

Ewa Lajer-Burcharth
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Drawing:



**The Invention of a
Modern Medium**

This catalogue accompanies the exhibition *Drawing: The Invention of a Modern Medium*, on view at the Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge, Massachusetts, from January 21 through May 7, 2017.

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Color

Marina Molarsky-Beck

Fig. 1
Maurice-Quentin de La Tour, *Portrait
of Jean de Jullienne*. See p. 282 for
full information.

In 17th- and 18th-century France, the status of color within the prevailing discourse on art was precarious. Academician Charles Le Brun wrote in 1672: “Color depends entirely on matter and is consequently less noble than drawing, which comes from the mind alone.”¹ Le Brun subscribed to the theorization of color and drawing (or design) as separate and opposing forces, a dichotomy traceable to debates over *disegno* versus *colore* in Renaissance Italy. There, drawing and color were regional specializations, with Venice championing *colore* and Florence *disegno*.² By the 17th century, the French Academy had solidified its institutional influence by prioritizing drawing, as drawing was linked powerfully to thought: it was a method of ordering the page and transforming ideas into something graphic and tangible. Artists conceived of drawing as a function of reason, lending painting legitimacy as a liberal art by imbuing the visual with discursive weight.

Color, on the other hand, posed a threat to art’s political and social importance, as it lacked the cool rationalism of line, of thought made material. As Le Brun noted, “[P]igment grinders would have the same rank as painters if drawing did not differentiate them.”³ This remark was as much a warning as an observation, for such a claim of drawing’s importance did not go unchallenged. In the late 1660s, Roger de Piles popularized the idea that color, not drawing, was the “soul and ultimate achievement of painting.”⁴ Le Brun held fast to the opposite view. For him, painters occupied a dangerous role because they performed manual labor, and their cultural prestige might easily be toppled if they were regarded as no more thoughtful than craftsmen.

Even as the propulsive thrust of technology introduced photography as a means of representation in the 19th century, debates over color and drawing persisted. In 1867, critic Charles Blanc penned the *Grammaire des arts du dessin*, in which he both presented a theory of color's uses and warned against its perils. According to Blanc: "Drawing is the masculine sex of art; color is the feminine sex. . . . The union of drawing and color is necessary to engender painting, just as the union of man and woman to engender humanity; but drawing must maintain supremacy over color. If it is otherwise, painting will be on the road to ruin; painting will be undone by color as humanity was undone by Eve."⁵

In the same text, Blanc opined on the pastel medium: "In the case of pastel, the real model is La Tour. . . . The eyes glisten, the lips move, the nostrils breathe, the hair rises with powder."⁶ Blanc was referring to Maurice-Quentin de La Tour, often considered the greatest master of pastel portraiture in the 18th century. In this passage, Blanc seizes upon the striking lifelike quality of La Tour's pastels, in which the sitters seem, indeed, to live and breathe—at least from a distance. On approaching the surface of his pastels, illusionism shatters; each gauzy mark of pigment becomes visible, as in La Tour's *Portrait of Jean de Jullienne* (Fig. 1). Though it is flat, drawn on a two-dimensional sheet of paper, the image traffics in tactility. La Tour renders the soft velvet of Jullienne's coat, which catches the light with each fold, and the partially transparent lace of his cuff. Philosopher Jacqueline Lichtenstein writes that "[t]he pleasure of color is, certainly, a pleasure of the eye; it is so to the supreme degree. It emerges from the spectacle of flesh as a desire for touch that never crosses the limit that representational order imposes on it—a feeling that can never truly play itself out as such."⁷ The expert handling of pastel in La Tour's oeuvre generates such a sensory confusion of sight and touch.

La Tour was something of a celebrity portraitist; he drew authors Voltaire and Rousseau and artists such as

Parrocel and Chardin. Jullienne was a different kind of subject: not a celebrity per se, but an *amateur* and collector who studied art with a connoisseur's intimate interest. He lies somewhere between the society figures and artists that La Tour drew, for Jullienne both shaped the art world of his day and inhabited it.

La Tour's chosen medium, pastel, was à la mode—the full-color pastel was still something of a novelty at the time of this drawing, but it was already wildly popular. In the early decades of the 18th century, readymade crayons in every imaginable hue arrived on the market, and new developments in glass production facilitated the preservation and display of pastel's characteristic powdery surfaces.⁸ Oil portraits were more expensive, grander, and more durable by nature, but pastels were considered more spontaneous and less formal, a hybrid between drawing and painting. La Tour's portrait of Jullienne vividly demonstrates the appeal of pastel, with its passages of buttery pigment. Here, color is an embrace of the sensual, for it is only through color that the artist can allow the eye to feel, as if endowed with a sense of touch. Essential to La Tour's popularity was his ability to mimic a range of tactilities: lace cuffs, wrinkled flesh, the tight coils of a wig. La Tour fools the eye and creates texture through color so absolutely mesmerizing that it is preferable to the real. Part of the pleasure is in allowing oneself to be fooled, a kind of giving in—a seduction before the master artist.

Yet La Tour, considered one of the greatest pastel portraitists, sometimes struggled with the medium. In a 1770 letter, he wrote:

Dominated by the idea of perfection . . . I lose consciousness of myself like an atom in the empyrean. . . . In my pastels, all is lost when I yield to a mood different from the original inspiration: the unity is broken. The painter in oils, by the use of alcohol and the bread rubber, may recover the first freshness of his conception.⁹

La Tour's understanding of his own process seems to align with the conception of color as treacherously yoked to emotion. He must preserve his feeling of "original

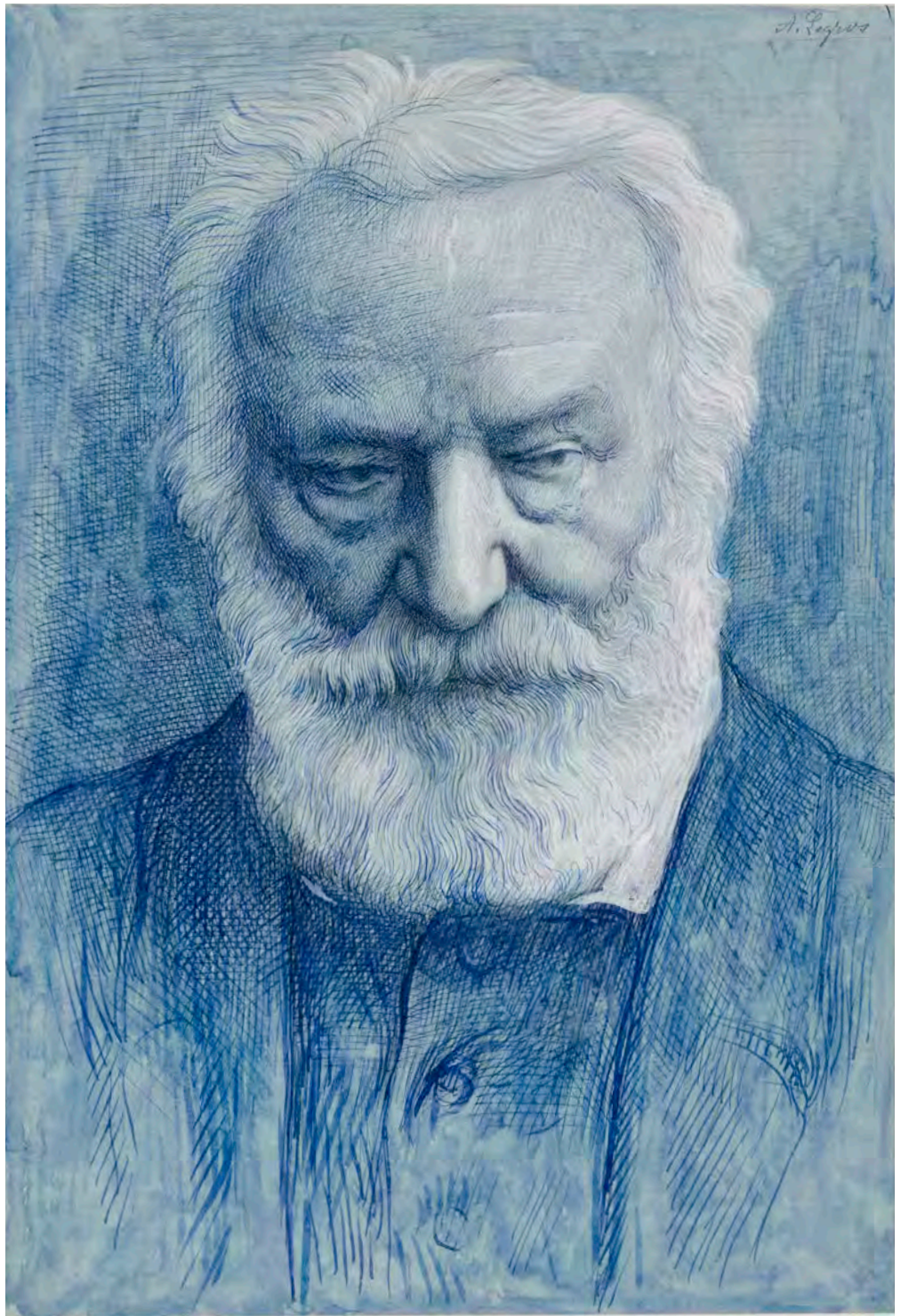


Fig. 2
Alphonse Legros, *Portrait of Victor Hugo*.
See p. 282 for full information.

inspiration” to create a coherent image, a feat reliant not only on technical proficiency but also on a harnessing of artistic energy. La Tour must control his own emotions just as he controls the pastel stick, for undoing his work is nearly impossible. The oil painter apparently does not contend with the same difficulty of erasure; he is able to rework the surface and to disguise the effort of transformation. The unreliability of emotion means that pastel is itself an unreliable medium, contingent on the moment of its creation.

The difficulty of working with pastel lies largely in its fragility and delicacy. Even more so than paint, pastel requires very thin layers of marks to accumulate. Colors mixed inexpertly on the page quickly muddy, losing the distinctive luster of the medium. In the same text in which he announced La Tour’s brilliance, Blanc acknowledged this impediment: “But alas! The grace of pastel is inherent to its greatest fault; it is brittle and it falls into dust.”¹⁰ Pastel, then, requires forethought. The pastellist must guide intuition with strategy: when drawing in color, thought and feeling are inseparable.

A century later, Alphonse Legros would use color in an entirely different way. His *Portrait of Victor Hugo* (Fig. 2), drawn in a monochromatic range of blues, transforms the full-color portrait, once the domain of pastellists such as La Tour. La Tour’s deployment of pastel marries drawing and color to mimic the illusionism of painting, but Legros’s portrait instead uses color to proudly declare the act of drawing. Legros, a master printmaker, relies largely on line; in this sense, his technique is equally indebted to drawing and to printmaking.

Unlike the pastel marks in La Tour’s portrait, Legros’s lines make no effort to conceal themselves. Instead, Legros uses marks of varying heft to differentiate surfaces. Hatching is extremely fine in the flesh of Hugo’s face, but bolder in the rendering of his jacket and in the space around his head. These marks are not only visible but widely varied. They do not always signify; at times, they serve merely as lines, as with the marks that comprise the background hatching, creating a tactile surface to mirror that of La Tour’s pastel. Instead of reproducing texture, though, Legros relies on the tools at his disposal and on

the qualities of the drawing medium itself. While La Tour’s portrait is nearly traceless, Legros’s is actively traceful, revealing the kinetic relationship between artist and support that results from drawing a portrait. Legros makes a display of sketchiness, showing off his own technique in the process. The artist is visible in the surface of the drawing; he is the hand that draws, rather than the eye that sees or the mind that thinks. While La Tour’s reproduction of velvet and flesh invites feeling through the eye, Legros’s emphasis of his own hand directs the eroticism of the drawing toward the figure of the artist.

Working in the 19th century, Legros seems to react to the new prevalence of photography. In fact, Legros was not the only one to make a portrait of Hugo: around 1860, Étienne Carjat took a photograph of the writer that converts the colors of reality into a restricted palette of browns and whites. Legros, similarly, makes Hugo a homogenous blue. Yet if this monochromatic approach to drawing owes a debt to photography, it does not borrow uncritically. Legros resists the conventions of photography just as he employs them. Both his use of brilliant blue and his emphasis of his own trace serve to make strange the visual vocabulary of the photograph. At the moment when Legros drew his Hugo, photography was threatening to eclipse drawing and painting as the default mode of portraiture, and would soon overwhelm traditional media altogether.¹¹ Against such a backdrop, the historical opposition of color and drawing began to erode, only to be replaced by a new conflict: the handmade versus the automatic. In borrowing from photography to make a drawing, Legros exploits the tension between the two methods of representation and challenges their opposition.

Legros jettisons the visual trickery so appealing in the pastels of the previous century, immediately abandoning the domain of realism through his selection of bright blue tints to depict Hugo. The unreality of the color signals the image as just that—an image—even from afar. Furthermore, Legros’s hatching and intricate pen marks invert the pleasures of La Tour. Rather than being beguiled by artifice, the viewer delights in the quality of the line and color as such. In the face of photography’s

perfect mimicry, La Tour's illusionism loses its power and novelty. The artist cannot hope to match the photographer in reproducing the real. Instead, in Legros we see an early act of deconstructing vision itself. Legros's blue is a play on the monochromatic image world of the photograph. However, his color palette consists not of chemical silver, but of multi-tonal blues that darken and lighten with the weight of the artist's pen. While the camera renders an image in areas of light and dark, Legros's hand renders an image as a web of lines; their character is as much the subject of this portrait as Hugo himself.

1

Charles Le Brun, "Sentiment sur le discours du mérite de la couleur," lecture, January 9, 1672; trans. in Jacqueline Lichtenstein, *The Eloquence of Color: Rhetoric and Painting in the French Classical Age*, trans. Emily McVarish (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 155.

2

David Rosand, *Painting in Sixteenth-Century Venice: Titian, Veronese, Tintoretto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 37.

3

Le Brun, "Sentiment sur le discours du mérite de la couleur," trans. in Lichtenstein, *The Eloquence of Color*, 153.

4

Charles-Alphonse Dufresnoy, *L'art de peinture de Charles Alphonse Dufresnoy, traduit en français avec des remarques très nécessaires et très amples*, trans. Roger de Piles (Paris: Langlois, 1673); quoted in Lichtenstein, *The Eloquence of Color*, 147.

5

Charles Blanc, *Grammaire des arts du dessin*, Collection Beaux-arts histoire (Paris: Ecole nationale supérieure des beaux-arts, 2000), 53; translation mine.

6

Ibid., 554–55; translation mine.

7

Lichtenstein, *The Eloquence of Color*, 167.

8

Marjorie Shelley, "Painting in the Dry Manner: The Flourishing of Pastel in 18th-Century Europe," in *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 68 (4) (2011); and Katharine Baetjer and Marjorie Shelley, *Pastel Portraits: Images of 18th-Century Europe* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011), 5.

9

Adrian Bury, *Maurice-Quentin de La Tour: The Greatest Pastel Portraitist* (London: Skilton, 1971), 28.

10

Blanc, *Grammaire des arts du dessin*, 555.

11

A portrait of course could be reproduced before the advent of photography: painted portraits were disseminated in the form of prints, as Stephen Bann discusses in his *Parallel Lines: Printmakers, Painters and Photographers in Nineteenth-Century France* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001). Printmaking allowed any work of art to be represented in multiple, a quality that made prints after portraits especially desirable, as they could convey likeness to a mass audience. However, photography's potential to represent with apparent scientific accuracy distinguished it immediately. Bann cites (p. 158) an instance in which Ingres included a photograph of his *La Source* alongside a drawing of the same work by Luigi Calamatta, the much-praised copyist, painter, and engraver. Ingres explained the inclusion of these two different forms of reproduction by noting that the photograph provided information about the original work that the drawing did not.



Movement

Marina Molarsky-Beck

Fig. 1
Célestin Nanteuil, *Diana*. See p. 285 for
full information.

Drawing has often been marginalized, relegated to the category of preparatory medium — the means to another end. Some particularly virulent critics of drawing have framed it as a dangerous distraction from the more virtuous (and more laborious) medium of painting. Lecturing at the French Academy in 1732, the comte de Caylus decried those artists who “have neglected painting to attach themselves solely to drawing,” lamenting that they “yielded entirely to the pleasing attraction of quickly tossing their ideas on paper.”¹ Caylus refers with alarm to the easy mobility of the drawing process, which minimizes the time required to render an image. The works that result from such a process are, in his view, merely “first thoughts,” and should be tempered and reworked to arrive at a more considered final product. Such a critique rests on an understanding of the artist’s working process — the very movement of the draftsman’s body — as fundamentally linked to the content of a work and to the ideas that inhabit an image.

Every drawing is a product of the artist’s moving hand, each trace a record of the pencil or crayon crossing the page. It thus follows that as the pen discharges its ink, or the crayon rubs pigment onto the page, thoughts are made visual. The memory of the moving hand is always already embedded in line. Draftsmen have often leveraged the possibilities of drawing to leave bare the line and generate pictorial movement indirectly, through the suggestion of the hand that made the image. As Sam Ewing discusses in his essay in this volume on “Line,” we often anthropomorphize the marks themselves, as if the hand that left the trace has bestowed upon it human characteristics. A line can be frenetic or languorous, tense or feeble,

yes, but it can also record subtleties of speed, momentum, and force, denoting not only movement, but kinds and ways of movement.

The shape and weight of the line are not the only means by which a draftsman can convey movement. Composition can suggest movement, setting up points of tension and release across the page. However, while the posing of figures can illustrate an action, movement will always defy representation in a still image. Drawing can suggest movement by capturing a horse in midair or a dancer poised to cross a stage, but the previous and subsequent motions of these active bodies will only ever be implied. Depicted movement—movement that exists solely within the picture plane—remains inseparable from the physical motion of the hand that generated it.

The title character of Célestin Nanteuil's *Diana* (Fig. 1) emerges from a dark thatch of lines that seem to ensnare her body. With one powerful thigh jutting out from under her robe, Diana is arrested in a moment of physical drama. Her clothes appear caught in a wild wind as she strides energetically across a craggy landscape with her hounds. Though she is in motion, the marks that delineate her form are narrower and more delicate than the scrawl around her. Nanteuil uses a series of faint, restrained lines to give shape to the joint of Diana's knee and the tense muscle of her calf. Her skirts are made up of nervous, fine lines, barely visible from a distance, while the surrounding scene is defined with patches of greasy lithographic crayon that run in all directions.

Movement is registered in two ways in this composition: through Diana's pose and through Nanteuil's mark-making. Most viscerally, movement is generated in the drawing's very lines, which loop and coil across the page, rendering the dogs and rocks at her feet as a blur. Nanteuil also uses hatching, but not the neat and orderly linear grids that model three-dimensionality in so many of the drawings to emerge from the École des Beaux-Arts. His hatching consists of jagged scribbles

that transform into black smears when, at Diana's sides, crayon is built up so thickly that it becomes a kind of void, swallowing up the viewer's gaze. Diana's face is a mere smudge, indicated by the outline of her head and a few overlapping marks to serve as features. It is not quite possible to make out the shape of her eyes. Her subjectivity is thus made irrelevant in this drawing, just as the details of her form, as with the whole of the depicted scene, are secondary to the overall sense of movement on the page.

By using a lithographic crayon on paper, Nanteuil allows himself a physical rehearsal for a future print. The many different widths of line and kinds of marks that appear in the work suggest an experimental mode of drawing. The mythological subject matter provides its own narrative context, freeing the artist from the burden of representing situational detail. Nanteuil's pictorial description of the world that Diana inhabits is limited; his process, by contrast, is made highly visible. It is easy to imagine the artist's process and the mobility of the crayon in his hand as it turns and swivels across the surface. Drawing, and the artist as draftsman, is as much the subject of this work as the faceless Diana herself.

Forward motion also dominates in Manet's watercolor *Race Course at Longchamp* (Fig. 2). But whereas *Diana* evokes movement through the quality of the artist's line, *Race Course at Longchamp* utilizes composition and perspective both to depict movement and to reproduce the conditions of spectatorship. Manet takes as his subject a horse race, a common enough spectacle in the 19th century, but puts the viewer in an unusual position—directly in the middle of the track. Horses and riders appear in the distance, just in front of the vanishing point of two strong orthogonal lines. This establishes a dangerous viewing position: the imaginary observer is not safely nestled on the sidelines, but rather is about to be trampled. Manet creates an alienating and unlikely vantage point, one that would not generally be experienced by any real participant in a horse race, be it rider or spectator. A rider would have the opposite view, stretching off into the distance, away from the rush of bodies, and a spectator would have a side or perhaps three-quarter view of the race, at a remove from the action. Manet, though, stares down



Fig. 2
 Edouard Manet, *Race Course at Longchamp*. See p. 285 for full information.

the race, as if immune to the force barreling toward him. The strangeness of this point of view is amplified by the elongated composition, which Manet achieved by joining two sheets of paper to create one unusually wide, almost panoramic sheet. This allows both the length of the race course, extending backward, and the dense crowd of spectators on the other side of the fence to be visible. By reorienting the default perspective of the viewer, Manet makes the experience of spectatorship a theme of this work.

In Manet's watercolor, motion is not expressed through the gesture of the artist, as in Nanteuil's drawing, but instead is implied through the extremity of the perspective, which creates a sense of imminent movement. Motion is anticipated, rather than felt. The figures near the foreground—ladies with their parasols and gentlemen in top hats—are utterly still. In his book *Manet's Modernism*, Michael Fried comments on the "contrast or opposition between stillness and speed" in this and the artist's other

treatments of horseracing at Longchamp.² Here, there is a striking difference between the immobile observers and the horses and riders rocketing toward the foreground. The composition itself is similarly built upon contrast: the orthogonal lines of the race course juxtapose sharply with the horizontal and vertical edges of the page. So pronounced is the distinction that the orthogonal lines extend over the edge of the support and onto a fresh sheet of paper.

Manet does not employ Nanteuil's calligraphic line to register the sweep of his own moving hand on the page, but he does choose to render the scene of the race with watercolor, and so invites movement into the very materiality of the picture. Watercolor is a motile medium that can bloom and stain a sheet of paper, easily escaping the control of the artist's brush. Manet makes careful use of watercolor's unpredictability. The distant figures in the crowd seem to have been blotted, so that their bodies appear to dissolve in the haze of the gloomy day. The horses and riders, the primary source of movement

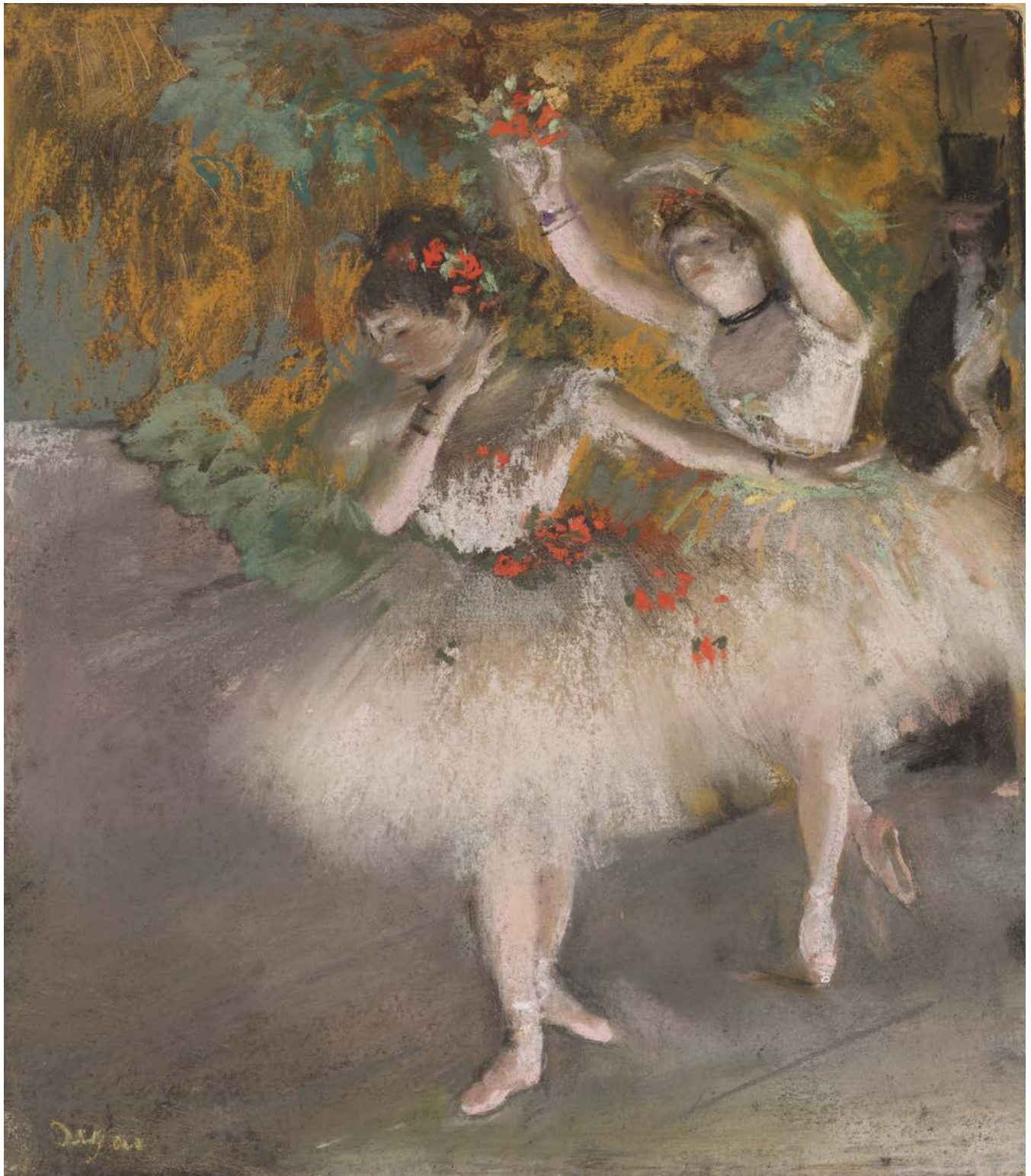


Fig. 3
Hilaire-Germain-Edgar Degas, *Two Dancers Entering the Stage*, c. 1877–78. Pastel over monotype in black ink on white laid paper, discolored to tan, 38.1 × 35 cm (15 × 13¾ in.). Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Bequest of Grenville L. Winthrop, 1943.812.

in the composition, are nearly subsumed by clouds of dust raised as hooves hit the ground. Manet's technical care confines the spread of pigment, limiting the natural tendency of the medium to move unchecked in a watery progress across the page.

In *Two Dancers Entering the Stage* (Fig. 3), Degas, like Manet, plays with spectatorship, but highlights a different kind of performance. While Degas's dancers move across a stage, they appear caught in static poses, paused in their passage as if in a modern snapshot. This creates tension in the composition between movement and stasis. Degas plants the dancers on a diagonal that extends from the upper right corner of the page to the lower left, leaving blank the spot on the stage where the dancers will soon be. This diagonal composition generates dynamism within the image, but also creates a kind of potential, rather than kinetic, movement. The viewer, like the lone spectator depicted at the far right of the page, is lured into a state of heightened anticipation. Dressed in evening tails and a top hat, this figure is a shadowy presence, a kind of ghost, both literally at the margin of the sheet and so minimally described by mark-making as to seem less corporeal than the dancers he watches. Through the inclusion of this sidelined onlooker, Degas, like Manet, reproduces the experience of observing a spectacularized movement. In Degas's work, however, the performers have a different pictorial weight than the spectator. Our eyes, like his, catch on the dancers, who are much more sensuously rendered in layers of ink and pastel. He is not the only ghost on the page: Degas's first layer on the support, monotype ink, is barely visible underneath swathes of pastel pigment, a half-hidden reminder of the artist's working process.

The artist's combination of media with very different properties heightens the effect of static movement in this composition. Degas similarly used both printed ink and drawn pastel in other performance scenes, including *Café-Concert* (Fig. 4), now in the collection of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. In both works, monotype ink creates a first layer onto which pastel can be built. The ink becomes all but invisible in the finished work, but something of its stillness remains.

For the artist, as for the dancer, the appearance of effortlessness can be deceiving. The audience of the ballet performance is invited to suspend disbelief, prompted by the velvet curtains, flickering lights, and graceful motions of the dancers. One could easily forget the labor of such a performance—the countless hours of study, rehearsal, and training that precede any opening night. The artist, too, produces a finished work that may at first seem to bear no sign of effort. Yet for Degas, the act of creation was exacting and labored. In his 1918 essay “Memories of Degas,” George Moore writes: “If led to speak on the marvelous personality of his art, Degas will say, ‘It is strange, for I assure you no art was ever less spontaneous than mine. What I do is the result of reflection and study of the great masters; of inspiration, spontaneity, temperament—temperament is the word—I know nothing.’”³ Indeed, Degas's process in making *Two Dancers Entering the Stage* consisted of several steps: first inking the plate, then printing the image, then adding pastel on top of that print. Degas here employs a process as iterative as ballet itself.⁴

While not always apparent on the page, the specter of practice hangs over any work of art; this quality is particularly prominent in drawings, where lines are the result of finely tuned motor skills and muscle memory. Toulouse-Lautrec drew *At the Circus: Jockey* (Fig. 5) in 1899, while confined to a psychiatric hospital in the Parisian suburb of Neuilly. There he practiced sketching a familiar and favorite subject: horses. Toulouse-Lautrec's father was an aristocrat with a love of hunting and of horses, but the artist himself had broken both femurs as a boy, which prevented him from growing thereafter. While he could not lead the sporting life that his father did, he had a love of horses and other animals, and his oeuvre bears witness to this fascination.⁵ Even in his teenage years, horses were a frequent subject: at 17, he painted a portrait in oil of his father on horseback with a falcon perched on his hand.

During his time at the psychiatric hospital, Toulouse-Lautrec proposed to his friend Maurice Joyant that he would make a series of drawings to demonstrate his wellness to his doctors; *At the Circus: Jockey* is one such example. (In fact, these drawings probably had nothing to



do with his eventual release, which came after a period of months, but nevertheless represent his keen focus on leaving the sanatorium.⁶) His choice of subject matter is charged with uneasy psychological resonance. Confined to the hospital, Toulouse-Lautrec could not have drawn this scene from life, though he had often attended circuses in his earlier years. Here, he draws on the memory of movement observed and on the memory of his own moving hand that had so often drawn horses and their riders in the past.

Toulouse-Lautrec saw Eadweard Muybridge's photographs of horses in motion as a teenager, and his careful observation of the body of the galloping horse is as evident in this 1899 work as it is in his other depictions of horses from that year.⁷ The lithograph *Le Jockey*, for instance, features a horse at full tilt with all legs raised in the air—Muybridge's carefully orchestrated photographs had provided definitive evidence of the notion that a galloping

Fig. 4
Hilaire-Germain-Edgar Degas,
Café-Concert, 1876–77. Pastel over
monotype on paper and board, 23.5 ×
43.2 cm (9¼ × 17 in.). National Gallery of
Art, Washington, D.C., 2014.136.175.



horse will, for a fraction of a second, leap off the ground altogether, with not a single hoof resting on the earth.

In Toulouse-Lautrec's drawing, line is mobile, and the viewer can make out the faint marks that the artist used to block out the form of the horse and rider on paper. The contours of the horse's body have been drawn and redrawn, revised finally into one sinuous, confident line. Toulouse-Lautrec traced over the drawing again and again, building up his marks. But the suggestion of movement produced in the drawing comes largely from the form of the circus ring, drawn in a series of concentric ovals that curve around the edge of the paper. The lines move around and around, just as horse and rider do. Toulouse-Lautrec has evacuated the circus of its audience, leaving only empty stands and the performers in the ring. There is a third performer, too, of course: the artist himself, drawing in the hope of release back into a world of activity and motion.

Fig. 5
Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec,
At the Circus: Jockey. See p. 285 for
full information.

1

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Drawing: Medium, Discourse, Object (Lajer-Burcharth)

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