



Estelle

A Novel

by Linda Stewart Henley



Fiction - Historical - Personage

294 Pages

Reviewed on 07/28/2020

Book Review

Reviewed by Saifunnissa Hassam for Readers' Favorite

Linda Stewart Henley's historical fiction story *Estelle* is based on the real-life visit to New Orleans in 1872-1873 by Edgar Degas, the French Impressionist painter. The novel has two interwoven storylines. One storyline is about Degas's time in New Orleans with his relatives, the Degas-Musson families. *Estelle* Musson was Degas's cousin and sister-in-law. She is pivotal in helping him find his artistic path again when he was ready to give up. The second storyline is about a fictitious character, Anne Gautier, set in 1970-71. A recent art graduate, Anne inherits her Fontenot family home in New Orleans. In the attic, she discovers Degas's notebook with portrait sketches; Marguerite Fontenot's journal detailing Degas's unique painting style; and a painting of Sophie, Anne's great-great-great-grandmother. An intern at the Museum of Art in New Orleans, Anne is shocked when she discovers the museum has two identical paintings of Degas's famous portrait of *Estelle* Musson. Which one is real, which one a forgery?

I greatly enjoyed Linda Stewart Henley's *Estelle* for the personal and artistic journeys of the real-life Edgar Degas and the fictitious Anne Gautier. I liked the rich evocative details of New Orleans, past and present, bringing characters vividly to life. I liked the way Anne's character development is influenced by *Estelle* Musson's life. *Estelle* was going blind, but she faced challenges with inner strength and courage, always reaching out to help others. The novel's tension rises as Anne confronts several challenges. Her historic family home is vandalized in protest against the city's destruction of rundown historic French Creole neighborhoods. She is still uncertain of her path as an artist. She learns from her mistakes. Inspired by Degas's art and *Estelle*'s life, she paints people in their everyday life in the historic district. A captivating historical novel about art and the artist's journey!