

MOTION ON PAPER

The Vivacious Drawings of Edgar Jansen

Edgar Jansen is an extremely versatile and talented artist specialized in drawing dance. He has given the dance community of Amsterdam an increasingly wide range of art documentation on various events and performances. Edgar's animated drawings even give everyday training sessions a special extra meaning.



How did you become an artist?

I started drawing at primary school. It was a very pleasurable way for a silent child like me to express himself. A few years later my grandparents celebrated their anniversary and our present to them was a book written by everyone in the family that was in dire need of illustrations. Surprisingly, everyone including myself thought my art work was a great success! So that was the start of my drawing career. I started to draw the landscapes in my neighborhood and to attend drawing classes where the average age was 65 even though I was only 15. Drawing became my passion so I showed my work to the Academy of Arts in Amsterdam (Rijksakademie) and they accepted me.

How did you start drawing dancers?

I was drawing at a portrait studio in Amstelveen where most of the models were dancers. Once a model stood in front of my work and said, "Wow, look at your drawing, the lines are dancing!" This opened my eyes. She invited me to attend my first dance rehearsal. That was 17 years ago. It was a modern piece with terrible sounds and weird movements but I liked it. I started to go to ballet rehearsals as well, huddled up under the piano but giving more and more freedom to my moving figures.

Dance as a subject gave me an opportunity to be very free and dance in my soul. My pencils were jumping and rolling while I sat and watched the dancers. After a year I had hundreds of drawings but I only kept a few. I needed more time to find my way.

Later a model told me about the Henny Jurriens Stichting (HJS), a well-known professional dance studio in Amsterdam. I am really sensitive to spaces and the location at the time at Park Church near Vondelpark was just perfect. I have been drawing the classes of HJS regularly ever since. I am happy about the studio's recent move to another church at Chassé Street this time.



What is your preferred dance style?

I like all kinds of dancing. There are probably some less impressive dance styles but I don't know about them. In addition to ballet and modern dance, I go to all kinds of events, classes and rehearsals, like flamenco, belly dance, hip-hop. By now I am in touch with more dancers and musicians than artists.

Have you ever thought about dancing yourself?

Of course I am a bit jealous, it would be so wonderful to move that beautifully, but I don't feel the need. I am very happy with what I do and I hope the dancers like my drawings as much as I like their movements so they can also be a bit jealous of me sometimes.

I saw you drawing everywhere from violin concertos to modern dance performances. Are there any days when you feel ready to be a stereotype artist who sleeps late and only works when he feels a little less lazy than usual?

In Amsterdam there are so many things going on, so many beautiful portrait models walking around, so many subjects indoors and outdoors, so many events. That's more than enough to be a painter 24/7. When I go out it's not a question of whether I should draw or not. I never say, "I am not in the mood today." As Picasso said, inspiration comes while you are working. But of course overdoing is not good for your art, so sometimes I say stop and I read a book or watch a movie.

What was the process leading up to this very specific drawing technique?

I started to draw people at my favourite cafe's but unfortunately they didn't wait for me to finish my drawing, so I had to find out more about dynamics and motion. At the dance studios I started working with pastels, but I realized my second name is not Degas so I better do some further experimentation. Using water colors and Japanese brush pens allowed me to express more dynamics since the flow of water on paper suggests movement. Working with water color sticks produces something between a drawing and a painting. Using a mixed technique is a very good way to create movements in lines.



Being free in my art means I can use everything around like a tea bag if I like its color or a candle, enjoying how wax reacts with water color and paper. Or some wine. Why not? Sometimes I produce a wet print on a blank paper with a recently finished drawing and I finish it again in a different way. Giving a shower to a drawing I don't like is a good way to wash away some superfluous lines and create a better work.

Besides your own work, you are part of dance performance projects. Could you tell us more about them?



One was a multidisciplinary [opera project about Pelléas and Mélisande](#), which was a student performance at the Theater School in Amsterdam. Another one was the [Walk in Gaps](#), an Indian dance project with Chandana Sharma. A more recent work was the [Movement Portrait](#), a very intense dialogue between dance and drawing with Israeli dancer Anabel Eckerling. I also teach workshops in drawing movement at dance academies and dance festivals. I am frequently asked to make drawings for performance flyers and recently a [dance conference at the University of Leeds](#) in England made a wallpaper of my work on their website.

How do you sell your work?

I am not such a good businessman but I have a lot of contacts. If someone wants to get in touch with me, they can contact me via my website. Open Ateliers are good at introducing your work to people who might want to buy it. I sometimes exhibit my work at group shows and I have had my own exhibitions at the Theaterschool, Dansmakers Amsterdam and theatres in Vienna, Jerusalem and Hollywood. But a good exhibition requires a big investment so you need to plan it well, otherwise you might wind up even poorer than before.

What would be the greatest artistic satisfaction for you?

I posted a drawing on Facebook of a mother and her two children on Mother's Day and more than 100 people liked it. The feeling that people are touched by my art is already a great satisfaction. Of course if someone buys a painting or a drawing it means a lot that they are willing to invest in my art and further development.

After drawing a dance class or a real show, dancers come up to me and say they recognize and feel their movements in my drawing. This is something that always amazes me, how via observation and emotion a real activity can become a true story on paper.

For more information about Edgar Jansen, see www.edgarportraits.com.

For feedback or questions, please email miroljuba.petrova@gmail.com.

This interview was done by dancer Miroljuba Petrova.
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