

EDGARD DEGAS (French, 1834-1917)

Born in 1834, Edgar Degas was one of the most celebrated artists of his generation. Considered one of the founding fathers of impressionism, he worked across a variety of mediums including painting, pastel, drawing and sculpture.

Whilst Degas' sculptures form a significant part of his oeuvre, none of these works (mostly modelled in wax and clay) were cast in bronze during his lifetime. In fact, Degas only ever exhibited one sculpture, that of *Little Dancer, Aged 14*, which was shown at the Impressionist exhibition of 1881 in Paris.

The work, which combined wax modelling with miniature clothing and a horsehair wig, was met with a rapturous reception. The collector Mrs Havemeyer exclaimed that *'Paris could scarcely maintain its equilibrium. He (Degas) became the hero of the hour, his statue discussed by all the art world.'* (Reff, 1976, p. 239)



Edgar Degas, *Little Dancer, Aged 14*, Bronze Model cast posthumously by Parisian foundry AA Hebraard Cire Perdue.

BOWMAN SCULPTURE

Nevertheless, following this exhibition, Degas' sculptures were to remain a private passion for the rest of his life. It was only after his death that 73 models were removed from his studio under the supervision of Paul-Albert Bartholomé (1848–1928), who then prepared the figures for casting, a job executed by the Parisian foundry A.A. Hébraard et Cie. Each of these posthumous casts were editioned A – T, with a further 2 casts labeled HER and HER.D, reserved for the foundry and Degas' heirs respectively. Only the *Little Dancer, Age 14*, was not numbered in this way, and it is unknown how many casts were produced of this work.

Whilst one cannot be sure whether Degas considered his small figurines to be 'finished works', it is certain that he was enthusiastic about the idea of having these studies made into bronze. When the young Aristide Maillol asked the artist about the existence of his notoriously private sculptures, Degas answered '*yes, I model, and perhaps one of these days I shall be cast in bronze!*' (Rewald, 1956, p.13)

Literature

Charles W. Millard, *The Sculpture of Edgar Degas*, (Princeton: 1976) p. 24.

Franco Russoli and Fiorella Minervino, *L'opera completa di Degas*, (Milan: 1970) p. 141, no. S20 (another cast illustrated).

John Rewald and Leonard von Matt, *Degas: Sculpture*, (New York:1956) p. 148, no. XXXIV (another cast illustrated, p. 149, fig. 13).

John Rewald, *Degas: Sculpture, the Complete Works*, (New York: H. N. Abrams 1956) p.13

John Rewald, *Degas's Complete Sculpture: Catalogue Raisonné*, (San Francisco: 1990) pp. 106-107, no. XXXIV (another cast and wax version illustrated).

Joseph S. Czeszochowski and A. Pinget, *Degas, Sculptures: Catalogue Raisonné of the Bronzes*, (Memphis: 2002) pp. 144-145, no. 12 (wax version and another cast illustrated).

Maurice Guillaud, ed., *Degas: Form and Space* (Paris: 1984) p. 196, no. 70 (another cast illustrated, fig. 195).

Theodore Reff, *Degas: The Artist's Mind*, (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1976), p. 239