

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Stunning works by Impressionist Edgar Degas on view at the Art Gallery of Hamilton

Three outstanding oil paintings by famed French artist Edgar Degas are on view at the Art Gallery of Hamilton from May 10th through September 1st in *The Japonisme of Edgar Degas and James Tissot*. The exhibition, which is sponsored by Orlick Industries, is part of *Inspiration East*, the Gallery's year-long celebration of Asian arts and culture.

The three inspiring works are *At the Café-Concert*, and on loan from the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa; *Mlle. Fiocre in the Ballet "La Source"*, on loan from the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York; and *At the Theatre: Woman Seated in the Balcony* on loan from the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

In addition, a colour lithograph entitled *Jockeys* --on loan from the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and the result of a close collaboration between Degas and virtuoso printer Auguste Clot – is also on view.

"The Art Gallery of Hamilton is excited to present this unique opportunity for people from Hamilton and region to enjoy Degas at his best," says AGH President and CEO Louise Dompierre. "As we mark *Inspiration East*, our year-long celebration of Asian art and culture, it's fitting we explore the influence of Japanese art on this great European artist."

The exhibition itself explores the role of Japanese art in influencing Degas and James Tissot, two French masters of nineteenth-century realism. In the 1850s, the long-isolated Japanese market was opened to foreign exchange. For the first time, commercial trade and major exhibitions, such as the 1867 Exposition Universelle in Paris, exposed a curious European public to the Japanese aesthetic. In France, the result was *japonisme*, an infatuation with Japanese art that influenced the visual arts, literature, fashion, and design.

Always an experimentalist, Degas was one of many to probe and find inspiration in the Japanese aesthetic. Degas was an enthusiastic collector of Japanese prints, and in his own art he combined their distinctive spatial organization with features from other sources, such as the careful drawing method he had learned from European tradition. Where many painters simply snatched fans and kimonos and dressed their models in Oriental garb, Degas probed deeply into the principles of Japanese art, and used the abrupt cutting of figures, the overlapping of one form by another, the exaggerated tilting foreground, and the diminished background in his works.

Degas was born into a rich French family that owned a banking business in Naples, and originally studied for the law, but decided to become a painter instead and entered the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. He contributed to all but one of the eight exhibitions the Impressionists held in Paris between 1874 and 1886. Upon his father's death in 1874 and the subsequent settling of the estate, it was discovered that Degas's brother was heavily in debt. In order to save the family's reputation, Degas was forced to sell his home and valuables, and was required, for the first time, to rely on his art for his livelihood.

Born into wealth and privilege and the first of the Impressionists to achieve success (despite railing against being labeled an Impressionist), he died nearly blind, alone, and without official recognition. Paris – the city in which he was born in 1834 and in which he died in 1917 – inspired him; he depicted the people who inhabited and frequented its theatres, cafes, Opera House, studios, and race tracks.

Founded in 1914, the Art Gallery of Hamilton is Ontario's third largest public art gallery and owns one of the finest collections of art in Canada. Summer 2008 marks the culmination of *Inspiration East*, the Gallery's first themed year and a celebration of Asian arts and culture at the AGH. In 2009, the Gallery will celebrate Italian arts and culture during *Vista Italia*. In 2010, the AGH will focus on the arts and culture of India.

Located in the heart of downtown Hamilton at 123 King Street West, the Art Gallery of Hamilton is open Tuesday and Wednesday, 12 noon – 7 pm; Thursday and Friday, 12 noon – 9 pm; Saturday and Sunday, 12 noon – 5 pm. The Gallery is also open statutory holidays – including those that fall on a Monday – from 12 noon – 5 pm. For complete exhibition and programming information, members of the public are invited to visit www.artgalleryofhamilton.com.

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