



**NINETEENTH-CENTURY EUROPEAN PAINTINGS  
AT THE STERLING AND FRANCINE CLARK ART INSTITUTE**

**VOLUME ONE**

Edited by Sarah Lees

With an essay by Richard Rand  
and technical reports by Sandra L. Webber

With contributions by Katharine J. Albert, Philippe Bordes, Dan Cohen,  
Kathryn Calley Galitz, Alexis Goodin, Marc Gotlieb, John House,  
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Kelly Pask, Elizabeth A. Pergam, Kathryn A. Price, Mark A. Roglán,  
James Rosenow, Zoë Samels, and Fronia E. Wissman

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PRECEDING PAGE 2: Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Snake Charmer* (cat. 154)

## REFERENCES None

**TECHNICAL REPORT** The original support is a canvas whose weave is visible in many areas due to the very thin paint. The picture is lined with a glue or paste adhesive onto coarse, irregularly stretched linen, with an interleaf of gauze fabric. Small holes along the edges may indicate that the tacking margins were at least partially included in the image at the time of lining. There are age cracks in the heavier brushwork and minute traction cracks in the black passages. Horizontal age cracks can be seen in the trees and in the beginnings of a concentric network above the left-most rider. There is some abrasion due to cleaning, and several impastos in the sky and horses are slightly flattened from lining pressure. The present varnish layer is a thin natural resin, seen in ultraviolet light as vertical brush marks, and probably dates to before 1939. Some residues of a previous coating or perhaps glazes can also be seen scattered over the surface. There are fills and retouching around the edges up to the brown paper tape. Under magnification, quite a few deposits of metal leaf can be seen in the upper left quadrant that seem unrelated to the image.

The whitish ground appears to be a fairly thick, possibly artist-applied layer, running in wide visible brushstrokes diagonally from the upper right to the lower left. An underdrawing of thin lines can be identified as graphite under low magnification. This rather complete drawing of the horses, figures, and trees is visible in infrared reflectography, and extends even to the musculature of the bay horse in the center. A slight change was made in the position of the leading foreleg of the white horse between the initial drawing and final image. A thin warm brown imprimatura layer seems to have been applied over the whole surface, with the pencil lines strengthened in thin brown paint. Localized color was then applied in the reds, whites, and flesh areas, using the underlying warm tone as part of the image. Brushstrokes are very fluid and thin, with glazes delineating shading and facial features. The signature, possibly applied in dilute black ink, is slightly abraded and has several losses where bubbles or skips in the strokes have chipped away.

1. *Time* 1956. See also Williamstown–New York 2006–7, p. 91.

2. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.11 and 1955.12.

3. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.2569 and 1955.2570.

4. Renauld 2008, p. 128.

## Hilaire-Germain-Edgar Degas

French, 1834–1917

## 110 | Self-Portrait (Self-Portrait in a Soft Hat)

c. 1857–58

Oil on paper, mounted on canvas, 26 x 19.1 cm  
1955.544

Some twenty painted self-portraits by Degas are known, all of them made in the artist's early years when he was studying in Paris, traveling in Italy, or attempting to launch himself as a professional artist.<sup>1</sup> They range from small introspective sketches to flamboyant life-size compositions, and were partly conceived as exercises in pose, lighting, and facial expression for a potential career in portraiture. Together they form a remarkable account of Degas's technical progress in the 1850s and early 1860s, and his transformation from timid ex-schoolboy to confident metropolitan dandy. Much of the character of the widely admired Clark *Self-Portrait* results from its execution at the mid-point in this formative process, when his command of the medium was already advanced but his inventiveness still constrained. Modest in scale and subdued in its visual drama, the picture nevertheless reveals a surprising breadth of artistic sympathy in the twenty-three-year-old Degas, as he emerged from his somewhat conventional apprenticeship.

The distinctive qualities of the Clark portrait are immediately evident when it is set beside one of the earliest and most celebrated pictures in the series, the large *Self-Portrait* of 1855 in the Musée d'Orsay (fig. 110.1).<sup>2</sup> Among his first exercises in oil technique, the Paris painting was created when Degas was briefly a student of the minor Ingresque artist Louis Lamothe (1822–1869), and was clearly much influenced by Lamothe's somber manner and by a famous self-portrait of Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres himself.<sup>3</sup> Here Degas poses stiffly with a drawing instrument in his hand as if working at an easel, but he wears a modern black jacket, bow tie, and wing collar in place of the studio outfit adopted by Lamothe or the flamboyant cloak worn by Ingres in comparable paintings. Illumination is equally severe, striking the young artist almost frontally and defining his features unsparingly, yet plunging much of the remaining scene into gloom. In contrast, the Clark *Self-Portrait* is intimate in form and manner, its cropped composition inviting us



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to join in an act of self-scrutiny rather than admire a bold public stance. Artistic apparatus has been omitted, leaving us to deduce the sitter's identity from his strikingly bohemian hat and orange cravat, and perhaps from his incipient beard. Warm, soft daylight plays unevenly across a less forbidding background and the forms of Degas's head and shoulders, while transparent shadows in the face hint at an increasingly complex, nuanced personality.

Two aspects of the Clark *Self-Portrait* are shared with the Musée d'Orsay picture and with a number of other paintings in this group. The first is the use of oil on paper, a medium associated at this date with student sketches and with preparatory studies for larger projects, though less commonly with formal portraits.<sup>4</sup>

Degas chose it frequently during this and the following decade, both for pictures on loose sheets and—as with the Clark and the Musée d'Orsay examples—for those on paper attached to canvas.<sup>5</sup> In the former, his approach to the technique was largely orthodox. The design appears to have been drafted out broadly, leaving some bold, unfinished painted lines at lower left. Thin paint based on a narrow palette of white and umber was then applied to the face with finer brushes and the features smoothly modeled, with delicate parallel strokes indicating the artist's facial hair. Firmer touches made up the hat and the rear wall, and less predictable flourishes of white, black, and orange in Degas's clothing suggest an experiment in exuberance.

*Self-Portrait* also has in common with the remain-



Fig. 110.1 Hilaire-Germain-Edgar Degas, *Self-Portrait*, 1855. Oil on paper, mounted on canvas, 81 x 64.5 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris (inv. RF2649)



Fig. 110.2 Hilaire-Germain-Edgar Degas, *Self-Portrait*, 1857. Etching and drypoint, third state, 23 x 14.4 cm. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts (1955.1402)

ing nineteen works in this sequence an unexpectedly meager basis in Degas's graphic oeuvre. Almost from the beginning, Degas had excelled in draftsmanship and followed the practice of making patient, detailed drawings for his figure compositions and portraits. No such drawing exists for the Clark picture, however, or for most of the other self-portraits, which have an imprecise relationship with a small group of charcoal, pencil, and chalk studies on separate sheets and a few thumbnail sketches in his notebooks. Again, the ambitious Paris portrait is instructive and surprising, its pose apparently relying on one or two miniature pencil studies that are little more than doodles, and some developed drawings of related, but not identical, configurations.<sup>6</sup> When painting his own appearance, it seems, Degas could rely on direct observation in a mirror and on the accumulated materials in his portfolios, though there is also some evidence that photography played a role in certain works.<sup>7</sup>

Unusually, the source that is closest to *Self-Portrait* is an etching (fig. 110.2), the only uncontested image of himself made by Degas in any print medium.<sup>8</sup> When allowance is made for the reversal of the composition during printing, such features as the low-crowned hat, the angle of the artist's head, and the direction of his glance, and—above all—the modulated light and shadow on his face, offer the most persuasive parallels with the Clark painting. A drawing in the Metropolitan Museum of Art has a close resemblance to both images, but its origin is undocumented and its authenticity has been challenged.<sup>9</sup> Strong circumstantial evidence points to the completion of the etching in 1857 and thus provides an approximate date for the Clark work, though other factors may favor the beginning of the following year.<sup>10</sup> For most of this period Degas was in Rome, where he created three other etchings of male figures with a similar emphasis on chiaroscuro, at least two of which explicitly acknowledged the example of Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–1669).<sup>11</sup> Even his adoption of a soft hat, perhaps an updated version of a Rembrandt accessory, might be traced to this connection, while the direct psychological engagement is strongly reminiscent of the Dutch master.<sup>12</sup>

As he worked in the Roman capital and studied the masterpieces of the High Renaissance, Degas's audacious decision to align his own *Self-Portrait* with the work of Rembrandt added to the picture's air of mild rebellion. Another factor may have been Degas's attitude to Ingres, whose celebrated self-portrait was painted shortly before he left for his own sojourn in

Rome. Degas would always revere the great Neoclassicist, but by 1857 he was already copying works of art outside the Ingresque canon and exploring such heterodox subjects as Roman street scenes and rural landscapes.<sup>13</sup> The Clark portrait is another tentative step away from conformity, a move that was soon to be encouraged by contact in Italy with Gustave Moreau (1826–1898) and the Macchiaioli. Sterling Clark enthused about the painting—the last of the works by Degas he acquired—though curiously emphasized its draftsmanship: “Marvellous; strongly influenced by the 15th century Italians in its drawing,” he wrote on the invoice from Durand-Ruel in 1948.<sup>14</sup> RK

**PROVENANCE** Marcel Guérin, Paris (d. 1948); Daniel Guérin, Paris, his son, by descent, sold to Durand-Ruel, 20 Apr. 1948; [Durand-Ruel, New York, sold to Clark, 20 Apr. 1948, as *Portrait de Degas au chapeau mou*];<sup>15</sup> Robert Sterling Clark (1948–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

**EXHIBITIONS** Paris 1925b, no. 27, lent by Guérin; Paris 1931b, no. 13, pl. I, as *Portrait de Degas en chapeau mou*, lent by Guérin; Philadelphia 1936, p. 53, no. 1, ill., as *Self-Portrait of Degas in a Soft Hat*, lent by Guérin; Williamstown 1956a, no. 103, pl. 20; Williamstown 1959c, no. 5, pl. 20; Williamstown 1970, no. 1, ill.; Chapel Hill 1978, pp. 54–56, no. 23, ill.; Williamstown 1984b, no cat.; Williamstown 1987, pp. 6, 31, no. 9, ill.; Paris–Ottawa–New York 1988–89, pp. 70–71, no. 12, ill., as *Self-Portrait in a Soft Hat*; Williamstown 1991b, no cat.; Williamstown 1994c, no cat.; Zurich–Tübingen 1994–95, pp. 163, 171, 320, no. 19, ill.; New Orleans–Copenhagen 1999, pp. 108–9, 265, no. 1, ill., as *Self-Portrait in a Soft Hat* (French ed., p. 60, no. 4, ill.); Ferrara–Edinburgh 2003–4, pp. 196–97, ill. (English ed., pp. 11, 91, ill. as frontispiece); Williamstown 2004a, no cat.; Williamstown–New York 2006–7, pp. 104, 114–15, fig. 101; Williamstown–Barcelona 2010–11, pp. 29, 31, 46, fig. 26.

**REFERENCES** Manson 1927, p. 41; Guérin 1931, ill., as *Portrait de Degas par lui-même*; Lemoisne 1931, p. 285, fig. 47, as *Degas par lui-même*; Grappe 1936, ill. on cover; Lemoisne 1946–49, vol. 2, pp. 16–17, no. 37, ill., as *Degas au chapeau mou*; Guérin 1945, not listed in French ed. (English ed., fig. 1, as *Self-Portrait in a Soft Hat*); Lemoisne 1954, p. 25, ill. opp. p. 24; *Emporium* 1959, p. 81, ill.; Canaday 1960, p. 58, ill.; Canaday 1961, p. 202, fig. 231, as *Self-Portrait in a Soft Hat* (1981 ed., pp. 240–41, fig. 287); Boggs 1962, p. 11, pl. 15; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 39, ill.; Aymar 1967, p. 180, pl. 88; Minervino 1970, p. 91, no. 125, ill. (French ed., p. 91, no. 125, ill.); Wilson 1971, ill. p. 69; Dunlop 1979, pl. 8; Brooks 1981, pp. 54–55, ill.; LeDuc 1983, p. 7, ill.; Copenhagen 1983, p. 20, ill.; Cavendish 1985, p. 482, ill.; Sutton 1986b, fig. 4; Armstrong 1988, pp. 116–17, 121–24, fig. 3; Gordon and Forge 1988, p. 86, ill.; Keller 1988, pl. 22;

Shenker 1988, p. 60, ill.; Coates 1989, p. 78, ill.; Schneider 1989, p. 40, ill.; Copplestone 1990, pp. 6–7, ill.; Armstrong 1991, pp. 231–35, fig. 119; Boggs and Maheux 1992, ill. on frontispiece; Starcky 1993, pp. 39, 41, ill.; Fried 1994, pp. 22–23; Kern et al. 1996, pp. 68–69, ill.; *Antiques* 1997, pp. 523, 528, ill.; Marmor and Ravin 1997, p. 194, fig. 17-1; Roquebert 2000, pl. 2; Atlanta–Minneapolis 2001, pp. 30, 99; New Haven 2003, pp. 78–79, fig. 37; London 2004–5, p. 10, fig. 1; Rome 2004–5, pp. 54–55, fig. 1; Cambridge 2005, pp. 78–79, fig. 37; Hoffmann 2007, pp. 8, 11, ill.

**TECHNICAL REPORT** The primary support is paper, mounted to canvas with an aqueous adhesive and stretched onto a five-member mortise-and-tenon stretcher. The edges are taped with brown paper tape, which shows in the framing and appears to cover the hat at the left edge. The tape, which is well adhered, appears to have been in place long enough for its adhesive to fracture and curl the paint along the edges and to slightly cockle the support along the top and bottom edges. There are scattered age cracks, possibly due to handling the paper prior to its mounting, and some traction cracks in the hat, cravat, and sitter’s hair. Localized varnish replacement was performed in 1976 after ink dots were removed which had splashed the surface. This is visible only in ultraviolet light as gaps in the green fluorescence of the older natural resin coating. Slight solvent abrasion along cracks in the cravat reveal an earlier varnish removal.

The paper layer was primed with a very wide brush, with the last layer clearly visible as horizontal sweeps beneath the thin image. This may indicate that the paper was a section of a larger sheet, cut to size after priming. The slightly pink cast of the off-white ground is visible in the unfinished lower left quadrant, and may contribute to the coloration of the face. The brushwork is thin and vehicular, with some strokes of paste consistency, and only one area of low impasto in the white outer garment. The brushwork appears to be wet-into-wet throughout and was likely executed in one sitting. There are minute subtractive strokes with a clean brush to lighten the beard at the chin, and connecting strokes along the jaw where the beard color was drawn through the wet paint of the cravat. While there is no detectable underdrawing, the brown lines along the coat lapel in the unfinished lower left suggest the artist quickly sketched his likeness in brown paint. Examination in infrared reflectography reveals what may have been the first features Degas sketched, including the prominent proper right cheekbone and a slightly different mouth expression. A change in the front upper brim of the hat can be seen in specular light where the surface is glossier above the hat’s edge.

1. Sixteen are listed in Lemoisne 1946–49 (L 2–5, 11–14, 31–32, 37, 51, 103–5, 116) and another three in Brame and Reff 1984 (BR 28–30); an uncatalogued example belongs to the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (95.GG.43).
2. L 5.

3. For Lamothe and his self-portrait, see Rome 1984–85, pp. 32–33, and Loyrette 1991, pp. 40–44, 63–66. For the importance of Ingres, see Paris–Ottawa–New York 1988–89, pp. 61–62; Ingres’s 1804 *Portrait de l’artiste* is in the Musée Condé, Chantilly.
4. Several of the smaller self-portraits were painted on paper; less expected was the use of this support on the large *Self-Portrait* in the Musée d’Orsay.
5. For examples of youthful studies of various subjects on paper or card from this period, see L 9, 22, 24, 36, 39, 47–48.
6. See Reff 1976b, vol. 1, Notebook 2, pp. 58B, 84, and 85; Notebook 4, p. 6; BR 28.
7. See, for example, *Self-Portrait: Degas Lifting His Hat* (Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon; L 105); in Paris–Ottawa–New York 1988–89, p. 104, this work is accompanied by an associated photograph.
8. Boston–Philadelphia–London 1984–85, pp. 23–29, no. 8.
9. See *ibid.*, p. 25, no. 8a.
10. For a discussion of the date, see *ibid.*, p. 21, where the inscribed “1857” on some prints of this period is questioned. Degas remained in Rome until July 1858; see Paris–Ottawa–New York 1988–89, p. 51.
11. Boston–Philadelphia–London 1984, pp. 20–21, nos. 5 and 6.
12. The soft hat appears in just one other self-portrait, that in the Getty; see note 1 above.
13. See especially Reff 1976b, Notebooks 8 and 9; and BR 16–23.
14. The invoice is in the Clark’s curatorial file.
15. The invoice is dated 16 Apr. 1948; payment was received on 20 Apr. 1948.

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**111 | Portrait of a Man** c. 1877

Oil on canvas, 79 x 59 cm  
 Lower left: Degas [stamp]  
 1955-44

Purchased by Robert Sterling Clark shortly after Degas’s death, at the fourth sale of the artist’s studio contents in 1919, *Portrait of a Man* has been curiously neglected in recent times.<sup>1</sup> When the Clark collection was first presented in its new premises at Williams-town, however, this canvas was singled out for special praise. Visiting critics from *The Connoisseur* and *Art News* noted it favorably in their dispatches,<sup>2</sup> and in Lane Faison’s 1958 *A Guide to the Art Museums of New England* it was described as “one of Degas’s finest oil

portraits.” Observing that “the girth of this man and the forceful structure of his skull are established with a minimum of effort,” Faison remarked that “the painting of the hands” was “especially remarkable . . . [and] the crisp linear accents about the eyes and at the neck are a transfer into painting of Degas’s great ability as a draftsman.”<sup>3</sup> In the half century since this successful debut, *Portrait of a Man* has returned to undeserved obscurity, exhibited only once outside its home town and overlooked in the specialist literature.<sup>4</sup>

*Portrait of a Man* belongs with an ambitious series of male and female portraits begun in the 1860s and continued into the following decade, in which Degas explored several radical approaches to the depiction of his contemporaries. An early milestone in this process was a superb group of drawings and etchings of Degas’s new acquaintance, Édouard Manet, the most famous of which show him in three-quarter profile, seated casually in a studio.<sup>5</sup> A less celebrated print from the same sequence portrays Manet’s head and shoulders, set against a plain, shadowed background, where the painter is apparently lost in thought or focused on a subject outside the frame. The combination of extreme spareness and gravity, which was later to inform *Portrait of a Man*, is less obviously innovative than the cluttered interiors and self-consciously modern behavior that Degas depicted in several large paintings of his peers, such as those of James Tissot, Edmond Duranty, and Diego Martelli.<sup>6</sup> Although they seem somewhat more traditional in comparison, the etching of Manet and the Clark painting offer subtle resistance to other conventions of the portrait genre, notably the establishment of eye contact between sitter and viewer, and the suggestion of narrative. In both works, our implied relationship with Degas’s model is oblique and the circumstances of the encounter remain unknown, while the man’s demeanor makes him seem oblivious to social niceties. Ambiguity and self-absorption set the tone, as if we have intruded on a private event or a moment of unspecified concentration.

The subject of *Portrait of a Man*, also known as *The Man*, has never been convincingly identified, though Degas’s rare acceptance of commissions makes it likely that he belonged to the artist’s current milieu.<sup>7</sup> After early experiments in portraiture based on himself (see cat. 110) and his extended family, Degas had gradually turned to the personalities of his new professional world: to fellow artists, such as Gustave Moreau, Evariste de Valernes, Victoria Dubourg, Henri Michel-Lévy, and Mary Cassatt; illustrators and print-