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\$52 million Avrum Gray gift to Purdue University



Purdue University has accepted a major collection of sculptures by prominent French impressionist artist Edgar Degas as a donation from Chicago businessman Avrum Gray .

The collection includes 74 bronze works and features “La Petite Danseuse de Quatorze Ans (Little Dancer, Aged Fourteen),” one of the artist’s signature creations and most iconic works. Valued at more than \$21 million with a market value of as much as \$52 million, the collection represents the largest gift in the history of Purdue’s College of Liberal Arts.

“Art at Purdue will thrive as an essential dimension of a leading institution of higher learning,” said Purdue President Mung Chiang. “The visionary generosity from Av Gray brings the largest collection of Degas sculptures to our campus, and we are truly excited about the transformational impact to the creation of beauty by Boilermakers.”

After graduating from Purdue, Gray established a successful career in the automotive industry, money management and venture capitalism. He was honored with an Outstanding Mechanical Engineer Award in 2019.

Gray also began building his art collection soon after leaving the university, beginning with sculptures and works on paper from artists he liked. Approximately 14 years ago, Gray had the opportunity to purchase the Degas collection, which he displayed in his suburban Chicago home for more than a

decade before deciding to downsize, which prompted him to donate the works to Purdue.

This is the second major gift Gray has made to the university. In 2006, Gray and his late wife Joyce established the Avrum and Joyce Gray Directorship in Purdue's Burton D. Morgan Center for Entrepreneurship.

"Purdue was very good to me in one way in particular: Purdue taught me a way to think," Gray said. "I want people to enjoy (the sculptures) the way I have enjoyed them. I thought Purdue would be the place to do that. I was pleased to know Purdue was putting the collection on display and that it would bring to students an additional perspective of life and art that you just don't get when you're looking at gears and pulleys. I want people to be able to come, see, enjoy and learn."

Known primarily as a painter, Degas created 150 small wax, clay and plaster sculptures that were discovered in his studio when he died in 1917. In fact, the only figurine cast during his lifetime was a plaster of the "Little Dancer."

After the artist's death, his heirs elected to commission bronzes of 73 of these figures plus the larger "Little Dancer," which stands 39 inches high. In 1997-98, a foundry in Paris used these 1903 plaster molds to create the bronze pieces that Gray donated to Purdue.

An original "Little Dancer" and many of the other sculptures found in Degas' studio are now housed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. Purdue University Galleries is assembling plans to showcase the complete Gray collection in one location for a full year. An exhibit and dedication are being planned for the fall, and additional details will be announced soon.

"In his lifetime, these sculptures were tools for Degas to inform his paintings," said David A. Reingold, the Justin S. Morrill Dean of the College of Liberal Arts. "His way of working mirrors the way our STEM students prototype and build new products in their fields. By exposing all Purdue students to these works and another way of seeing the world, we can catalyze their growth as creative and innovative thinkers and problem solvers."

Purdue University is a top public research institution developing practical solutions to today's toughest challenges. Ranked in each of the last five years as one of the 10 Most Innovative universities in the United States by U.S. News & World Report, Purdue delivers world-changing research and out-of-this-world discovery.

Committed to hands-on and online, real-world learning, Purdue offers a transformative education to all. Committed to affordability and accessibility, Purdue has frozen tuition and most fees at 2012-13 levels, enabling more students than ever to graduate debt-free.

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