

The Frick Collection: Detail Report



Study of a Male Nude with a Sword

Edgar Degas (French, 1834–1917)

Date ca. 1856–59

Medium Graphite on rose colored wove paper

Dimensions 11 x 8 1/8 in. (27.9 x 20.6 cm)

Credit Line Bequest of Charles A. Ryskamp, 2010

Exhibitions Highlights of Drawings from The Frick Collection

Accession Number 2010.3.04

Currently On View

First Floor, Room 6, Cabinet

Commentary Best known for his depictions of modern Parisian life, Degas produced hundreds of sketches during his travels to Italy between 1856 and 1858. This study of a striding nude figure is likely one of them. Making art after works of classical antiquity and the Renaissance was central to Degas's artistic training. In this, he was inspired by Ingres, who encouraged the practice. Ingres's influence is also evident in the hard, graphic lines that define this limber figure, who lunges gracefully while gripping a sword. The subject remains uncertain, although the legs and feet resemble the ancient statues of Castor and Pollux from the Fontana dei Dioscuri in the Piazza del Quirinale in Rome. At upper left, Degas repeats the left thigh and labels its muscles. Although the decentered composition suggests its possible cropping from a larger sheet, the size is consistent with many of Degas's drawings from this period. This study does not appear to relate to any paintings, though the interest in the movement of the body infuses much of Degas's later output. This striding figure may be modeled after one of the monumental horsemen in the Piazza del Quirinale in Rome, which Degas visited as a young artist during an extended stay in Italy. His hard, graphic line recalls the draftsmanship of Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, whom he much admired. At the upper left, Degas repeats the figure's left thigh and labels its individual muscles, probably drawing on knowledge of écorché models or anatomy demonstrations.