

Basic Detail Report



Beach Scene

Date

c. 1876-1877

Primary Maker

Hilaire-Germain-Edgar Degas

Medium

Oil on paper mounted on canvas

Dimensions

47.5 × 82.9 cm

Description

Many of Degas' great paintings result from his observations out of doors; urban life in Paris; on the racetrack and in this case on the beach. The resulting works are just as acute and penetrating as his ballet scenes and 'keyhole' views of ladies' ablutions. Degas preferred taking public transport remarking that on the omnibus he could see people. It was his belief that artists were created to look at one another and he certainly did, drawing on his contemporary experiences as well as absorbing the works of earlier artists in creating a modern realism. Most probably painted in his studio, Beach Scene does not have the atmospheric 'en plein air' feel to it one experiences in the beach scenes of his contemporaries such as Monet and Boudin. The flattened figures owe a debt to Japanese woodcuts as does the chopped frame particularly around the bag and umbrella. Masterly in execution, the format echoes that of the Ukiyo-E, although unlike the Japanese print, Degas has aligned his sequences of images. The combining influences of Oriental composition and Western imagery have been embodied in a revolutionary realism. This painting was purchased by Hugh Lane in December 1912 for the gallery. In a letter to Lady Gregory, W.B. Yeats wrote Hugh Lane "has just bought a Degas for £4,500 to go to the Gallery if the money for the building is found." The painting is now part of the Sir Hugh Lane Bequest 1917 and this collection of 39 works is shared between the National Gallery London and the Hugh Lane Gallery.