



## Doing the Steps

### *Edward Gorey and the Dance of Art*

April 7 – December 31

**“If you’re absolutely obsessed with something, everything else seems meaningless.”**

— Edward Gorey to Anna Kisselcoff, *NYTimes*, 1973

How do you explain the influence of dance on a visual artist? Probably, you show a lot of that artist’s drawings of dancers, but in Edward Gorey’s case, it becomes quickly apparent that there’s a much bigger story to tell. Famous as an illustrator, set and costume designer, as well as book artist, playwright and collector, Gorey is also well-known in some circles as the man who attended the New York City Ballet every night for 30 years.

That is a startling feat and, to be honest, an urban legend as well. Edward Gorey *did not* attend every performance at the NYCB—but he saw more of them than probably anyone else, except maybe the NYCB’s choreographer and director George Balanchine. Ticket stubs stored at the House (and included in this exhibit) indicate about 160 shows a year, and frequently over 200 shows including virtually every annual *Nutcracker* performance for over thirty-plus years (including matinees). Not every show, but certainly a powerful testament to one man’s devotion to one ballet company and its choreographer.

In fact, it could be said that to really understand Gorey’s works, one would have needed to sit through a lot of dance at the NYCB from approximately 1953 to 1979—give or take a few years. As this is no longer an option, *Doing the Steps* sets out to explore how dance comes to permeate so much of Gorey’s work.

**“‘Just do the steps’ is probably Balanchine’s most famous remark [to his dancers]. Properly considered, it somehow explains everything, and can be applied to whatever you can think of in both art and life.”**

— Edward Gorey, 1993 *Ballet Review* tribute to Diana Adams

Gorey consistently cited George Balanchine as his greatest inspiration and muse—high praise from a man who borrowed liberally from Edward Lear, Lewis Carroll, Agatha Christie, the Symbolists, Dadaist, Surrealists and decades of film. This was not a collaborative

relationship—Balanchine staged ballets and Gorey attended them. Gorey was never asked to create a single set or costume design (in fact, Gorey passed up the award ceremony the night he won a Tony for *Dracula's* costumes to attend the NYCB).

*Doing the Steps* explores both Gorey's works relating directly to dance and the NYCB, as well as those demonstrating how Balanchine's works became a vast creative reservoir for Gorey. Movement and pacing, the storyless stories and fragmented narratives—all aspects of Balanchine's world—are reflected in Edward's own works. In fact, *Doing the Steps* invites the notion that virtually all of Edward's books function—as dance pieces.

Our 2022 exhibit is a celebration of the Edward Gorey House's 20<sup>th</sup> season. We've designed *Doing the Steps* with only a rudimentary understanding of dance. Wild speculation has been invited to this dance party—but not so wild as to be implausible.



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