Early Years: Drawing and the Human Figure

Pablo Picasso *The Old Fisherman*
Studies of picturesque human types played a part in the education of nineteenth-century artists. This work also reflects Picasso’s response to the dramatic realist style of the Spanish masters seen some time earlier on his first visit to the Prado.

Edgar Degas *Self-Portrait*
Degas was living in Italy when, at age twenty-three, he executed this penetrating self-appraisal. Wearing a white artist’s smock and a soft hat to shade his eyes from the sun, he presented himself as a committed painter, the loose brushwork and bold contrasts of color and tone reinforcing this image.

Pablo Picasso *Self-Portrait*
Picasso was only fourteen or fifteen when he painted this formal, bust-length self-portrait, but he already showed as much concern with inner mood as outer appearance. Precociously adept at absorbing differing sources, he fused discreet allusions to the great seventeenth-century Spanish masters with a contemporary realist style indebted to photography.

Edgar Degas *Roman Beggar Woman*
Painted in Rome during his years of study in Italy, this superb canvas reveals the sophisticated skills that Degas had already acquired. Scenes of picturesque or poignant local figures had a wide popularity and gave Degas the chance to represent a real — rather than an idealized — individual he had encountered.
Paris: Picasso Discovers Degas

Pablo Picasso Portrait of Sebastià Junyer i Vidal
As he grew in confidence, Picasso tackled some of Degas’s most well-known works in a respectful yet openly competitive manner. Echoing the scene of drinkers in Degas’s In a Café (L’Absinthe), this painting is bleaker in tone and more direct in suggesting the dissolute life of one of Picasso’s friends and his female companion.

Edgar Degas In a Café (L’Absinthe)
Considered shocking when exhibited before 1900, Degas’s painting of two of his friends posed in a café was regarded as an image of bohemian dissolution. Known to Picasso either firsthand or in reproduction, it prompted a series of large and small variants in which the younger artist seemed to compete with his predecessor.
Women and their Private World

Pablo Picasso  *The Blue Room (The Tub)*

This vivid painting shows the apartment Picasso rented after his successful exhibition at Ambroise Vollard’s gallery in 1901 (some unsold pictures and a poster by Toulouse-Lautrec are shown on the walls). Posing his model in a zinc tub, Picasso paid homage to Degas’s bathing scenes, including the lithograph shown nearby.

Edgar Degas  *Woman Ironing*

Degas made many paintings of Parisian laundresses at work, showing both their drudgery and the bareness of their surroundings. In this superb example he emphasized the muscular effort of the woman’s task and noted the bowl of water used for dampening clothes, both features that Picasso “borrowed” for his own laundress scenes of 1901–1904.

Pablo Picasso  *Woman Plaiting Her Hair*

In 1906, Picasso generally achieved his most monumental effects in his painting, working on a grander scale and representing the body more forcefully than in his sculpture. The restricted palette, inconsistent handling, and visible alterations to this composition suggest the influence of both the style and the imagery of Degas’s late drawings.

Edgar Degas  *El pentinat*

Between about 1920 and 1936 this painting belonged to Picasso’s friend Henri Matisse. The numerous signs of revision, bold draftsmanship, urgent brushwork, and fiery color scheme dramatize the ostensibly peaceful ritual of haircombing, providing a model for the expressive simplifications and emotional tension of Picasso’s late figure style.

Pablo Picasso  *Nu pentinant-se*

Picasso’s highly charged reinterpretation of the classical motif of Venus wringing her hair may reflect both personal troubles and anguish caused by the Korean War. But the hasty revisions to the composition, emphatically spontaneous technique, and dramatic use of monochrome are reminiscent of Degas’s style in late, unfinished works.
The Ballet: Homage and Humor

**Pablo Picasso** *The Dwarf*

Though his model was a vaudeville artist rather than a ballerina, Picasso has echoed the stance of Degas’s *Little Dancer Aged Fourteen* in this defiantly garish painting; note especially the position of the right leg and the arm held behind her back. Significantly, the height of the picture — like Picasso’s *Standing Nude* nearby — is closely comparable with Degas’s sculpture.

**Edgar Degas** *Jove ballarina de catorze anys*

First exhibited in Paris in 1881, this sculpture was originally made in wax and dressed in a tutu and a wig of real hair. Known to Picasso by reputation, its radicalism prompted him to paint young dancer-like figures in Expressionistic and Cubist styles, and apparently to consider a comparable sculpture of his own.

**Pablo Picasso** *Yellow Nude*

Painted as his celebrated canvas *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon* was approaching completion, Picasso’s *Yellow Nude* combines the sexuality of his brothel scene with the angularity of African sculpture. The figure’s distinctive pose, with right leg forward and arms behind the back, also seems to recall Degas’s *Little Dancer Aged Fourteen*.

**Edgar Degas** *Dancers in the Classroom*

The ballerinas in this painting are not involved in a formal class, but stretch themselves at the barre or rest from their exertions. Degas made many hundreds of studies of such figures, often in the form of drawings, apparently inspiring Picasso to explore the same theme in the 1920s.
Picasso’s Bather-Dancers

**Pablo Picasso Running Woman**
The most exuberant of Picasso’s small sculptures from this period, Running Woman might almost be a drawing in space.

**Edgar Degas Grand Arabesque, Second Time**
Degas’s ballerina is less unconventional but more emphatically projected in three dimensions. Like many such works, Picasso’s figure was made in plaster and later cast in bronze.
Brothel Scenes: the Artist as Voyeur

Pablo Picasso *The Offering*
Made in the wake of *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon* (1907), Picasso’s masterpiece on the theme of prostitution, this gouache evokes the power of women over men. The composition recalls Degas’s monotype (shown in facsimile in the case) of prostitutes offering bouquets to their madame on her name day.

Pablo Picasso *Degas among the Prostitutes. First Appearance of Degas*
This is the first in the suite of thirty-nine etchings to depict Degas. Echoes of his monotypes and of Picasso’s own brothel painting *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon* (1907) are accompanied by a witty allusion to Degas’s notorious sculpture *Little Dancer Aged Fourteen* in the hands-behind-the-back pose struck by both Degas and the prostitute facing him.

Edgar Degas *Self-Portrait*
When or how Picasso acquired this photograph is unknown, but it was certainly on display in his studio in Cannes in 1958-1959, when he formed his collection of monotypes by Degas. Alterations to the photograph, which originally included Degas’s housekeeper, were probably made with a view to publication before Picasso obtained it.

Edgar Degas *Resting on the Bed*
Picasso owned a copy of Ambroise Vollard’s edition of *La Maison Tellier* and knew this monotype from the reproduction there. In 1958 he purchased one with very similar voyeuristic iconography. These monotypes inspired the etching shown nearby, in which an anxious Degas has been lured onto the grinning prostitutes’s bed.