

## **Essay on the Music and Dance Drawings of Edgar Jansen** **By Fay Robinson**

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Edgar Jansen is a contemporary fine artist who currently lives and works in Amsterdam. Focusing on portraiture, Edgar often does commissioned work including portraits of children, as well as other pieces based around landscapes, flowers, animals, café's and interiors. His work is often used commercially for illustrating C.D. covers, posters and websites. He also teaches portraiture and gives workshops in drawing and dance movement. In this essay I plan to investigate his influences, context and techniques.

Edgar Jansen is an artist who works in an impressionist style, which is easily recognisable by its flowing lines and subtle colours. Edgar's works have a definite contemporary feel to them, however he uses traditional techniques and ideas. I am particularly interested in his work around musicians and dancers captured during concerts and 'jam sessions' which are classes in which artists and dancers come together to create music and art. Jam sessions are also a good opportunity for the dancers to explore new ways of moving and Edgar captures this spontaneity in his drawings. Edgar's style lends itself to this type of art because he is able to suggest the freedom of movement as well as the character of the dance or dancer.



Edgar's work had always had an impressionist style and his drawings expressed movement long before drawing dancers. Jansen first started drawing flamenco dancers at a performance in the park when one of his dancer friends said that she saw movement in his drawings. He tries to imagine the feelings of the dancer themselves when he is drawing them, by exploring the dancer's weight, freedom and physical pain and this makes the drawings very personal to the dancers, who often recognise themselves in his work. This encouragement stimulates Jansen to continue and develop his drawings.

Modern Amsterdam is a culturally diverse and creative place as there are lots of good opportunities to experiment with new techniques and ideas surrounding the arts – such as Edgar's 'jam sessions'; which are a very contemporary creation that allow exploration across many different methods of making art. There is a lot of wealth in Holland nowadays, which allows Jansen to do some commissioned work, such as the children's portraiture. This allows him to concentrate on elements such as accuracy, composition and colour.



This is one of Edgar's child portraits that is done in pastel and would sell for 650 Euros, or about £490.

I am going to compare Edgar Jansen to three post impressionist artists starting with Degas, who also did a series of drawings and paintings which were studies of dancers. Degas is far more traditional than Jansen as he was working during the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Paris, France.

Degas was also a Post-Impressionist, although his mark-making is much more controlled than that of Edgar Jansen and his use of paint and colour richer and more detailed. Degas colours are subtler as he does not concentrate as much on the passion behind the movement as the expressions on the dancer's faces and their body language, in fact often the dancers are stood still or fixing their shoes. Comparatively, Edgar keeps his colours limited and focuses on trying to capture the movement, patterns and shapes that the dancers create.



**Dancers at the barre – Degas 1900**

There are similarities in the artist's work, and it is clear to see the influence of Degas on Jansen, particularly in quick studies such as Degas "Dancers at the Barre (1888)" which has similar colours and tones to Edgar's work as well as the bold, expressive mark making that is also very similar.

Rodin, a sculptor and artist also working in 19<sup>th</sup> century France, is another artist where similarities with Edgar can be found. Most famous for his large bronze sculptures such as 'The Thinker', Rodin also did a series of sculptures and drawings based around moving dancers. Although these are executed in a different medium from the one that Edgar works in, there are similarities in their work such as the focus on body positioning and shape rather than facial expressions. Rodin's dancers are moving and he captures parts of their movement in much the same way Edgar does, by using flowing lines to show their movement as well as subtle colours that are very similar to Edgar's.



**Cambodian Dancers – two of forty. Rodin 1906.**

Toulouse Lautrec drew and created prints of famous dancers in the dance halls of Paris in the 1800's. These are much more simple line drawings with block colours than Edgar uses, however I can see some similarity in the way that Lautrec drew the movement of the dancers dresses and Edgar draws the movement of the flamenco dancers. The difference between these two artists is that Jansen concentrates more on the movement of the dancers themselves but Lautrec's

dancers look posed and much more attention is paid to their faces - these dancers were famous and the posters were used as advertisement for the shows.



**Jane Avril – Toulouse Lautrec 1893**

Edgar spent three years developing his style of drawing dancers as there were few examples to base the work on and he aimed to be as original as possible. Edgar began to experiment with media, especially testing watercolour on wet paper as this creates a loose flowing effect that was perfect for his studies. However, influenced by the bible illustrations of Marc Chagal who and combines many different media in one illustration, Jansen found the most striking effect was created when he mixed different materials such as chalk, ink watercolour and pencil.



**Solitude – Marc Chagal 1933**



Edgar chooses his media carefully to suit the portrait; for example the freedom of water soluble chalk and ink suit the portraits of dancers, however the striking colours and textures of oil paint are more suited to his seated portraiture. He uses washes to create depth and make the dancer stand out. I think this looks effective as the use of line could become confusing and the washes create interest, particularly when used with mixed media such as pastel. Chalk also works well as the speed in which chalk can create line matches Edgar's enthusiasm, an example of this is shown when he talks about one of his first experiences drawing at a concert:

"...The young Israeli cellist was still sweating from the recital and my hands were black from pencil and other art materials. I was impressed by the passion of his music and the virtuosity and the style of playing. I showed Gavriel my sketches of his performance. He was very excited about my work..."

Edgar never works from photography, with all of his portraits being done from life in order to capture character and movement of the subject. This gives the paintings life, and although the technical accuracy may be reduced, the overall effect of the painting is much

improved and Edgar's freedom of line could not be captured working from photographs.

Edgar studies many different styles of dance such as ballet, modern dance, tango, contact improvisation (where dancers contact each other spontaneously without either partner knowing what the other is going to do), Oriental and African dance as well as Flamenco and Butoh. I think his style suits all types of dance and movement, however he works very well with modern dance and contact improvisation as the movement in these disciplines is more expressive and less structured, compared to ballet where the steps are very specific.

Edgar looks at the figure as a whole, rather than concentrating on details like clothes or faces; he draws quickly and from memory - making mental photographs to base the drawings on. He chooses movements which appeal to him or express something which he relates to which is usually some kind of emotion. Drawing in an intuitive way, without consciously knowing what he is doing, Edgar follows the dimension of the dance. Movement is continuously moving and flowing, and he records this to paper so that there is a permanent record of that gesture.



Edgar feels as though he is a choreographer or dancer when he is drawing, going through the same movements as a dancer and has to compose the picture in the same way a choreographer has to lay out the dance in a room space.

It is clear that his studies of dancers and musicians is what Edgar enjoys the most as this work is the most expressive and lively and what he is best known for. However Edgar has to make a living as an artist and his portraiture, although not as expressive as his other work, is a means of funding Edgar's projects.

Edgar's pieces do not have a political message, nor do they really "say" anything, however I think that this can come as a welcome break from much contemporary fine art which tries to convey a

message of some sort. With Edgar you can enjoy the work without particularly having to think, and in this case that is a good thing.

I especially like the dancer drawings by Edgar Jansen as I think they are the best I have seen at capturing the movement of the dancer. Drawing or taking photographs of musicians or dancers is often pointless as the whole reason for their beauty is the movement or music that they create; however Edgar manages to combine the product with the artist in his work, so that the figure is shown at their best – making art of their own.

I particularly like the use of colour in his drawings of Flamenco dancers, which is subtle yet creates a striking effect and is very similar to the tones the dancers dresses would create when twirling around. Edgar obviously understands the dancers very well as their feelings and emotions are shown without the need for facial expressions. Edgar experiences music in much the same way a dancer would – hearing the language and emotion as well as just rhythm and notes. This is shown in a quote from him that I think sums his work up well:

"...Seated with a sketchbook on the first row, I let myself be inspired by classical music and dance performances. I am trying to catch movement and sound in my sketches. I am not only drawing what I see, but also what I hear. Music can take away the constraints of the drawing technique...I just let my hand go and follow the music..."

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