

## Looking at Artists and their Art through Astrology

By Anne F. Schie

In this speech I have been looking into two old masters of the world of artistic painting, Caravaggio and Degas, their work and their life. Both have contributed tremendously in the history of art by their wonderful paintings I really do admire.

When I was working through Mod 4, one of the exercises was to deepen my self into a planet. I chose Saturn or rather he chose me.

At the same time in my art class I was copying Caravaggio "Sacrifice of Isaac" from the 1600 century. I realized then, how much Saturnian principles I was working with at this time. So when looking at Caravaggio I decided to emphasise most on him but also on Uranus due also to the fact that I do not know the exact time but only the day – 29<sup>th</sup> September 1571

### SHOWING "SACRIFICE OF ISAAC"

By working with this painting it became very obvious that there was no coincidence in how the motive was built up, there was a plan behind every line and every stroke of paint including a lot precision, patience and hard work. You can see how the lines go into the mouth of Isaac and the line of the knife match the direction of the branch.

When it comes to colour he always used black ground on his canvas, also for the flesh, limiting the force of the light to few areas. The medium we used was also the same as the artist used at that time, a medium that contained lead. It is a liquid you have to treat with respect and caution, it is poisons but it is the best I have ever painted with and gives a perfect result. Just like Saturn making lead into gold.

The motive is an old story, about Abraham who was tested by God nearly sacrificed his only son. Saturn is definitively about testing. Uranus in Capricorn shows him self with the shocking event for Isaac being nearly sacrificed- what a kind of new direction!!

### CARAVAGGIO'S BIRTH CHART

Saturn seems to me to play an important role in many artist lives. He is the one who is able to create structure out of chaos, to give tangible form to invisible and nebulous realms. Raw material can be crafted into something meaningful, useful and enduring. An innate awareness of perfection where we may hold high standards and sort out what is worthwhile and what is dross. He can inspire us to rise our game to aim high and achieve may be more than we had anticipated. To work hard and develop skills when it comes to material results and success. Saturn is also a strong father who can give us hard time and pain.

Saturn in Scorpio in the natal chart of Caravaggio is quite strong, but it is not exalted and with the conjunction to Mercury sextile Uranus in Capricorn, indicating an interest in the depth of the mind. By utilising this, his intellect and emotions in learning the real nature of the energies of creation he could become an innovative magician, which he actually did.

Saturn and Mercury may have made him able to think in realistic pattern and remember, to plan and think in form and structure. His technique was as spontaneous as his temper, and he worked with extraordinary speed, painting directly onto the canvas without even sketching out the main figures, as if he had by the SN and Moon in Aquarius trine Mercury in Scorpio had an inner knowledge – just knowing.

When he was about 13 years old in 1584 his mother died. Being at the age were transit Saturn was opposite natal Saturn there might have been some need for change and adjustments, and he returned to Milan and began his four- year apprenticeship to the Milanese painter Peterzano. In this period he had acquired exceptional technical facility.

At the age of 21 when transit Uranus made a waxing square to his natal Uranus Caravaggio was again ready for change, wanted more and left Milan for Rome, Italy's artistic and cultural centre indeed of the world at that time. He had already a reputation of being very skilled but the first few years were a struggle.

The Counter- Reformation, with Neptune square Pluto, was in full swing and there was a demand for paintings to fill the many huge new churches and palazzos being build. Caravaggio started out to copy religious paintings, which offered him board and lodging in return. In his spare time he painted whatever he wished and the picture "Boy Bitten by a lizard" is from this time, which seems to show the Saturn/Uranus sextile.

### **PICTURE OF "BOY BITTEN BY A LIZARD"**

The young boy is shown at the exact frozen moment of a sudden unforeseen pain, where he reacts and jerks his hand away. The work is a revolution in it self, making the advent of the instantaneous in painting which brakes with the conventional and being astonishing innovative. To paint like this Caravaggio became a master.

It also shows on a deeper level of how suddenly pain can occur and our ability to handle and control it. This reflects also the pain inherited in love, with the bare shoulders and the flower behind his ear there is a sexual flair here and he seems to be a prostitute.

In her book Saturn, A new look at an Old Devil Liz Green writes that things are never as they appear with Saturn, and wherever there is light there is shadow. Caravaggio was a famous master with light and shadow, a really re-newer of his time.

### **PICTURE OF "THE CALLING OF SAINT MATTHEW".**

He started to study lightning, and in this picture you can see a focused light source enters from the top right of the canvas as a steady diagonal path hitting the central scene. This is without reflections in a room with a single window being closed and the walls painted black. In this fashion the lit and shadowed areas are very light and very dark that give enormous three-dimensionality to the painting. With Saturn in Scorpio he

also created a kind of mysticism, with Christ symbolically called “the light of the world” bursting in unexpected pointing at Mathew with an imperious gesture.

Caravaggio was also a man of contradictions. He worked hard and concentrated for long periods of time, but due to his need for freedom he periodically mingled with friends and people in the street and involved him self into lot of trouble.

But it was actually among these people he found his models for his most famous religious paintings. He created a new language of the article realism, working with people less fortunate, with irregular, rough and characterful faces and showed them in recognisably contemporary surroundings.

What he did was bringing these people into art. By doing this, he created and communicated the reality and truth of human being, which was strictly against the tradition of the time where the models looked more like deities than human beings.

This may be explained by his Moon conjunct Chiron in Aquarius trine Mercury conjunct Saturn and trine Neptune (the Grand Trine)

### **PICTURE OF “DEATH OF THE VIRGIN”**

In this picture showing the death of Madonna together with Maria Magdalena and the Apostles. It is said that his model in this painting was a prostitute found dead in the river and when he portrayed the mother of Jesus in this kind of condition he created something that was totally unacceptable.

He was accused of being too realistic with his extreme naturalism, with the skin looking green in the process of decomposition showing also her dirty feet not covered by the blanket. By also covering the faces of the people sitting around the radiated sorrow in the picture became quietly diminished. Something that was discovered and also highly unacceptable by the bishops-the painting was a disgrace, and it was taken down from the altar and his relationship with the church became not the best.

He was an artist who somehow cut through the artistic convention of his time right down to the universal blood and bone of life. There was a strong need to be different bringing in the truth and reality of life among people specially from the streets by which he really shocked others.

It is said that with the exception of Michelangelo no other Italian painter exercised so grate an influence. After him painting could never be the same again.

In the aftermath of the Renaissance, what begins in the work of Caravaggio is, quite simply, modern art.

## Edgar Degas

And so on to Degas. I bet most of you have seen his wonderful ballet paintings!

### PICTURE OF BALLET

Edgar Degas was a French artist famous for his painting, drawings, prints and sculptures, born in a wealthy family in Paris 19<sup>th</sup> of July in 1834.

### BIRTH CHART

Looking now at his birth chart we can see that there is a strong emphasise of cardinal, the ability for direction of energy by braking new ground.

His Ascendant is in Aquarius and Chart rulers are Saturn and Uranus –Again this Saturn/Uranus strong combination that show us the real truth put into form and structure.

Independent and inventive, someone who needs freedom and room to grow. A revolutionary with a rational approach to the world. With also Mercury, Jupiter and Chiron angular, my emphasise here is not only on the cart rulers.

Saturn is in Libra in the 8<sup>th</sup> ruling 12<sup>th</sup> and co-ruling 1<sup>st</sup>. Indicating a person who could be determined and eager to build knowledge, deeply structured and creative, disciplined and professional, but also at times swing to the side of feeling awkward and unable hampering him-self.

He painted his paintings all over again and was never satisfied with the result, which gave him a lot of frustration at times. Disliked to be criticised so in the beginning he kept his painting out of exhibitions, within his own control.

Uranus is in its own sign of Aquarius in 1<sup>st</sup> ruling 1<sup>st</sup>. May not indicate an ordinary life. Highly original, creative and inventive capable of insight who also created new ideas into his field of interest. A person who could not cope of being a follower needing to go his own way. Degas was a man who all the time experimented with different tools in his work-pastels, pencils, paint and clay and he produced quite a lot of artistic work through his life.

He was absolutely a man of contradictions. Going into his studio one could find him shuffling about in his slippers dressed like a pauper, his trousers hanging never buttoned. And yet this was a man who could be a dandy, whose manners were the most distinct, a man who spent his evenings in the wings at the Opera.

There is a strong emphasise on the 4<sup>th</sup> house, 3planets and 2 of them angular conjunct the IC and involved in a Grand Trine and two T-Squares. The 4<sup>th</sup> is about our foundation, family and history. By being ruled by Venus in Virgo this may also indicate that Degas was raised in a family of intellectual who valued the tangible work of art. A wealthy family that made him different and at times like an outsider among his artistic friends. His Jupiter, ruling 11<sup>th</sup>, and Chiron are conjunct IC. With also Mars here he was strongly rooted in his family who supported him also financially when he was challenged in his aspiration to take another life direction, not following his father

footsteps something he first obeyed. This may be explained, by his Grand Trine and the Uranus, Mars, Mercury T-square, Mars rules also the 10<sup>th</sup>

His Sun is in Cancer in 6<sup>th</sup> with an opposition to Neptune in 12<sup>th</sup>. This seems also to be a house axis of emphasise since both Sun and Moon are involved.

His Sun shows his focus on work with a desire to be skilled really nurturing his creative projects of his hart.

Sun rules the 7<sup>th</sup> so relationships may have to be part of it and it did but that seemed to of a more professional level.

He used a lot of live female models for his work and studied them carefully specially when creating the dancers.

He said: " Why I never married? Well I was always afraid that my wife might look at one of my paintings and say: " Mmmm, very nice, dear ...."there is love and there is paintings. And we only have one heart".

With Saturn in Libra in 8<sup>th</sup> and the tight Chiron-Venus square, this may only be part of the truth.

Mercury in Leo is conjunct the Descendant and rules, 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>. May show his deep interest to interact with others in order to learn the art of drawing and painting to develop his artistic knowledge in which he could be unique.

He met Jean August Dominique Ingress in 1855, a person he revered, and whose advice he never forgot

"Draw lines young man and still more lines, both from life and from memory, and you will become a good artist".

At this time his progressed Moon was in Libra in the 9<sup>th</sup> squaring his natal Moon in Capricorn in 12<sup>th</sup>. So there seems to have been a hunger to expand and build more knowledge by interacting with others. He spent a lot time in museums and copied the old masters over and over again, he studied movement, inner life and pain of other people.

Something he shows in his paintings.

Actually, he started out as a historical and portrait painter and the first work I will show is the Bellelli Family.

### **PICTURE OF "THE BELLELLI FAMILY"**

This is an extraordinarily ambitious work. What looks like an unruffled family life, turn out to reveal a psychological contrast through Degas inclusion of the Baron. The Baron is seated with his back to us at the right-hand edge of the composition, and has no other real presence than to counterbalance the group of mother and daughters. The mother and wife is the focus of attention. The picture lays bare the frustration of that marriage which was probably an arranged one by highlighting the distance between the father

and the females of the family. Degas has also given Giulia special attention. Through her bodily posture she is allied with her mother, but she is looking sideways to her father.

Capturing the moment in this way enables Degas to show a sense of immediate presence. For the first time we see an artist explore the isolation of the individual, a subject Degas was to examine in every walk of society.

His chart shows quite a bit of psychological insight. His Moon is in Capricorn in 12<sup>th</sup> ruling the 6<sup>th</sup> and according to Sasportas the Moon in 12<sup>th</sup> the person is like a psychic vacuum cleaner sucking in what is circulating in the atmosphere. Supported also by Pluto in 3<sup>rd</sup> ruling 10<sup>th</sup>. Owing these ability he was also able to put his serious depth of understanding into structure and order in his creative work.

When he started on this ambitious painting, his progressed Sun was in Cancer in the 7<sup>th</sup> house so there seems to be an inner focus on family relationships at this time.

Reinforced also by transit Saturn in Gemini the 4<sup>th</sup> house

When he was working with the painting transit Uranus in 4<sup>th</sup> was squaring his natal Uranus in 1<sup>st</sup>. The family he painted was part of his own by the baroness being his aunt. And there seems to have been some family surprises that gave him deeper insight necessary to illustrate, because during his work, he re-arranged the composition and the painting and turned out to be totally different than first expected.

He finished the painting in 1860 when his progressed Mercury was station and about to go direct and his progressed ASC had just turned into Aries. This is surely to be considered as an early masterpiece of those years.

After his 1<sup>st</sup> Saturn return there were some change of direction. It seems now to be the time where he realized that his preference was for painting modern subjects and he tried to engage more directly with the present than the past. He became a classic painter of modern art bringing with him all his knowledge acquired from the old masters. With Mercury angular he seemed also to be interested in studying the movements of others, and he started to paint horses and horse riding but most off all he became famous for his ballet paintings.

## **PICTURE OF BALLET**

Degas was not alone in pursuing a new type of art at the beginning of 1870, which marks the birth of the Impressionism. To Degas this was really a gradual process and for such shift in emphasise, he was well prepared. May be also due to his progressed MC moved into the 12<sup>th</sup> and IC into 6<sup>th</sup> -new creative focus of interest. He was an acute observer, a consummate draughtsman and possessed remarkable power of detachment.

Degas increased his output dramatically during the 1870s due to the interest of his work, and at the age of 37 what captivated the artist most at this time was the ballet to which he remained in thrall to the rest of his life.

At first Degas kept his distance just viewing the performance from the auditorium but with Pluto in 3<sup>rd</sup> trine Mercury and time he finally gained admittance to backstage where he could observe the dancers closer.

Observation of movements led to the construction of forms in movements. By being admitted to the backstage the artist learned about the art of classical dance and the technical aspects. He also observed the life of ballerinas from the earliest stage of their development as children, known as rats, to the highest level of prima ballerina. Above all there was the physical commitment of dancers working to the point of exhaustion, injury or collapse. In these respect there might be said that ballet was a metaphor for Degas' own practice as an artist and this association became stronger the longer he engaged with the ballet.

### **SHOWING SKETCHES OF DANCERS**

Degas was really a hard worker and he drew hundreds of sketches – rapid studies in black chalk or charcoal. There was no attempt to prettify or glamorize the ballet, Dancers of all age perspire, grimace, ach, groan, showing the real truth. He depicted them one by one and arranged them together in his paintings. Not very impressionistic but then he insisted on being called a realist.

### **BALLET DANCERS**

In 1873/74 when transiting Neptune squared his natal Sun and Neptune his father died with whom he had a good relationship due to the early loss of his mother. Right after that Degas learned that his brother had accumulated a lot of business debt and to perceive the family reputation Degas had to sell his house and art collection.

At the end of 1874 Transiting Pluto was conjunct his Mars effecting his Mercury, Mars Uranus T-square. This seems to have been a waking up time by which he had the possibility to express his individuality and creativity, to connect with his energy and will needed to implement and realise his desires to be visible and gain recognition from his work with Mars also ruling 10<sup>th</sup>)

Transit Uranus was also trine his MC, and Transiting Jupiter was trine his natal Mars so this indicate also a free flow of energy, creativity and courage in his profession.

Being now without, money he had to earn his living, and during this period he produced much of his greatest work, participating now in a lot of exhibitions. He increased on painting the ballet subjects because they were easy to sell- the collector were forever only wanting dancing girls. Degas referred them to be "his merchandise".

He was a man who changed in a lot of directions when it comes to his artistic work and Degas's authority as a draughtsman was demonstrated through his series of female nudes worked out now in pastel.

### **WOMAN BATHING**

They show women in their personal toilettes, bathing washing, drying them selves. It seems that Degas was let into some very private areas in which he could study the women figure and movements closer. The strokes that model the form are scribbled more freely than before and the backgrounds are simplified.

In 1880-ties when his progressed Sun entered his 8<sup>th</sup> house there seems to be a need to be alone and he retreated into his studio to work in isolation. He did not want to be interfered with due to the belief that painters could have no personal life. This may also have to do with his terrible difficult situation and sorrow by gradually losing his eyesight, which was so important for him in his work.

He started to work with clay, because this he could form and he said that

**“ Art is not a matter of what you see, but what you can make other people see.”**

By only reading about these artists, made everything flat and sometimes a bit impersonal, but looking at their birth chart made them come alive in a total different way.

It gives flesh to the bones and life to the spirit. It is like coming into the inside of that person. Somehow, when working with Degas, I was invited in, as long as I treated his life with respect. Something I find is very important when working with Astrology.