

PRESS RELEASE

# A GIFT FROM THE STÄDELSCHER MUSEUMS-VEREIN: THE STÄDEL RECEIVES PROMINENT WORKS BY GUIDO RENI AND EDGAR DEGAS FOR ITS BIRTHDAY

**GUIDO RENI (1575–1642), *THE ASSUMPTION OF THE VIRGIN*, CA. 1596/97;  
EDGAR DEGAS (1834–1917), *STUDY OF A NUDE (ÉTUDE DE NU)*, CA. 1888–92**

**Frankfurt am Main, 21 January 2015.** Frankfurt's Städel Museum, founded in 1815, has started its anniversary year with two exceptional new acquisitions – *The Assumption of the Virgin* of 1596/97 by Guido Reni (1575–1642), and the precious *Study of a Nude (Étude de Nu)* (1888–92), a drawing by Edgar Degas (1834–1917). Both works are entering the collection as special birthday presents from the Städel'scher Museums-Verein. The purchasing funds for the Reni painting were raised entirely by means of a successful donation drive and the outstanding dedication of numerous members of the association founded in 1899. The acquisition of the Degas drawing was made possible by a single donation from a Frankfurt patron of the arts.

In the Städel's Old Masters collection, Reni's *Assumption of the Virgin* closes a major gap in the area of early Italian Baroque painting. Executed on copper, this gem of a painting is one of the few surviving early works by Reni, an artist of key significance for the development of Baroque painting in Bologna and Rome whose works still contribute strongly to shaping our image of the Italian Baroque today. Degas's *Study of a Nude (Étude de Nu)* dates from the final phase of the artist's career and is an important milestone on the way to the modern art of the twentieth century. The work represents a valuable enhancement to the nineteenth-century French drawing holdings of the Städel Museum's Department of Prints and Drawings.

“The continual expansion of the Städel collection is one of our association's chief goals. Since its founding in 1899, the Museums-Verein has already been responsible for the purchase of more than one thousand prestigious artworks. We are very proud and happy that – thanks to the exceptional support of many of our members – we

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have now succeeded in fulfilling this great wish for the Städel on its two-hundredth birthday”, commented Sylvia von Metzler, chairman of the Städtischer Museums-Verein.

“For the past two hundred years, the development of the Städel collection has built on the dedicated patronage of many citizens. The two most recent acquisitions not only represent superb additions to our holdings and definitive works in the history of European art, but are also a living symbol of art patronage. The Städtischer Museums-Verein and its members are more active than ever before – their generosity fills me with the utmost respect and gratitude.

Whereas the donation campaign for the purchase of the painting by Guido Reni received generous support from Fritz and Waltraud Mayer, Ibeth Biermann, Dieter and Ingrid Seydler as well as a large number of further large and small donations from association members and sponsoring institutions, the acquisition of the Degas drawing was made possible by a single donation from a Frankfurt patron of the arts. The total volume of the two purchases amounts to some two million euros.

**GUIDO RENI (1575–1642)**

***THE ASSUMPTION OF THE VIRGIN, CA. 1596/97***

**OIL ON COPPER, 58 X 44.4 CM**

In the seventeenth century, Guido Reni was one of Europe's most successful and most highly celebrated painters. His art was greatly in demand among prestigious patrons of the nobility and the clergy. His influence made itself felt above all in the religious imagery of European painting, which it continued to change and shape even after the Baroque epoch had come to an end.

Executed around 1596/97, Reni's painting places the Virgin at the pictorial centre. She is surrounded by angels and painted in the canonical colours – with a red robe, a blue mantle and a white veil. She floats on a throne of clouds, her arms spread out wide, her gaze lifted heavenward in the transfigured manner typical of Reni. In art history, this form of depiction is referred to as the “himmelnde Blick” (“heaven-directed gaze”). As Reni's career continued, it was to become his trademark. A golden radiance fills the pictorial space. The celestial character of the light is an allusion to God the Father, who will receive Mary in heaven. For this composition, Reni took his orientation above all from two major altarpieces of the *Assumption of the Virgin* (1592–94) by Annibale Carracci (1560–1609) and his brother Agostino Carracci (1557–1602), today in the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Bologna. Both painted just a few years before Reni's work, they supplied the motivic inspiration for the figure of the Virgin seated on the throne of clouds with outspread arms, as well as for the angels surrounding her. At the same time, however, Reni's interpretation of the theme is not only entirely different, but can even be said to revolutionize the conventions for

depicting the motif. He has translated the pathos of Mary's dramatic ascension – a mode of representation learned from the High Renaissance and above all the late Raphael – into a gentle upward floating full of poetic harmony and a clear pictorial composition based on geometrical shapes. The three main figures – Mary and the two large angels in the foreground – form an isosceles triangle. In fact, Reni's work seems to anticipate the revolving oval compositions that would come to be favoured in Baroque painting. In its manner of depiction, the work embodies the transition from Late Mannerism to the Early Baroque.

“Reni's *Assumption of the Virgin* is a masterpiece and a key work of the Italian Baroque. After more than four centuries in private ownership, at the Städel it will be made accessible to the public for the first time in its history”, explained Bastian Eclercy, the head of the collection of pre-1800 Italian, French and Spanish painting at the Städel, who is very happy about the acquisition.

The painting's provenance can be traced without interruption back to the artist's lifetime. Already his early biographer Carlo Cesare Malvasia (1616–1693) reported in 1678 that among Reni's earliest works was an *Assumption of the Virgin* painted on copper in the Sampieri collection in Bologna – undoubtedly the very work now in the Städel's possession. It was presumably commissioned by the jurist Astorre di Vincenzo Sampieri, a canon of the Cathedral of San Pietro in Bologna and the owner of an important art collection. After being passed down in the family for centuries, in 1811 the painting found its way into the collection of Eugène de Beauharnais, Napoleon's viceroy and the later Duke of Leuchtenberg. In Munich it was Johann David Passavant (1787–1861) who catalogued the superb Leuchtenberg collection in 1851 and first had it reproduced in engravings. In 1917 the work was purchased by Nordiska, a Stockholm art dealer; sometime after 1925 it made its way from there into the collection of Rudolph Poeschel, where it verifiably remained until 1961. In that year, the *Assumption of the Virgin* entered a private Swiss collection by way of auction. Finally, in 2013 it was acquired by Jean-Luc Baroni, a London-based Old Masters dealer, at an auction carried out by Koller in Zürich; Baroni then sold it to the Städtelscher Museums-Verein in 2014. Thanks to the acquisition of Reni's *Assumption*, the Städel collection now reflects all the more clearly the key role played by Italy in the history of Baroque painting. In the Städel's large Italian gallery, the newly acquired masterpiece can be linked to a somewhat later painting by Reni, *Christ at the Column* (1604), but also to the most recent new addition to the Old Masters collection, Jusepe de Ribera's *Saint James the Greater*, for which the Städel has a donation by the patron Dagmar Westberg to thank. Owing to this happy coincidence, the Städel is now for the first time in a position to present the two most important roots of European Baroque painting with the aid of two superb works: whereas Ribera's *Saint James* stands for the school of Caravaggio, Reni's early *Assumption of the Virgin* represents the academy of the Carracci and the reforms introduced in painting around 1600.

## **EDGAR DEGAS (1834–1917)**

### **STUDY OF A NUDE (ÉTUDE DE NU), CA. 1888–92**

#### **CHARCOAL AND PASTEL ON PAPER, 55.8 X 36.8 CM**

Edgar Degas is among the most prominent French artists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. World famous for his portraits, ballet and jockey scenes, as well as figures of women bathing or combing their hair, he is today considered one of the pioneers of modern art. In the drawing acquired for the Städel Museum, Degas depicted a close-up view of a female body, but not in such a way as to parade his model to the viewer. On the contrary, this study demonstrates the quality of dissociated perception so typical of Degas's art, and takes it to its very limits: the artist has achieved a delicate interplay between respectful observation and sensual depiction. This late nude conveys an undeniable impression of plasticity and concentrated energy. In the process, Degas strips her of her individuality, while extracting from her form an immediacy and expressive power virtually classical in nature. "Edgar Degas returned to certain key themes again and again. His approach can be described as a process of the constant intensification of his artistic experiences. The nude drawing dating from the period between 1888 and 1892 refers the beholder to his paintings as well as his sculptural work, and is thus capable of standing for Degas in his entirety", observes Jutta Schütt, the head of the Städel Museum's collection of post-1750 prints and drawings.

The work bears the Degas estate stamp ("Lugt 658"). It remained in the artist's studio until his death in 1917 and was auctioned off with the rest of his estate in 1918. In the decades that followed it alternated between private collections and the art market in Belgium, New York (1949), London and California (since 1981). The Städel Museum's Department of Prints and Drawings has in its holdings a small but extremely high-quality group of nineteenth-century French drawings, among the best in Germany. Until now, Degas has been represented at the Städel by the early drawing *Portrait of Madame Gaujelin* (1867) and the monotype *Repos sur le lit* (ca. 1876/77). The new acquisition will soon be made available to interested visitors in the Study Hall of the Department of Prints and Drawings during the department's regular opening hours.

## **THE STÄDELSCHER MUSEUMS-VEREIN**

The Städelischer Museums-Verein, with whose aid both purchases were realized, has been supporting the museum since 1899. Its more than 7,600 members champion the cause of the Städel Museum as well as the Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung. Among the Städelischer Museums-Verein's chief aims is the continual expansion of the collections through the purchase of artworks. Since its founding, the association has already acquired more than one thousand works for the Städel.

## **200 YEARS STÄDEL**

When he committed his will to paper in 1815, Johann Friedrich Städel laid the cornerstone for Germany's oldest civic museum foundation. The 15th of March 2015 will be the two-hundredth anniversary of that momentous day. The Städel Museum will be honouring its anniversary all year long with a large number of top-notch exhibition and research projects, numerous prominent acquisitions and additions to the collection, a grand public celebration, and the major expansion of its education programme, especially in the digital realm.

### **Städel Museum**

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**Location:** Städel Museum, Schaumainkai 63, 60596 Frankfurt am Main

**Museum opening hours:** Tue, Wed, Sat and Sun 10 am – 6 pm, Thu and Fri 10 am – 9 pm

**Department of Prints and Drawings opening hours:** Wed 2 – 5 pm, Thu 2 – 7 pm, Fri 2 – 5 pm