

EUROPEAN
PAINTINGS AND
SCULPTURE



Here are some of my absolute favorite objects in the museum, and you'll notice that quite a few of them are by Edgar Degas. While he's best known for his paintings and sculptures depicting the dancers of the Paris Opéra, what Degas was really interested in was movement and musculature, making the horse one of his favorite, though perhaps less well-known, subjects. In Gallery 814 you'll find no less than seven bronze figurines of horses in various postures, all casts of the originals which the artist made in wax (a more pliable medium which allowed him to really articulate even the finest tendons and hairs). In fact, Degas was vehemently opposed to reproducing them in a more permanent material like plaster or metal, but when he died in 1917, his heirs authorized the casting in bronze of all that was left in his studio, including the horses. While in 814, take a few pictures of the thoroughbreds and have them on your phone to compare with his pastels of racehorses in 817 and 821. Though a completely different medium, you can still see that the artist was again focusing on depicting the animals' motions and the way their bodies perform them, as all are in the middle of a movement.

As far as paintings of horses go, however, there is only one man who truly made his career on his ability to paint horses and their anatomy, and that is George Stubbs. Stubbs was completely self-taught, but his talent was recognized by many aristocratic British patrons, who commissioned him one after another to paint their horses. They saw that he was able to achieve a degree of accuracy never before seen in equestrian portraits, and that probably had more than a little to do with the fact that Stubbs was also an amateur anatomist. We know that in 1756, he spent eighteen months dissecting horses (hopefully ones that were already deceased), and in 1766 he published *The Anatomy of the Horse*. There are over sixteen Stubbs equestrian portraits in the British Royal Collections in London, but the Met's *The Third Duke of Dorset's Hunter with a Groom and a Dog* from 1768 is one of the only ones in New York. Stubbs was a significant inspiration to Rosa Bonheur, whose most famous painting, *The Horse Fair*, was shown to great acclaim at the Paris Salon of 1853. Bonheur went to the city's horse market twice a week for a year to complete her sketches for the painting, dressing as a man to discourage attention. Honorable mentions in this department go to Théodore Géricault's depiction of a horsewoman on a Tango/Cowboy lookalike, Gerard de Lairese's gigantic painting of *Apollo and Aurora* currently hanging outside my office, and the very Mr. Whicomb-esque portrait of a British army captain by Sir Joshua Reynolds. Fun fact: the Reynolds painting took twenty-one sittings with the model, two of which were devoted solely to his horse.



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1

**Title: The Third Duke of Dorset's
Hunter with a Groom and a Dog**

**Artist: George Stubbs (British,
Liverpool 1724–1806 London)**

Date: 1768

Medium: Oil on canvas

Accession Number: 1980.468

On View: Gallery 615

2

**Title: Captain George K. H. Coussmaker
(1759–1801)**

**Artist: Sir Joshua Reynolds (British,
Plympton 1723–1792 London)**

Date: 1782

Medium: Oil on canvas

Accession Number: 20.155.3

On View: Gallery 615

3

Title: Horsewoman

**Artist: Théodore Géricault (French, Rouen
1791–1824 Paris)**

Date: 1820 or later

Medium: Oil on canvas

Accession Number: 2019.141.11

On View: Gallery 801

4

Title: The Horse Fair

**Artist: Rosa Bonheur (French,
Bordeaux 1822–1899 Thomery)**

Date: 1852–55

Medium: Oil on canvas

Accession Number: 87.25

On View: Gallery 812

5

Title: Three Jockeys

**Artist: Edgar Degas (French, Paris
1834–1917 Paris)**

Date: ca. 1900

**Medium: Pastel on tracing paper, laid
down on board**

Accession Number: 1992.103.1

On View: Gallery 817

6

Title: Race Horses

**Artist: Edgar Degas (French, Paris
1834–1917 Paris)**

Date: ca. 1885–88

Medium: Pastel on wood

Accession Number: 1999.288.3

On View: Gallery 821

7

Title: Thoroughbred Horse Walking

Artist: Edgar Degas (French, Paris 1834–1917 Paris)

Founder: Cast by A.-A. Hébrard et Cie (Paris)

Date: modeled before 1881, cast 1920

Medium: Bronze

Accession Number: 29.100.434

On View: Gallery 814

8

Title: Prancing Horse

Artist: Edgar Degas (French, Paris 1834–1917 Paris)

Founder: Cast by A.-A. Hébrard et Cie (Paris)

Date: modeled probably before 1885, cast 1920

Medium: Bronze

Accession Number: 29.100.427

On View: Gallery 814

9

Title: Horse Standing

Artist: Edgar Degas (French, Paris 1834–1917 Paris)

Founder: Cast by A.-A. Hébrard et Cie (Paris)

Date: modeled possibly ca. 1881–82, cast 1920

Medium: Bronze

Accession Number: 29.100.425

On View: Gallery 814