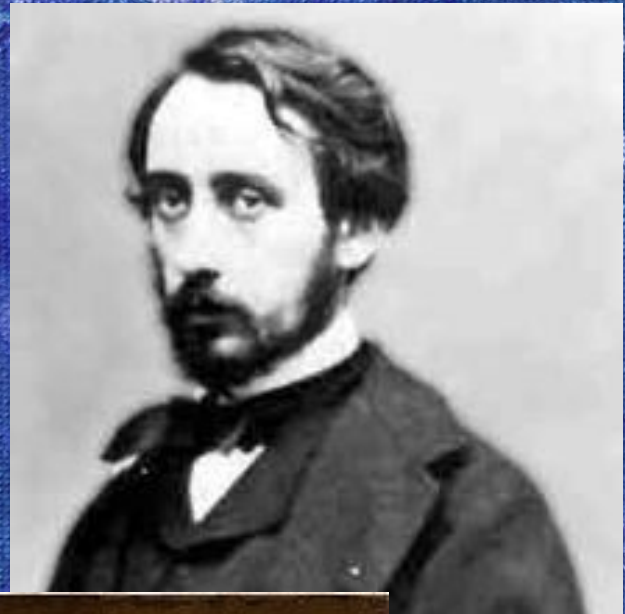


Edgar Degas
(1834 - 1917)



Edgar Degas was born in Paris, France on July 19, 1834. He was the eldest of 5 children in a family of aristocrats, and like every privileged child at the time, he was exposed to the finer things in life. Degas began to paint, and knew he was an artist. Edgar's idol was the painter Jean Auguste Ingres, whose example pointed him in the direction of a classical draftsmanship, stressing balance and clarity of outline. After beginning his artistic studies with Louis Lamothés, a pupil of Ingres, he started classes at the Ecole des Beaux Arts but left in 1854 and went to Italy. He stayed there for 5 years, studying Italian art, especially Renaissance works. By 1860, he had made more than 700 copies of classical paintings—it was his way of learning how to be an artist.



He returned to Paris in 1859 and moved into a large studio. He was accepted by the Salon (the salon was a big annual art exhibition in Paris where works were judged and careers were made and ruined). Degas painted portraits of his family, friends and a number of historical subjects, in which he combined classical and romantic styles. In Paris, Degas came to know Edouard Manet, and in the late 1860s he turned to contemporary themes, painting both theatrical scenes and portraits with a strong emphasis on the social and intellectual implications of props and setting.

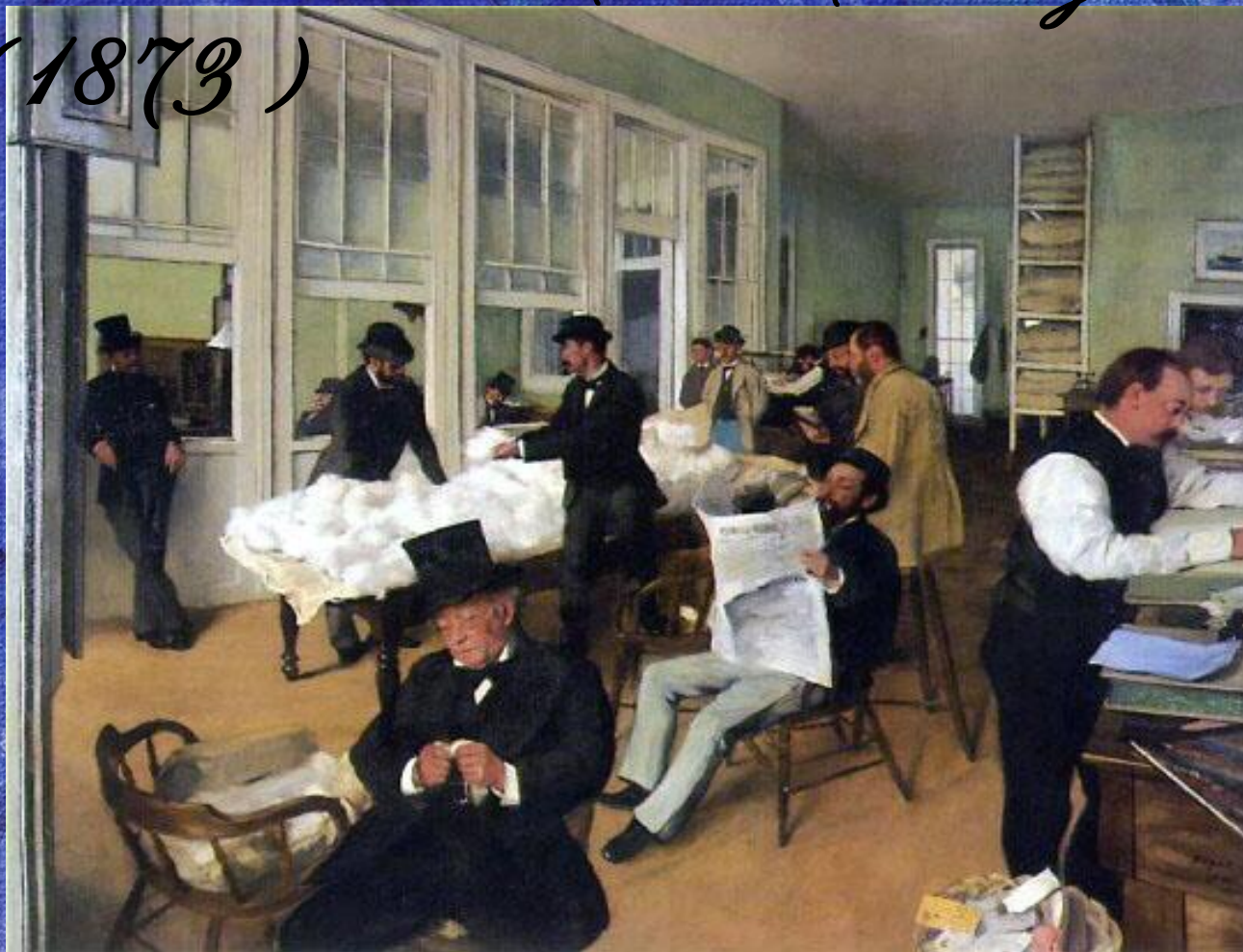


*The Belli Family
(1959-67)*

Woman Seated beside a Vase of Flowers
(1865)



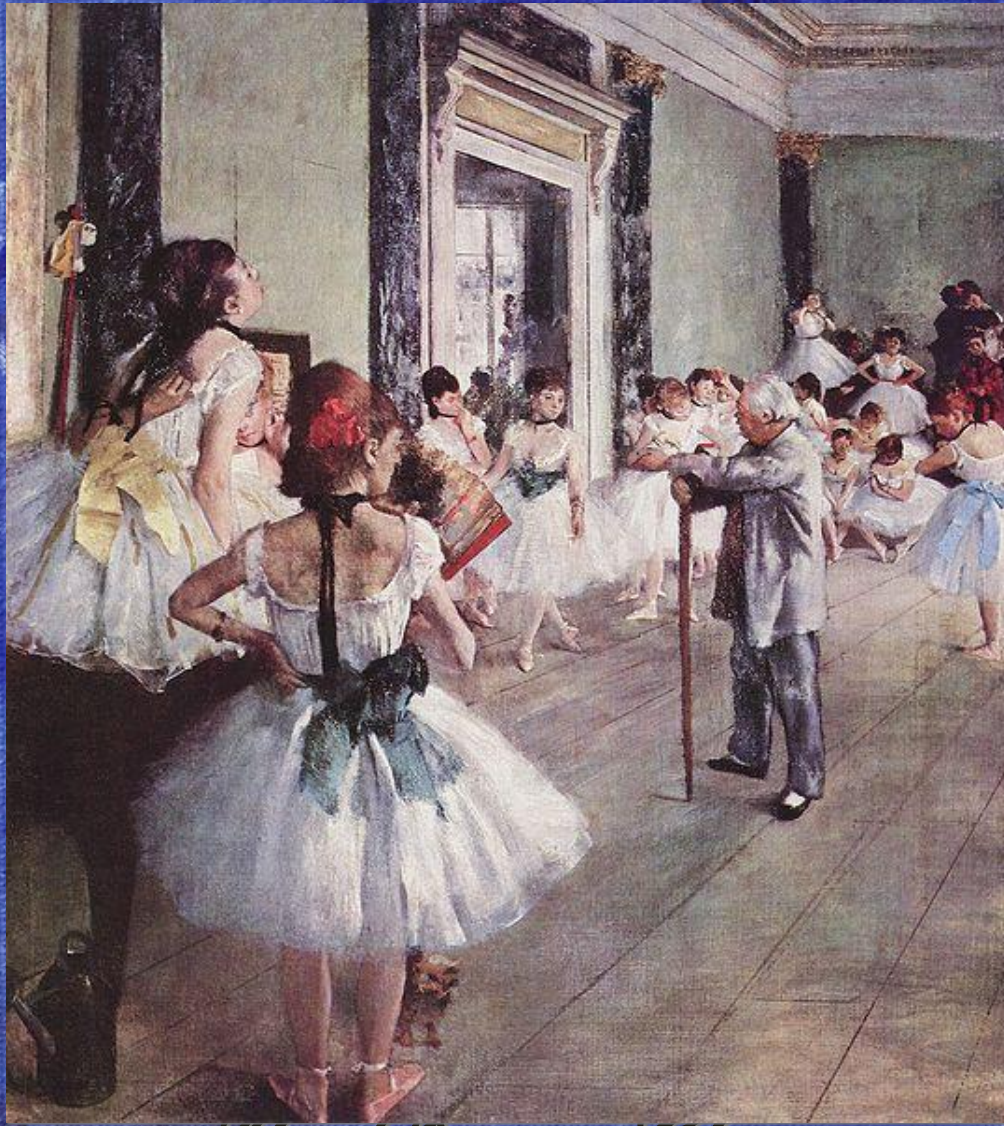
The New Orleans Cotton Exchange (1873)



On a visit in 1872 to Louisiana, where he had relatives in the cotton business, he painted *The Cotton Exchange at New Orleans* (finished 1873; Musée Municipal, Pau, France), his only picture to be acquired by a museum in his lifetime. Other subjects from this period include the racetrack, the beach, and cafe interiors.

In the early 1870s the female ballet dancer became his favorite theme. He sketched from a live model in his studio and combined poses into groupings that depicted rehearsal and performance scenes in which dancers on stage, entering the stage, and resting or waiting to perform are shown simultaneously and in counterpoint, often from an oblique angle of vision.





*The Dance Class
(1873-76)*

He returned to Paris in 1873 after the death of his father. His brother had run up debts, so he began to paint as a way to make money. He was tired of the Salon, and joined a group of young artists who were organizing their own exhibiting society. They were called Impressionists, for their colorful, less classical style. Degas didn't like the label "Impressionist", and although he was a leading member of the group, he was critical of other artists styles and the way they liked to paint "en plein air" (outside instead of in a studio).

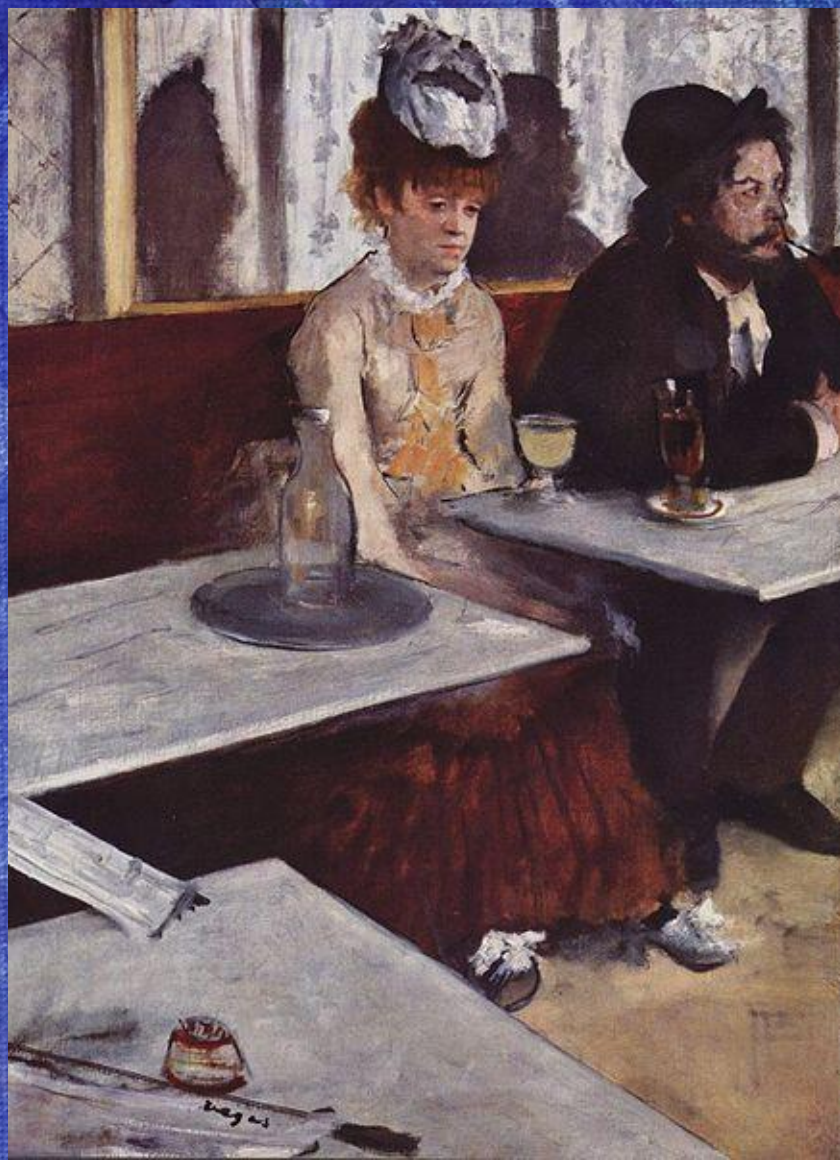
Ballet Rehearsal, 1873





*Place de la Concorde
(1875)*

Degas was interested in photography, and it's influence can be seen in his paintings. His compositions are often framed off-center, as if seen through a camera lens. The subjects often seem like snapshots—as if they were captured in a moment of time, possibly unaware that they were being seen.

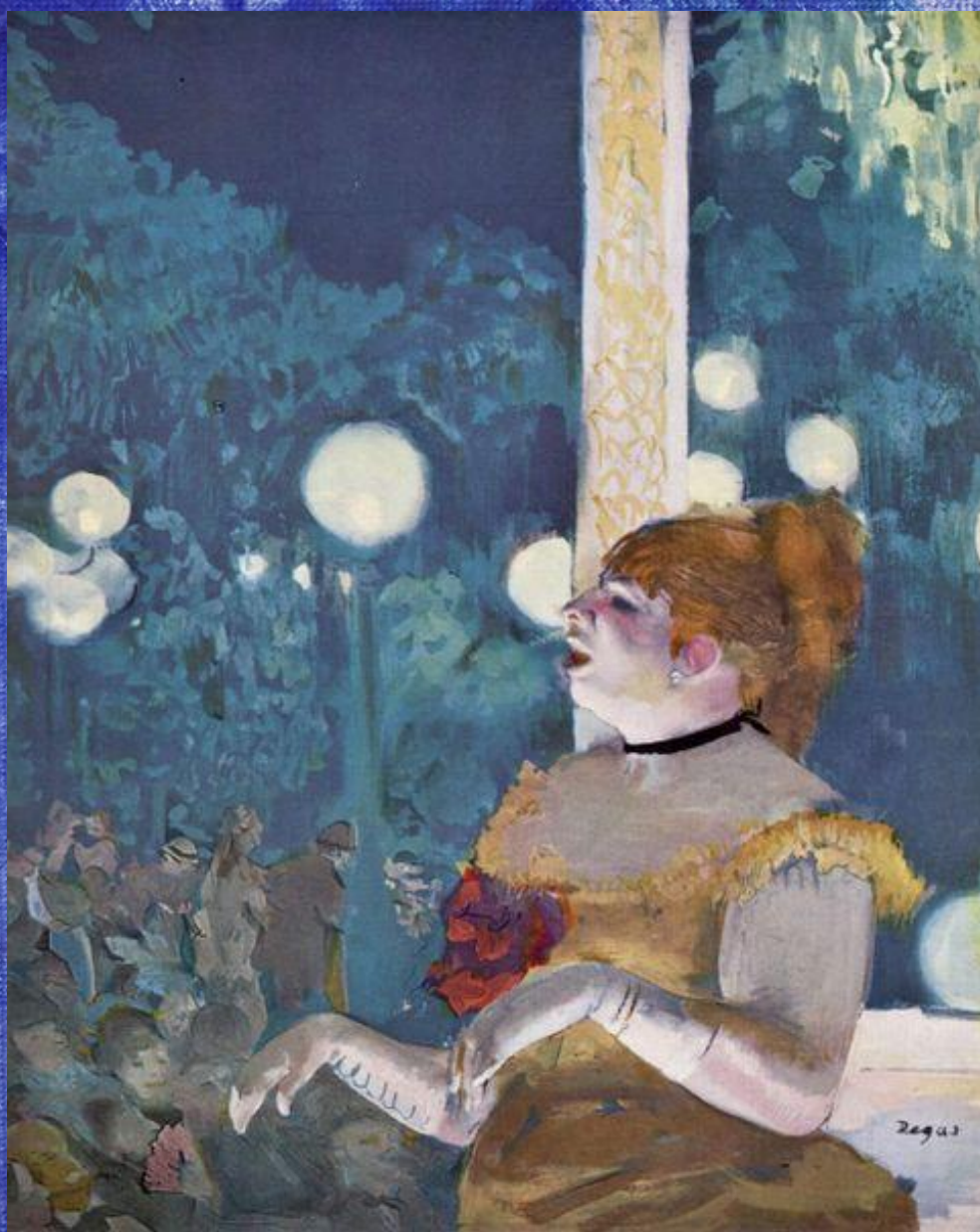


L'Absinthe

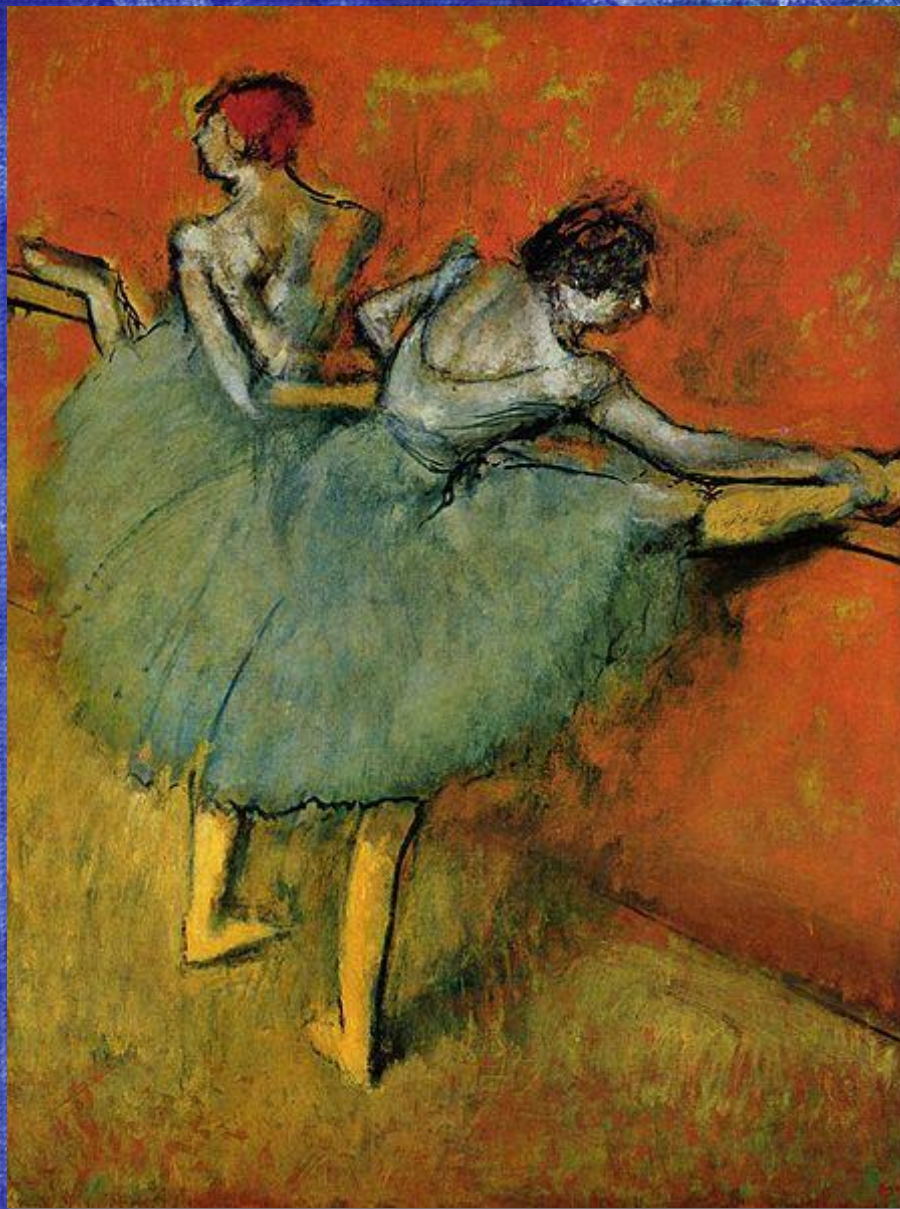
Degas liked to paint people at work, and painted hat makers, laundresses, & especially ballet dancers. Most often he shows them backstage or in a rehearsal, showing the “work” part of dancing. He was a master at using physical cues—body language, manner of dress, posture—as well as social status or kind of job they are doing—to help us draw conclusions about them.



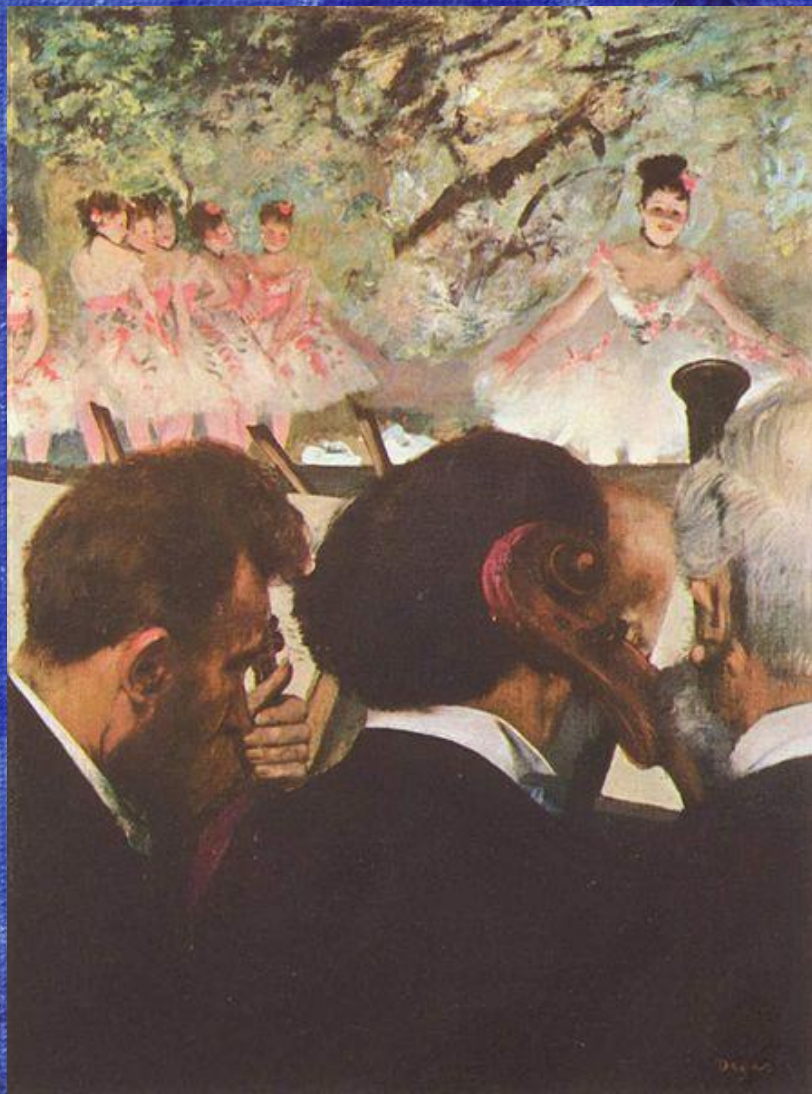
*Stage Rehearsal,
1878-1879*



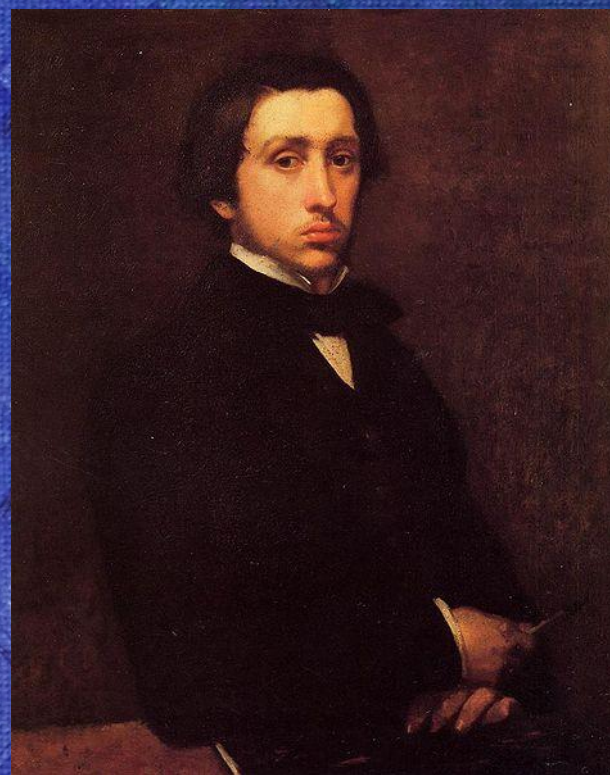
the Song of the Dog
(1875-77)



Dancers at the Bar (1888)



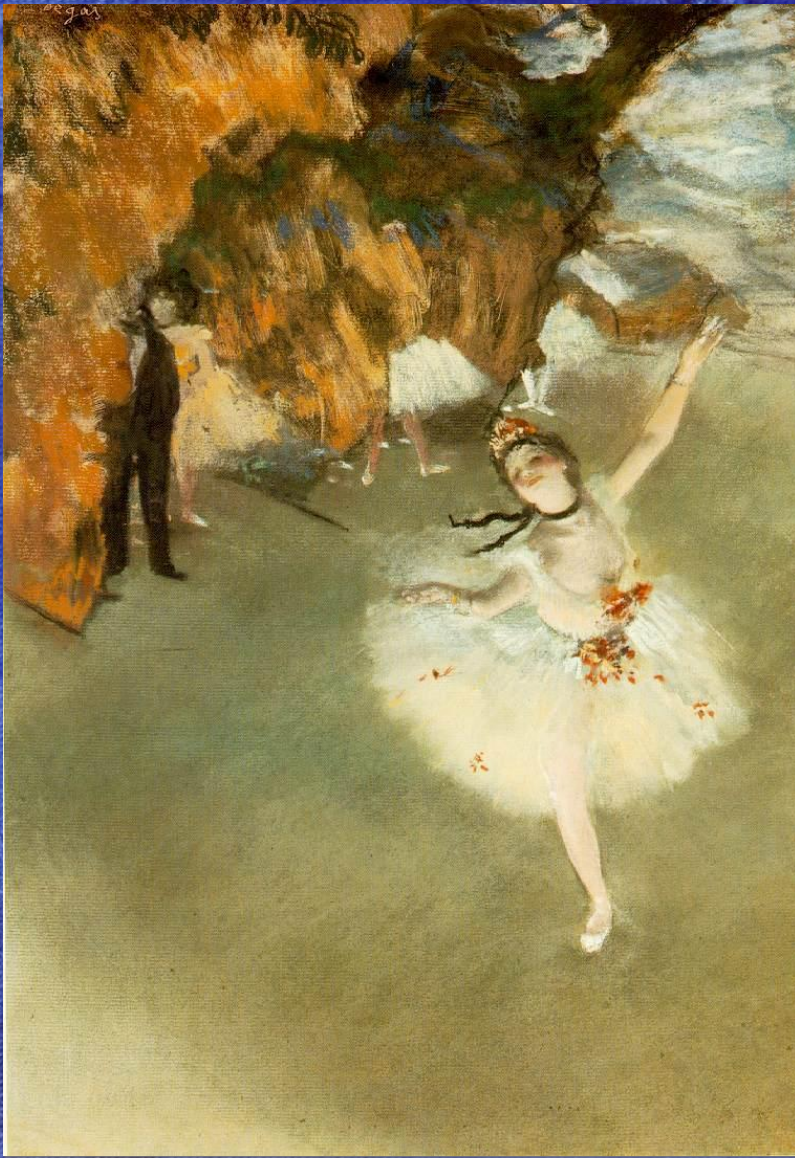
Degas was difficult and argumentative, driving away friends and artists alike. He believed that an artist needed to be alone, with no social life, and that is how he lived his life. He never married.



*Orchestra Musicians
(1870-71)*



The Races. Before the Start
(1872)



Degas frequently left unfinished portions in his paintings. He described himself as having a habit “to begin a hundred things and not finish one of them”.

The Star

(1876-77)



At the Races (1877-80)



Blue Dancers (1898-99)

Degas also created sculptures, although this is the only one that was ever shown publicly until after his death. Notice his use of real cloth for her skirt and hair ribbon. When this piece was exhibited, critics complained of it's "appalling ugliness".



*Little Dancer of Fourteen
Years (1881)*



Around 1910 his poor eyesight forced him to quit working. Having lived the life of a solitary bachelor, he spent the last years of his life alone, wandering the streets of Paris, until he died in 1917 at the age of 83