

The Courtauld

Create a 3D theatre inspired by Edgar Degas



↑ Edgar Germain Hilaire Degas (1834-1917), Two Dancers on a Stage, 1874, Oil on Canvas, 46x61.5cm (Samuel Courtauld Trust) © The Courtauld

Degas and the Ballet:

Edgar Degas (1834-1917) was a French artist who lived in Paris in the second half of the 1800s. He is famous for his drawings, paintings and sculptures of ballet dancers. He was also interested in other subjects that involved movement, such as horse racing. He studied at a traditional art school in Paris, where he spent many hours drawing people from life and from artworks he admired.

In the 1870s Degas became friends with the Impressionist group of artists who were rebelling against older ways of painting. They used rough, visible brush marks to capture their experiences of Paris and landscapes beyond the city. While they were excited about capturing the effects of light and nature out-of-doors, Degas was most happy at the Paris Opéra House, where he had special access to draw the ballet dancers rehearsing and performing.

The ballerinas were usually young girls from poor families who worked hard to earn a living. Degas made sketches from life and then worked these up into paintings back in his studio. He sometimes paid dancers to model in his studio and made small wax sculptures of them to help him better understand difficult poses.

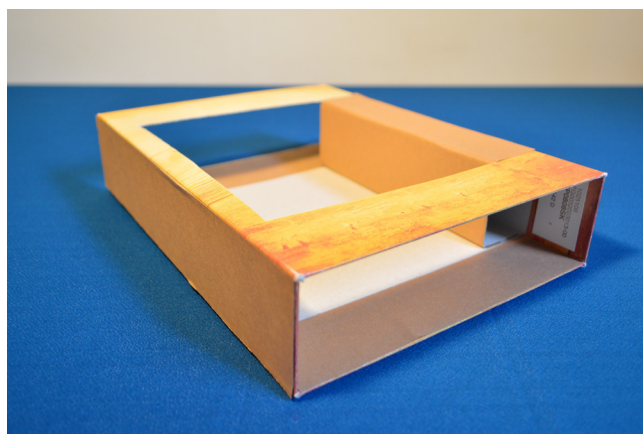
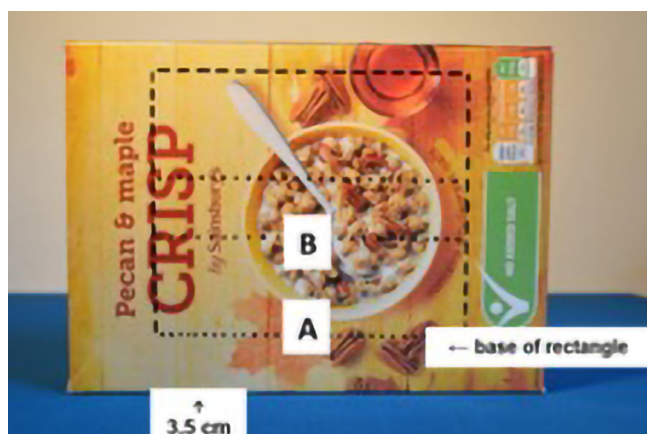
A Closer Look:

- How many dancers are there in the painting? Is this a trick question?
- Where do you imagine Degas was sitting in the theatre (in the main audience, in a box, on the stage)?
- How long do you think Degas would have had to sketch these poses (hours, minutes or seconds)?
- How has Degas created a sense of movement?
- Where do you think the main dancer will go next?

Activity:

Materials:

- Cereal box
- Glue stick
- Pencil, colouring pencils/pens
- 2 lolly pop sticks/drink stirrers or something similar, ruler, scissors and coloured tissue paper (optional)



Step 1:

Draw a rectangle on the front of the cereal box so that it looks like a picture frame. The base of the rectangle should be 3.5 cm from the edge of the box. You do not need to measure the rest of the frame. This rectangle is going to fold back to make your stage.

This next bit takes some concentration. Measure the depth of your cereal box with a ruler. Now, measure up from the base of your rectangle by exactly the same amount of cms and draw a horizontal line (A). Measure 3.5 cm above this and draw another horizontal line (B).

Carefully cut the left, top and right edges of the main, big rectangle (shown as dashed lines in the image) - leaving the rectangle attached at the bottom. It doesn't matter if the edges are a bit jagged.

Step 2:

Fold the horizontal lines backwards (shown as dotted lines in previous image) and tuck the sections back on themselves so that you have created a platform/stage. Trim to fit. Next, fold the cereal box tabs on the sides inwards and stick down. We've covered these with some paper for neatness.

Tip: put glue on both the cereal box card and on the paper to avoid the parts bending as they dry.

Step 3:

Design your scenery - this is the backdrop that will help you tell a story. Degas' ballerinas are performing in the 'Ballet des Roses', a love story between flowers and butterflies, set in a woodland. Where will your story take place? It could be under the sea, in outer space, on a desert Island, a medieval castle, or anywhere you like!

Draw your scenery on a rectangle of paper the same size as the rectangular space on the back section. Colour this in before sticking it down.



Step 4:

Make your theatre spectacular! Degas is closely associated with the Palais Garnier in Paris, one of the most luxurious theatres in the world. Add decorations and colour to the front section to make an appropriate frame for your performance. You could use some tissue paper for the curtains.

The floor would have been wooden boards, but perhaps you could add some circles or patches of colour to show the effects of stage lighting that Degas loved.

Step 5:

Decide on your story and make your performers. Mind-map some ideas for how your performance will unfold (if you have time you could plan this out as a story board). Some famous ballets are Cinderella, Firebird, Swan Lake and the Nutcracker.

Draw two dancers on off-cuts of card. Make their costumes bold and eye-catching. They will need to be about 6-7cm high (check with a ruler). Cut out your dancers and glue or tape them to the wooden sticks. Degas always drew from life so you could ask a family member to pose for you!

Now it's time for your performance!

If you enjoyed making this, you could design extra pieces of scenery and dancers, and even create a video or animation of the performance.