

Norton Simon Museum For Immediate Release

411 West Colorado Boulevard, Pasadena, California 91105 www.nortonsimon.org
External Affairs Department 626.844.6900 media@nortonsimon.org

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Media Contacts:

Leslie C. Denk | ldenk@nortonsimon.org | (626) 844-6941

Emma Jacobson-Sive | emma@ejs-media.com | (323) 842-2064

Taking Shape: Degas as Sculptor

Exhibition marks the centenary of Degas's death by presenting the Museum's entire collection of bronze modèles for the first time

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Pasadena, CA—The Norton Simon Museum presents *Taking Shape: Degas as Sculptor*, an illuminating exhibition that explores the improvisational nature of Edgar Degas's artistic practice and considers the affinities between sculpting, painting and drawing in his oeuvre. By bringing together the Museum's entire collection of *modèles*, the first and only set of bronzes cast from the artist's original wax and plaster statuettes, and related pastels, drawings and paintings, *Taking Shape* offers viewers the opportunity to study Degas's artistic process across media. Seen together, this expansive body of Degas's works—one of the largest collections of its kind in the world—celebrates the artist's boundless enthusiasm for creation and his insatiable impulse to build form.



Edgar Degas (French, 1834-1917)
The Tub, 1889
Bronze no. 26, modèle cast
8 3/4 x 16 5/16 x 17 in.
Norton Simon Art Foundation

Renowned for his technical experimentation, Degas (French, 1834–1917) exhibited just one sculpture during his lifetime, the controversial *Little Dancer, Aged Fourteen*, which startled visitors to the 1881 Impressionist exhibition with its unidealized physiognomy and radical use of real materials such as silk slippers and a wig made from human hair. In the privacy of his studio, however, Degas modeled in wax and clay throughout his career, producing hundreds of small-scale, informal studies of horses, dancers and bathers that were seen only by close friends and visitors. It

was not until the artist's death—100 years ago this year—that the extent of this sculptural production was revealed. Of the nearly 150 models retrieved from Degas's studio, the artist's heirs selected 74 of the best-preserved examples to cast in bronze and sell as an edition, making public and permanent these transient exercises in form.

The unique set of sculptures in the Simon collection¹ served as the matrix for the serial bronzes that followed, and in some cases they preserve evidence of Degas's handwork that has been altered or repaired in the wax originals. Capturing the condition of the figurines when they were discovered in the artist's studio, the *modèles* vividly convey the instinctive way in which Degas pressed and smeared pliable wax and plaster over handmade wire armatures, and bulked the core with cork and other easily accessible materials. Rather than serving solely as sources for paintings or pastels, these sculptures were independent objects, what the artist called *essais*—"trials" or "experiments." For Degas, the act of sculpting was an end in itself.

The direct and openly tactile techniques that Degas honed as a sculptor also permeate his work in two dimensions, as the artist ground rich overlays of pigment into paper and put aside his paintbrush to fashion frothy tutus from his thumbprints. Visitors will see familiar favorites that demonstrate these creative approaches, including oil paintings such as *Dancers in the Rotunda at the Paris Opera*, c. 1875-1878 (reworked c. 1894), and superb pastels like *Dancers in the Wings*, c. 1876-78, in which the artist innovatively combined pastel, gouache and *peinture à l'essence* and built up the composition from 10 discrete strips of paper. These exceptional works, when viewed alongside the Simon's collection of *modèles* and related bronzes (including *Little Dancer, Aged Fourteen*), reveal the artist's fascination with form, balance and the evocation of movement.

Taking Shape: Degas as Sculptor is organized by Emily Talbot, assistant curator at the Norton Simon Museum. The exhibition is one of many worldwide that honors the centenary of Degas's death. A series of special events and offerings will be organized in conjunction with the exhibition and announced later in the year.

About the Norton Simon Museum

The Norton Simon Museum is known around the world as one of the most remarkable private art collections ever assembled. Over a 30-year period, industrialist Norton Simon (1907–1993) amassed an astonishing collection of European art from the Renaissance to the 20th century, and a stellar

¹ Norton Simon purchased 70 of the 74 *modèles* in 1977, and acquired two more in later years. The location of the final two *modèles* is unknown.

collection of South and Southeast Asian art spanning 2,000 years. Modern and Contemporary Art from Europe and the United States, acquired by the former Pasadena Art Museum, also occupies an important place in the Museum's collections. The Museum houses more than 12,000 objects, roughly 1,000 of which are on view in the galleries and gardens. Two temporary exhibition spaces feature rotating installations of artworks not on permanent display.

Location: The Norton Simon Museum is located at 411 W. Colorado Blvd. at Orange Grove Boulevard in Pasadena, Calif., at the intersection of the Foothill (210) and Ventura (134) freeways. For general Museum information, please call (626) 449-6840 or visit www.nortonsimon.org. **Hours:** The Museum is open Monday, Wednesday and Thursday from noon to 5 p.m., Friday and Saturday from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. It is closed on Tuesday. **Admission:** General admission is \$12 for adults and \$9 for seniors. Members, students with I.D., and patrons age 18 and under are admitted free of charge. Admission is free for everyone on the first Friday of every month from 5 to 8 p.m. All public programs, unless stated otherwise, are free with admission. The Museum is wheelchair accessible. **Parking:** Parking is free, and no reservations are necessary. **Public Transportation:** Pasadena Transit stops directly in front of the Museum. Please visit <http://pasadenatransit.net> for schedules. The MTA bus line #180/181 stops in front of the Museum. The Memorial Park Station on the MTA Gold Line, the closest Metro Rail station to the Museum, is located at 125 E. Holly St. at Arroyo Parkway. Please visit www.metro.net for schedules.

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