



# PICASSO LOOKS AT DEGAS

## **PRESS CONFERENCE**

14<sup>th</sup> October 2010, at 11.30 a.m.

## **OPENING**

14<sup>th</sup> October 2010, at 19.30 p.m.

The exhibition will be open to the public from 15<sup>th</sup> October 2010 to 16<sup>th</sup> January 2011

**Picasso Looks at Degas** is organized by The Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts, and the Museu Picasso in Barcelona.

With the special cooperation of:

**FUNDACIÓN  
ALMINE Y BERNARD  
RUIZ-PICASSO  
PARA EL ARTE**

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## 1. PRESENTATION

The Museu Picasso in Barcelona presents, from 15 October to 16 January 2011 the major exhibition «**Picasso Looks at Degas**». The exhibition is curated by Elizabeth Cowling, Professor Emeritus of History of Art at Edinburgh University, and Richard Kendall, the Clark's Curator at Large and is organized by the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown and the Museu Picasso, Barcelona, with the special cooperation of Fundación Almine y Bernard Ruiz-Picasso para el Arte.

Throughout his life Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) was fascinated by the personality and art of Edgar Degas (1834–1917). He collected the Impressionist's work, often re-interpreted his signature imagery, and at the end of his life created scenes that included depictions of Degas himself. «**Picasso Looks at Degas**» is the first exhibition to explore the extent and significance of this phenomenon and brings together over one hundred works from international museums and private collections, including many that have never before been shown in Spain. The Museu Picasso is the exclusive European venue for the show, which is curated by Picasso expert Elizabeth Cowling and Impressionist scholar Richard Kendall.

Thanks to his friendship with older artists in Barcelona's Quatre Gats group, Picasso knew something of Impressionism before his first visit to Paris in 1900. However, what became a sustained dialogue with Degas's work began to develop only after he started visiting the French capital and seeing examples in the original. When he settled in the Bateau Lavoir in Montmartre in 1904 Picasso was within a few minutes' walk of Degas's studio. They had many acquaintances in common in the Parisian art world, including the legendary dealer Ambroise Vollard, but they seem never actually to have met.

Using compelling pairings and groupings of works on related themes, the exhibition examines Degas through Picasso's eyes and the ways in which the Spanish artist's response varied over time from emulation to confrontation and from parody to homage. Both shared a lifelong obsession with women, visible in their portraits of friends and innumerable representations of the female nude. But Picasso also echoed Degas's acknowledged signature subjects of café concert performers, ballet dancers, women at their toilette, and prostitutes. While usually identified as painters, both Degas and Picasso were supreme draftsmen and highly innovative sculptors and printmakers, and the exhibition brings together works in all these media in order to examine Picasso's reaction to the challenge posed by Degas's oeuvre and the fascinating affinity between their creative thinking and working methods.

The exhibition opens with Picasso's early years when he received an academic training very similar to that of Degas, whose art he had not discovered at that point. It then turns to the bohemian world of early twentieth-century Paris where Picasso first began to respond directly to Degas's imagery of modern life. In pictures such as *End of the Performance* (1900–01, Museu Picasso, Barcelona), he paid tribute to Degas's café-concert scenes by depicting a singer in mid-performance on stage. One of the most dramatic confrontations in this section is between Degas's controversial masterpiece *In a Café (L'Absinthe)* (1875-76, Musée d'Orsay, Paris) and Picasso's riveting Blue period *Portrait of Sebastia Junyer i Vidal* (1903, Los Angeles County Museum of Art). The ballet is a central theme in Degas's work, and paintings such as *Dancers in the Classroom* (c.1880, Clark Art Institute, Willamstown) established him as the Impressionist artist of dance. «**Picasso Looks at Degas**» examines Picasso's depiction of the ballet at various points in his career. In a striking example of how this artistic dialogue unfolded, the Clark's iconic sculpture *Little Dancer Aged Fourteen* (1879–1881), considered shocking and radical in its time, is juxtaposed with Picasso's *Yellow Nude* (1907, Gretchen and John Berggruen Collection, San Francisco), which heralded Cubism. Shortly after Degas's death, Picasso married Olga Khokhlova, a dancer from the Ballets Russes, and embarked on a passionate exploration of the dance that culminated in a number of sculptures emulating Degas's celebrated series of dancers. Never-before-exhibited archival material complements these works and sheds new light on Picasso's relationship with Olga and the ballet.

Picasso inherited and transformed another of Degas's favourite themes—women bathing or doing their hair—returning to it repeatedly over a period of more than fifty years. The exhibition will reveal how both artists explored this intimate female world in all media and in formats ranging from the diminutive to the monumental. Picasso's statuesque *Woman Plaiting Her Hair* (1906, Museum of Modern Art, New York) will be shown with both Degas's glowing red-pink *Combing the Hair* (c. 1896, The National Gallery, London) and his immense, apparently unfinished *Nude Woman Drying Herself* (1884-86, Brooklyn Museum, New York).

In the late 1870s Degas created a series of monotypes depicting prostitutes and their customers in brothels. Picasso particularly admired these prints and eventually acquired nine of them for his own collection. At the end of his life he directly engaged with them in a series of humorous and poignant etchings in which Degas himself appears in the guise of a wary and inhibited but fascinated client. The exhibition closes with this series and with the portrait of Degas Picasso painted in 1968 (Private collection) as a tribute to the great Impressionist.



## 2. EXHIBITION TOUR

**Room 1:** Early Years: Drawing and the Human Figure

**Room 2:** Paris: Picasso Discovers Degas

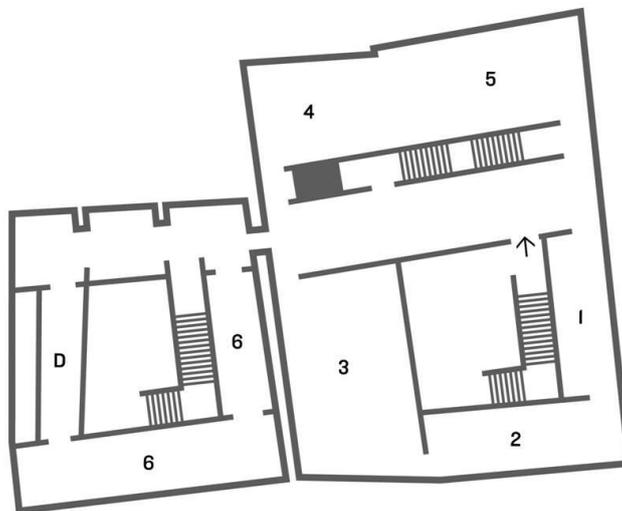
**Room 3:** Women and their Private World

**Room 4:** The Ballet: Homage and Humor

**Room 5:** Olga Khokhlova, Dancer and Muse  
Picasso's Bather-Dancers

**Room 6:** Brothel Scenes: the Artist as Voyeur

**Room D** Documentation





### 3. EXHIBITION AREAS

#### Hall

Pablo Picasso used to say: “When there’s anything to steal, I steal.” Throughout his long and prolific career, he often made works of art in response to his predecessors, quoting and adapting famous compositions by Velázquez, Delacroix, Manet, among many others. In Picasso’s youth, contemporaries noted the influence of Edgar Degas on his paintings of cabarets and cafés, portraits, women bathing, and ballet dancers — subjects that had come to define the French artist’s work. When he moved to Paris in 1904, Picasso lived in the same neighborhood as Degas, but although they had acquaintances in common they apparently never met. Strikingly different in character and way of life, they nevertheless shared many preoccupations. Both were artistic revolutionaries, yet much of their work was based on the human figure and informed by their knowledge of the past. Both were superb draftsmen, who also experimented radically with sculpture, printmaking, and photography. Towards the end of his life Picasso based numerous etchings on monotypes by Degas that he owned, and, as a final act of homage to the older man, portrayed Degas himself in many of them. *Picasso Looks at Degas* is the first full-scale exploration of Picasso’s lifelong fascination with Degas’s art and personality, and of the profound affinities between their multi-faceted oeuvres.

### **Room 1: Early Years: Drawing and the Human Figure**

Throughout their careers both Degas and Picasso focused primarily on the human figure, an obsession that had its roots in their early art-school education. Separated by almost half a century, both began their training by drawing, first from plaster casts, then from posed nude models, and by copying great figurative art from the past. Degas quickly rebelled against this system and embarked on a long study tour of Italy. Picasso, who revealed outstanding talent as a child and was directed by his art-teacher father, refused to complete his training at the Real Academia de San Fernando in Madrid and, aged sixteen, began consciously emulating more abstracted, vanguard styles. Nevertheless, for the rest of their lives drawing remained the corner-stone of both artists' work, although Picasso, unlike Degas, would later work from memory and the imagination rather than hired models.

### **Room 2: Paris: Picasso Discovers Degas**

In their different circumstances, portraiture allowed both Degas and Picasso to progress beyond academic subject matter to contemporary urban imagery. In 1899 Picasso joined Barcelona's Quatre Gats group and fell under the influence of Catalan artists, such as Ramon Casas, who had visited Paris and seen the work of the Impressionists, including Degas. Picasso's strongly characterized portrait drawings made at the turn of the century resemble not only those by Casas, but also by Degas and his Parisian followers. Picasso first visited Paris in 1900, when the city's glamour and artistic prestige were at their height. He stayed with Catalan friends in the artistic quarter, Montmartre, and reveled in the famous bars, cabarets, and street life. Degas was then in his sixties and lived nearby, and was still admired for his pioneering pictures of these subjects. By 1904, when Picasso settled in Paris, he had already produced many caricatural cabaret scenes and also responded directly to some of Degas's most celebrated and controversial pictures, notably *In a Café (L'Absinthe)*.

### **Room 3: Women and their Private World**

Although a lifelong bachelor reputed in his own day to be a misogynist, Degas was so fascinated by women that they dominated his work in all media. Alongside numerous portraits that are notable for their sympathy, penetration and honesty, he produced hundreds of images of women washing themselves and doing their hair, rejecting mythological subject matter in favor of contemporaneity. For Picasso too, women were always the prime subject, and as with Degas portraits of women in his circle coexist with generic images of nudes. In 1906, when toilette scenes briefly dominated his work, Picasso adopted a willfully "primitive" form of classicism, drawing inspiration from Degas's daringly simplified late style. The posthumous sales of the contents of Degas's studio in 1918–1919 brought a flood of unknown drawings and paintings onto the market. Picasso's interest in Degas was reignited, and for the rest of his life he periodically produced suites of toilette scenes, never imitating Degas closely but acknowledging his precedent by echoing his most characteristic poses and devices.



#### 4. THE STERLING AND FRANCINE CLARK ART INSTITUTE

The Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute is one of the few institutions in the world with a dual mission as both an art museum and a center for research and higher education in the visual arts. Its superb collections, distinctive exhibitions, and scholarly community foster an environment that might best be described as a greenhouse for ideas.

The core of the Clark's collection—European and American paintings and sculpture, Old Master prints and drawings, English silver, and porcelain—is the legacy of its founders, Sterling and Francine Clark. The museum is perhaps best known for the quality of the Impressionist and Old Master paintings in its permanent collection and by its groundbreaking exhibitions, such as the critically acclaimed *Picasso Looks at Degas*.

Scholarly inquiry and intellectual engagement define the Clark's Research and Academic Program, which has achieved international distinction. In the past decade, its residential visiting Fellows program has hosted well over 200 scholars from more than two dozen different countries. Located in Williamstown, in the Berkshires of Western Massachusetts, the Clark has close ties to nearby Williams College, the foremost liberal arts college in the United States. Together, they offer a graduate program in art history attracting students from around the world to this important academic community, easily accessible from the urban centers of Boston and New York.

As the Clark undertakes an expansion that will add new buildings designed by the Japanese architect Tadao Ando to its 140-acre woodland campus, it will share some of its most important works with new audiences through a series of exhibitions in Europe, North America, and Asia.

