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The pastel medium communicating sexuality and promiscuity in late nineteenth-century Paris

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THE PASTEL MEDIUM: COMMUNICATING SEXUALITY AND
PROMISCUITY IN LATE-NINETEENTH CENTURY PARIS

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Honors in the Major Program in Art History
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Thesis Chair: Dr. Ilenia Colón Mendoza

ABSTRACT

Throughout the history of art, the pastel medium has been considered a medium of secondary interest. Despite its pulsating textures, vibrant colors, and unique receptivity to touch, this medium has been recognized above all for its swiftness in stroke and subsequent ability of the artist to record images of fleeting moments and ideas almost instantaneously. The focus on the advantageous rapidity of the pastel, however, hindered the pastel medium's potential as a mere preliminary technique to working with grander mediums, such as oil paint, thus failing to recognize the prominence of pastel in capturing character. This research endeavor focuses on a very specific era with comparably high usage of pastel – late nineteenth-century Paris – and the distinctive characteristic that defines said era – the hyper-sexuality of the Parisian prostitute. The eminent presence of prostitution and the consequential iconography of female sexuality in late nineteenth-century Paris defined the world of French Bohemia and seeped into the artistic exchange of the era. Although holding a traditionally subsidiary position to other historically primary mediums, the pastel medium prevailed in communicating the sexuality, sensuality, and promiscuity of the sinful female in Paris at the close of the century. The pastel works of prominent artists in the nightlife milieu such as Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Edgar Degas which revolve around the theme of prostitution serve as key illustrations of the distinctive ability of the ephemeral medium to capture the mood and personality – and therefore the sensual quintessence – of its subject. Through contextual and visual analysis, this research endeavor thus ultimately aims to lift the traditionally secondary pastel medium to one of impressive proportions, emphasizing its unique advantages and raising its overall credence.

To Ima, Aba and Shlomit – the most loving family a girl can have, who never stopped believing in me, never doubted my dreams, and made me the person I am today.

To Noam – the world’s funniest, brightest, wildest little brother, who makes me want to be the best version of me and always aim for the stars.

To Shai – who showed me the world and never failed to remind me that *anything* is possible.

And to my friends – who always kept a SMILE on my face when things got rough.



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PASTEL IN THE WORLD OF VENAL LOVE

Art is a reflection of a time and a place, a permanent transcription of an idea, a mood, a feeling, a fleeting moment of inspiration. In late nineteenth-century Paris, the city's visual culture reflected the growing theme of sexual availability and venal love which best defined the era. Though the topic was depicted in various ways to communicate all aspects of the rising presence of female prostitution, it is in the artworks completed with the aid of the pastel medium that the underlying nature of the Parisian prostitute and her position as the embodiment of sexuality at the close of the nineteenth-century is best communicated. Still, due to its history as a preliminary art form for larger-scale artworks in more primary mediums such as oil paint, pastel is to this day viewed in academic settings as inferior to more established art modes.

This research endeavor is thus an argument for the chief qualities of pastel in attempt to raise its position within the realm of art from secondary to primary through an acknowledgement of the unique advantages of the medium in communicating the essence and character of a subject at hand. The argument revolves around a distinct era with a comparably high usage of pastel – late nineteenth-century Paris – and the distinctly quintessential characteristic that defines this era – the hyper-sexuality of the Parisian prostitute. In other words, this thesis represents a meditation on the pastel medium and how it transcends its traditionally subsidiary position to oil painting to communicate sexuality and promiscuity in late nineteenth-century French Bohemia as other media could not, with a primary focus on pastel sketches of Parisian prostitutes.

In terms of theoretical methodology, the argument presented is most heavily based on contextual and formal analysis of the history of the era and medium in focus, and the visual qualities of the pastel works respectively. In short, contextualism is “the view that a work of art

can only be understood in the context of its historical or cultural circumstances, or in the light of other works by the same artist or in a surrounding tradition.”¹ Formalism, on the other hand, is the view that a work of art can be understood with emphasis on its compositional elements, artistic techniques, and aesthetic value alone, void on any consideration of subjective contextual elements. Together, these methodologies allow for a fully-developed analysis of pastel medium, both aesthetically and historically.

In illustrating the advantageous effects of the pastel medium within these theoretical approaches, a large focus has been placed on the pastel artworks within the *oeuvres* of the two unique Parisian artists of the late nineteenth-century avant-garde: Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, with his outwardly blatant depictions of explicit prostitution, and Edgar Degas, with his purposefully ambiguous images of implicit clandestine prostitution. However, despite their differences, the two artists, who were actually acquainted with one another in the Parisian artists’ circle, both chose the pastel medium to represent the “truth,” or in other words the sexual quintessence, that they saw in their prostitutes. In answering the *why* to this artistic decision, a contextual analysis of the rise of the prostitute as artistic muse and the definition of sexuality in late nineteenth-century Paris will be made. Additionally, a detailed formal analysis of the technical use of the pastel medium in highlighted artworks will be made to prove the artists’ conscious decisions to intuitively utilize pastel for its unique advantages. The outcome will be an effective argument for the prevalence of the pastel medium in achieving an honest representation of a figure’s essence, thus achieving the motivating research aim.

¹ Blackburn, Simon, “Contextualism (aesthetics),” in *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Simon Blackburn, 1st ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 77.

“THE GREAT HOUSE OF PROSTITUTION CALLED PARIS”²

Late nineteenth-century Paris was, without a doubt, the most romantic, the most deceptive, the most exciting of cities. With a pulse beating wildly to the music and gaiety of the night, it was a bohemian center of debauchery, seduction, pleasure, and robust artistic energy. Though there were many unique characteristics of bohemian life in the decades nearing the close of the century, the aspect which most personified the era was the overwhelming presence of the Parisian prostitute as the alluring embodiment of nineteenth-century sexuality and promiscuity.

Though deemed dishonorable, the age-old profession was on an unprecedented rise in Paris over the preceding decades, privately indulged and publicly disdained. The repercussions of the vast urban expansion of the capital city earlier on in the century through what was called “Haussmanisation” were widespread and alarmingly obvious in terms of the city’s commercial growth. In the 1860s, French civic planner Baron Haussmann transformed the previously medieval city into a modernized Paris, complete with large boulevards and uniform building façades. The city reveled in new outlets for social and economic development, as seen in the newly renovated outdoor dance halls, opera house, and rampant nightlife.³ Yet with the increasing technological, industrial, and architectural advances came the hurried rise of the prostitution.⁴ As early as the 1830s, authoritative figures were seeking solutions for the sweeping presence of prostitution, the leading figure being Alexandre J. B. Parent-Duchatelet and his two-volume study, *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris*. Within this anthropological document,

² Balzac (1799-1850) qtd. in Charles Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989), 157.

³ David P. Jordan, “Haussmann and Haussmanisation: The Legacy for Paris,” *French Historical Studies*, vol. 27, no. 1, New Perspectives on Modern Paris (Winter 2004): 87-113.

⁴ Jennifer D. Roberts, *The Art of Prostitution: Social Influences on Nineteenth-Century Artistic Representations of French Prostitutes by Edgar Degas and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec* (Jackson, MI: Millsaps College, 1991), 1-2.

Parent-Duchatelet discussed plans for the regulation and containment of Parisian streetwalkers, going as far as attempting to classify their physiological and personality traits in hopes of creating a profile of the sinful female that would aid in future regulatory policies.⁵ As the plans of urbanization continued, however, the fame of the prostitute as ruler of the night only flourished in the suddenly-booming social nightlife on the gas-lit boulevards. Thus, as contemporaries helplessly witnessed the escalating ‘prostitute problem,’ the newly-modernized city was quickly transformed into the aggressively sexual “city of open living” that we associate with the era today.⁶

By the latter half of the century, the lively presence of prostitution was so spectacular that writers, critics, and even travelling passers-by could not help but notice the vivacious energy of the Montmartre district, often leaving a record of their reaction to the bohemian spirit of sexual liberation in the form of travelogues or journals. More often than not, the records were identical in their responses. Here, an anonymous writer paints a picture of Parisian nightlife in a scandalous travel guide to the capital city, *Paris after Dark, Night Guide for Gentlemen*:

No where are the Nymphs of the pave to be seen in greater force than on the Boulevards. As soon as the lamps are lit, they come pouring through the passages and the adjacent rues, an uninterrupted stream, until past midnight. The passages Jouffroy, Opera, and Panoramas, on wet nights swarm with these women. At the cafés on the boulevards, particularly on the Blvd. Montmartre, the muster, always, is considerable. Only glance at one of these creatures, and you will be entrapped in a moment unless you have the moral courage to resist.⁷

⁵ Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France*, 8-33.

⁶ Qtd. in Hollis Clayson, *Painted Love: Prostitution in French Art of the Impressionist Era* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 94.

⁷ Clayson, *Painted Love: Prostitution in French Art of the Impressionist Era*, 93.

A similar scene is set by critic Georges Grison in “Paris Horrible et Paris Original,” a contemporary novel:

For it's no longer the night, the evening, from the lighting of the gas lamps until eleven o'clock when the *hetaires* operate.⁸ It is all day. It's not in the remote neighborhoods that they search out their booty, it's in the most lively center of Paris. Between noon and midnight, pass by the left sidewalk of the Rue de Faubourg Montmartre – you see that I'm precise – you will encounter twenty, thirty, forty girls, ages between fifteen and eighteen – there are some that are twelve! – hatless, *décolletées*, provoking, shameless, brushing up against you with an elbow or a shoulder, barring your way while telling you things in the loudest voice that would make a rifleman blush.⁹ Where do they come from? It is easy to tell from their demeanour; they walk dragging their feet, bothered by high-heeled shoes that they are not accustomed to; encumbered by corsets that they haven't worn for long. It's the riffraff from the *bals de barrière* who, enticed by impunity, have descended upon Paris.¹⁰

The negative connotations of these remarks were influenced by the heavily-regarded work of Parent-Duchatelet, which denounced the names of the Parisian prostitutes and reduced them to sources of pollution comparable to that of the sewer system.¹¹ Public figures such as French historian Alain Corbin noted the effects of the study in shaping both the public view of the prostitute as a social deviant and the introspective view of the prostitute regarding her own identity: “Parent-Duchatelet's portrait of the prostitute was repeated so often in the literature on prostitution and inspired so many novelists that, in addition to distorting the vision of later researchers... it determined to some extent the behavior of the prostitutes themselves.”¹² The result was the marginalization of the prostitute figure in the eyes of the bourgeoisie, leading to

⁸ *Hetaires* – French word meaning *courtesan*, or a higher-class, sophisticated prostitute. Originates from the Greek word *Heteaera*.

⁹ *Décolletées* – French word referring to a manner of dress which reveals the neck or neckline. This statement portrays the French philosophy of the “plus que nue,” or “more than nude,” promiscuous woman. For more information, see Clayson, *Painted Love: Prostitution in French of the Impressionist Era*, 76.

¹⁰ Clayson, *Painted Love: Prostitution in French of the Impressionist Era*, 94.

¹¹ According to Jill Harson, “[Parent-Duchatelet's] analysis of prostitutes was almost immediately granted the status of truth.” It was the most influential anthropological study of prostitution of its time. For more detail, see Shannon Bell, *Reading, Writing, and Rewriting the Prostitute Body* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 45.

¹² Bell, *Reading, Writing, and Rewriting the Prostitute Body*, 45.

their perception of the nugatory worth of the Parisian ‘whore,’ as seen in the extensive contemporary literature regarding the ill-fated profession.

Yet in spite of the negative opinions of authoritative figures, novelists, bourgeois members of society, and so on regarding the prostitute as a diseased and disgraceful presence in Parisian society, her notoriety and fame only intensified as she became iconic of the bohemian nightlife scene. This becomes evident in the contemporary accounts of Parisian nightlife. The physique of the prostitute had already been stereotyped in earlier studies of her temperament and physical appearance, such as that in Parent-Duchatelet’s work. The prostitute was said to have “a peculiar plumpness” to her, as well as a number of other distinctive traits.¹³ However, the colorful inhabitants of the Montmartre district saw the Parisian prostitute differently, recognizing her as the embodiment of nineteenth-century deviant sexuality and as such the ruler of the dangerously exciting Parisian night. It thus wasn’t long before the young, creative minds of Bohemia took her representation into their own hands and set forth to create a new image of the prostitute through the visual arts.

¹³ Sander L. Gilman, *Sexuality: An Illustrated History* (New York: Wiley, 1989), 297.

“THE ARTISTIC FIGURATION OF THE WHORE” ¹⁴

Mirroring the rise of the prostitute as a social phenomenon was the rise of her representation in the visual arts. The sinful Parisian female was ever-present by the latter half of the nineteenth century; she was a quintessentially modern entity characteristic of Parisian culture at the time. It is due to the prostitute’s figural representation of modernity that the theme became so prominent in the avant-garde art and literature of the era and thereafter.

A clear marker of the rise of the image of the prostitute among artists in Paris and elsewhere is the revolutionary *Olympia* (1863) by Edouard Manet. With this painting, Manet dared to defy contemporary expectations, instead introducing the Modernist idea of painting as a representation of fact on



Figure 1: Edouard Manet, *Olympia*, oil on canvas, 1863.

canvas and highlighting his presence as artist. In his *Olympia*, Manet depicts with stark realism in terms of both content and technique a confident, unflinching female nude with a gaze so fixed at the viewer that it creates an element of intimacy that was all too real for its contemporaries.¹⁵ Stimulating her viewers with the cunning look in her eyes, Olympia calls to her beholder with a sort of invitation, or rather, as expressed by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, a look that says, “Do you

¹⁴ Qtd. in Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France*, 2.

¹⁵ Robert Roseblum and H.W. Janson, *19th Century Art* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005), 295.

want to come and see me?"¹⁶ Olympia's accessories, such as her thin black choker, dangling shoes, elegant earrings and bracelet, and bloomed flower in her hair, as well as the surrounding room decor and the presence of her black maid also emphasize her nakedness and status as a prostitute. This is further highlighted by the bouquet presented by the black maid from an unseen male suitor, or perhaps a likely customer.¹⁷

To match this bold representation in terms of content, Manet handled the application of paint in a similarly forward manner which challenged the stylistic preferences in academic art. Through harsh, unyielding brushstrokes and unsympathetic lighting which eliminates mid-tones and thereby flattens the reclining Olympia, Manet created a relatively un-modeled and un-idealized nude perceived as vulgar in the eyes of its viewers. Olympia thus becomes the first blatantly naked woman for sale, identifiable not only by her surroundings and rendering but by the recognizable identity of the sitter, the infamous model and prostitute Victorine Meurent.¹⁸ All in all, the underlying theme becomes one of prostitution shown boldly and without remorse, a confidence easily noted by the critics of the time.

Prior to this work, images indicative of sexual availability were customarily veiled with mythological and allegorical guises meant to conceal the obviously erotic presence of the nude figure in an academically-acceptable fashion to escape accusations of decadence. Through the use of the concept of the "window" peering into a fantastical and idyllic world, female nudes

¹⁶ "Edouard Manet: Olympia," *Musee d'Orsay*, 2006, < <http://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/home.html>>; Phyllis A Floyd, "The Puzzle of Olympia," *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide: a Journal of Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture*, <<http://19thc-artworldwide.org/index.php/component/content/article/70-spring04article/285-the-puzzle-of-olympia>>.

¹⁷ *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Miniature: Edouard Manet, 1832-1883*, (New York, NY: Book-of-the-Month Club, Inc, 1954).

¹⁸ *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Miniature: Edouard Manet, 1823-1883*.

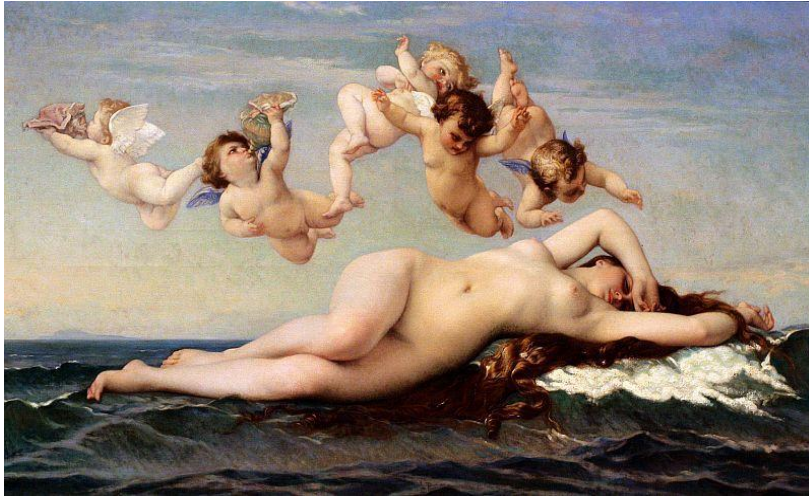


Figure 2: Alexandre Cabanel, *Birth of Venus*, oil on canvas, 1863.

availability is Parisian artist Alexandre Cabanel's *The Birth of Venus*, also exhibited in 1863. In accordance to the popular taste and the standard canon of the female nude, Cabanel depicted a luscious, delicate Venus awakening on paradisiacal ocean waves as flying cupids make known her birth with the blows of conch shells.¹⁹ Her body, however, twisting and turning with connotations of pleasure, seems to have been consciously placed in a lascivious manner of display and exhibition, thus making the repressed sexuality of his seemingly-pure Venus obvious to the Modern eye.²⁰

Thus, although the theme of prostitution was addressed in works prior to Manet's *Olympia*, it was with this ground-breaking work that the ubiquitous presence of the prostitute was at last acknowledged in the public artistic realm. Finally, through the representations of an

¹⁹ Rosemblum, *19th Century Art*, 296.

²⁰ Jennifer L Shaw, "The Figure of Venus: Rhetoric of the Ideal and the Salon of 1863," *Art History*, 14.4 (1991): 540-70.; David Rodgers and Dimitris Plantzos, "Nude," *Oxford Art Online: Grove Art Online*. 2010, <<http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T012852>>.

utterly realistic, undisguised prostitute, the barrier between the real and the ideal was broken and the theme of modernity and ‘real life’ was welcomed over a calculated vision of male fantasy in the avant-garde artist circle in Paris.²¹

The subject, exhilarating by nature, was both privately and publically explored in a number of different mediums, including pencil sketches, monotype prints, pastel drawings, and oil paintings. Besides Manet, notable late nineteenth-century artists who worked with the prostitute as a muse include Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Paul Cézanne, Vincent van Gogh, and a plethora of other celebrated Parisian recorders of the newly-eroticized city culture. The most honest representations of the unique sexuality of the prostitute, however, can be found in the works of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Edgar Degas, two unique Parisian artists with a distinct polarity in both their social immersions within the brothel scenes and in the ways they depicted prostitution. Lautrec, on the one hand, was an infamous creature of the night recognized for his captivating pastel sketches, gouache and oil paintings, and advertising posters celebrating the prostitutes he so closely knew and loved while staying sure to emphasize all of their sexual magnetism with explicit images of prostitution. Edgar Degas, on the other hand, whose seemingly-innocent pastel studies of women at their baths and milliners in their shops hid their true nature as “the mimic summons of the urge to prostitution,” as stated by the contemporary poet Paul Valery, conversely diverted away from the brothel scene to the confines of his decidedly private life and created rather ambiguous implicit images of clandestine prostitution.²²

²¹ Francis Martin Jr., “Nineteenth-Century Art” (Course at the University of Central Florida, Orlando, FL, Fall 2010).

²² Qtd. in Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France*, 157.

The extensive studies of prostitutes by these artists and their contemporaries thus further contributed to the iconography of the prostitute as a symbol of late nineteenth-century sexuality in a way that has lasted to the present day.

THE ESSENCE OF THE PROSTITUTE: DEFINING SEXUALITY IN LATE NINETEENTH-CENTURY PARIS

In discussing the essence of the sinful Parisian female and how her sexuality, sensuality, and promiscuity shone through the artistic renditions of her likeness, it is crucial to understand female sexuality as it was seen in late nineteenth-century Paris. In other words, in the eyes of the contemporary Parisian, what defined sexuality?

The image of the sexual, the amorous, and the sensual was simultaneously overt and covert. In the era of the rising bourgeoisie, the ideal woman was molded to be utterly feminine; she was delicate, refined, cultured, and dainty – a damsel in distress looking for the lead of the ideally respectable man. The bourgeois woman was polished in manner, petite in form, pale in skin-tone. Each of her features was meant to indicate her gentle, cultured existence and her social status as part of the elite class. However, with the rise of prostitution in Paris came the slow shattering of the bourgeois ideal of beauty and of feminine sensuality as the image of the honorable woman began to intertwine with that of the ill-reputed creature of the night.

Known to mimic standards of bourgeois beauty, prostitutes belonging to the more discreet *maisons* servicing the societal elite along with the clandestine prostitutes of the street, such as the milliner, soon began to blend into the Parisian day scene.²³ It grew increasingly difficult to distinguish the clandestine prostitute and *fille publique* from the decorous woman and *femme honnête*.²⁴ As documented by Parent-Duchatelet, “in public places and meetings, nothing can distinguish them from the most proper women; but when they want to, they know how to affect a tone, a countenance, and a glance that are significant to those who look for this particular

²³ *Maisons* – French word referring to a house of prostitution.

²⁴ *Fille publique* – French word for “woman of the streets”; *Femme honnête* – French word for a respectable married woman.

class.”²⁵ Thus, unlike the bourgeois woman, the prostitute was lustful, flirtatious, desirable, and sexually attractive to the bourgeois male in an entirely different way. As the characteristic hypersexuality of the prostitute, described as an erotic air and promiscuous character, lured both the respectable and the working class, the construct of what was sexually desirable shifted from fragile femininity to a bolder, more rambunctious sexuality – a promiscuous vision of a new sort of sensual female offering her body to be admired and devoured...for but a small fee. The quintessence of deviant female sexuality in late nineteenth-century Paris thus became defined by the idea of the ‘essential prostitute,’ who was elementally a theatrically playful, outwardly inviting, sexually-driven solicitor of the night. Though sometimes crude, she was always colorful and vibrant in character with her too-frilly costume and too-white make-up, readily available for the admiration of a paying customer.



Figure 3: N.A., Two Parisian Prostitutes Sit, One on a Table, and Chat Pose and Flirt, photograph, c. 1912.

Still, while the prostitute’s role as the principal focus of “male fantasies of female sexuality” made her the ultimate object of desire, the late nineteenth-century Parisian male was nonetheless fearful of her as she remained in their eyes an image of an infamous *femme fatale*.²⁶ According to Art Historian Elizabeth K. Menon, “the *femme fatale* has come to be known as an archetypal woman whose evil characteristics cause her to either unconsciously bring destruction or consciously seek vengeance.”²⁷ The fear of the *femme fatale*, though universal as a

²⁵ Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France*, 27.

²⁶ Elizabeth K. Menon, *Evil by Design: The Creation and Marketing of the Femme Fatale* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 95.

²⁷ Menon, *Evil by Design: The Creation and Marketing of the Femme Fatale*, 4.

superstitious concept, was especially widespread in the latter half of the nineteenth century as a defensive device against the increasingly modernized woman and the advancements of the female role in society.²⁸ Although this stereotype was present for the ideal bourgeois woman as well (both in literature and visual form), it was much more prominent in discussions of the Parisian prostitute due to the contemporary association between the ill-fated profession and venereal disease.²⁹ As a consequence of this association, the relationship between the prostitute and the *femme fatale* who, with her obsessions with simultaneous pleasure and peril, could bring unimaginable danger to the most morally sound of men, developed well into the early twentieth century.

All in all, the notion of sexuality in the late nineteenth century was represented by the male-driven struggle between the fear of and desire for the openly-willing creature of the night. Renditions of the prostitute as emblem of a new sort of hyper-sexuality that foiled bourgeois beauty were thereby affected by the prostitute's assumed lurking nature and were thus oftentimes completed with an undertone of reasserted masculinity in the hand of the male artist. Still, as thought by contemporary art critic Camille Mauclair among others, the avant-garde artists of French Bohemia who looked to the prostitute as an artistic muse more often than not ignored the dangers of the prostitute's outward perversity and *femme fatale*-esque desire for vengeance in their visual communication of her sexual essence.³⁰

²⁸ Patrick Bade, *Femme Fatale: Images of Evil and Fascinating Women* (London: Ash & Grant, 1979), 9.; Menon, *Evil by Design: The Creation and Marketing of the Femme Fatale*, 94.

²⁹ Menon, *Evil by Design: The Creation and Marketing of the Femme Fatale*, 95.

³⁰ Menon, *Evil by Design: The Creation and Marketing of the Femme Fatale*, 95.

PASTEL: COMMUNICATING CHARACTER THROUGH MEDIUM

A common medium used for representing prostitution and sexuality in late-nineteenth century Paris was the pastel, otherwise referred to as “colored pencils.” Pastel is a particularly versatile powdered substance varying in shade and gradation as well as in methods of application, thus allowing for a number of different visual effects ranging from a velvety smoothness to a vigorous interplay of line and hatching. As stated by art historian Genevieve Monnier, the pastel stick “is spirited, variegated, ever changing, the strokes running straight or zigzagging, breaking into dottings or commas or sweeping curves, hatched with fine parallels or broad squashing, interweaving from top to bottom or left to right, or effaced by rubbing and scraping.”³¹ The multiform nature and versatility of the pastel medium is therefore the primary reason for the endless textural effects possible with the pastel medium.

Throughout history, these qualities alongside the rapidity and swiftness of the pastel stick made for an excellent medium for artists’ preliminary works, or sketches. Despite its pulsating textures, vibrant colors, and unique receptivity to touch, pastels were therefore more often utilized as mere means of colorful embellishment and highlighting for chalk or charcoal drawings of a figure, or as a way of making a quick impression of a subject rather than as the medium of a finished work. With the pastel medium came the added convenience of portability and subsequent proximity to the sitter or subject at hand, a characteristic essential to the artist in the early stages of his or her composition. Alas, its traditional use as a medium for quick on-scene studies and swift recordings of a subject or source of inspiration consequently hindered the pastel’s progression as an honorable artistic tool. As a result of this preconceived notion, the

³¹ Qtd. in Genevieve Monnier, *Pastel: From the 16th to the 20th Century* (New York: SKIRA/Rizzoli International Publications, 1984), 6.

pastel medium was historically looked upon as secondary to the more established artistic media such as oil paint. With time, however, the diverse properties of the medium were valorized and it was used more readily as a primary instrument. Eventually, pastel drawing was seen as an art form in itself, favored by numerous artists in the eighteenth century during the Rococo movement and then again in the late nineteenth century with a new surge of artistic interest.³² In the eyes of the late nineteenth-century artists of the avant-garde, the medium allowed for an uncompromised application of vibrant color through a cost-efficient medium that fit the needs of the rise of scientific observation in art movements such as Impressionism with its advantage of portability. However, aside from the new exploration of the medium at the time, why was it that so many of the most honest representations of female sexuality and in turn prostitution, both implicit and explicit, were completed with the pastel medium in late nineteenth-century Paris?

Since its early usage, the pastel was utilized for the transcription of the ‘real’ over the ideal with the aim of truthful representation of contemporary life and culture, a snapshot of an artistic muse or source of inspiration. Although beneficial for quick impressions of scenery and surroundings, the pastel medium was particularly popular in portraiture, such as in Rococo pastel painting. The textural effects possible with the pastel grain are well suited to communicate the various textures of a human figure – the hair, the eyes, the lips, the skin, the curves and grooves of the human form.³³ With its fusion of color and line (and therefore drawing and painting) into one, the possibility of maintaining detail and contour while emphasizing features through vivid colors drew in the budding pastellists of the late nineteenth century. The most prominent advantage of the pastel medium thus ironically lies in the very quality that imprisoned its

³² Anne F. Maheux, *Degas, Pastels* (Ottawa : National Gallery of Canada, 1988), 11.

³³ Monnier, *Pastels: From the 16th to the 20th Century*, 7.

development: its swiftness in application. While more methodical, schematic artistic modes, such as oil painting, separate the two “steps” of creating a work of art as chronologically assumed jobs, the pastel medium merges the otherwise separate feats of line and color and achieves results in a quarter of the time. It is thus to no surprise that artists turned to the pastel pigment for their studies of the sinful Parisian streetwalker and her characteristic hyper-sexual essence – they hoped to capture the prostitute’s spirit through the vigorous yet direct treatment of the medium with which they rendered her.

Yet even more than the textural advantages of the medium, it was the similarities between the temperament of the medium itself and the subject presented that drew artists to the pastel pigment when depicting prostitution and communicating the sexuality of the Parisian prostitute. The commonality in subject matter between the eras showing booms in the usage of the pastel medium further emphasizes this unique ability of the pastel to capture the sensual quintessence of its subject – both the Rococo period and the late nineteenth century were cultures equally driven by sex and desire. Although the frivolous sexual encounters and frisky behavior through soft, playful compositions in Rococo art are opposite of the harsher, more rambunctious sexuality of the late nineteenth century, the significance of the usage of the pastel medium in communicating sexuality in both instances is undeniable. Beyond its technical advantages, the pastel medium has a conceptual connection to the subject of sexuality as a whole. Pastel, by nature, is an ephemeral and tactile medium; it is easily blended, effortlessly effaced, and hardly concrete. The physical connection that comes with the production of a pastel work (especially in comparison to the distance between the artist and the canvas via a paintbrush in oil painting) could therefore be held accountable for this phenomenon, as the proximity of the medium and

immediacy of the work parallels the sexual encounter itself. Indeed, in creating a pastel piece, the artist has the closest possible contact with not only the subject but the paper itself, touching and rubbing the grain to create a shadowed and blurred romantic effect, even licking their fingers for a wet application that allows a fusion of matted color. Said to hold a “precarious existence,” the medium thus relates to the inherent nature of the momentary, brief encounters of sexual exchange in prostitution via its relationship with female sexuality.³⁴

Hence, certain characteristics of pastel are directly linked to the use of the pastel medium as aid in works communicating the character of the essential sexualized female in late nineteenth-century Paris: beyond its inherently sexual working methods, pastel has the unique ability of capturing the fundamental nature of a subject through its fusion of line and color together with its ephemeral, even subversive qualities when representing abstract subjects such as female sexuality, and in turn prostitution. Yet in conveying the conceptions of the ‘essential prostitute,’ how did the pastel medium transcend itself to communicate the hyper-sexuality, sinful promiscuity, and overall character of the figures represented? Is the success of artworks depicting prostitution reliant on the effects of the pastel medium? If so, is it acceptable to draw the conclusion that the sexual quintessence of late nineteenth-century Parisian prostitutes is best communicated in the visual arts with the aid of the pastel medium? In-depth analyses of pastel renditions of Parisian creatures of the night will answer these unavoidable questions.

³⁴ Qtd. in the anonymous “Treatise on Pastel Painting,” Paris, 1788 translated in Monnier, *Pastels: From the 16th to the 20th Century*, 110-116.

LAUTREC AMIDST THE “BLEEDING LAUGHTER OF MONTMARTRE”³⁵

The telling artworks of bohemian artist Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec revolving around the theme of prostitution offer great insight into these questions about the nature and aesthetic abilities of the pastel medium in conveying the mesmeric sexual deviancy of the Parisian *femme de maison*.³⁶ A notoriously colorful inhabitant of bohemian Montmartre, Lautrec was known to immerse himself in the nightlife of this infamous microcosm of outcasted free spirits. This, of course, was in part due to his sociable character and ironic charm, complemented by the peculiarity of his own misshapen, diminutive form and crooked walk. A wholehearted participant and observer of the Parisian nightlife scene, Lautrec was quick to fall in love with the Montmartre ‘lowlife’ of cafés, brothels, dance-halls, and bars. Himself known as the “brilliant invalid” of Paris, Lautrec found a home in the world of the ‘other,’ at one point even recorded to say, “I hear the word brothel on all sides but have never felt more at home.”³⁷ Lautrec was taken by the nighttime entertainment of the mischievous city, and the fundamental theme of nightlife celebrities, dancers, and prostitutes developed accordingly in his overall *oeuvre*³⁸ as the animated creatures of the night proceeded to serve as his guiding muses for the remainder of his life up until his untimely death.³⁹

³⁵ French writer Jules Valles qtd. in Claire Freches-Thory, *Toulouse-Lautrec: Scenes of the Night* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1994), 30.

³⁶ *Femme de maison* – French for “woman of the house,” house meaning ‘whorehouse.’ This phrase, or *femme* for short, is commonly used to refer to the Parisian prostitute.

³⁷ Qtd. in Freches-Thory, *Toulouse-Lautrec: Scenes of the Night*, 71.; Lautrec qtd. in Freches-Thory, *Toulouse-Lautrec: Scenes of the Night*, 95.

³⁸ *Oeuvre* – French phrase for a collection of work.

³⁹ Just as Lautrec made his mark on the Bohemian nightlife scene, so did this pleasure-point of Paris make its mark on him. Lautrec ended his love affair with the brothels and courtesans when he died of syphilis and alcoholism at the young age of thirty-seven. For more information, see Russell Ash, *Toulouse-Lautrec: The Complete Posters* (London: Pavilion Books Limited, 1991), #.

While the majority of Parisian society kept their involvement with the whorehouses of Paris discreet and under wraps, Lautrec made his engagement with the brothel scene and, more specifically, the sinful *femme galantes*⁴⁰ of the city of venal love, a public affair. So inspired by the verve of the prostitute and nighttime entertainer, Lautrec dedicated his life and art to acute observation and recording of her sensual presence, more so in an effort to accurately depict his creatively-stimulating environment than to glorify the ‘essential prostitute’ herself. He was drawn to the haunting poetry of the ‘whore’ and, determined to use her as his muse in his artworks, sought the valued friendship and acceptance of the Parisian prostitutes through his residence at the various brothels in the *Rue de Moulines*, including the infamous *Moulin Rouge*.⁴¹ As written by Lautrec’s lifelong friend and confidant, Maurice Joyant, about Lautrec’s uniquely adventurous world of inspiration:

For some time Lautrec had been making forays out of Montmartre, disappearing for days at a time; his close friends were soon given the key to the mystery: A number of the brothels on the rue des Moulines, the Rue d’Amboise, and the Rue Joubert had become his working headquarters. There he saw the nude, the nude in motion, rather than the typical studio nude in conventional pose who says: “I’ve sat for Bouguereau and for M. Cabanel. I do not model my whole body, but only my head for M. Henner.” Lautrec had his fill of professional models; he wanted subjects that were closer to nature, whose gestures and attitudes were almost wholly uninhibited. He sought an animal of freedom of movement. And in the brothels, where some of his doctor friends justified their presence by examining the nerves and hearts of the inmates, many of them fit cases for the Salpetriere

⁴⁰ *Femme galante* – French for “courtesan.” Courtesans were higher on the social ladder of prostitution in that they served the elite customers and, outside the brothel, gave the impression of reputable stature to the unknowing eye. Parent-Duchatelet felt these were the most dangerous of the women for sale: “More than any other, they spread diseases and early infirmities; they can destroy one’s fortune as well as one’s healthy, and can be considered the most dangerous people in society.” Lautrec’s artwork revolved the theme of prostitution as a whole, yet his main focus was the *femme galante*, the superficially respectable nighttime dancers and entertainers of the more exclusive brothels and dance-halls. For more information, see Patrick O’Connor, *Nightlife of Paris: The Art of Toulouse-Lautrec* (New York, NY: Universe Pub, 1991), 70.

⁴¹ It is recorded that Lautrec once even exclaimed to a friend: “She’s first-rate! Doesn’t she look like a slut! It would be wonderful if we could use her as a model!” This shows his captivation by the sexualized prostitute. For more information, see Freches-Thory, *Toulouse-Lautrec: Scenes of the Night*, 38.

[asylum], Lautrec tirelessly painted and drew, observing the life of these recluses in minute detail.⁴²

It is thus apparent that Lautrec's guiding light and source of inspiration was, in fact, the very figure to solicit the Parisian night. Indeed, Lautrec took his subject from, as stated by critic Jumelles in 1901 in the publication *Lyon Republican*, "wherever depravity deformed people's faces, coarsened their features, and exposed the ugliness of their souls in their expression."⁴³ The dedication and enthusiasm for portraying the promiscuity of the Parisian night found in Lautrec as an artist was unmatched by his contemporaries. His artworks, representative of late-nineteenth century Parisian celebrity and brothel life for *les femme galantes*, are therefore crucial in understanding the true nature of the bohemian atmosphere and promiscuous streetwalkers.

Although the pastel pigment was not an overly prominent medium in Lautrec's *oeuvre*, which consisted predominantly of oil paintings, the utilization of pastel was instrumental in the candid portrayal of the character and underlying sexuality of Lautrec's prostitute muses whenever it did come into play in his artwork. It is interesting to note, however, that it is in his private studies rather than in his public works that Lautrec used the pastel medium most freely. Though the traditions of the visual arts would argue that his use of oil paint for his public works was a decisive portrayal of his abilities in the more readily acceptable art media, the obvious switch in mood between Lautrec's public and private works offers new evidence for his choice in medium depending on the purpose of his study.⁴⁴

⁴² Maurice Joyant qtd. in Freches-Thory, *Toulouse-Lautrec: Scenes of the Night*, 153-154.

⁴³ Freches-Thory, *Toulouse-Lautrec: Scenes of the Night*, 158-159.

⁴⁴ For this discussion of Lautrec's public works, a focus is placed on his "fine arts" artworks rather than his advertising posters.

In Lautrec's public works, such as his most recognized painting, *At the Moulin Rouge*, which famously illustrates the sensationalized cabaret and brothel, an ominous and rather foreboding tone is set for the viewer. The scene depicts the calm of the storm at the infamous cabaret, yet hints at the rambunctious activity to come.



Figure 4: Lautrec. *At the Moulin Rouge*. oil on canvas. 1892-95.

In essence, the painting is an angled view of the cabaret interior, featuring a group of publicly recognized bohemian deviants and dancers, as well as a self-portrait of Lautrec himself in the background. The monumentality of the painting is achieved, however, with the mesmerizing absinthe-green face of Jane Avril, another dancer and close friend of the sickly artist.⁴⁵ In its haunted spotlight, the dancer's face offsets the abstracted acid-washed palette of the overall work and confronts the viewer with a bleak, menacing stare and eerie invitation to the Parisian underground of sexual adventure and disease. Thus, through his use and manipulation of the oil paint and turpentine, Lautrec creates a scene which invites and simultaneously warns the spectator of the hauntings within the *Moulin Rouge*. All in all, this threatening undertone is

⁴⁵ Jane Avril, otherwise known as *La Melinite* because of her wild energy, was a celebrated performer in the Moulin Rouge. Her audience was captivated by her ability to transform from a demure citizen of Paris with her fashionable dress and intelligent wit into the ecstatic dancer and dancing star she was known to be. For more information, see Freches-Thory, *Toulouse-Lautrec: Scenes of the Night*, 35-72.

characteristic of such public works, suggesting Lautrec's role as protector of his home through his visual attempts to scare off those who did not belong.

Lautrec's private works, on the other hand, achieve a slightly less aggressive mood with an underlying characteristic of truth to observation. Within his private sketches and studies of his dancer and prostitute muses, a general gravitation towards oil essence and gouache is evident. Oil essence is simply oil paint diluted with turpentine to achieve a matte effect similar to gouache, which is in short an opaque version of watercolor. It is interesting to note, however, that oftentimes the way in which Lautrec handled the oil essence and gouache is reminiscent of a pastel sketch. This suggests an intuitive acknowledgement by Lautrec of the pastel's advantageous qualities in capturing the essence of character and truth. The addition of pastel into his mixed media works is therefore understandable and even expected for the artist. While his public works feature a theatrically threatening tone, Lautrec's private works welcome the pastel medium in an attempt to capture his subjects and their *true* sensual presence behind the limelight of the stage and gas-lit boulevards.

The advantages of the pastel medium are apparent, for instance, in Lautrec's study of the serious, yet delicate character of May Milton, the graceful English dancer of the *Moulin Rouge*. May Milton won the hearts of her audience and enjoyed a celebrity existence at the *Moulin Rouge* through her charming dance moves and refined English temperament. Unique from the native *Montmartroise*, she captivated her late-nineteenth century spectators with her soft and sensual sexuality distinct from the more forward sexuality of her fellow dancers.⁴⁶ For Lautrec, it

⁴⁶ *Montmartroise* – French word referring to the regional nickname for the inhabitants of Montmartre, the bohemian hub of late nineteenth-century Paris.

was her splendid red hair and soft sexuality that captured his attention.⁴⁷ Thus, typical of his pursuit to realistically depict his surroundings, he used May Milton as a model for several of his artistic endeavors.

Lautrec's most telling depiction of May Milton, a mixed media portrait study completed with the use of both pastel and oil essence, is instrumental in arguing Lautrec's realization of the pastel medium's advantages in portraying character. An analysis of the usage of each media within this work suggest that, while the oil essence is utilized in the loose impressions of the dancer's figure and dress, Lautrec looked to the pastel medium in the representations of all the features which serve as supposed windows to the soul – the eyes, the skin, the mouth. This switch in medium is not accidental, but rather methodical to juxtapose texture and, more importantly, to achieve truth in representation of both May Milton's physiognomy and character. While Lautrec used the oil essence to imply May Milton's form, he recognized that the dancer's true personality must be emphasized through detail, texture, tone, and color, and thus exaggerated these elements accordingly with the pastel medium so to accentuate her hyper-sexuality and overall character. This method of emphasis on the feature

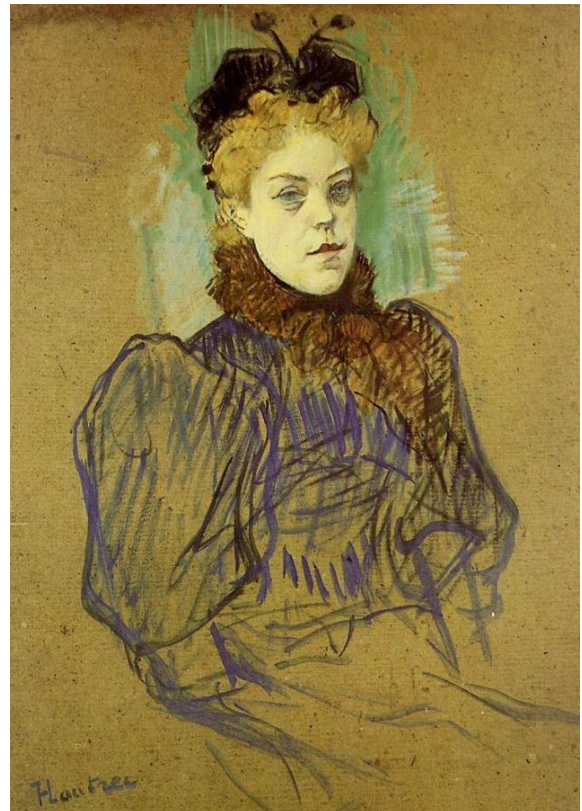


Figure 5: Lautrec, *May Milton*, pastel and oil essence on cardboard, 1895.

⁴⁷ Freches-Thory, *Toulouse-Lautrec: Scenes of the Night*, 92.

of utmost importance (the face) and subtle less-detailed insinuation of the less important features (the costume and dress) is otherwise known as the “lost-and-found method,” traditionally instrumental in communicating personality.⁴⁸

Within Lautrec’s realistic recording of the dancer’s typically English physiognomy – her iconic pale, heavy countenance, her prominent chin, her serious gaze – is evidence of her sensuality and simultaneous piercing sexuality through the use of color. When rendering May Milton’s strikingly white chalk skin, typical of Parisian prostitutes in their theatrical attempt to mimic the fashionably feminine paleness of the beautiful bourgeois woman, Lautrec took advantage of the layering effects of the pastel pigment and interlaid coats of alternating colors such as patches of yellows and pinks and hints of soft sea-foam blues to highlight May Milton’s unique presence beneath her powdered façade. The mimetic makeup routine of May Milton was in accordance with the average Parisian prostitute, who, in attempt to dramatize her sexuality, would powder her face white, often adding fish glue preparations to hide wrinkles and signs of deterioration and, for an added final touch, carefully drawing on lines of blue to symbolize veins and convey the idea of “transparency” in both their body and soul.⁴⁹ The cracked application of the pastel medium, especially in areas such as the cheeks and jawline, therefore remind the viewer of May Milton’s sinful intentions as a Parisian dancer and woman of the night. This is further highlighted by the yellow discolorations of the skin, which serves as a visual reminder of May Milton’s vices through the connotation of the disease-ridden place of the prostitute within society. Still, the touch of femininity characteristic of May Milton among her audiences is visible through the plum-pink accents on the apples of her cheeks.

⁴⁸ Dennis Frost, *Capturing Personality in Pastel* (New York: Watson-Guption Publishing, 1950), 18.

⁴⁹ Roberts, *The Art of Prostitution*, 6.



Figure 6: Lautrec, Detail of *May Milton*, pastel and oil essence on cardboard, 1895.

Lautrec's friendship with May Milton and communication of her true personality through his study of her is evident in the way in which he rendered her eyes with a sense of mystery hidden behind the milky coat of blue pastel. Here, he allows the pastel medium to tell the story of the dancer, teasing the viewer with a suggestion of her experiences in the dangerously exciting Parisian nightlife scene through a dot of luminescence in her pupils, immediately surrounded by an indistinct shade of darker hues of blues and purples. In doing so, Lautrec again reminds us of the foreboding mood of the bohemian underground, turning the false purity of the nighttime celebrity on its head and reminding the viewer of her inherently wicked nature.

Thus, within the features of May Milton's face, Lautrec depends on the qualities of the pastel medium in his rendering of her most telling physical traits. While he utilizes hints of oil

essence only to highlight and dramatize certain characteristics, such as the shape of May Milton's lips or the seductive outlines of her eyes, Lautrec otherwise leaves it to the pastel to write the story of his subject's character. The concentration of the pastel medium in rendering the face and the crosshatchings of her costume therefore create a radiating energy from the dancer with her eyes as central focus.⁵⁰

The foreboding mood underlying Lautrec's image of his dancer friend, however, emphasizes the ways in which the Parisian *femme* could not escape the social stereotypes and effects of her ill-fated profession. It is true that the nighttime dancers and entertainers in the late nineteenth-century Paris were not always prostitutes, and in fact, professional dancers such as May Milton often avoided the realm of prostitution in spite of their association with the infamous cabarets and dance-halls associated with deviant sexual availability. Although in many cases, especially in the Second Empire, dancers openly participated in prostitute acts; the late nineteenth-century saw a rise in women turning to the dancer professions as alternative means secondary income which avoid falling to prostitution.⁵¹ Still, although there is no record of prostitution by May Milton herself, she and the prostitute often become one in the eyes of her male viewers due to the associations between her theatre of choice, the *Moulin Rouge*, and sexual availability. This male perception of woman as commodity in the Parisian nightlife applied not only to these dancers, but to other female nighttime professions as well, such as the barmaids inside these venues. The portrayal of the barmaid in Edouard Manet's famous painting *A Bar at the Folies-Bergères* (1882, Figure 7), for example, comments on the placement of the barmaid as part of a commodity display amongst a 'still-life' of clearly labeled liquors and spirits

⁵⁰ For detailed images of Lautrec's *May Milton*, see Appendix A.

⁵¹ David Price, *Cancan!* (London: Cygnus Arts, 1998), 17.

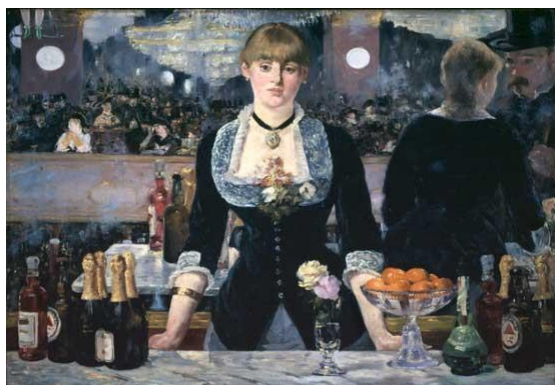


Figure 7: Edouard Manet, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergères*, oil on canvas, 1882.

through the “spatial incoherence” presented with the mirror image revealing discussion of attempted sexual exchange. Whether or not the barmaid willingly sells her body is therefore unimportant to the male customer.⁵² This same assumption by men was true to the dancers as well, who, due to this cultural interpretation of her professional

atmosphere, becomes victim to these ill-fated associations within the sexual provocation.

Aside from the occasional act of sexual exchange between dancer and customer at these venues (or assumption of its availability by the male viewers), this reputation of promiscuity was further enhanced by the sexual ravishment of the late nineteenth-century cabaret dances, such as the can-can and the quadrille. These dances, full of energy with their high kicks and splits, were suggestive of the loose morals of those women participating in them. According to David Price, the exhibition of the legs and garters from the exaggerated kicks and twirls were unacceptable for the ‘respectable’ woman whom was expected to maintain her refined dignity. The use of crinoline in dresses and the increasingly erotic lacing and frilling of the cancan skirts also added to the suggestive nature of the dance as the skirts twirled in the air to create evocative shapes which reminded the viewer of the sexual encounter.⁵³ Thus, May Milton’s image is connotative

⁵² For more information on the interpretation of women in Impressionist works as consumer versus commodity, see Ruth E. Iskin, *Modern Women and Parisian Consumer Culture in Impressionist Paintings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Also, see Paul Smith, *Impressionism: Beneath the Surface* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1995), 52-55.

⁵³ The suggestive nature of the cancan skirts are akin to that of the skirt in the famously lascivious Rococo painting *The Swing* (1767) by Rococo master Jean Honoré Fragonard. For more information on the suggestive nature of the skirts, see Clive Hart, *Heaven and Flesh: Imagery of Desire from the Renaissance to the Rococo* (Cambridge;

of prostitute sins not because she herself was undoubtedly a prostitute, but because her profession as a dancer and nightlife entertainer among the sex-ridden boulevards of Montmartre made her appear as so to her viewers.

Thus, keeping with Lautrec's oath to truth in his artwork, the connotations in this image of May Milton become yet another hint into the true meaning of and associations with sexuality of the late nineteenth-century Parisian prostitute. As discussed, the infamous *femme* of the night was a dramatically colorful character, a figure of *hyper*-sexuality with her *too*-white makeup and *too*-frilly clothes. An actress in her own right, the prostitute was there to answer the needs and wants of her customer, putting aside any and all of her own troubles and insecurities. Yet, in reality, the life of the prostitute was filled with hardships and saddening pursuits of a manageable life. Indeed, most prostitutes did not offer themselves for sale by choice, but rather because of their monetary conditions. As proved by Parent-Duchatelet's study through detailed surveys of registered prostitutes, a chief factor which led women of all classes to turn to prostitution was the need for additional sources of income to supplement for the dangerously low wages for women labor: "Since my work was not sufficient to cover my expenses, I was forced to earn my living some other way."⁵⁴ Once submissive to the monetary benefits of prostitution, the lives of Parisian prostitutes were still difficult in numerous aspects. For the lower classes of prostitution, the prostitutes' lives were quite routine and tiresome, consisting of a never-ending pattern of idle waiting for customers in the night. For the higher classes of prostitution, this degradation and

Cambridge University Press, 1995), 49. For more information on the advances in fashion relating to the cancan, see Price, *Cancan!*, 3-9.

⁵⁴ Plea of an arrested prostitute recorded by Dr. Octave Commenge qtd. in Clayson, *Painted Love: Prostitution in French of the Impressionist Era*, 116. The female professions known to have low wages and thus suggestive of clandestine prostitution are further discussed later on in the thesis in the discussion of Edgar Degas' thematic interest in professions associated with covert prostitution.

feeling of uselessness was less prominent, yet the disapproval of and disgust by these *femme gallantes* by the ordinary citizen were nevertheless burdening.⁵⁵ Hence, the hardships behind the lives of prostitutes in late nineteenth-century Paris were factors in their sexuality; a hint of sadness always lay behind their charade of gaiety and sexual appetite.

Connotations of distraction and unease on the faces of Parisian prostitutes, both blatant and concealed, are apparent in numerous other artworks by Lautrec, some of which also use the pastel medium to capture and emphasize the character of the figure represented. For instance, Lautrec's

Jane Avril entering the Moulin Rouge and *Seated Dancer in Pink Tights* are both brilliant works done primarily in oil essence but heightened with pastel

detail. In both cases, the oil essence was insufficient in bringing out all that

Lautrec was trying to communicate, and so he took advantage of the textural abilities of the pastel pigment for the finishing touches of the artworks. In *Jane Avril entering the Moulin Rouge*, Lautrec incorporated sensitive strokes of the pastel stick throughout the contours of the artwork, each stroke transforming the composition and making the colors vibrate so to enhance the sexuality of the famous nighttime entertainer and simultaneously emphasize the bleak expression on her face. In *Seated Dancer in Pink Tights*, he similarly turned to textural fluencies

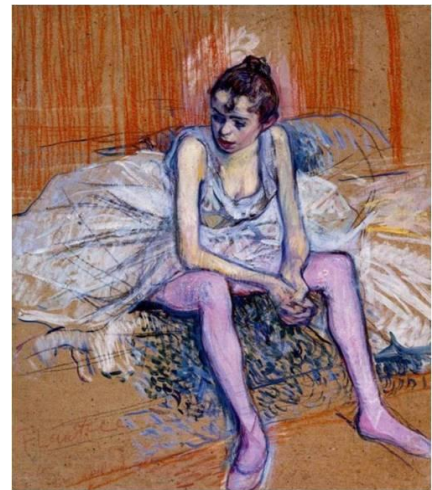
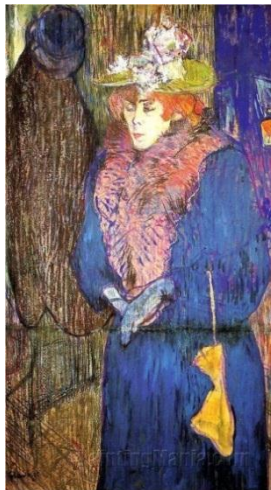


Figure 8: Lautrec, *Seated Dancer in Pink Tights*, pastel and oil on wooden board, 1890.

Figure 9: Lautrec, *Jane Avril entering the Moulin Rouge*, pastel and oil on three sheets of cardboard, 1892.

⁵⁵ Roberts, *The Art of Prostitution*, 5-7.

of the pastel grain to bring out the sensual young spirit of the ballerina and in turn hide her reputation as a clandestine prostitute.⁵⁶ Lautrec emphasizes the difference in surface touch of each element – the frilly tutu, the tight leotard, the velvety softness of the skin – and creates a foil between the still fullness of the tulle and sexual evocation of the smoothness of her tight bodice. Here, the pastel medium is utilized more readily than the oil essence. In fact, there seems to be an even balance of pastel and oil essence, signifying a growing dependence on and increasing comfort with the pastel medium in Lautrec's *oeuvre*.

Even with signs of growing familiarity with and utilization of the pastel pigment, however, works done fully in pastel were rare in the collection of Lautrec. Still, the few artworks he did complete entirely with the pastel medium fully communicate the advantages of pastel even in the hands of an oil master. A comparison can be drawn between his handling of the pastel stick and oil paint to reflect the sexuality of the *femmes de maison* in his renditions of the backsides of anonymous prostitutes whom most likely modeled for him during his residencies at various Montmartre brothels. For this comparison, the entirely pastel artwork *Prostitutes (Femmes de Maison)* (Figure 10) is pitted against the entirely oil painting *Woman before a Mirror* (Figure 11). While both representations of the promiscuous redheaded nudes capture the stereotypical crude embonpoint and large buttocks of prostitutes observed by Parent-Duchatelet in his publications, the artworks convey entirely different portrayals of the same subject.⁵⁷ The oil painting seems to simply record a setting and figure, its presiding message lying not in the medium but rather within the stance of the figure and the way in which she ponders her

⁵⁶ The ballerina's position as clandestine prostitute will be developed in a discussion of female professions indicative of clandestine prostitution in the artwork of Edgar Degas.

⁵⁷ Bell, *Reading, Writing, and Rewriting the Prostitute Body*, 48.

reflection, again playing into the connotations of hardship for prostitutes in Lautrec's artwork. In contrast, the presiding message in the pastel work lies less in the prostitute's posture and more in the body itself. Utilizing the "lost-and-found" technique, Lautrec reels the viewer's attention into what he successfully makes the main focus of the work: the figure of the prostitute and sensation of her skin. With the pastel medium, Lautrec was able to bring to life the grooves and curves of the prostitute's form, handling the pastel stick so effectively that the viewer can feel the texture

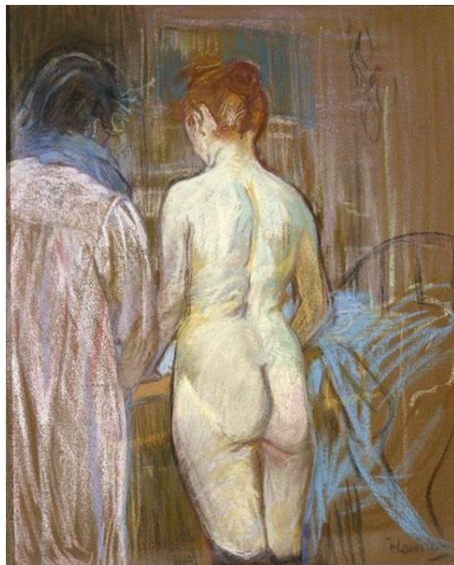


Figure 10: Lautrec, *Prostitutes (Femmes de Maison)*, pastel on emery cloth, 1893-95.



Figure 11: Lautrec, *Woman before a Mirror*, oil on cardboard, 1897.

of the prostitute's skin and follow the bends and folds on her body with their mind's eye. Bringing in whispered traces of pinks, yellows, and blues within the peach white skin of the figure

(similarly to his rendition of May Milton), the pastel

pigment moves with the prostitute's body, each stroke traveling in the direction of her curvature. The body of the prostitute, despite its connotations of crudity, is thus better represented as a sensual entity in the pastel work. While the prostitute in the oil painting looks like a portrait of just any *femme de maison*, the pastel rendering of the prostitute body makes *this* prostitute tangible, reachable, recognizable.

Overall, whether in mixed media form or entirely in the pastel, Lautrec conveys a wholly clear portrayal of all aspects of the Parisian prostitutes' hyper-sexuality – including her theatricality and her dark social conditions – with the aid of the textural effects of pastel. Despite his favoritism for oil essence, he could not avoid the advantages of the pastel medium when attempting to capture the character and personality of his prostitute muses, as well as their subsequent deviant sexuality, in his private sketches.

THE FLUX OF LIFE IN THE EYES OF DEGAS

While Lautrec publicly celebrated the Parisian prostitute and nighttime entertainer, one of Lautrec's major influences, an artist of equal merit, depicted a rather implicit record of female sexuality in Paris in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Edgar Degas, the acknowledged pastel master, focused *his* oeuvre on what would seem to be the everyday life of the modern Parisian woman. However, in reality, each one of the female professions and themes depicted in the work of Degas was one associated with clandestine prostitution at the time. Ballerinas, laundresses, and milliners alike were all considered female professionals inclined to partake in sexual exchange due to their dangerously low wages. According to Art Historian Charles Bernheimer in his research, *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Late Nineteenth-Century France*:

We have the records of one *maison de rendez-vous*, run by a certain widow Fretille in the 1880s. Among these documents is a list of the professions of those who recruited women for the establishment – a list that is impressive for its length and variety. It includes dressmakers, milliners, laundresses, music and dance teachers, piano tuners, director of marriage and employment agencies, photographers, dentists, hairdressers, midwives, waiters, coachmen, and many more. The carefully documented account of all this venal activity given in Corbin's *Les filles de noce* suggests that the possibility of a sexual exchange must have been latent in the majority of encounters between bourgeois men and working-class women in fin-de-siècle Paris. And this possibility contributed toward defining the particular excitements, anxieties, instabilities, and ambiguities of modern urban life.⁵⁸

Prostitution as a viable option for supplementary income was thus quite prominent in newly-modernized Paris. Well aware of the source of refuge for these troubles women, contemporary Parisians further established the commercial quality of late nineteenth-century sexuality, enforcing both the habit and the stereotype against the sinful *filles* through their willful

⁵⁸ Qtd. in Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France*, 165-166.

acknowledgement of it.⁵⁹ This is apparent, for instance, in the commentary by contemporary sociologist C. J. Lecour in his novel, *La Prostitution a Paris et a Londres* (1890) recording prostitution in the capital cities from 1789 to 1870: “They are seamstresses or milliners according to what’s posted. Inside the establishment, the *mise en scene* is complete; there are fabrics, patrons, work in progress. In reality, it is a place of debauchery where often, under the pretext of a lucrative business, one takes in young women who quickly allow themselves to become perverted.”⁶⁰

Even the theme of the nude bather in Degas’ work was indicative of prostitution in that bourgeois women did not bathe themselves in such a manner.⁶¹ Rather, bourgeois or even middle-class women were advised not to bathe; in the nineteenth century, bathing was associated with illness and aging as well as a deterioration of moral standing, and so it was considered dangerous to one’s health.⁶² In contrast to the ‘decent’ woman, frequent bathing in a bedpan or tin tub was typical of prostitutes whom washed themselves before and after each paying customer to disguise any sign of venereal disease, a habit which Parent-Duchatelet argued was the cause of the prostitute’s plump figure.⁶³ The presence of a washbasin was therefore characteristic of a brothel prostitute’s bedroom, especially in the regulated whorehouses of the nineteenth century.⁶⁴ Further proof of the bathers place as prostitute was the voyeuristic effect of and male desire to watch a woman bathe common in brothels.⁶⁵ In fact, the bathing woman was a

⁵⁹ *Fille* – French for “girls” or “prostitutes”

⁶⁰ Qtd. in Clayson, *Painted Love: Prostitution in French of the Impressionist Era*, 113.

⁶¹ Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France*, 171.

⁶² Eunice Lipton, *Looking into Degas: Uneasy Images of Women and Modern Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 169.

⁶³ Roberts, *The Art of Prostitution*, 40.

⁶⁴ Lipton, *Looking into Degas: Uneasy Images of Women and Modern Life*, 169.

⁶⁵ Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France*, 171.

staple in the pornographic formula of the era.⁶⁶ Additionally, the inclusion of stockings and the choker necklace as found in Manet's *Olympia* earlier discussed were indicative of prostitution in that these accessories were used as methods of emphasizing the aspect of nakedness promoted by the brothel whores and prostitutes.

Nevertheless, whether depicting the promiscuous bather or the seedy female professional, Degas chose to portray his figures with an air of ambiguity that attempted to conceal their disreputable tendencies. In fact, it is only in his personal monotypes and sketches that Degas works against the confines of Impressionism and portrays explicit images of prostitution and the voyeur in the bather scene (see Figure 14). His public works, including his pastels and oils, in contrast attempted to conceal any relation he might have had with brothel life, thus remaining in tune to his decidedly private personal life and activities, and withdrawal into an introspective world of social solitude (see Figure 12 and 13). In his public bather pastels exhibited at the eighth and last Impressionist exhibition, for instance, Degas represented his nudes as ambiguous females at their baths. He attempted to ignore the obvious implications of their surroundings as well as the understanding that these bathing types were a source of sexual excitement in attempt to suggest an innocent portrayal of the average women at her toilette.

Still, his contemporaries were well aware of the sexual availability of Degas' bathing types, as evident in a commentary on the works by Henri Fevre in the 1886 salon:

Degas lays bare for us the streetwalker's modern, swollen, pasty flesh. In ambiguous bedrooms of registered houses, where certain ladies fill the social and utilitarian role of great collectors of love, fat women wash themselves, brush themselves, soak themselves, and wipe themselves off in basins as big as troughs.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Lipton, *Looking into Degas: Uneasy Images of Women and Modern Life*, 169.

⁶⁷ Qtd. in Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France*, 171.



Figure 12: Degas, *The Tub*, pastel on paper, 1886.

Figure 13: Degas, *The Morning Bath*, pastel on paper, 1890.

Figure 14: Degas, *Admiration*, monotype print, 1876-77.

It is thus apparent that, despite his efforts, Degas was unable to conceal the true nature of his model nudes to the contemporary Parisian viewer. Though there existed few critics, such as Joris-Karl Huysmans, who noticed the ambiguity of the figures in that the place of the spectator is left undefined, leading them to argue the bather's position as the ordinary woman naked solely for herself, the large majority was in opposition to this supposed innocence of the bather and protested the obscenity they saw in Degas' exposition, immediately linking the pastels to representations of prostitution.⁶⁸ In a sarcastic remark about the status of Degas' models, for example, critic J. M. Michel exclaimed: "Don't forget that the Exhibition is two steps from the corner of the boulevard!"⁶⁹

Yet still, no matter what the chosen theme, Degas' most frequent medium of choice was the pastel due to its ability to capture the fleeting moment and convey the essence of his subject –

⁶⁸ Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, ed., "Joris-Karl Huysmans (1848-1907) on Degas's Pastels," in *Art in Theory 1815-1900: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 893-895.

⁶⁹ Heather Dawkins, *The Nude in French Art and Culture, 1870-1910* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 68.

female sensuality. Indeed, while Lautrec depicted the hyper-sexuality of the Parisian *femme gallante*, Degas' desire for impersonal ambiguity made it so that his images rather depicted the deviant *sensuality* of the *femme de maison*. Even the critics of the bather pastels were, in the words of Huysmans, "struck by the life radiating from [the] pastels," despite their disgust from the bold subject. Degas' use of the pastel medium was therefore instrumental in capturing the essence of the prostitutes and of his encounters in the brothel houses: "...what we should look for in these works is the unforgettable truth of their characters, captures in broad, confident lines, with lucid, controlled enthusiasm, with tempered fever."⁷⁰

Degas' common repetition of and experimentation with a single image in different mediums allows for a comparison between Degas' ability to communicate this desired sensuality in the pastel medium versus the other mediums he utilized, including oil paint, monotype, and charcoal. This again establishes the value of the pastel in expressing character. A telling example of the pastel's advantageous nature exists in Degas' three-time repetition of the image of a woman finishing her bath, each a different medium yet given the identical title, *Getting out of the Tub*. Here, he takes his controversial bather type and depicts her in the midst of her bathing routine: the bathwater still filling the tub, the prostitute bather stands and bends down to reach for a towel to dry.

Degas' first experiment with this figure and setting created between 1877 and 1880 was a monotype print, a medium typical of his explicit depictions of brothel life (see Figure 15). This image, with its array of black stains and imprecise contours, conveys a more crude reflection of

⁷⁰ Huysmans in Harrison, "Joris-Karl Huysmans," 895.



Figure 15: Degas, *Getting out of the Bath*,
monotype print, 1877-80.



Figure 16: Degas, *Getting out of the Bath*,
charcoal and pastel drawing, 1885-88.

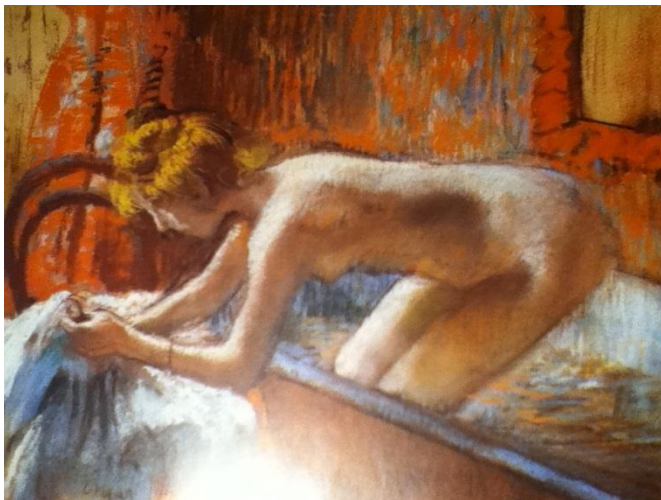


Figure 17: Degas, *Getting out of the Bath*,
pastel on paper, 1888.

the Parisian prostitute. Her features are hazy, contours indistinct, and posture rough. In this sense, the image tends to mirror the disapproving Parisian public view of the streetwalkers and women for sale. Overall, instead of communicating the bather's sexuality, the monotype communicates the stereotypical crudity associated with the prostitute.

Degas' second experiment with the bather finishing her bath was a sketch-like drawing completed between 1885 and 1888; just a few years after the first rendition (see Figure 16). This time, however, he chose to work with the figure in black charcoal and grey pastel and to leave out her setting, focusing only on the posture itself and the reaching motion for the towel. The end result of his shift in medium was a slight expression of feminine sensuality. Unlike the monotype figure, this bather has a definite curvature enhanced by the greater sense of line and contour. Known to rely on artistic strictness of line and draftsmanship, Degas' more accurate definition of the curves of his bather was instrumental due to its role in communicating the sensuality of the figure by showing the fruitful characteristics of her figure – now, one can distinguish the breasts, the thighs, the neck, and so on.⁷¹ Complementing the line quality of the pastel stick and charcoal pencil, Degas then shaded his figure tenderly so to foil and balance the grooves of her curves. Still, the image was missing something significant in its portrayal of sensuality.

Fortunately, the void found in the charcoal and pastel rendering was filled in Degas' final version of the woman finishing her bath, a wholly pastel work completed in 1888, again just a few years after the last trial (see Figure 17). Perhaps realizing the effect the pastel had on the

⁷¹ Degas was an admirer of the classical artistic tradition, following the footsteps of his predecessors (such as Ingres) and promoting the value of drawing. In fact, to his students, it was recorded that Degas advised: "Make a drawing. Start it all over again, trace it. Start it and trace it again." This also supports his reasons for creating repetitive images. For more information, see Maheux, *Degas, Pastels*, 23.

prior work, Degas took advantage of the textural effects of the pastel medium to add a sense of depth that makes the bather come to life. Each component of the composition was unique in surface grain: the skin is filled with small patches of peach and white to dramatize the curvature; the hair is drawn with twisting strokes of blonde pastel; the water ripples display an array of color; and the background curtain hangs with a roughness mirrored by the abstracted course rendering of the cloth. With the fusion of line and color possible through the utilization of the pastel grain, the conveyance of the bather's sensuality is more fully communicated and the image finally complete. Overall, this illustration of an evolution of an image is key due to the successive nature of the images in communicating the hidden sensuality, although still deviant to the norm, of the prostitute bather owed to the increasing harmony of color, tone, and texture that came with the utilization of the pastel medium.⁷²

It is apparent that Degas recognized the crudity and sensual shortcomings of the monotype print created in his initial experiment with the bathing figure discussed, and in turn understood the versatility and artistic gain achieved through the pastel medium throughout the *Getting out of the Bath* experience. Degas thus often enhanced his private monotype experiments with the pastel to heighten his subjects' sensuality, again proving the advantageous qualities of the pastel pigment over other mediums in capturing the essence of a figure.

Similar proof of the unique ability of the pastel to communicate his prostitute muses' character as in the *Getting out of the Bath* series is evident when placing, for instance, Degas'

⁷² It is recorded that this final pastel work was exhibited by Degas in 1888 in the gallery of famous art dealer Theo van Gogh, stealing the attention of the contemporary viewers. Degas' decision to exhibit that last experiment with this specific bather composition is in accordance to his public showing of his more ambiguous bathers over the crude prostitutes found in his monotypes. A conclusion can therefore be made that the sensuality portrayed by Degas through the use of the pastel medium was advantageous for the artist's aim to humanize the prostitute as well. For more information, see George T.M. Shackelford and Xavier Rey, *Degas and the Nude* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts Publications, 2011), 153.

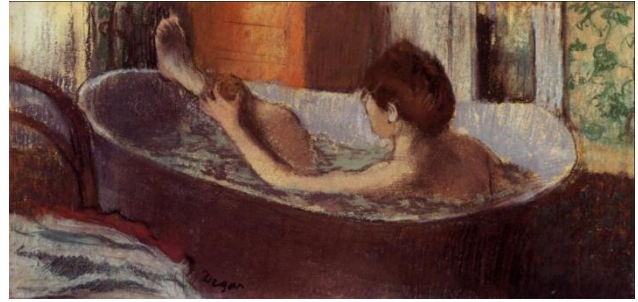
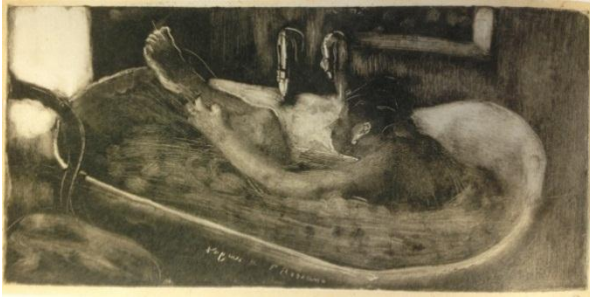


Figure 18: Degas, *Woman in a Bathtub*, monotype print, 1880-85.

Figure 19: Degas, *Woman in Her Bath, Sponging Her Leg*, pastel over monotype print, 1883-84.

Woman in a Bathtub (Figure 19), a traditional monotype print, in opposition to his *Woman in Her Bath, Sponging Her Leg* (Figure 18), a monotype print heightened with pastel. Like the previous example, these prints offer a succession of an image finalized with the pastel medium. Recognizing the crudity of the monotype print, Degas took to enhancing the print with the pastel medium to heighten the figure's sensuality, again proving the advantage of the pastel over other mediums in capturing the character of his subject. The evolution in medium in these images, however, is unique in that the pastel version was worked on a second impression from the same plate as the original image. In other words, instead of reworking the composition anew as with the *Getting out of the Bath* experiments, Degas simply heightened the composition through the pastel medium with the aid of the original monotype matrix as a tonal base. The weaker second impression, which was most likely faint and shadowy from the initial printing, allowed Degas to completely conceal the monotype base with the pastel and in turn manipulate the original composition. In the second reworking, Degas removes the faucets, opens the room by moving the wall backwards, and changes the overall form of the bather into a more stylized idea of sexuality. The adjustments are completed according to formal balance. Thus, while the monotype

is very utilitarian, the pastel work is slightly changed to exaggerate the sensual qualities of the bather over the inherent vulgarity of her profession.

Degas' method of heightening monotypes with pastel to bring out the sexuality of his subject was not unique to his bather prostitute images, however. Similar examples exist with, for example, monotypes depicting Degas' famous ballerinas. The ballet, once a celebrated art form, had declined in renown by the late nineteenth-century. As Paris began to modernize and the line between decent living and clandestine prostitution began to merge, the ballet too became a scene of erotic fantasy. It became known that ballerinas were chosen more so for their beauty than their dancing skill, and, due to the unpopularity of dance at the time, the ballerinas took advantage of their perceived sensuality as clandestine prostitutes.⁷³ One dancer had commented: "What's the use of doing yourself so much harm, when you can please just as well with much less effort? If you haven't a good figure, you must use your talent, but if you are pretty and well formed, that makes up for everything." Yet another dancer, referring more explicitly to the ill-reputed association of dance, commented: "As soon as she [the dancer] enters the Opera, her destiny as a whore is sealed; there she will be a high class whore."⁷⁴ Thus, since the ballerina too was a profession associated with clandestine prostitution in late nineteenth-century, Degas was again confronted with the feat of expressing the ballet dancers' sexual eminence.⁷⁵

⁷³ Lipton, *Looking into Degas: Uneasy Images of Women and Modern Life*, 13.

⁷⁴ Ballerinas qtd. in Lipton, *Looking into Degas: Uneasy Images of Women and Modern Life*, 79.

⁷⁵ Proof of Degas' conscious acknowledgement of the ballerina as a prostitute type is found in the concluding line of his "Little Dancer" sonnet, which reads "She remembers her race, her descent from the streets." For more information, see Lipton, *Looking into Degas: Uneasy Images of Women and Modern Life*, 88.

One instance of a ballet monotype reworked with pastel is with Degas' *Three Ballet Dancers*, a traditional monotype print, pitted against his *Dancer Onstage with a Bouquet*, a monotype print heightened with pastel. In *Three Ballet Dancers*, Degas creates what seems to be a rough impression of a scene of dancers. Although the facts are all there, there is no outstanding message



Figure 21: Degas, *Three Ballet Dancers*, monotype print, 1878-80.



Figure 20: Degas, *Dancer Onstage with a Bouquet*, monotype heightened by pastel, 1876.

communicated through the monotype; instead, the monotype is rather bland, failing to evoke any real response due to the figural and textural limitations of the medium itself. The pastel dancing scene in Degas' *Dancer Onstage with a Bouquet*, on the other hand, overcomes the limitations of the monotype print by introducing the pastel detailing to enhance the effect of the fleeting moment – the frills of the tutu, the velvety peach of her skin, the protruding collar bone. These elements in turn invite the viewer into the scene and successfully express the youthful spirit and playful sensuality of the ballerina.

Yet while Degas' recognition of the benefits of the pastel medium in enhancing his monotype and charcoal images is undeniable, the question of his reasoning for his decision to utilize pastel over the most academically-recognized medium, oil paint, still stands. An analysis of a fully pastel work pitted against a fully oil work completed within the same year with an



Figure 22: Degas, *The Ironer*, pastel on paper, 1869.

Figure 23: Degas, *The Ironer*, oil on canvas, 1869.

identical theme (the ironer laundress) is therefore pivotal in proving the preference for pastel when communicating sexual evocation within the *oeuvre* of the pastel master. A comparison will therefore be made between Degas' 1869 pastel and oil works titled "The Ironer."

This comparison draws in the place of the ironer laundress as clandestine prostitute. Although it is a radical thought in today's day and age, ironer laundress was actually among the most sexualized professions associated with covert prostitution as a means for supplementary income. The industry for laundering employed as much as a third of the Parisian working class under very harsh conditions of heat, leading to an etiquette which called for male fantasy. Indeed, when in the ironer's ground-floor shops, the excessive heat of the irons and hard labor of the ironers led the ironer laundresses to violate standards of femininity as they oftentimes

removed their garments and left their breasts exposed to the passing Parisian in attempt to escape the unbearable temperature.⁷⁶ Even outside the laundress shop, the young girls sent on errands to the client's homes became fantasy figures in the eyes of the bourgeoisie man as she "picked up and delivered laundry in what could become the provocative intimacy of bachelors' rooms."⁷⁷

Representations of ironer laundresses in the visual arts of the late nineteenth century are therefore among the most sexualized of the female professions. Within Degas' *oeuvre*, they become the most genre-like images as they tend to tell the story of the laundress's hardships.⁷⁸ It is with the pastel medium, however, that the expression of the setting, the personality of the figure, and the story itself is seen best. In Degas' oil version of *The Ironer*, the figure is presented as static, a studio model without a story to tell. In the words of art historian Eunice Lipton, she "looks out at us immobilized, as if momentarily stunned."⁷⁹ The opaqueness of the oil paint and rough application of layers fails to communicate both the exhaustion of the ironer and the harsh conditions of her setting. The pastel version of *The Ironer*, on the other hand, contrasts the oil rendition in its dynamic representation of the story behind the ironer laundress. Through the textured application of the pastel stick, Degas traps in the heat of the laundress shop, as communicated with the vibrating white energy and movement emanating from the figure. Assumed to be representative of the high temperature in the room, this aura of heat, accomplished with the rubbing of the side of the pastel stick directly on the paper, draws in the viewer as if he is there in the shop of the laundress. The exhausted expression on the ironer's three-quarter profile and resting stance beside her table emphasize the harsh conditions and

⁷⁶ Lipton, *Looking into Degas: Uneasy Images of Women and Modern Life*, 127-128.

⁷⁷ Lipton, *Looking into Degas: Uneasy Images of Women and Modern Life*, 131.

⁷⁸ Lipton, *Looking into Degas: Uneasy Images of Women and Modern Life*, 135.

⁷⁹ Lipton, *Looking into Degas: Uneasy Images of Women and Modern Life*, 139.

fatiguing labor. The sexuality of the figure is nonetheless put into focus with the effect of the strikes of pastel on the woman's chest, drawing attention to her sweating chest and sexual availability.

It is thus apparent that Degas recognized the benefits of the pastel medium in both his implicit and explicit representations of prostitution in the newly-modernized capital city. Within both his entirely-personal crude monotype prints and his ambiguous public representations of clandestine prostitution, he turns to the pastel for expressions of essence and character, and more specifically sexual availability. His works therefore become a picture of the desired covert sexuality in late-nineteenth century Paris with the aid of the pastel.

THE PREVALENCE OF THE PASTEL MEDIUM

Though historically undervalued as a working art medium, pastel prevailed over competing mediums in its ability to convey sexuality as essence of character in late nineteenth-century Paris. The textural and tonal qualities of the pastel medium, such as its fusion of color and line, are key in its ability to capture a source of inspiration almost instantaneously. This quality in turn made pastel a preferred medium for capturing the sexual quintessence of the sinful female in Paris at the close of the century, regardless of the artists' intention in production and the nature of his subject's sexual presence. This is not to say that other mediums *lack* effectiveness in communicating sexuality, or general essence of character, but rather than the intrinsically intimate characteristics of the pastel medium lend itself to a heightened portrayal of sexual intimacy and provocation.

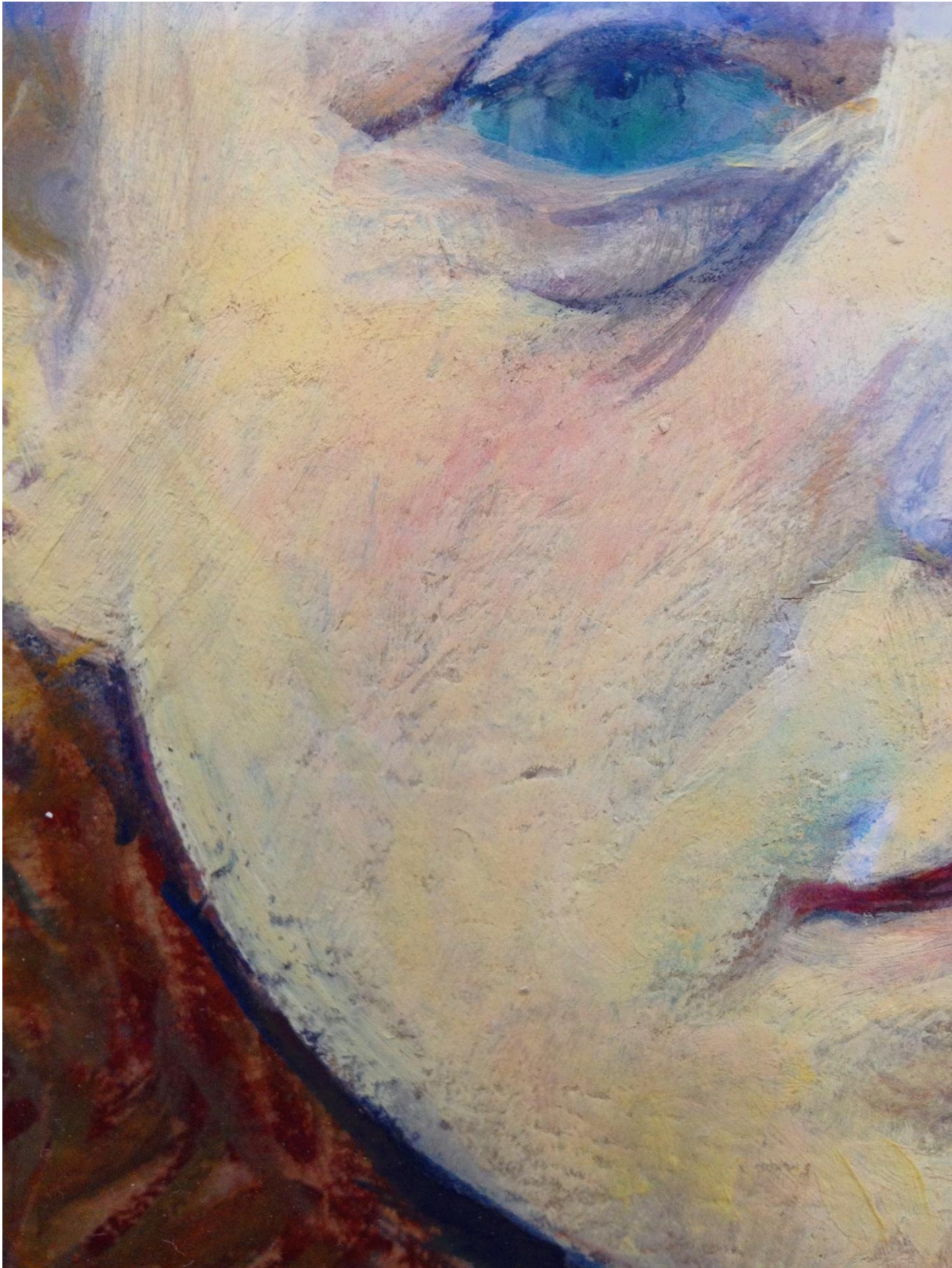
The question of whether the pastel conveys the essence of the person or the character they portrayed remains valid in that a legitimate point can be drawn that the hyper-sexuality of the prostitute was a stereotype placed upon her, which she then embraced. In the case of implicit renditions of prostitute life such as in Degas' work, however, the ambiguity of the figure lends to the ability to focus on the underlying essence of the figure herself, as well as her subsequent sensuality and promiscuity. Similarly, in the case of the *femme gallante* depicted in the work of Lautrec, the emotional proximity of the artist to his models and muses, and resultant extreme familiarity with the life of the Parisian prostitute allows for an honest conveyance of the true character of the subject, both in her theatrical sexuality and her grim condition.

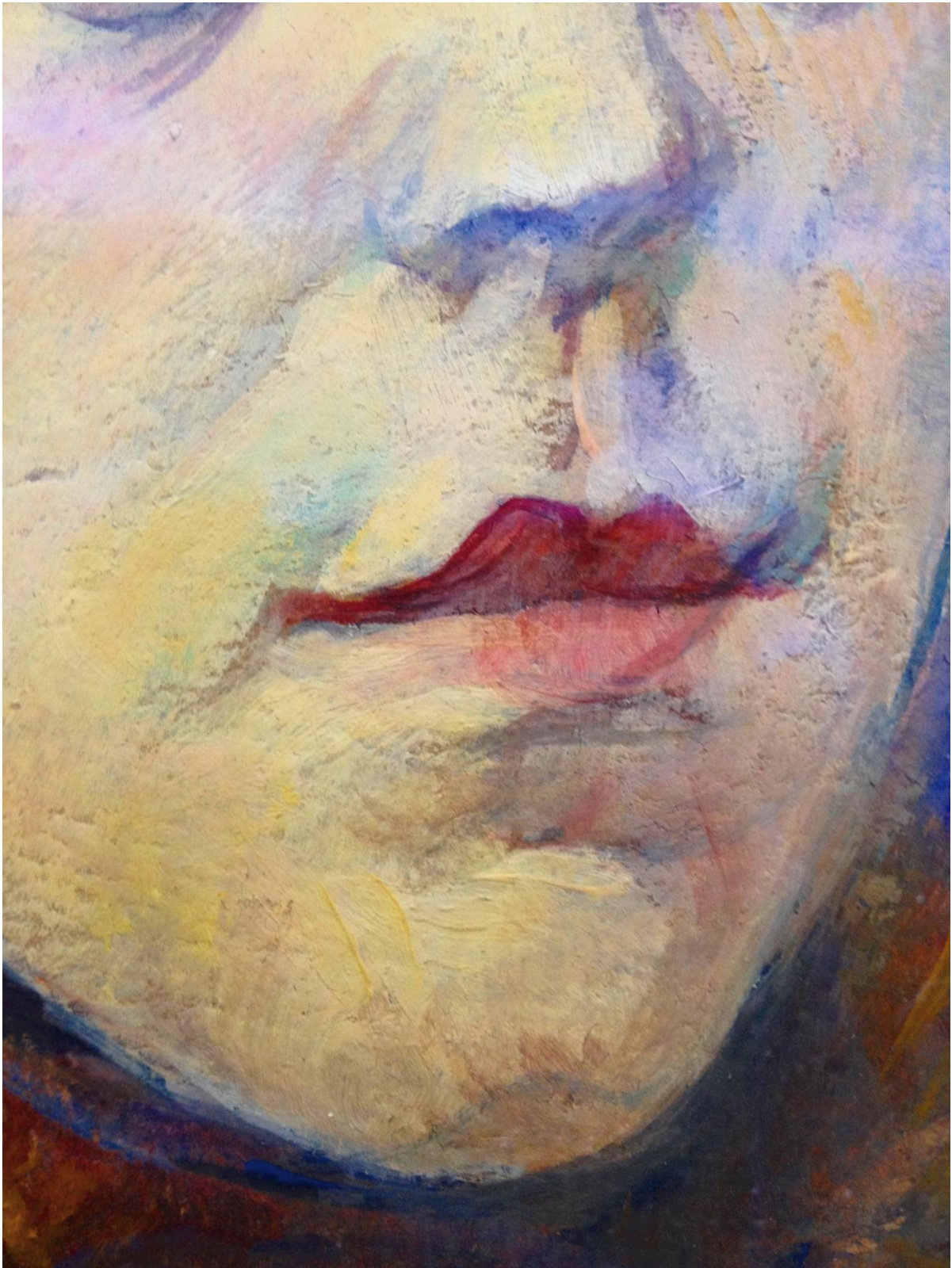
Overall, this research endeavor has, through the numerous visual analyses of both pastel and non-pastel works, elevated the importance of the traditionally secondary medium,

emphasizing the distinct advantages of the ephemeral pastel pigment and raising its overall credence. Still, this thesis serves as only an initial look into the abilities and uses of the pastel medium. As a whole, pastel is a relatively understudied medium in the history of art due to its role as a preliminary working tool. Though special attention is given to pastel in the study of the eighteenth century works on paper and within the *oeuvres* of specific artists, the abilities of the medium beyond the light palette and frivolity of the Rococo era are often overlooked as associations are made between the medium and Rococo themes. By examining the boom of the pastel medium in a wholly different era (late nineteenth-century Paris), it is evident that the transformative abilities of the medium go beyond what is implied by their association with Rococo art and status as a preliminary tool.

Therefore, there is still a wealth of knowledge to be discovered in regards to pastel. Even in late nineteenth-century Paris, the era in focus in this research endeavor, there is a plethora of artists outside of Lautrec and Degas whose pastel works are worthy of study and contemplation to reveal the fluencies of the pastel medium. For instance, although this thesis focused on Lautrec and Degas as the best examples of pastel communicating sexuality in the era in question, there is a depth and breadth of more examples of prostitution and female sexuality depicted with the aid of the pastel medium by equally popularized artists, such as Vincent van Gogh and Paul Cézanne. Hence, the purpose of this research is not only to highlight the importance of the pastel medium, but to promote scholarly research on its uses and abilities, thereby promoting knowledge of the medium's chief qualities and encouraging its use in contemporary visual culture.

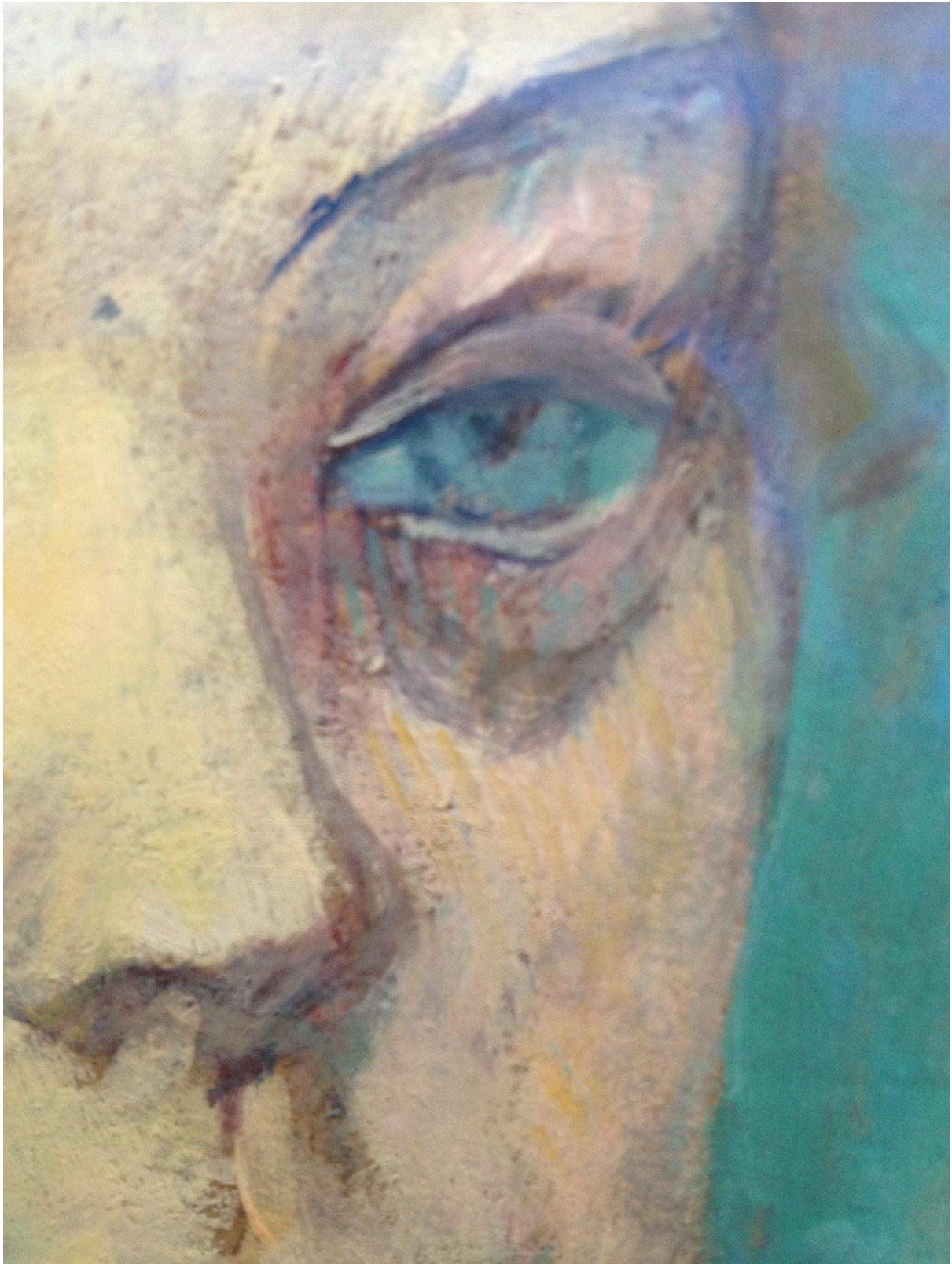
**APPENDIX: DETAILS OF LAUTREC'S
MAY MILTON (1895) (PASTEL ON PAPER)**

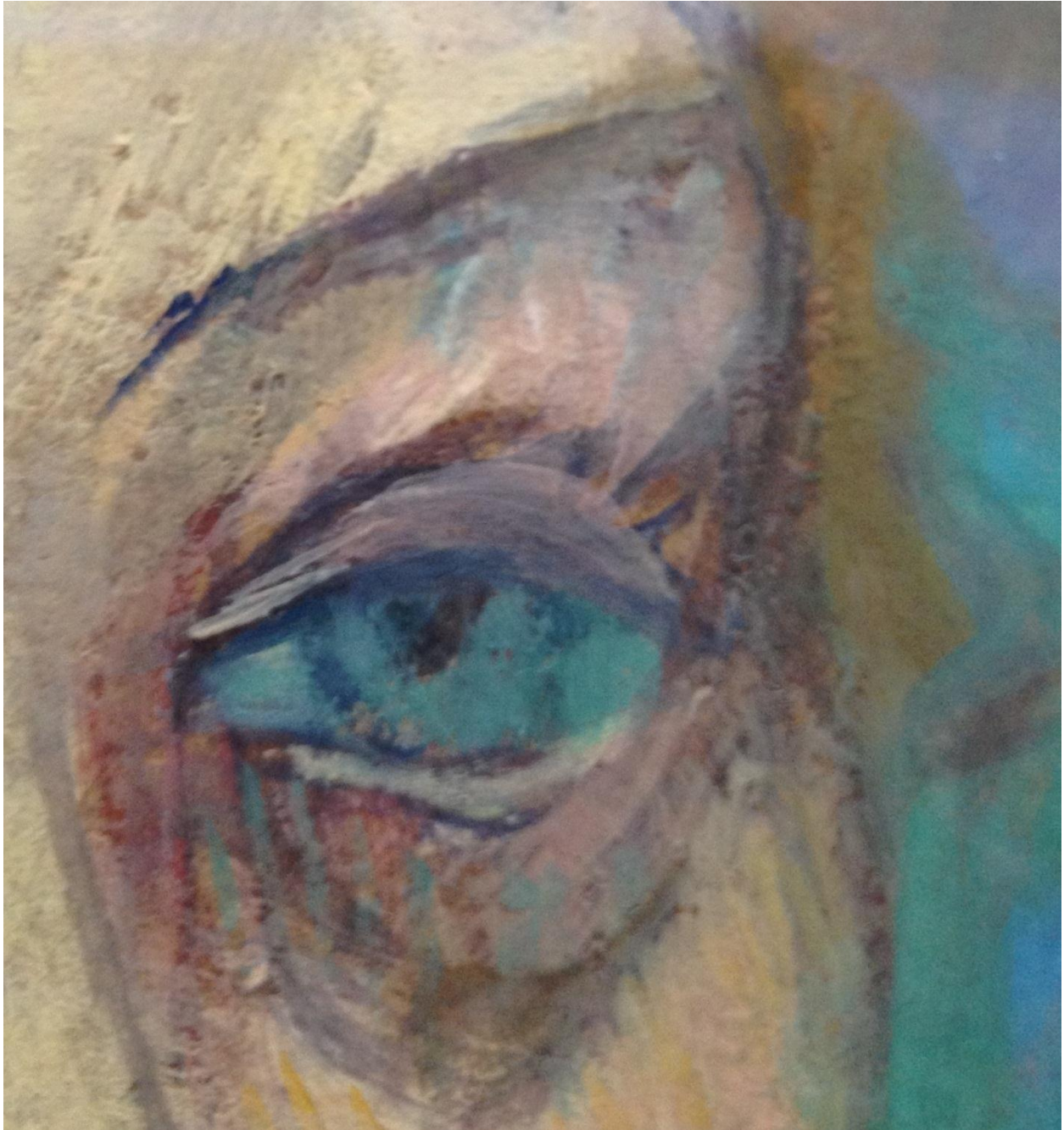


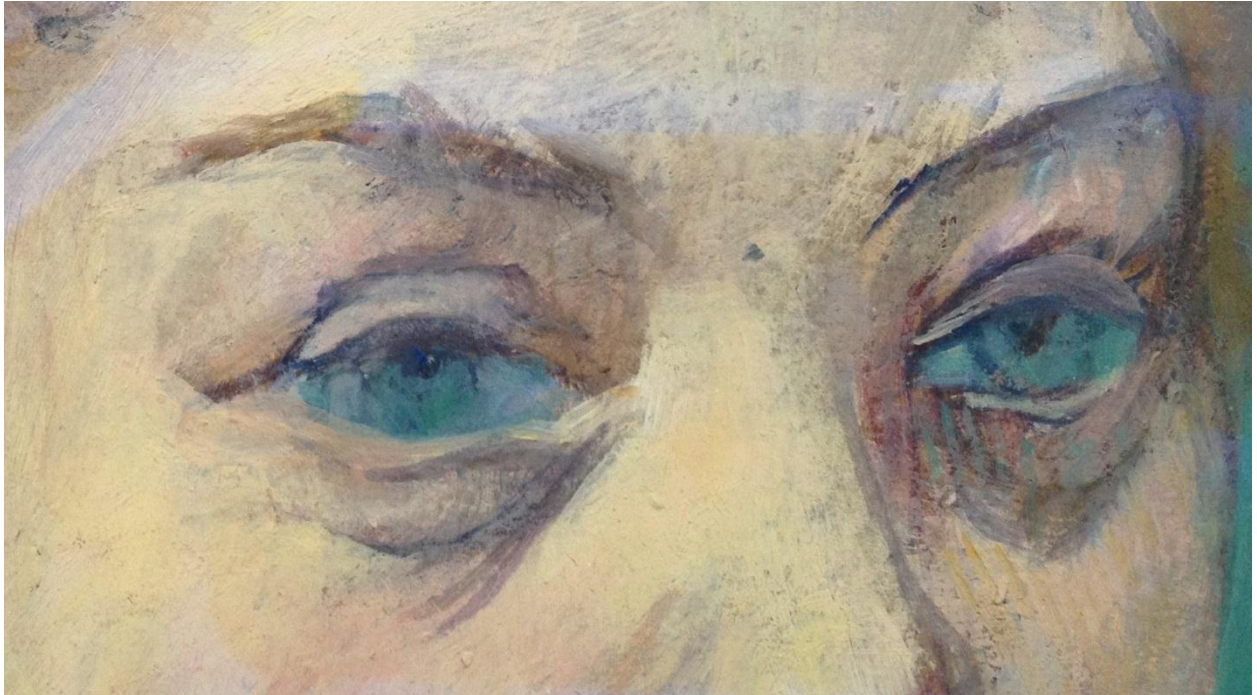












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