

DEGAS - JOCKEY 35-233



CAPTION ONE

This drawing reminds us that Degas, although close to the Impressionists, worked in a very different way from them. While artists like Monet and Renoir worked directly from nature on to a canvas - rarely making preparatory drawings or studies - Degas continued to work in the traditional academic manner.

Before painting a canvas or working on a finished pastel Degas would make numerous drawings and compositional studies. He would draw each figure a number of times, establishing the pose and action he wanted. Only then would he transfer his figure on to the canvas or paper support - often, as here, by squaring.

CAPTION TWO

This black chalk drawing of a horse and jockey is directly related to a group of three pastels of horses and jockeys that Degas executed during the period 1883 to 1900. It is difficult to tell which pastel the drawing relates most closely to and so we cannot be sure of the drawing's date.

In the foreground of all three works there is a mounted horse with its neck extended. What is the horse doing - is it about to bite a clump of grass (which racehorses are trained not to do) or will it buck its rider? So unusual is the horse's action that, in the pastels, the other jockeys have turned to watch.

CAPTION THREE

There are some unanswered questions about this drawing. After Degas's death it was included in the third sale of his works that took place in 1919. The reproduction in the sale catalogue seems to show the sun in the upper right corner. The drawing then entered the collection of Rene de Gas but when it was sold after his death (Paris, Drouot, 10 November 1927) the illustration in the sale catalogue did not show the right margin.

As the sun is no longer part of the drawing was it trimmed from the original sheet at an unknown date? Maybe - but there is another possibility. It might be that the sun that appears in the reproduction in the Degas sale catalogue is only an optical effect produced by a round label on the verso of the drawing which could have formed creases on the surface.

CAPTION FOUR

No-one is entirely sure of the role that sculpture played in Degas's late work. Is there an inter-relationship between his sculptures and his pastels and drawings? It is difficult to know for certain. What is fascinating is how close our drawing, *The End of the Race*, is to one of Degas's sculptures - *Horse with Head Lowered* (one example of which is in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).

Degas had first modelled horses in the late 1860s. He returned to the subject some twenty years later, during the 1880s, executing fifteen sculptures on the theme. We know that Degas regularly destroyed and then re-started his waxes and so it is possible that he treated these late sculptures almost like three-dimensional drawings. They may have helped him as he wrestled to work out a horse's pose or the related poses of horses in a composition.

CAPTION FIVE

It is possible that Degas's equestrian subjects were influenced by photographs taken by E J Marey and Eadweard Muybridge showing horses in movement. Muybridge's photographs had proved that, during a gallop, a horse's hooves never leave the ground all at one time as they had traditionally been represented as doing. Muybridge's book, *Animal Locomotion*, was published in 1887. Muybridge visited France, giving a demonstration of his photographic method in the studio of the artist Meissonier.

Degas refers to Muybridge's photographs in his notebooks and his friend, the poet Paul Valery, claimed that Degas had, indeed, been influenced by them. We know that Degas made some large chalk drawings after photographs in the book, which he would have found a valuable source for studying horses in movement. It has also been suggested that Degas's frequent representation of horses in single file may too show the influence of photography.