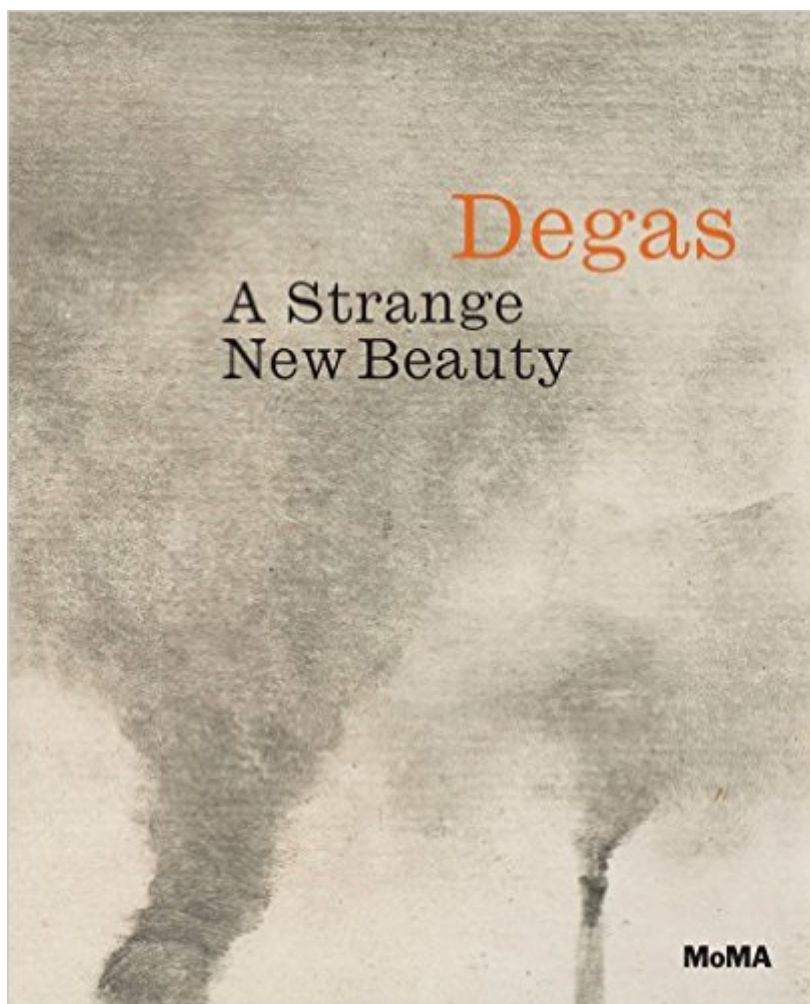


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Edgar Degas: A Strange New Beauty



Synopsis

A towering figure in 19th-century art, Degas is best known as a painter and chronicler of the ballet. Yet his work in monotype reveals the true extent of his restless experimentation. In the mid-1870s, Degas was introduced to the monotype process, a technique in which the artist draws in ink on a metal plate that is then run through a press, typically resulting in a single print. Degas embraced the medium with enormous enthusiasm, inventing a new repertoire of mark-making that included wiping, scraping, scratching, fingerprinting and rendering via removal. The resulting works are characterized by enigmatic and mutable forms, luminous passages emerging from darkness and a heightened tactility. Taking the monotype process to radical ends, Degas explored a variety of subjects, including city dwellers in motion; harshly illuminated cafe singers, ballet dancers on and offstage, women in intimate settings; and evanescent landscapes. With this medium, Degas is at his most modern, liberating drawing from tradition, depicting the body in new and daring ways, and boldly engaging the possibilities of abstraction. Published to accompany an exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art, this richly illustrated catalogue presents approximately 120 monotypes along with some 60 related works, including paintings, drawings, pastels, sketchbooks and prints. Essays and detailed studies by curators, scholars and conservators explore the creative potency of Degas's rarely seen monotypes, and highlight their impact on his wider practice. Hilaire-Germain-Edgar Degas (1834–1917) was a French painter, draftsman, printmaker and sculptor celebrated for his scenes of modern life, from the cabaret concert to the racetrack to the ballet, the subject for which he is best known. Academically trained, Degas emulated old master and 19th-century predecessors; at the same time, he embraced radically new subjects, compositions and techniques.

Book Information

Hardcover: 224 pages

Publisher: The Museum of Modern Art, New York (March 22, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1633450058

ISBN-13: 978-1633450059

Product Dimensions: 10.3 x 8.3 x 1.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars See all reviews (13 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #48,854 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #5 in Books > Arts & Photography > Other Media > Prints #19 in Books > Arts & Photography > Individual Artists > Monographs

Customer Reviews

This catalog accompanies the exhibition currently on view at MoMA at the time this review is being written. The show focuses on Degas's monoprints and is highly recommended. On view are portraits, dancers, figures and landscapes. The dancers are breathtaking with their sense of motion and lights and darks. The landscapes are a revelation. Some of the works are abstract works far ahead of their time. The book catalogs all of the works in the exhibition in color and black & white. Unfortunately not all of the images in the book are full page reproductions. Sometimes there are several images on a page making them small illustrations. Still you get to see the full range of subject matter and the reproductions are clear and as close as you can get in color accuracy. I wouldn't make this my first Degas book since it does not focus on his paintings. But for a Degas fan looking to add a second or third book on the artist this is recommended. If you can make it to NY to see the exhibition I highly recommend it. Nothing can replace the nuance and textures of seeing an artwork in person no matter how good the book. It's still early in the year but this is one of my favorite exhibitions of the year.

The book is excellent in several ways: It's a great collection of reproductions based on a rare collection for MoMA's superb exhibit, fine essays by Degas scholars, a smart thesis for the overall show, good color separations with lots of images. My problem is with the choice of paper for the catalog. I don't mind the choice of uncoated paper because it has an affinity to the printmaking papers used by Degas. However, the huge disappointment is with the amount of see-through with this paper. The text and the images appear through to the other side of the page; I am constantly aware of the text or printed artwork on the opposite side of the page. It compromised the appreciation of the images and the reading of the text. I wish there had been a more careful choice for the paper even if had cost more money.

The show itself is as wondrous a show as you'll ever see. Please make every effort to see it in NYC or as it travels. Literally every piece is brilliant, radiant, at times unimaginably envisioned. However the book is in insult to the art. As another reviewer stated, the paper is all wrong for works where highlights set everything aglow. Here it's dull and duller. The pieces could have been printed 1 to a page with the doubles across from one another, creating an experience close to the real thing. Instead they wasted 85 pages with ho hum redundant prose that takes up nearly half the book.

A beautiful catalogue might have included simply the historical information displayed in the show and loving attention to the reproductions of Degas' art. This book is an insult to his work and the reader. Buy if you must.

The landscapes alone are worth the price. They will blow your mind. It's too bad when the illustrations aren't as generous as they could be. Design and negative space are great things, but I too will complain about the capacious margins. But you know what? You'll be dead before another book is published on the subject. I will note a certain displeasure. In recent years, art books seem to be more about those assembling the pages. As with numerous monographs of late you have to wonder what's more important, the art on display or the essayists involved. About a dozen academics get publishing credits with this book. Which would be okay if there was a central editing post. Instead you get, say, a bunch of words wasted on numerous cursory explanations of Degas' otherwise revolutionary dark-field/light-field monotypes. You hear echos of the same phrasings. But trust me. If you couldn't go to the exhibition, you'll want to study the pages of this book.

The Degas mono print show at MoMA was fantastic and this book is a great catalog/overview. There's nothing like seeing the real thing but the book is well printed and it's a lot easier to read the history in a book than on the walls of a museum.

Essays good but reproductions of the art very poor

Informative writing about Degas' printmaking techniques and experimentations. Images of his work that are rarely seen.

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