

# Degas and the English Connection 1872-1876

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Nineteenth-century Britain's rapidly expanding demand for art effected a strong pull on Continental artists.<sup>1</sup> In England a new breed of professional art merchants had developed promotional and marketing tools to maximize the profitability of art dealing;<sup>2</sup> these included art exhibitions aimed to attract a mass audience who would pay admittance for the privilege of viewing. The paintings offered there for sale were often centered around one "sensation picture," of which fine steel engravings were sold directly or by subscription to the public.<sup>3</sup> A growing number of art writers and publications such as the *Art Journal* or *The Athenaeum* played an important support role by promoting these occasions and generally stimulating interest in art.<sup>4</sup> Such exhibitions often attracted up to a thousand visitors a day, and from the mid-century onward rarely a week passed by in London without several widely-publicized art events occurring simultaneously.<sup>5</sup> The cash flow generated by this market resulted in substantial earnings for many dealers and artists and laid the economic basis for England's "Golden Age of Living Painters."<sup>6</sup> One of the French artists who was attracted to this market was Edgar Degas, and this essay fo-

cuses on the socioeconomic circumstances under which his pictures first appeared in London.<sup>7</sup> I will briefly touch on Degas's early awareness of English art and proceed with an examination of the roles played by the painters Tissot, Whistler, and Legros in Degas's English career. A subsequent discussion of his London dealers and sales of his works allows for a calculation of his surprisingly good earnings. Nevertheless, I will argue that, by comparison, Degas failed commercially in England and that his failure exemplifies the growing influence of a market economy on a maturing art market increasingly controlled by entrepreneurial middlemen.

Visits to Paris by London dealers were awaited with excitement by the French art community, and already as early as 1860 Durand-Ruel had contact with such important English art dealers and print publishers as Agnew, Gambart and Henry Wallis.<sup>8</sup> Whether Degas tried, during the 1860s, to attract the attention of these individuals is not known; however, his early awareness of, and interest in, English art is well documented.<sup>9</sup> Indebtedness to contemporary English art is evident in the artist's early racecourse pictures: for example, his *Jockeys at*

<sup>1</sup> An early example of a French artist tapping into the lucrative English exhibition market is the showing of Gericault's *Raft of Medusa* (1818-19) in London in 1820. See Johnson, "The Raft of Medusa in Great Britain," *Burlington Magazine* XCVI (1954).

<sup>2</sup> In 1840, H.M. customs listed a total of 2,732 paintings imported from France; in 1850, 2,982. In 1855, after the Litchfield House exhibition and two exhibitions of French paintings organized by the dealer Gambart, the number of imported works from France had reached a staggering 29,401, a ten-fold increase. See Jeremy Maas, *Gambart* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, Ltd., 1975) 125. In my forthcoming dissertation, *Under the Hammer: A Socioeconomic Analysis of Auction Sales in Nineteenth Century Britain*, I will offer additional statistical data concerning the role of dealers during this period.

<sup>3</sup> For further discussions on the English art market during the Victorian Age see Geoffrey Agnew, *Agnew's 1817-1967* (London: The Bradbury Press, Ltd., 1967); Thomas M. Bayer, "Marketing of Genius—Ingenious Marketing: The Role of Engravings in Mid-Nineteenth Century English Art Dealing," *Athanasior* XI (1992); Jeremy Maas, Gerald Reitlinger, *The Economics of Taste* (New York: Hacker Art Books, 1982).

<sup>4</sup> The role of art writers in Victorian England still warrants further investigation. Critics could play decisive roles in the success or failure of many artists' careers by manipulating, consciously or unconsciously, public taste.

<sup>5</sup> See Maas, describing the events surrounding the premier exhibition of Hunt's *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple* at Gambart's German

Gallery, April 1860. Maas's book also provides a list of exhibitions organized by the dealer Gambart.

<sup>6</sup> The term was used by Reitlinger, vol. 1, 175-206, to describe the Victorian period.

<sup>7</sup> The subject of Degas and England has most recently been discussed by Denys Sutton in his "Degas et l'Angleterre," *Degas Inédit*, Actes du Colloque Degas, Musée d'Orsay, Paris, April 18-21, 1988, 277-288. The essay summarizes previously known material and is more biographical than economic in focus.

<sup>8</sup> Maas 90 and n. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Denys Sutton, *Edgar Degas: Life and Work* (New York: Rizzoli, 1986) 81, 93; Jean Sutherland Boggs, ed. *Degas* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1988) 43. The Exposition Universelle of 1855 and of 1867 provided ample opportunity for direct exposure, and entries in Degas's notebook reveal a more than passing interest in the works of the Pre-Raphaelites, especially Millais. In fact, Degas's friend Tissot, in a letter from the early seventies to the artist, referred to Millais's *Eve of Saint Agnes* (1863) as the model for Degas's *Interieur* of 1868-69 (L. 348), and the painting may well have been done with the English market in mind. See Theodore Reff, "Tableau De Genre," *Art Bulletin* 54 (Summer 1972) 334-337; also James Wentworth, *Tissot* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984) 54-55; Boggs 146. Throughout this text, the capital letter 'L' followed by a number refers to Lemoisne's *Catalogue Raisonné* of Degas's works.

*Epsom* of 1860-62 (L.75—"L." denotes Lemoisne's *Catalogue Raisonné* and entry number, here and following) depicts the same English racecourse which served as the backdrop for William Powell Frith's immensely popular *Derby Day* (1858) which had been sent to Paris to be engraved<sup>10</sup> and with which Degas was possibly familiar through its prints; his studies of jockeys from the 1860s and '70s also recall sketches of Ben Marshall and J.F. Herring, Senior;<sup>11</sup> his *Gentlemen's Race before the Start* of 1862 (L. 101) was painted at a time when he was particularly interested in English painters, scenes, and literature;<sup>12</sup> and his *Steeplechase* of 1866 (L.140) was, in fact, characterized by a contemporary viewer as "somewhat in the English style."<sup>13</sup> A similar description could be made of his *Racehorses before the Stand* (1866-68, L. 262), Figure 1: the "rocking horse" in the background, although reminiscent of De Dreux, recalls also English sporting prints. Degas's *Sulking* of 1869-71 (L.335), Figure 2, even shows the 1847 engraving of J.F. Herring, Senior, on the wall behind the two figures.<sup>14</sup> Influence of British racing prints is also evident in his *At the Races in the Countryside* of 1869 (L.281), which was exhibited in London in 1872 and '73.<sup>15</sup> An obvious attempt of an English subject was his *The Meet* of c. 1873 (L.119): the top hats worn by the riders were an exclusively English feature and it may be that the artist executed this work during his trip to England in 1873.<sup>16</sup> This influence of British sporting prints on the artist's equestrian paintings attests to the prevailing Anglo mania and general indebtedness to English influence on horse racing in France.<sup>17</sup> However, it should also be understood as a conscious effort on Degas's part to create an art which in subject was traditional and thus, due to its conservatism, would appeal to the middle class market in France and England.<sup>18</sup>

Degas's interest in Great Britain started early, apparently spurred by the success of his friend Tissot in London. The two

had met, most likely, in 1859 and remained friends for some thirty years.<sup>19</sup> Their correspondence provides insight into Degas's thoughts about selling his work in Great Britain because Tissot's financial success in England presented to Degas an example of effective marketing of a French artist's paintings there.<sup>20</sup> Tissot, however, was quite willing to reorient his work to suit market demands, and the effectiveness of this strategy is demonstrated by the fact that in 1863, when Tissot turned from history paintings to modern life subjects, he was 100,000 francs in debt but only two years later was earning 70,000 francs annually.<sup>21</sup> Even earlier, Tissot seemed to have emulated artists who enjoyed widespread popularity. Of relevance here is his interest in the works of the successful Belgian artist Henri Leys. This painter had enjoyed Queen Victoria's patronage since 1843 and his work was introduced to the English public at the Litchfield House exhibition in 1851. In 1862, the London dealer and print publisher Ernest Gambart purchased a group of paintings for the then-staggering sum of 8,000 pounds and this dealer's ensuing patronage was the main driving force behind Leys's success in England.<sup>22</sup> It is possible that Leys's example there may have prompted Tissot to emulate his work. Tissot himself also had numerous dealings with Gambart: in 1866, the dealer showed, for the first time, a work by the artist, *The Spring* (Salon of 1865, no. 2074),<sup>23</sup> and continued to work with Tissot from then on. The painter sold his paintings in a methodical way, demonstrating an understanding of the English art market far better than his friend Degas. Success did not come instantly, however: English opinion of French painting was not always positive and several of Tissot's works were received poorly by the press.<sup>24</sup> Yet this did not discourage the artist's efforts to define English taste in order to orient his products to the market. In the spring of 1871 Tissot fled Paris to settle in London where he made his debut at the Royal Acad-

<sup>10</sup> Maas 102.

<sup>11</sup> Sutton, "Degas: Master of the Horse," *Apollo* CXIX (April 1984) 285. Sutton, however, cautions that this similarity should not be taken to mean that these English artists influenced Degas's career directly. Yet see below on his direct appropriation of a print by J.F. Herring, Sr.

<sup>12</sup> Boggs 101.

<sup>13</sup> Anonymous, *Salon de 1866* (Paris: 1866), as cited by Boggs 123, n. 2.

<sup>14</sup> The print was convincingly identified by Reff in his *Degas: The Artist's Mind* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harper & Row, 1976) 117. The interest in middle class private life, carefully depicted and sometimes interrupted by the invasion of a third party, was a popular motif among Victorian painters. See also Boggs 147-8; Sutton, *Edgar Degas: Life and Work*, 138; also his "Degas: Master of the Horse," 286. A more recent discussion of *Sulking* is provided in John House's essay "Tableaux de Genre" in *Dealing with Degas*, Richard Kendall and Griselda Pollock, eds. (New York: Universe, 1992) 80-94.

<sup>15</sup> Boggs 158; Sutton, "Degas: Master of the Horse," 286, dated slightly later.

<sup>16</sup> Boggs 193.

<sup>17</sup> J. Richardson, *La Vie Parisienne 1857-76* (London: Hamilton, 1971) 110-112.

<sup>18</sup> Eunice Lipton, *Looking into Degas, Uneasy Images of Women and Modern Life* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1986) 23, 35.

<sup>19</sup> Wentworth 16. Wentworth suggests that they may have met in the studio of their teacher Lamothe sometime after April, 1859. Sutton in his *Edgar Degas: Life and Work*, 39, considers the possibility of their first meeting to have taken place in Italy in the late 1850s, although no proof exists for Tissot's presence in that country prior to 1862. Their friendship apparently ended when Tissot sold Degas's painting *Horses in the Field* (L. 289), which the artist had given him as a gift, to Durand-Ruel in 1890; Tissot also sold a similar present of Degas, his *Woman with Field Glasses* of 1875/6 (L. 431) for 1,500 francs. See Boggs 223; also Wentworth 190.

<sup>20</sup> Wentworth 92, n. 24. Tissot earned 1.2 million francs while in England.

<sup>21</sup> Wentworth 57-8 and n. 47.

<sup>22</sup> Wentworth 24-28; Maas 54, 92, 159.

<sup>23</sup> Maas 191.

<sup>24</sup> Wentworth 39, 40, 43, 85 and Appendices II and III.

emy one year later. He cultivated friendships with successful artists like Millais and Alma-Tadema as well as other members of London's "smart set."<sup>25</sup> Particularly Whistler, whom Tissot knew from Paris, helped him find his way in the English art world, possibly offering him suggestions about his work.<sup>26</sup> Tissot's early London canvases consisted largely of variations on the themes of English narrative paintings and, much more than Degas, he attempted to tie "psychological exploration to an art of pleasure."<sup>27</sup> The resulting stylish and expensive canvases, carefully promoted by London's fashionable dealers, soon found buyers among the *nouveau riche* plutocracy. Agnew's purchase of Tissot's *Hush* (also called *The Concert*), Figure 3, at the Royal Academy in 1875 for 1,200 guineas is solid proof of his success.<sup>28</sup> By comparison, Degas's *Classe de Danse* (L.341), Figure 4, was sold in London in 1876 for 166 guineas of which the artist received 145—around 1/8th of the amount Tissot was paid.<sup>29</sup> It should be stressed that the high prices of Tissot's original works depended on income from engravings published in editions numbering sometimes tens of thousands. Tissot was well aware of the financial rewards of popular reproductions: in 1869, he was hired by the editor of *Vanity Fair*, Gibson Bowles, to do illustrations for the magazine, and by 1873 Tissot had made a total of 55 sketches for the publication.<sup>30</sup> While different from his paintings, they nevertheless sharpened his sense for capturing the element of popular appeal.<sup>31</sup> Degas must have been aware of his friend's efforts to build a career in England, although written documentation exists only after Tissot had left Paris in 1871. The earliest record is the artist's letter to Tissot of September 30, 1871, which made reference to Tissot's financial success in London and asked for advice as to how Degas, too, could profit from England.<sup>32</sup> Another letter to Tissot from New Orleans dated November 19, 1872, again addressed Tissot's good fortune and continued with: "Here I have acquired the taste for money, and once back I shall know how to earn some, I promise you." He also expressed regrets at having missed seeing Millais and sent his regards to Whistler, Legros, and Charles Deschamps, the manager of Durand-Ruel's showroom in London where Degas's works were

shown.<sup>33</sup> In another letter, towards the end of his stay in America, he described two works specifically painted with the intention of selling them to the London dealer Agnew, suggesting even a potential client. Once again reference was made to Tissot's success in England and Degas accused the popular Victorian painters of exploiting some trick while also complaining about Deschamps's failure to sell his pictures in England. The letter implied as well that Tissot had repeatedly insisted that there was a place in England for Realist painters such as Degas.<sup>34</sup> Upon returning to Paris in 1873, in another note, Degas revealed again his preoccupation with the English market: he inquired about his, as yet non-existent, future with Agnew and asked his friend to entertain him with "some juicy ideas and some veritable sums of money."<sup>35</sup> A subsequent letter of uncertain date expressed Degas's wish to visit Tissot in London with several pictures; he also once more complained about Durand-Ruel's lack of sales.<sup>36</sup> During 1874, Degas appeared to have been occupied with the first Impressionist exhibition: in an undated letter he urged Tissot to participate, asking him to "forget the money side for a moment."<sup>37</sup> The latter's absence from the exhibition is illuminating: success in England had perhaps curbed, if not eliminated, Tissot's interest in supporting his friend's endeavors to promote the Impressionist cause in France. A final note to Tissot towards the end of 1874 addressed Degas's still uncertain commercial position in London.<sup>38</sup> After 1874 no further writings between the artists are known. This break-off of correspondence may have been due to a possible strain on their friendship resulting from Tissot's unwillingness to support the Impressionists as well as Degas's growing awareness of Tissot's preoccupation with financial success contrasted with what Degas saw as a position of artistic integrity.

Curiously, none of these letters suggests that Tissot ever actively furthered his friend's career in England. In an artistic environment where patronage between artists was quite common and even flattering to those who extended it, Tissot's behavior was atypical. Far more support in London, for example, was provided for Degas by the resident painters James McNeil Whistler and Alphonse Legros.

<sup>25</sup> Wentworth 89, 128, n. 7.

<sup>26</sup> Wentworth 99. For further discussion on the effects of English taste on Tissot see also 95-99.

<sup>27</sup> Wentworth 6.

<sup>28</sup> Wentworth 117, n. 99; also Marilyn Brown, *Degas and the Business of Art: A Cotton Office in New Orleans* (Pennsylvania State UP, 1994) 48, n. 110.

<sup>29</sup> Douglas Cooper, *The Courtauld Collection* (London: University of London, Athlone Press, 1954) 60-61. Tissot's *Hush* measures 73.5 x 112 cm and Degas's *Classe de Danse* 85 x 76 cm.

<sup>30</sup> Wentworth 87. Also on staff, besides Tissot, were Carlo Pellegrini and de Nittis, both friends of Degas.

<sup>31</sup> Brown 48, n. 110, for contemporary comments by Berthe Morisot,

Edmond de Goncourt, and J. S. Sargent on Tissot's commercial instinct. Sargent referred to Tissot as a "dealer of genius."

<sup>32</sup> M. Guerin, ed. *Degas Letters* (Oxford: Cassirer, 1947) 11-12.

<sup>33</sup> Guerin 18-19.

<sup>34</sup> Guerin 29-31. The paintings are *A Cotton Office in New Orleans* (L. 320) and its smaller version.

<sup>35</sup> Guerin 33.

<sup>36</sup> Guerin 34; the date suggested is 1873.

<sup>37</sup> Guerin 38-39.

<sup>38</sup> Guerin 41-42. Boggs, 222, suggests the date of 1874 due to Degas's mention of Faure in this letter.

One of Degas's letters indicates that he must have met Whistler prior to September 1871, and their mutual admiration and lifelong friendship are well known.<sup>39</sup> By then Whistler had become the center of a group of young English art students in London he had met earlier in Paris and who kept abreast of the latest developments in French art.<sup>40</sup> To this circle he introduced Fantin-Latour and Alphonse Legros, and it appears that he also extended patronage to Degas. As Douglas Cooper points out, "behind most of the early purchases in England of Degas—Ionides, Sickert, Mrs. Unwin, Sir William Eden, or William Burrell—one can trace the connection with Whistler."<sup>41</sup> These acquisitions, however, occurred in the 1880s. If and how during the early 1870s Whistler extended his hand to Degas is not documented, yet the American's character favors the notion that Degas enjoyed Whistler's support. One patronal link did exist through the dealer Gambart, who knew Whistler since 1864,<sup>42</sup> subsequently established a successful business relationship with Tissot and was, I believe, the same 'Gambar' Degas met during one of his trips to London.<sup>43</sup> Perhaps it was the American who orchestrated the meeting between Degas and this influential dealer.

Degas also mentioned in the above letter his friend Legros who had left France in 1863 and, with Whistler's help, settled in London.<sup>44</sup> Legros stayed in touch with his artist friends in Paris and often extended his support: during the Franco-Prussian War and the events of the Commune in 1871, for example, Monet and Pissarro stayed with him, and after 1872 he acted as a member of the Committee of Honor of the Society of French Artists recently created by Durand-Ruel to promote his exhibitions of contemporary French paintings in London.<sup>45</sup> Degas was first introduced to the English public through these exhibitions and subsequently participated in a total of eight<sup>46</sup> until 1876, when Durand-Ruel closed his London branch and Legros became first Slade Professor at University College, London. Suggesting a possible link between Degas's participation in these

exhibitions and Legros's role in the Committee of Honors is, of course, speculative, but the coincidence is worth noting, particularly since Legros's appointment to the faculty of University College in 1876 coincided with the last exhibition of the Society of French Artists in London. He may have been one of the driving forces behind the organization and his new faculty responsibilities could have hindered further active involvement in the organization.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, unlike Tissot, Legros did participate in the first Impressionist show in 1874,<sup>48</sup> and his influence in the London art world contributed to the gradual acceptance of Impressionism in Britain. It should be mentioned also that the artist was responsible for Ionides's purchase of Degas's second version of *Le Ballet de "Robert Le Diable"* (L.391) from Durand-Ruel in 1881.<sup>49</sup> Although sparse, the available information on Whistler's and Legros's support of Degas suggests, I believe, the possibility of far more extensive patronage than is presently known.

Degas's interest in the English market was paramount between 1872 and 1876 when Durand-Ruel and Charles Deschamps were showing his paintings in London. Durand-Ruel, after fleeing Paris in 1870 during the Franco-Prussian war, had arrived in England with a substantial inventory of paintings of which custom clearance he entrusted to Henry Wallis, owner of the French Gallery and close associate of Gambart.<sup>50</sup> Wallis initially stored the pictures at McLean's gallery to which, in early November 1870, the public was invited to view, for the first time, works by Monet, Pissarro, Manet, and others of the Realist/Impressionist tendency.<sup>51</sup> Towards the end of the year the exhibition, now titled "The Society of French Artists" was moved to Gambart's German gallery at 168 New Bond Street.<sup>52</sup> The event was generally well received by local critics and now also included works by Rosa Bonheur, Burne-Jones, and Alma-Tadema, all well established artists of Gambart's stable. The association between Durand-Ruel and Gambart was tightened further when the latter's nephew, Charles Deschamps, in 1872,

<sup>39</sup> Guerin 12, citing a letter by Degas to Tissot of September, 1871, in which he extends his regards to Whistler. For their friendship see also 19 and 32.

<sup>40</sup> Cooper 14.

<sup>41</sup> Cooper 18. With the exception of Sickert, Cooper provides no documentation for this statement, although it is often repeated and accepted in Degas literature.

<sup>42</sup> Maas 116.

<sup>43</sup> Theodore Reff, "Some unpublished letters of Degas," *Art Bulletin* LI (March 1968) 88. The dating of this letter is somewhat problematic and will be discussed in a later section as will be the role of Gambart whom Reff incorrectly describes as a bookseller and publisher who had joined a firm of print sellers and publishers in 1871. However, in a letter of 18 January 1998 to the author, Dr. Reff indicates that this statement will be corrected in his forthcoming edition of the letters of Degas.

<sup>44</sup> Maas 166 and n. 1.

<sup>45</sup> *Lettres à Lucien*, 58, letter of Camille Pissarro of July 25, 1883, as cited by Cooper 29, n. 1, also 21.

<sup>46</sup> Kate Flint, *Impressionism in England: The Critical Reception* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984) 356-360.

<sup>47</sup> Cooper 17; Flint 360. The next collective showing of Impressionists in London did not occur until 1882. To argue for a cause and effect link would be going too far: economics were the main reason for Durand-Ruel's departure. However, the successful promotion and sale of new art requires a delicate interplay of forces and Legros's shift of focus towards his new position could have contributed to Durand-Ruel's decision to leave. Of course, the argument could be inverted: Durand-Ruel's departure may have prompted Legros to pursue other career opportunities. If and what connections existed between the two events, so far, remains speculation.

<sup>48</sup> Guerin 39. For a contemporary discussion of Legros see Edmund Duranty, "The New Painting: Concerning the Group of Artists exhibiting at the Durand-Ruel Galleries," reprinted in Charles Moffet, *The New Painting, Impressionism 1874-1886*, exhibition catalogue, Richard Burton, Geneva.

<sup>49</sup> Cooper 29; R. Pickvance, "Henry Hill, an Untypical Victorian Collector," *Apollo* LXXVI: 10 (December 1962) 791; Boggs 270.

<sup>50</sup> Maas 223.



became the secretary of Durand-Ruel's "Society of French Artists." Deschamps had been involved in his uncle's business since the latter's establishment of "The Secretariat of French Painters in England and The USA" in Paris in 1859.<sup>53</sup> When Gambart offered the post of manager of the French Gallery to Henry Wallis in 1861, Deschamps was one of the new manager's liaisons in Paris.<sup>54</sup> After fleeing Paris in 1871, the young man went to London to apprentice with his uncle and soon befriended artists in the circle of the Pre-Raphaelites and others represented by Gambart. After accepting the post of secretary of "The Society of French Artists" in 1872, Deschamps still maintained close personal and business ties to his uncle.<sup>55</sup> After the ninth exhibition in November 1874, Durand-Ruel left the London gallery in charge of Deschamps who organized three subsequent exhibitions of the "Society" until 1876 when the gallery was closed.<sup>56</sup> It is noteworthy that the largest number of Degas's works sold during the last year of the gallery's operation when all four exhibited pieces were purchased by the Brighton collector Henry Hill. Degas must have been disappointed when Deschamps closed just as sales seemed to indicate that the artist's career in England was about to flourish. Most likely the undated letter in which he asked Deschamps about another English dealer with premises at 55 Great Russell Street was an attempt to find a new outlet for his pictures.<sup>57</sup> Evidently, these efforts were unsuccessful, or he may have simply lost interest, since his works did not reappear on the London market until 1882, again with Durand-Ruel.<sup>58</sup>

Degas's London debut consisted of two paintings shown during the fourth exhibition of the Society of French Artists in the summer of 1872: *A False Start* (L.258), Figure 5, and *The*

*Ballet from "Robert Le Diable"* (L.294). Both were priced at a reasonable 100 guineas each but neither sold during the show. However, the ballet scene, which Degas specifically did not want to have displayed in London, was purchased in 1874 by the opera singer Jean-Baptiste Faure and returned to Degas in exchange for other works.<sup>59</sup> The artist subsequently painted another version which appears to be the earlier mentioned canvas acquired by Ionides in 1881 on Legros's advice.<sup>60</sup>

The Society's fifth exhibition during the winter of 1872/73 featured three of Degas's works: *At the Races in the Countryside* (L.281), also shown at the sixth exhibition (no. 79), was likewise acquired by Faure for 50 guineas and later exhibited at the first Impressionist show in 1874 (no. 77).<sup>61</sup> The artist's *Classe de Danse* (L.297) was sold to Brandon and also loaned to the aforementioned show (no. 55). It reappeared on the English market in 1876 when it was purchased by Hill during the last exhibition before Deschamps closed.<sup>62</sup> The third work, *Le Foyer de la Danse à l'Opera de la Rue Peletier* (L.298), Figure 6, went to Louis Huth for 140 guineas of which Degas received a total of 95.<sup>63</sup>

Evidently to increase his popularity and perhaps prompted by Tissot, by whom he had seen an engraving in an illustrated paper in New Orleans, Degas sent that year a design to the *Illustrated London News* (L.400).<sup>64</sup> The London market was of particular interest to Degas at this time since he had just completed his *Cotton Office* (L.320), Figure 7, while in New Orleans with the intent to sell it in England. Both endeavors failed: the design for the *News* was refused, a predictable reaction considering that, contemporaneously, illustrations by Gerome and Bouguereau were being accepted.<sup>65</sup> Degas reworked the pen-

<sup>51</sup> *Athenaeum*, Nov. 5, 1870, as cited by Maas 223; Lionello Venturi, ed. "Memoirs de Paul-Durand Ruel," in *Les Archives de l'Impressionisme* (Paris, New York: 1939) 175-81; Cooper 22.

<sup>52</sup> Flint 2.

<sup>53</sup> Maas 110. The organization was initially represented by Surville who was later assisted by Deschamps.

<sup>54</sup> Maas. The other was Surville.

<sup>55</sup> Maas 223, 238.

<sup>56</sup> Ronald Pickvance, "Degas's Dancers, 1872-1876," *Burlington Magazine* 105 (June 1963), 258, n. 20; Flint 4, giving the date for Durand-Ruel's closing of the London premises as the end of 1875. The dealer's next attempt on the English market did not occur until the summer of 1882 with a small exhibition at a gallery he rented at 13 King Street, St. James. In the spring of 1883 he renewed his efforts with a much larger exhibition consisting of 65 works of which 7 were by Degas at the Dowdeswell's Gallery. See also Cooper 23.

<sup>57</sup> Sutton, *Edgar Degas: Life and Work*, 116, n. 30; Reff, "Some Unpublished Letters," 91-2.

<sup>58</sup> Flint 360. There is some evidence suggesting that the artist's first business dealings with Durand-Ruel go back to 1871, one year prior to the first showing of his works in London. See Boggs 161. Gallery records, however, indicate that the first purchases of Degas's paintings were made in January, 1872. See Pickvance, "Degas's Dancers," 256-7; Boggs 42,

<sup>59</sup> The term 'purchase' has to be used with caution. The difference between the price paid to the artist and the retail price was often too small to indicate an outright purchase but more likely a consignment arrangement. Durand-Ruel worked normally with a 100% mark-up, or doubling the price paid to the artist. See Boggs 370. For the next year and a half frequent transactions occurred between the two until, in late 1874, Deschamps took over. See Boggs 161, 212; also Guerin 34. The artist's relationship with Durand-Ruel appeared to have been occasionally strained but nevertheless long lasting.

<sup>59</sup> Guerin 34-35, in a letter to Tissot; also Boggs 59, 171; Flint 57; Cooper 22.

<sup>60</sup> Cooper 29, 60.

<sup>61</sup> Boggs 157.

<sup>62</sup> Pickvance, "Degas's Dancers," 257-8.

<sup>63</sup> Boggs 175. By February 18, 1873, Degas was unaware of the sale of these paintings as indicated by the content of a letter to Tissot. See Guerin 32.

<sup>64</sup> Guerin 33; Boggs 225; Wentworth 92. Continental artists often submitted their works to this magazine; in fact, as Pickvance points out in "Degas's Dancers," 260, the December 21, 1872, issue included an illustration by Degas's friend, the Danish artist Lorenz Frohlich.

<sup>65</sup> Gérôme on December 14, 1872; Bouguereau on January 4, 1873.

and-ink drawing and it was later purchased by Hill in 1876 at the last exhibition at Deschamps's gallery as *Repetition d'un Ballet sur la Scene* (L.400). Degas's naivete in commercial matters becomes even more apparent in his failed campaign to sell the *Cotton Office* to the dealer Agnew. In his entrepreneurial enthusiasm he had even suggested to Tissot a potential client, the Manchester cotton spinner Cottrill, whose name he might have known from a series of illustrated articles in the *Art Journal* in 1870/71.<sup>66</sup> As a Victorian merchant firm, Agnew's would have considered the painting, if they ever saw it, without commercial potential: painted by an unknown foreign artist, depicting the comfortable, leisurely business environment of wealthy cotton brokers, the canvas was without the required mass appeal. It was too specifically aimed at one narrow interest group which, even apart from the commercial crisis of the cotton industry, would have considered the "colonial" location of the scene as inappropriate as the apparent glorification of the ease of capitalist business life.<sup>67</sup> Popular subject and mass appeal were, from a Victorian art merchant's viewpoint, vital factors in a painting's purchase decision. Degas's *Cotton Office* failed on all counts. There is no evidence that Agnew's ever saw the painting and, in my opinion, Tissot never mentioned it to them. Three years later the canvas was in London with Deschamps. Since it arrived after June 1, 1876,<sup>68</sup> it was too late for the final exhibition suggesting that Degas was unaware of the imminent closing of the gallery. The dealer may have continued his activities privately, since the painting remained with him until spring of 1877. The *Cotton Office* was finally bought by the museum in Pau, France, for 2,000 francs, or about 65 guineas—even for Degas a very low price.<sup>69</sup> The commercial history of this painting can serve as a textbook example of the risks of the artist/entrepreneur combination.

In spite of these failed efforts, the year 1873 showed some successes: all three of Degas's paintings shown at the sixth ex-

hibition of the "Society," *Getting Ready For The Start* (L.317), *A Racecourse in the Normandy* (L.281), and *Horses at Grass* (L.289), were purchased by the singer Faure.<sup>70</sup>

At the seventh exhibition, during the winter of 1873, Degas showed for the first time a laundress subject in England (L.356), but he again asked Faure to purchase it from Durand-Ruel in his behalf.<sup>71</sup> After reworking it, Degas exhibited the canvas at the second Impressionist show in Paris in 1876.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, in March 1874, he recalled his *Orchestra Musicians of 1870* (L.295), which he had sent to London in May 1873.<sup>73</sup>

The catalogue of the eighth exhibition in the spring of 1874 listed no works by Degas; almost everything he had thus far sent had found new owners.<sup>74</sup> For the ninth exhibition that winter the artist replaced one of the two sold ballet scenes (L.297 and L.298) with his *Scene de Ballet* (L.425)<sup>75</sup> which went to Henry Hill who was to buy all but one of the subsequent works Degas sent to London over the next two years.<sup>76</sup> The only unsold painting was his *Dancer Posing for a Photograph* (L.447; Figure 8) shown at the tenth exhibition in the spring of 1875.<sup>77</sup> Although well reviewed, it attracted no buyers.<sup>78</sup>

On 22 August 1875, Degas notified Deschamps of the arrival in London of another painting, *La Repetition au Foyer de la Danse* (L.362) which was shown at the eleventh exhibition of the Society, November 1875. The press received this sketch-like work favorably and Captain Hill added it to his collection.<sup>79</sup>

The twelfth and last exhibition, organized by Deschamps in the spring of 1876, now renamed "Pictures of Modern French Artists," featured four ballet scenes which were again purchased by Hill. There was Degas's earlier mentioned *Dance Class* of 1871 (L.297) which had been bought by Brandon four years prior.<sup>80</sup> Also shown was the reworked design rejected earlier by the *Illustrated London News*, now titled *Rehearsal of the Ballet on the Stage* (L.400).<sup>81</sup> The third painting going to the

<sup>66</sup> Degas revealed his entrepreneurial enthusiasm in a letter to Tissot from New Orleans of November 19, 1872: "here I have acquired the taste for money, and once back I shall know how to earn some, I promise you." See Guerin 17. For Cottrill see also Guerin 30 and Brown 44 and n. 96.

<sup>67</sup> For a detailed discussion of this painting within this context see Brown 43-46, 48-51.

<sup>68</sup> Archives Durand-Ruel, Paris, excerpted and translated in Sutton, *Edgar Degas*, 115, advising Deschamps of the forthcoming arrival of *Cotton*, letter of June 1, 1876; also see Boggs 216, describing a letter by Degas to Mme. Nittis complaining about Deschamps from whom he had requested the return of the painting.

<sup>69</sup> Brown 105, and n. 83.

<sup>70</sup> Cooper 22, as catalogue numbers 33, 79, 100, respectively; also Flint 358, and Boggs 221.

<sup>71</sup> Flint 358, catalogue number 80; also Boggs 223, stating that the painting was bought from Degas for 2,000 francs and sold to Faure for the same amount; also Cooper 22.

<sup>72</sup> Boggs 223-4.

<sup>73</sup> Boggs 164 and 221 for a complete list of the paintings purchased by Faure from Durand-Ruel in Degas's behalf.

<sup>74</sup> Cooper 22.

<sup>75</sup> Flint 359, as catalogue number 9; also Pickvance, "Degas's Dancers," 261. There is a letter by Degas of November 8, 1874, to Deschamps about the shipment of one painting to London in the next two days. The thus far unidentified painting was, most likely, this ballet scene for which the artist suggested a price of 1,000 francs.

<sup>76</sup> Pickvance, "Henry Hill."

<sup>77</sup> Pickvance, "Degas's Dancers," 258, n. 20; Boggs 244, as catalogue number 72, *Ballet Dancer Practicing*.

<sup>78</sup> Pickvance, "Degas's Dancers," 258, n. 20, and Boggs 244. It seems that the picture had been varnished before the oils were dry, and thus prematurely yellowed.

<sup>79</sup> Pickvance, "Degas's Dancers," 265; Reff, "Some Unpublished Letters," 395-96; Cooper 22 as catalogue number 99.

<sup>80</sup> Boggs 174.

Brighton collector was *The Dance Class* (L.398) and he also added another work of the same title (L.341) to his collection<sup>82</sup> which now included a total of six ballet scenes. This last painting was purchased together with Degas's *Absinthe Drinker* of 1875/76 (L.393) and Hill loaned both to the "Third Annual Winter Exhibition of Modern Pictures" in Brighton in September 1876.<sup>83</sup> The *Absinthe Drinker* was not listed in the catalogue of the twelfth exhibition but must have been shipped by Degas later to Deschamps who then sold to the collector. To present to potential buyers to increase sales, the artist had also sent his dealer some photographs of available works, not included in the show.<sup>84</sup>

The relative success of having sold five works in a span of a few months encouraged Degas and he informed Deschamps on 15 May 1876 of another ballet painting he was sending to London. He asked also if the dealer was still interested in his *Cottoniers* and urgently requested 7,000 francs owed to him.<sup>85</sup> No records have yet been found which would indicate that the ballet painting was ever received by the dealer. Degas's request for money, however, provides some useful information: it tells us that the artist's business was on a consignment basis and it gives us the minimum amount Degas had earned in London during the previous year assuming, of course, that no financial obligations had been left to Deschamps by Durand-Ruel. The actual earnings of this period must have been considerably higher than the sum owed by Deschamps: Degas had received 3,000 francs for one of the dance pictures bought by Hill for 4,200 francs (166 guineas); the same collector had also acquired the *Absinthe Drinker* for around 4,000 francs.<sup>86</sup> Assuming that the artist's portion was around 3,000 francs, corresponding with the previous transaction, these two sales alone amount to 6,000 francs. Since one of Hill's purchases (L.297) no longer had belonged to the artist, only two remaining ballet scenes have to be taken into account for an income projection. Since there is

no reason for these works to have been priced substantially less than the other ballet picture, Degas's income in London during 1876 alone could have been as high as 12,000 francs. Considering the fact that the average wage of a Parisian shop clerk was about 1/6th of this amount,<sup>87</sup> the year 1876 should be considered a financial success for Degas. Unfortunately, by this time his family's debt had become such a burden that earnings from England presented little relief from his financial woes.<sup>88</sup> The loss of his dealer in London kept Degas from continuing the momentum there. Provincial exhibitions, such as the one in Brighton in 1876, could only have commercial repercussions if a supply of works was available for sale in England. Degas now focused on the Impressionist exhibitions in Paris and his works did not reappear on the English market until 1882. Without a dealer, Degas lacked the representation essential to commercial success in London. It seems almost ironic that just at the point of a potential breakthrough the artist lost both his dealer and his financial independence.<sup>89</sup>

A discussion of Degas's early career in England would be incomplete without a closer examination of the possible meeting between the artist and the dealer Ernest Gambart based on the assumption that the individual 'Gambar' mentioned in Degas's letter was in fact this influential art merchant. Although the exact date of the letter and its addressee are still not firmly established, the circumstances of the encounter strongly support this notion.<sup>90</sup> This meeting would have represented the only known direct contact between Degas and any leading English dealer and the issue raises certain questions. The dealer's importance as well as general propriety make a meeting without a third party introduction highly unlikely. Who provided it and its exact purpose are still unresolved; most certainly the latter went beyond riding around London in a cab to locate Legros, as Degas described in the letter. Unknown is also the possible content of the conversation, but it is curious that Degas did not

<sup>81</sup> Boggs 227-8; Pickvance, "Degas's Dancers," 259. Hill paid 180 pounds (150 guineas) or 4,000 francs.

<sup>82</sup> Pickvance, "Degas's Dancers," 259; Boggs 232.

<sup>83</sup> Boggs 234, 286; Pickvance, "Degas's Dancers," 259. Hill paid 180 pounds (150 guineas) or 4,000 francs.

<sup>84</sup> Boggs 214; Ronald Pickvance, "L'*Absinthe* in England," *Apollo* LXXVII: 15 (May 1963) 395-96.

<sup>85</sup> Reff, "Some Unpublished Letters," 90.

<sup>86</sup> Cooper 60 (L. 341); Boggs 286.

<sup>87</sup> Brown 136 for this statistic and other information on Degas's earnings.

<sup>88</sup> Boggs 215.

<sup>89</sup> Boggs 215. On August 23, 1876, Achille Degas informed Michel Musson in New Orleans that the family bank had finally closed and that Rene's failure to repay a loan had forced him, Edgar, and Marguerite to live on a bare subsistence in order to honor the bank's debt.

<sup>90</sup> Boggs 215, n. 49. Degas was helped by 'Gambar' to locate the artist Legros. It seems highly unlikely that there would be another 'Gambar'—other than the dealer with the phonetically identical name in London—to whom Degas would turn for help in locating an artist friend. Dr. Reff, in the above mentioned letter to the author concurs and will suggest this in his forthcoming edition of Degas's letters. There are two opinions regarding the identity of this artist friend. Reff, in "Some Unpublished Letters," 88, n. 1, opines that it is Alphonse Legros and the date October, 1871, citing as reasons an address written in the letter. Yet Degas's hotel, Hotel Conte, was not listed in the London Post Office Directory in the years around 1871. (Reff, "Some Unpublished Letters," 84, n. 22). Dr. Reff, in the above mentioned letter to the author, however, points out that the Directory lists, among other private, family and lodging hotels at Golden Square, one at no. 2 owned by Victor Ronveau, who was presumably French and suggests that it might have been such an establishment in which Degas stayed. Browse 21, n. 4, and Wentworth 84, n. 1, identify the addressee as Tissot and the date as August, 1868, citing an unpublished response by Tissot from Paris as their source. (The letter is in the possession of M. Jean Nepveu-Degas, Paris.) Unfortunately, no proof is provided for their assumption that the address, 1 Victoria Grove Villas, Baywater, was Tissot's. Sutton's suggestions in *Edgar Degas: Life and Work*, 93-4, that this meeting occurred during Degas's trip to London in the fall of 1872 cannot be correct since Gambart was not in London at that time. See Maas 238.

mention Gambart, but Agnew, in the letter about his *Cotton Office* to Tissot in February 1873.<sup>91</sup> His attempts to engage Tissot as middleman indicate that he had no direct contact with the firm. Perhaps Degas tried to initiate a business relationship with Gambart but was rejected. To a dealer of this type, Degas's work was entirely unsuitable. Wallsize, publishable "sensation pictures" or, at least, acceptable Royal Academy or Salon paintings were the basis of his and most prosperous Victorian dealers' financial successes. In view of a possible rejection by Gambart, Degas's comment accusing English artists of exploiting some trick, takes on a different light. Perhaps this meeting had provided him with a brief insight into the workings of the Victorian art market. His lack of understanding of, or unwillingness to emulate, this "trick" is demonstrated by the initial commercial failure of his *Cotton Office*. The risk of dealing in untested art was usually avoided by Victorian art merchants or left in the hands of foreign dealers. Durand-Ruel and his artists were clearly no threat to Gambart. His close associate Wallis and his nephew Deschamps were key figures in the establishment of Durand-Ruel in London and thus in the first introduction of Impressionism in England. It would not be uncharacteristic of Gambart to keep an eye on, and possibly financial interest in, these new intransigent painters, recognizing their talent but preferring an at-arms-length involvement.<sup>92</sup>

The preceding examination of the commercial history of Degas's works in England reveals both failure and success. Partly responsible for his interest in London was Tissot's career. Compared to him, Degas's attempts failed. The artist evidently did not understand that Tissot's high prices<sup>93</sup> were based largely on projected earnings of the combination of a painting's three separately marketable entities: reproduction rights, exhibition rights, and original work. Tissot's prices required a dealer's willingness to pay him such amounts because anticipated profits from a picture's other income properties, i.e. reproduction and exhibition rights, were factored in. Thus, profit potential determined, to a large part, the degree of support dealers extended to any young artists, and the effects of economics on the arts in this dealer-controlled art market should not be

underestimated. Profit considerations of the middlemen determined the price of artistic labor. The most important, in fact, *necessary*, ingredient for achieving the success of a Leighton, Frith, Hunt, Bonheur, or Tissot was mass-appeal. Whether Degas was aware of this is not known; perhaps his mention of "some trick" employed by English artists referred to this. The one work intentionally painted for the English market, his *Cotton Office*, shows that his understanding of the contemporary art market in England was at best fragmentary.

However, the London experience can also be seen as a success. Most of Degas's exhibited works sold and his income in the last year alone was quite substantial. His lamentations about the lack of money give the impression that he was unsuccessful; yet the facts tell a different story. Unfortunately, a combination of unlucky circumstances prevailed: there was Degas's commitment to Faure to replace for free the six canvases the singer had bought in the artist's behalf from Durand-Ruel with four new ones.<sup>94</sup> This extra burden without remuneration came at a time when he began to suffer under the effects of his family's financial misfortune. Also his ability to send to Deschamps a steady supply of works was constrained by his obligation to Faure. Even more problematic was the loss of his dealer in London. Deschamps was the only dealer who had begun to develop a clientele for Degas and finding a new agent on short notice would have been very difficult. Degas may well have tried when he asked Deschamps about the gallery in Russell Street. Such efforts, however, were doomed to fail: no typical Victorian dealer would have been inclined to take him on, business economics simply did not justify it. The last, and in some respects, most important factor, in Degas's financial woes was his inability or unwillingness—with the exception of the *Cotton Office*—to yield to market demands.<sup>95</sup> In spite of sporadic preoccupation with earning money, the artist, time and time again, returned to his consuming passion: the making of pictures in his own style and, ultimately, I think, therein lies the source of his greatness.

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<sup>91</sup> Guerin 29.

<sup>92</sup> Maas 236 ff. Around this time Gambart was also slowly withdrawing from active business life in London.

<sup>93</sup> Guerin 18, 30.

<sup>94</sup> Boggs 221.

<sup>95</sup> A letter by Achille Degas, dated February 16, 1869, to his uncle Michel Musson in New Orleans (Tulane University Archives, N. 27, box II, folder 29) mentions Edgar's brief interest in a business deal with Alfred Stevens's brother, Arthur, a dealer in Belgium; evidently, nothing came of it. See Brown, "The Degas-Musson Papers at Tulane University," *Art Bulletin* (March 1990) 121.



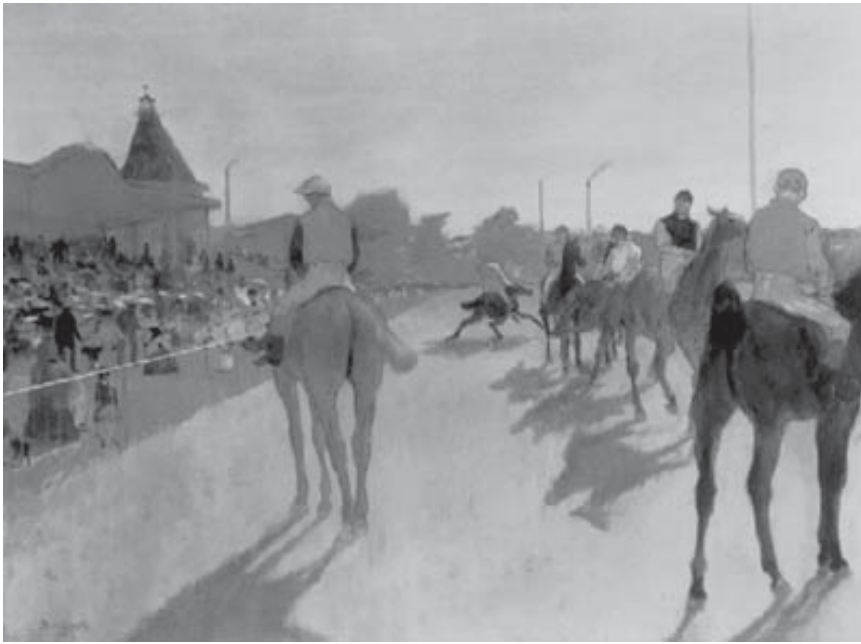


Figure 1. Edgar Degas, *Racehorses before the Stand*, 1866-68, oil on canvas, 46 x 61 cm., signed lower left, Louvre, Paris. (L. 262)\*

\*Note: An L. followed by an Arabic numeral refers to the Lemoisne catalogue raisonné number of Degas's work.



Figure 2. Edgar Degas, *Sulking*, 1869-71, oil on canvas, 32 x 46 cm., signed lower right, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. (L. 335)



Figure 3. James Jacques Tissot, *Hush*, c. 1875, oil on canvas, 73.6 x 112 cm., signed lower right, City of Manchester Gallery.



Figure 4. Edgar Degas, *Classe de Danse*, 1874, oil on canvas, 85 x 75 cm., signed lower left, Louvre, Paris. (L. 341)

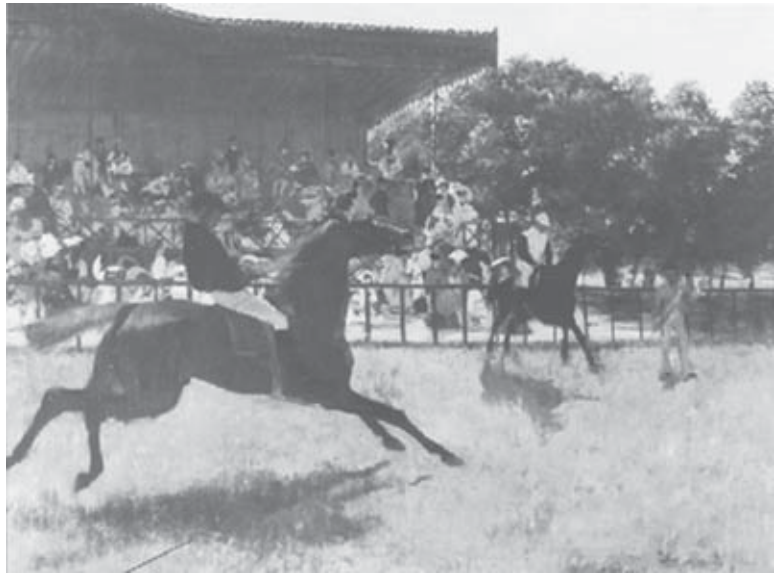


Figure 5. Edgar Degas, *A False Start*, c. 1872, oil on canvas, 32 x 40 cm., signed lower right, Boston Museum of Fine Arts. (L. 258)



Figure 6. Edgar Degas, *Le Foyer de la Danse à l'Opera de la Rue Peletier*, 1872, oil on canvas, 32 x 46 cm., signed lower left, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. (L. 298)



Figure 7. Edgar Degas, *A Cotton Office in New Orleans*, 1873, oil on canvas, 74 x 92 cm., signed lower right, dated New Orleans, 1873, Musée Municipal de Pau, France. (L. 320)



Figure 8. Edgar Degas, *Dancer Posing for a Photograph*, 1875, oil on canvas, 65 x 50 cm., signed lower right, Pushkin Museum, Moscow. (L. 447)