



Search for **Phoenix** area homes in the MLS.

City: Boston | Bed / Bath: 3bd 2ba | Sq. Ft.: 1300 | Go

zipRealty

azcentral.com

[Email this article](#)  
[Print this article](#)  
[Most popular pages](#)

[Click to send](#)  
[Click to print](#)  
[Today](#) | [This Week](#)

## Accidental legacy

**John Carlos Villani**  
 The Arizona Republic  
 Feb. 29, 2004 12:00 AM

Edgar Degas, one of the most influential artists of the French Impressionist movement, painted modern, almost shocking (for their day), scenes of life in Paris. His world was one of ballerinas, prostitutes and racehorses.

Degas achieved extraordinary success during his lifetime. In 1912, one of his paintings was sold to an American collector for the highest price ever commanded for a work by a living artist.

Less well-known about Degas (1834-1917) is his legacy as a sculptor. Through much of his career, he used wax sculpture studies as a casual and personal way to work through problems he encountered while painting and drawing in his studio.

With one exception, he didn't bring these studies to a final form. His lone bronze sculpture, *Little Dancer, Aged Fourteen*, was completed in 1880-81.

That piece, along with 72 other sculptures attributed to Degas but commissioned after his death, is featured in the Phoenix Art Museum's latest exhibition, "Degas in Bronze." The show opens today and continues through May 30.

The works have been traced to a complete set of sculptures that Degas' heirs commissioned from a Paris foundry in 1918. They were



Courtesy of the Fogg Art Museum

Edgar Degas (1834-1917) was hardly a starving artist.

---

### 'Degas in Bronze'

**WHERE:** Phoenix Art Museum, 1625 N. Central Ave.

**WHEN:** Through May 30. 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesdays-Sundays; until 9 p.m. Thursdays.

**ADMISSION:** \$12, \$6 ages 6-17 (includes general admission to museum).

**SUITABILITY:** Families.

**DETAILS:** (602) 257-1880, [phxart.org](http://phxart.org).

---

exhibited by the Gazirah Museum in Cairo in 1939 and now are owned by the Museu de Arte de Sao Paulo in Brazil,

Practically from the time of Degas' death, controversy has followed these and other bronzes attributed to him. There are many reasons, starting with the fact that the artist never authorized the re-creation in bronze of his wax studies. Eighty such works were removed from Degas' studio by his heirs after his death and sent to the A.-A. Hébrard foundry in Paris to be cast in bronze.

Degas created wax models from 1866 until 1912, and he used these rough depictions to enhance his understanding of the movements and proportions of horses and human figures. In 1897, he told an interviewer, "None of this is intended for sale."

According to Tom Bollinger of Arizona Bronze, a Tempe foundry that works with more than 100 sculptors from around the world, the posthumous commissioning of an artist's sculpture isn't unheard of.

"As long as it's not passed off as originals made during the artist's lifetime, the market accepts this kind of work and assigns it a lower value than it would to the originals," Bollinger says.

Although accounts of the way Degas' heirs handled the commission of his sculptures are part of art history's back story, it's undeniable that the artist's sculpture studies represented an important step forward in art's transition into the modern vernacular.

"Degas moved the sculpture world a significant way along its route to abstraction," says Thomas Loughman, curator of European art for the Phoenix Art Museum. "The range of movements and types of moments Degas captured in his sculpture pushed people's expectations of what was possible in three-dimensional art."

Degas' long career oversaw art's transition from its post-18th-century era of heroic Romanticism to its early-20th-century revolution of abstraction. Degas was more than up to the challenge of adjusting his techniques to keep pace with the experimentation sweeping the art world.

"He led the way toward the 20th century's idea of sculpture as 'what is real,' and he introduced us to the fragment concept of roughly modeled sculpture that was missing certain anatomical elements," says Douglas Lewis, curator of sculpture and decorative arts at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. "And it's this same concept that played a prominent 20th-century role in the work of artists like Moore, Calder and Brancusi.

"Degas was willing to take the bold step of offending the (art) establishment by creating earthy, blue-collar realism. His art wasn't interested in antique perfection, and, during his lifetime, he broke the mold of (others') expectations."

**Reach the reporter at (602) 444-8384.**