

Dancers



Anonymous *Conference/Dancing figures*, undated



Adam Kops *The Dancer*, 1991

CONTENT AND IDEAS

What can you see in the painting *Conference/Dancing Figures*?

- Seven men dancing on a brick floor
- There is a patch of grass in front of them and a brick wall with two door openings behind them
- Windows and doorways of a building behind the wall

Where is the scene set?

- Outdoors
- In a courtyard or garden
- Probably in a town or city – because of the office type building behind

How are the men dressed? Do they seem wealthy or poor?

- All the men wear smart suits with white shirts (some with stiff collars) and ties (one has a bow tie).
- Some of the men are wearing waistcoats.
- Two men wear hats – one wears a top hat.
- All wear black shoes. Most of them wear spats (stiff white fabric that covers the top of shoes and which is fastened underneath – part of the formal dress of wealthy men in the early 20th century, usually also worn with a black suit, top hat and cane).

What do you notice about the dancers' hands?

- The hands are all too big for dancers' bodies (particularly those of the man with the moustache).
- Their fingers are mostly long and thin and widely separated.
- The dancers are all using hand gestures as part of their dance – notice:
 - several holding up one arm and hand in a graceful curve
 - one with a hand on his hip
 - two holding hands
 - one with his forefinger and thumb joined to make a circle
 - one with his arms stretched out wide, waving his hands like the conductor of an orchestra
 - the pointing finger of the man with the moustache

What do you notice about the dancers' feet? What effect does this have?

- The dancers' feet are all too small for the size of their bodies.
- All but one of the dancers wear exactly identical black shoes with pointed toes and spats.
- The small pointy shoes help to make the dancers look dainty and light despite their large bodies.

Are the men young or old? How can you tell?

- Three of the men are bald and one has a white moustache, so they are relatively old.
- The youngest looking man is the chubby one on the right.

How do you think the dancers are feeling? Describe their expressions.

- Open to interpretation... The dancers all have very different expressions:
 - The moustached man looks stern.
 - The two men behind him look quite anxious.
 - The man with the top hat looks as if he is shouting orders.
 - The bald man in front of him looks surprised, breathless or as if he is talking.
 - The chubby man he is dancing with is the only person smiling.

Why do you think the men are dancing? What appears to be happening in the picture?

- The scene is very ambiguous and the questions above may trigger all sorts of creative thinking, writing or drama. Children might like to consider:

- Is anyone in charge of the dance?
- Why are there two groups of men?
- Where have the men come from – the building behind or somewhere else?
- Why is the man with the moustache pointing?
- Why are the three men crowding around him?
- Why are there no women at the dance?
- Why does the picture have two titles - **Conference/Dancing figures?**
- Are they dancing to any music?
- Are they dancing the steps of a particular dance?

What happened just before this scene and what will happen when the dancing stops?

How would you describe the mood of the dancing?

If you could ask the dancers one question what would you ask them?

Activity

Ask children, in groups of seven, to devise a dance/mime/drama, which tells the story behind this dance, and which includes this scene as part of the story.

Describe the sculpture *The Dancer*

- The dancer leans forward, standing on one bent leg. The foot is part of the sculpture's base and is turned right out.
- The left thigh muscle is exaggerated in size, both to emphasise its strength and support of the dancer's body weight.
- The dancer's other leg is twisted and stretched out in the air.



- Both arms are raised and stretched out for balance.
- Notice the hole in the right arm to make it feel lighter.
- The arms have no hands and the legs have no feet.
- The head is a circle of metal. It does not have a face.
- The artist has excluded fussy details to strongly capture the essence of the dancer's movement.

FORM AND COMPOSITION

How have both artists shown a sense of movement? What similarities between them?

• In **Conference/Dancing Figures**, movement is shown by the shape of the dancers' limbs.

– All the men have their knees bent and at least one arm raised and curved.

– Two men have one foot raised, so they are off balance.

– One points a toe.

– Another lifts a heel.

• The repetition of curved and pointed lines gives a sense of flow.

Notice the precisely curved heads, shoulders and knees; also the points of the coat tails, lapels, collars and shoes.

• The straight lines of the walls, doorways and the brick floor either side of the central circle provide a contrast to the oval and curves of the dancers

• The careful shading on the dancers' clothes, often dividing them with more curves and points, emphasises, for example, bulging calf or thigh muscles, a swinging coat or a bent elbow.

• The composition has been carefully planned so that most of the dancers are enclosed inside an oval shape. Notice how the shape and position of the dancers' arms, feet, clothes and hands help to create the oval (see above).

• Notice the shapes of the shadows on the ground as well.



Compare with other dance pictures using circles:

William Blake *Oberon, Titania and Puck with Fairies Dancing* 1785 (Tate, London)

Pieter Breughel the Elder *The Wedding Dance* c.1566 (The Detroit Institute of Arts)

George Segal *The Dancers* 1971 (sculpture) (National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC)

Keith Haring *Monkey Puzzle* 1988 (Estate of Keith Haring, New York)

Henri Matisse *La Danse* 1910 (first version - Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Nicholas Poussin *The Dance to the Music of Time* 1640

Paula Rego *The Dance* 1988

Peter Paul Rubens *Peasants' Dance* 1636/40 (Prado, Madrid)

- **Kops'** dancer also has a bent knee and one leg raised so it is also off balance.
- The raised leg and one of the arms are both twisted to give the impression of continuous movement through the air.
- The arms are shaped like a rippling wave – one turned upwards; the other downwards
- The head leans back, balanced on a neck, which doubles as the dancer's spine and trunk.

Activity

- Ask children to pose in the position of **The Dancer**. They will quickly discover how hard it is to balance in this pose and that they will need to keep dancing.
- Ask children to make a sketch of **The Dancer's** pose.

Compare Kops' sculpture with these other sculptures:

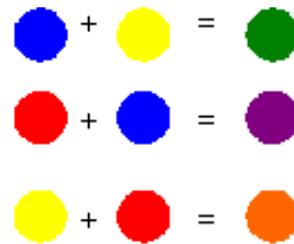
- Umberto Boccioni *Unique Form of Continuity in Space* 1913 (Mattioli Collection, Milan)
- Edgar Degas *Little Dancer aged Fourteen* 1880-81 (Tate, London)
- Edgar Degas *Fourth Position Front, on the Left Leg* c.1883/88 (National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC)
- Pablo Gargello *Dancer* 1934
- Elie Nadelman *Dancer* c.1918-19 (Wadsworth Atheneum, Hertford CT)
- Pablo Picasso *Football Player* 1961 (private collection)
- Auguste Rodin *Dance Movements A-H* 1910-11 (Rodin Museum, Paris)

What materials did Kops use to make his sculpture? How did he join them together?

- Pieces of scrap metal
- He welded them together.

An explanation of complementary colours

- The three primary colours are red, yellow and blue.
- Two primaries can be mixed to make secondary colours:
 - yellow + blue = green
 - red + yellow = orange
 - red + blue = purple
- The complementary colour of each primary is the mix of the other two:
 - red's complementary is green (blue + yellow);
 - yellow's complementary is violet (red + blue)
 - blue's complementary is orange (yellow + red)
- Placed next to one another, complementary colours look stronger and stand out more.



secondary colours



complementary colours

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Anonymous

Anonymous means that we do not know who painted this picture, so nothing is known about him or her.

Adam Kops

Adam Kops was born in London in 1956, the eldest of four children of the Dutch-Jewish playwright and poet, Bernard Kops. His grandfather came from the same area of Amsterdam as Anne Frank and most of his European family was killed by the Nazis during World War II. Adam studied art at Wimbledon College of Art and then at St Martin's. He has exhibited at the Kingsgate and Camden galleries in London and run children's sculpture workshops for the Ben Uri Gallery and elsewhere.

Photographs of the artist sourced from The National Portrait Gallery

Bernard Kops; Erica Kops (née Gordon) and their son Adam Kopsby

Ida Kar

bromide print, 1960

22.8 cm x 29.3 cm

Given by Victor Musgrave

NPG x31636

Bernard Kops; Erica Kops (née Gordon) and their son Adam Kops

Ida Kar

vintage bromide print, 1960

18.0 cm x 24.2 cm

Purchased, 1999

NPG x12529

Can be viewed on line at:

<http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person.php?LinkID=mp93073>