

Grid Drawing

NORTON SIMON MUSEUM | ART IN THE CLASSROOM



Portrait of Madame Dietz-Monnin

c. 1879

Edgar Degas (French 1834–1917)

Pastel on brown paper

18½ x 12¼ in. (47 x 31.1 cm)

Norton Simon Art Foundation

Objective

Just as builders use architectural plans with detailed measurements to construct sturdy homes, artists often use grids to make accurate drawings. Use this method to explore Edgar Degas's (French, 1834–1917) *Portrait of Madame Dietz-Monnin* by recreating the portrait one square at a time.

Background

Grid drawing is a technique that has long been used by artists to accurately portray the world around them. Ancient Egyptians drew grids underneath their paintings and sculptures to ensure their subjects' **proportions** were correct. Centuries later, when creating tapestry designs, artists would often begin by making a small sketch that would then be covered in a grid so it could be reproduced as a much larger **cartoon**, the life-size model from which a tapestry, like the Norton Simon Museum's *The Death of Dido*, was woven.



Activity

- Using pencils or pastels on paper, recreate Degas's *Portrait of Madame Dietz-Monnin* (1879).
- Begin by laying out the attached piece of paper with a blank grid next to the attached image of Degas's drawing overlaid by a grid.
- Then, looking at the image of the drawing overlaid by a grid, draw the contents of each square in the corresponding blank grid. Complete each square until you have finished the drawing.
- Note that you can also trace the grid in pencil onto a blank sheet of paper if you wish to erase the lines of the grid once your drawing is completed.

Vocabulary

Proportions: The relationship of different parts within a whole.

Cartoon: A full-sized preparatory design for an artwork in another medium. Cartoons were used in the creation of frescoes, other large-scale wall paintings and tapestries.


