

# Sketching: Gesture Drawing Inspired by Edgar Degas

**Time:** 20 minutes

**Difficulty level:** Easy

**Messy level:** Low



Practice gesture-drawing techniques and learn to capture major movements of the human figure in motion.

Gesture drawings are quick sketches that help capture the overall movement of a figure. These drawings are often less than a few minutes. In these cases, artists are not concerned with details, but more about the overall movement and action of the figure. These drawings are often used as a warm-up exercise before drawing a human figure in more detail.

Edgar Degas, *Russian Dancers*, 1899, pastel on tracing paper mounted on cardboard, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, John A. and Audrey Jones Beck Collection, gift of Audrey Jones Beck, 98.278.

Family Programs at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston receive generous support from the Junior League of Houston, Inc.

Learning and Interpretation programs receive generous funding from the Jerold B. Katz Foundation; Institute of Museum and Library Services; H-E-B; MD Anderson Cancer Center; Houston Junior Woman's Club; The Brown Foundation, Inc.; Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo; Sharon G. Dies; Susan Vaughan Foundation; and additional generous donors.

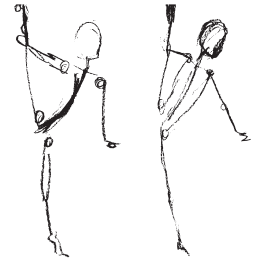
All Learning and Interpretation programs at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, receive endowment funds provided by Louise Jarrett Moran Bequest; Caroline Wiess Law; the William Randolph Hearst Foundation; Cyvia and Melvyn Wolff; the National Endowment for the Humanities; the Fondren Foundation; BMC Software, Inc.; the Wallace Foundation; the Neal Myers and Ken Black Children's Art Fund; Mr. and Mrs. A. L. Ballard; Mr. and Mrs. Charles W. Tate; the Eleanor and Frank Freed Foundation; Virginia and Ira Jackson; the Favrot Fund; Neiman Marcus Youth Arts Education; gifts in memory of John Wynne; and gifts in honor of Beth Schneider.

To view a hi-res image of the work, visit the [MFAH website](#).

## Gather These Materials

- Sketching pad or several pieces of sketching paper
- Drawing pencils, Conté crayons, or charcoal stick
- Printed photos of people in motion

To purchase recommended art materials, visit [dickblick.com](#).



## Step-by-Step Artist Instructions

1. Using the middle figure in the *Russian Dancers* image as an example, imagine where the spinal cord for the dancer is and its direction. Draw the spinal cord, finding its natural curve.
2. Now, look at the head and explore the angle at which it is bent in comparison to the figure's spinal cord. Draw an oval shape as a placeholder for the head.
3. Next, draw two circles where the shoulder joints would be and two circles where the hip joints would be.
4. Connect the head to the shoulder joints by drawing in a neck.
5. Next, draw an upside-down triangle to connect the hip joints and spinal cord.
6. Then, draw the knee joints as circles and connect the knee joints to the hips using a cylindrical shape. This is known as the ball-and-cylinder method of sketching.
7. Now, draw circles for the ankle joints and draw a triangular shape for the feet.
8. Do the same thing for the arms, drawing balls and circles where the elbow and wrist joints are and then connect them using cylinder shapes.
9. Add additional movement lines throughout the sketch using lines to emphasize the movement of the dancer.
10. Do several more gesture sketches from photos of people moving. Try to do several quick ones, in less than two to three minutes, and then do some longer ones of five to ten minutes.

