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Nota di contenuto	Intro -- 1. Self-Portrait, ca. 1863. -- 2. Edgar Degas, ca. 1855/60. -- 3. Monsieur and Madame Edmondo Morbilli, ca. 1865. -- 4. The Bellelli Family, 1858/67. -- 5. Place de la Concorde (Comte Lepic with his daughters), 1876. -- 6. Pouting, ca. 1869/71. -- 7. The Ironer, ca. 1880. -- 8. Interior, ca. 1868/69. -- 9. Scene of War in the Middle Ages or The Misfortunes of the Town of Orleans, 1865. -- 10. Half-nude Woman, Lying on her Back, 1865. -- 11. Young Spartan Girls Challenging the Boys, ca. 1860-62. -- 12. Young Spartan Girl, ca. 1860. -- 13. At the Races, Gentlemen Jockeys, ca. 1876/77.; 14. Ballet (The Star), 1879-81. -- 15. The Rehearsal on Stage, 1874 . -- 16. Blue Dancers, ca. 1893. -- 17. Mademoiselle Lala at the Cirque Fernando, 1879. -- 18. Orchestral Musicians. -- 19. Dancers in the Wings, 1878-80. -- 20. At the Milliner's, ca. 1882-86. -- 21. In a Cafe, also called The Absinthe, 1875/76. -- 22. Portrait of Mademoiselle Eugenie Fiocre on the Occasion of the Ballet ""The Source"", 1867/68. -- 23. Waiting, ca. 1882. -- 24. Dancer Greeting with a Bunch of Flowers, ca. 1877. -- 25. In the Salon, ca. 1876/77. -- 26. Repose, ca. 1876/77.; 27. Mister

Perrot's Dance Lesson, 1873-1875. -- 28. The Procuress, ca. 1876/77. -- 29. Madame's Name-Day, 1876/77. -- 30. At the Theatre, ca. 1880. -- 31. Repose on the Bed, ca. 1876/77. -- 32. "'C'etait le marquis Cavalcanti qui se retournait le plus souvent'", 1880. -- 33. Pauline and Virginie Talking to Admirers, 1880. -- 34. In the "'Cafe des Ambassadeurs'", 1885. -- 35. Concert in the "'Cafe des Ambassadeurs'", ca. 1876. -- 36. The Song of the Dog, ca. 1876/77. -- 37. Singer with a Glove, ca. 1878. -- 38. The Bath, ca. 1880. -- 39. Two Women (Scene in a Brothel), ca. 1879-80 or 1876/77.; 40. Woman Drying Herself, ca. 1894. -- 41. After the Bath, 1890-93 (dated 1885 by a later hand). -- 42. The Tub, 1885/86. -- 43. Woman with a towel, 1898. -- 44. Woman Washing Herself, ca. 1894. -- 45. Naked Woman Drying her Foot, 1885/86. -- 46. The Bath: Woman Washing Herself, ca. 1887. -- 47. Woman Leaving her Bath, ca. 1877. -- 48. The Morning Bath (The Baker's Wife), 1885-86. -- 49. The Tub, ca. 1880. -- 50. Nude Woman Scratching Herself, 1879-83. -- 51. Women Combing their Hair, ca. 1875-76. -- 52. Nude Woman Combing her Hair, ca. 1879-85. -- 53. Nude Woman Combing her Hair, ca. 1886-88.; 54. The Morning Bath, ca. 1895. -- 55. Behind the Stage, ca. 1898. -- 56. Pas de deux, ca. 1877-1878. -- 57. Woman in front of a Mirror, ca. 1877. -- 58. Two Dancers, ca. 1895. -- 59. Grande Arabesque, ca. 1892-1896. -- 60. Woman Seated in an Armchair, Drying her Left Axilla, ca. 1900-1905. -- 61. Little Dancer Aged Fourteen, ca. 1879-1880. -- Biography -- 62. Little Dancer Aged Fourteen, ca. 1879-1880. -- 63. Woman washing her left leg, ca. 1900-1903. -- 64. The Masseuse (group), ca. 1900-1903.

## Sommario/riassunto

Degas was closest to Renoir in the impressionist's circle, for both favoured the animated Parisian life of their day as a motif in their paintings. Degas did not attend Gleyre's studio; most likely he first met the future impressionists at the Café Guerbois. He started his apprenticeship in 1853 at the studio of Louis-Ernest Barrias and, beginning in 1854, studied under Louis Lamothe, who revered Ingres above all others, and transmitted his adoration for this master to Edgar Degas. Starting in 1854 Degas travelled frequently to Italy: first to Naples, where he made the acquaintance of his numerous cousins, and then to Rome and Florence, where he copied tirelessly from the Old Masters. His drawings and sketches already revealed very clear preferences: Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Mantegna, but also Benozzo Gozzoli, Ghirlandaio, Titian, Fra Angelico, Uccello, and Botticelli. During the 1860s and 1870s he became a painter of racecourses, horses and jockeys. His fabulous painter's memory retained the particularities of movement of horses wherever he saw them. After his first rather complex compositions depicting racecourses, Degas learned the art of translating the nobility and elegance of horses, their nervous movements, and the formal beauty of their musculature. Around the middle of the 1860s Degas made yet another discovery. In 1866 he painted his first composition with ballet as a subject, *Mademoiselle Fiocre dans le ballet de la Source* (*Mademoiselle Fiocre in the Ballet 'The Spring'*) (New York, Brooklyn Museum). Degas had always been a devotee of the theatre, but from now on it would become more and more the focus of his art. Degas' first painting devoted solely to the ballet was *Le Foyer de la danse à l'Opéra de la rue Le Peletier* (*The Dancing Anteroom at the Opera on Rue Le Peletier*) (Paris, Musée d'Orsay). In a carefully constructed composition, with groups of figures balancing one another to the left and the right, each ballet dancer is involved in her own activity, each one is moving in a separate manner from the others. Extended observation and an immense number of sketches were essential to

executing such a task. This is why Degas moved from the theatre on to the rehearsal halls, where the dancers practised and took their lessons. This was how Degas arrived at the second sphere of that immediate, everyday life that was to interest him. The ballet would remain his passion until the end of his days.

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