

Race Horses; 1885 - 1888



Pastel on Wood Panel
30.2 cm x 40.6 cm (11 – 7/8 x 16 in)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, USA

This pastel is unusual, since Degas allowed the wood's natural color to act as the background color of this composition. The sky over the village, for example, is untouched. The warm wooden color gives a golden glow to the entire picture, like a warm summer day.

It was unusual to use pastels on any surface other than paper. Degas occasionally did panels. Notice the rough use of pastels in this composition—there is very little smooth blending and a lot of scribbling one color on top of each other, or next to each other.

Horse Galloping on the Right Foot; Left Foot only Touching the Ground; ca. 1890s



Pigmented Beeswax
18.9 x 7.1 x 32.2 cm (7 - 7/16 in x 2 13/16 in X 12 11/16 in)
National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

This was one of the dozens of little wax sculptures found in the studio of Edgar Degas after he died. His heirs included his youngest brother (and only surviving sibling) Rene, and the four children of his sister Marguerite. These people discovered all these little wax figures, only one of which (Little Dancer, Aged 14, see other packet) had ever been seen publicly. Several wax figures were selected to be cast in bronze, but this was not among them.

Still created out of the original beeswax, Degas created this horse and rider sometime towards the end of his working life, often working in dark studios and using only his sense of touch to mold the wax.

Had it been cast, the metal rod that is currently supporting the model would have been removed in the final casting, creating a really dynamic pose full of movement.

The False Start; 1868 - 1870



*Oil on Panel
32 x 40 cm*

Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut USA

This painting depicts a horse taking off before the official start. In an age before the spring-triggered gates now used at races, the horses and riders would line up and wait for their signal. An anxious or excited animal could easily break the line and charge ahead, causing some excitement, which Degas wanted to capture.

The detached shadow, the diagonal lines as the horse splays its hooves out in excitement, the jockey leaning back to keep his seat on the moving animal, all give the scene a great sense of excitement and sudden action.

Degas also studied photography, and did some photography as well. He cropped many of his action packed paintings like a candid photograph. The main horse is barely in-frame, as though an imaginary photographer was taking a photo of the line and captured the horse as it charged into the camera's view.