finally, master. The book does not endeavor to further our understanding of drawing as a kind of knowledge, "a way of being" in the world as Paul Valéry understands it.[10] Nor does Lloyd wish to complicate the mythology of modern man and his individual expressions in paint or pastel. These are the reader's desires for a different book. However, the Getty publication is something of a lost opportunity to present a more thorough summary of, or introduction to, the critical scholarship on Degas's drawing and on the broader status of drawing in France at the end of the nineteenth century. While Lloyd does make quick reference to Lecoq de Boisbaudron's treatise, *L'Education de la Mémoire Pittoresque* (1848, 1862), he fails to contextualize Degas's practice within Eugène Guillaume's influential teaching methods or Antonin Proust's rational language of drawing, a national curriculum introduced in 1881 (pp. 192-93). More importantly, Lloyd overlooks the art historical scholarship that closely examines the formal anomalies in Degas's practice. To take but one example, Eugenia Parry Janis and Marc Gerstein have written on Degas's distinct graphic style of the late 1870s. Parry, describing specific pastels, finds "a kind of comic cartooning, a witty calligraphy similar to that which . . . had been reserved for the . . . monotypes." [11] Gerstein notes the "low comedy" of the "angular drawing" in several pastel fans, particular brothel monotypes, early lithographs, a brush and ink sketch, and designs for dinner plates.[12] But again, this is not Lloyd's tale. In fact, the brothel monotypes are scarcely discussed, positioned as mere exercises for the artist to gain "sufficient confidence to develop the motif of modern women seen in the domestic environment" (125).

Lloyd is most comfortable in the masculine interior, and he reserves his highest praise for Degas's *Portrait of Edmond Duranty*, exhibited at the Fourth Impressionist Exhibition in 1879 (p. 132). The pastel was a critical success then—admired by Silvestre and Huysmans—and it represents the same genre of self-possession that modernist critics most esteemed in Degas's work.[13] In this way, Lloyd's *Degas* reads as a neat re-remembering of a century of respectful Degas scholarship, far from the dunghill of Montmartre. In 1918, Moore already regarded the writing on Degas in much the same way. At the end of his preface, he surmises that he and Sickert are in agreement in at least one thing: ". . . any criticism

written at the present time about Degas's work could not be else than a languid repetition of things that have been said and re-said for the last ten or a dozen years. . . . [O]ur memories are more valuable than our thoughts.”[14]

NOTES

[1] George Moore, “Memories of Degas,” Parts 1 and 2, *Burlington Magazine*, vol. 32, no. 178 (January 1918): 22-23 and 26-29; vol. 32 no. 179 (February 1918): 63-65.

[2] George Moore, “Degas: The Painter of Modern Life,” *Magazine of Art* 13 (October 1890): 421-422.

[3] Moore, “Memories of Degas,” p. 27.

[4] Ambroise Vollard, *Degas (1834-1917)* (Paris: G. Crés, 1924); Vollard, *En écoutant Cézanne, Degas, Renoir* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1938); William Rothenstein, *Men and Memories: Recollections of William Rothenstein*, vol. 2 (New York: Coward-McCann, 1931); Paul Valéry, *Degas Danse Dessin* (1938) (Paris: Gallimard, 1965); Jeanne Fèvre, *Mon oncle Degas* (Geneva: P. Calliver, 1949); Daniel Halévy, *Degas parle* (Paris: La Pallatine, 1960).

[5] Richard Kendall and Griselda Pollock, eds., *Dealing with Degas* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992); Carol Armstrong, *Odd Man Out: Readings of the Work and Reputation of Edgar Degas* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Anthea Callen, *The Spectacular Body: Science, Method, and Meaning in the Work of Degas* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995).

[6] Jill DeVonyar and Richard Kendall, *Degas and the Ballet: Picturing Movement* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2011).

[7] Edwige Phitoussi, *La Figure et le Pli: Degas, Danse, Dessin de Paul Valéry* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2009); Jennifer Dyer, *Serial Images: The Modern Art of Iteration, International Studies in Hermeneutics and Phenomenology* 4, ed. Wierciński (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2011).

[8] Armand Silvestre, “Le Monde des arts: Les Indépendants” *La Vie Moderne*, April 24, 1879. [My translation]

[9] Richard Schiff, “The Original, the Imitation, the Copy, and the Spontaneous Classic: Theory and Painting in Nineteenth-Century France,” in “The Anxiety of Anticipation,” special issue, *Yale French Studies*, no. 66 (1984): 27-54; Roger Benjamin, “Recovering Authors: The Modern Copy, Copy Exhibitions and Matisse,” *Art History*, vol. 12, no. 2 (June 1989): 176-201; Patricia Mainardi, “The 19th-Century Art Trade: Copies, Variations, Replicas.” In “Theo Van Gogh and the 19th-Century Art Trade,” *Van Gogh Museum Journal* (2000): 62-73.

[10] Valéry, p. 207. [My translation]

[11] Eugenia Parry Janis, “Degas Drawings,” *Burlington Magazine*, vol. 109, no. 772 (July 1967): 413-5 and 417; p. 413.

[12] Marc Gerstein, “Degas’s Fans,” *The Art Bulletin* 64 (March 1982): 105-118; p. 112.

[13] Clement Greenberg, “Review of an Exhibition of Edgar Degas,” *The Nation*, April 30, 1949.

[14] Moore, “Memories of Degas,” p. 27.

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