



January 20, 2004

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Degas Sculptures

October 18, 2003 - January 18, 2004

[Legion of Honor](#)
San Francisco, CA

Featuring a collection of Edgar Degas sculptures from the Museu de Arte de São Paulo, one of only four complete sets of the artist's bronzes in existence.

For more information, please call:
415-863-3330 or online at:
<http://www.legionofhonor.org/>

How did Degas' dancers get to Brazil?

A colorful and controversial Brazilian born in Italy - Pietro Maria Bardi - who died in October, 1999, at the age of 99, was the man mostly responsible.

Bardi and media mogul Francisco de Assis Chateaubriand built up (MASP) the Museu de Arte de São Paulo, now considered the most important art museum in Latin America, in the shaky years after World War II, when so many art treasures were missing in action and no institution had much money to buy the works available.

Chateaubriand met Bardi, who had moved to Brazil with his wife Lina in 1946, at an exhibit of Italian art in Rio. The Italian art dealer and the Brazilian entrepreneur joined their unique talents with the hope of creating a museum.

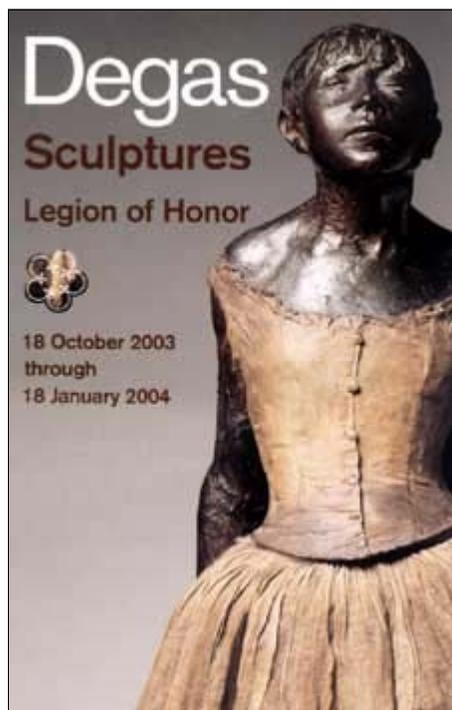
A \$4 million loan from Chase Manhattan Bank funded Bardi's exploratory voyage back to Europe. He returned with one Rafael - Resurrection - a Velásquez, 13 Renoirs - and the 73 Degas sculptures now at the Legion of Honor. The São Paulo set is one of only three cast from Degas' original molds.

MASP was born in 1947. What with embarrassments over money - loans accepted and not repaid, a takeover by the federal government, and more than 20 years required to move the museum to its current location - MASP has weathered more than its share of scandal.

In the 1950's, a rumor arose that Bardi had filled MASP with fakes or forgeries. Needless to say, the war had played havoc with provenances - throughout the world, questions still exist today. To answer his and the museum's critics, Bardi organized a tour of the works being questioned, beginning at the Museum of the Orangerie in Paris, and continuing on to Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, and finally, the Metropolitan in New York.

By the time the collection returned to São Paulo in 1957, the critics had been silenced. Bardi became director of MASP, again having to counter complaints - this time, over conflict of interest -- that he had continued his art dealings and ownership of a gallery.

His supporters rallied - pointing out that not only did the man serve as MASP director without



salary (for 40 years), he sold pieces from his own collection to help the museum.

Bardi retained the honorary title of MASP president until his death, although, from the age of nearly 90, he had had to surrender the responsibilities due to ill health. He was around for the museum's 50th birthday in October, 1996, the year of his own 96th birthday.

His behavior was not always circumspect. His history included more than a flirtation with Italian fascism. And he ended up in jail for some scatological graffiti on the walls inside the museum. He said it was his way of protesting against political posters which defaced the outer walls of the place he loved. He was in his 70s at the time.

He said he didn't mind getting old because he always had fun - without smoking or drinking, and by ignoring the envious - not a bad motto for these so young, so delicate young Degas dancers, saved by two men who loved art and loved Brazil.

---Barbara Firger, 10/1/03

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