Freezing Motion in Art

Have you ever tried to draw a moving figure?

Edgar Degas is famous for his paintings and sculptures of ballet dancers. He made hundreds of quick sketches to capture their slightest poses and positions. Back in his studio, he used his sketches to create artworks that froze the dancers in a moment of time.

Degas also created sculptures in his studio. First he built an armature, or supporting structure, out of wire. The armatures often looked like stick figures. Then he would build up the figures using wax or clay. Since the wire was flexible, Degas could bend the arms and legs of the figures until he got them just the way he wanted.

Fun fact: Figure models can hold their pose for 5 to 30 minutes while artists observe, sketch, even paint or chisel. How long do you think you can stay still?

Examples of gesture drawing on the following pages!
**Gesture Drawing**

A gesture drawing is a quick sketch of the figure in front of you. It can be a simple line drawing, and all you need is a piece of paper, a pencil, and a model. Below are two examples from the MAG collection.

Left: Kate Greenaway, *Seated Figure of a Young Girl, with sketches of hands*, 1905. Graphite on paper. Gallery purchase, 1927.56


Are you ready to draw? Try sketching *Dancing Court Lady* on the left.

How fast can you capture her outline?

Unknown, Chinese, *Dancing Court Lady*, 7th–early 8th century. Terracotta and polychromy. R.T. Miller Fund, 1948.90.1

See the following pages for more gesture drawing ideas!
Hold That Pose!

Look at all the gestures in the artworks from the MAG collection below. Some of them are people, some are animals, and some aren’t even images of figures! Can you arrange your head, arms, and legs to match one of the images?

If you have a partner, make them your “model”! Give instructions of how to hold their pose, and then make a quick gesture drawing of your model from the front, the two sides, and the back. When done, switch places and let your partner be the artist while you Hold That Pose!


More artworks on the next page . .