



August 19, 2004

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Updating 'Dancer'

Photographers take their shots at interpreting Degas' sculpture

Richard Nilsen

The Arizona Republic
Feb. 26, 2004 12:00 AM

Her name was Marie van Gothen, and she was the subject of one of the most famous and best loved statues of all times.

The Little Dancer is one of more than 70 sculptures by French artist Edgar Degas in the exhibit "Degas in Bronze," opening Sunday at the Phoenix Art Museum.

The daughter of a Belgian tailor and a laundress, little Marie was 14 years old when Degas modeled her with her toe out, her hands stretched behind her and her bland, sweet, working-girl face tilted upward.

She was one of the *rats de l'opera*, the young ballerinas at the Paris Opera school, and Degas' sculpture was groundbreaking: Instead of an idealized ballerina, she is a very particular person, and instead of being entirely bronze, the statue wears a real cloth tutu. It outraged many critics when it was shown at the sixth Impressionist exhibition in the spring of 1881.

They were used to more traditional ways of seeing the dance. And it was a long tradition.

"We know some of the earliest works of art ever created are of dancers: in the Indus Valley, of what is now Pakistan," says Tom Loughman, Phoenix Art Museum's curator of European Art. "Dancing women is a theme in Greek and Roman art, and, of course, dance is one of the seven liberal arts.

"So, Degas' pursuit of dancers is a classic idea, but he approaches it in an entirely modern way."

Which proves that there is always another way to interpret a subject.

The Arizona Republic asked two local photographers to take their stab at this classic subject, in honor of Degas' little dancer.

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Going to see the dancer

'Degas in Bronze'

WHERE: Phoenix Art Museum,

1625 N. Central Ave.

WHEN: Sunday-May 30.

ADMISSION: \$6 to \$12.

DETAILS: (602) 257-1880,
www.phxart.org.

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