

*Edgar Degas: The Little Fourteen Year old Dancer, 1878-1881, wax sculpture, 104.8cm, Havemeyer Collection, cast in 1922*

The intention of this sculpture was to show an awkward adolescent girl. Degas was an impressionist who copied old masters in some ways. Edmond de Goncourt said, "Surprised by nature one side faced with the graceful twisting movements and gestures of these little monkey-girls... And it really is very amusing to see him (Degas) on tiptoe, with rounded arms, mixing the aesthetics of the painter with that of a ballet master." Degas doesn't neglect a single detail as he shows the Little Dancer at ease in her casual fourth position. The Little Dancer is Marie van Goethem a 14 year old ballet dancer from the Paris Opera.

Degas changed her during 1880-1881, he made her neck extend more which created a monkey like effect although his intentions were to show an awkward adolescent girl. Through x-rays you can see Degas original head for the dancer started where her neck is now. Some critics say she was vulgar, ugly, bestial, coarse, sinful and belonged in a zoology museum. Sculptures were supposed to show people at their best not resemble an Aztec monkey. This was an emotional effect as the viewers were outraged.

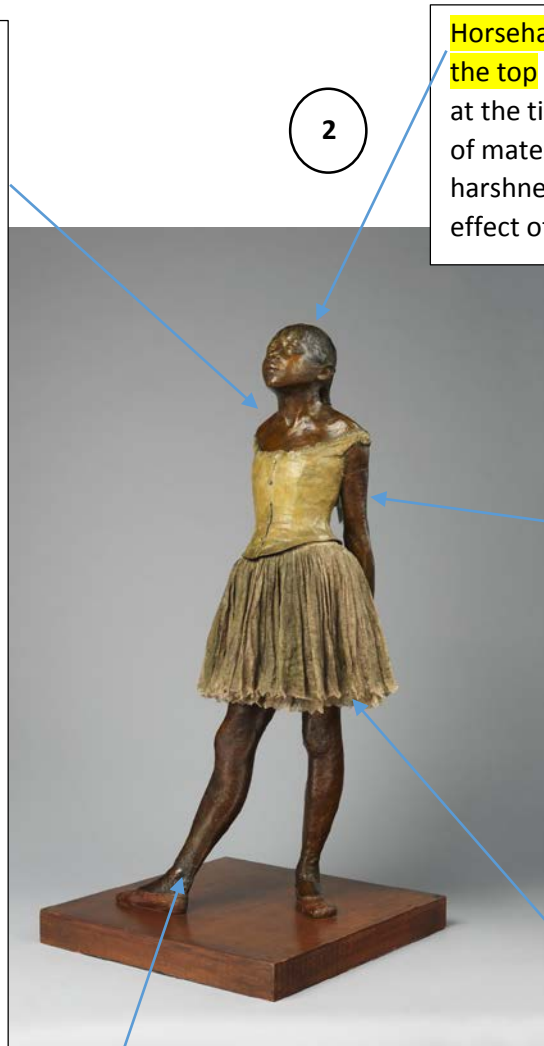


Degas creased the wax on her legs to make it look as if she was wearing stockings. Some judged the new use of materials brutish and many critics said she didn't belong in the Opera. She is also wearing real satin shoes that have been covered in wax to incorporate them with the figure. The stockings not only show a textural effect but also give the sculpture an effect of movement as the stockings are creased in an everyday ballerina fashion.

Horsehair on her head with wax over the top was shocking to the audience at the time. It was an unorthodox use of material and resembled a harshness of reality. Also shows the effect of texture like the stocking legs.

Paintbrushes and a lead pipe armature were used as structural support. This kept the limbs of the dancer from falling off. The metal handles holding the bristles together were a good compromise to use as support was cheap and easily assessable for Degas

Constantly flit between real material and wax. The entire dancer was covered in wax except a satin ribbon and the gauze tutu. The unusual use of wax over real material had never been seen before and showed a harsh realist effect



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