



## Artist Happy Un-Birthday Project

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For this Un-Birthday project, each student spent one week studying an artist whose work has influenced contemporary art. Artists varied by gender, culture, time period, political views, artistic medium and content. Students then paid homage to their artist by creating an Un-Birthday present and accompanying gift box. The gifts were displayed at an Artist Happy Un-Birthday Party on exhibition night, complete with a birthday cake and decorations. The event was a cacophony of color, paint, and imagination that paid tribute both to Judy Chicago's famous "Dinner Party" art piece and to Lewis Carroll's Mad Hatter's Tea Party in *Alice in Wonderland*.

### Teacher Reflection

Choosing the gift was perhaps the most important and difficult part of the project for the students, as they were asked to distill what they had learned about their artist into a single object. The students loved the idea of presenting their projects on exhibition night to a public audience. This added another layer of meaning to the work and encouraged even further reflection and refinement of the projects.

### Student Reflection

I chose Edgar Degas because I am very fond of his art, and particularly the pastel drawings of ballet dancers. On the top of the box, I placed a cutout of his self-portrait. On the back of the cutout head is his name and a copy of his very first sketch of a ballet dancer. I then painted the sides of the box the color of his skin. On the body of the box I put a leotard and a tutu that I made to fit the box, which represented what he loved to draw and paint: ballerinas. On the four sides around the box, I re-created four of his paintings. Inside the box for the present, I placed something very valuable to me, and something that I knew Edgar Degas would enjoy drawing: my first pair of Pointe shoes. In the end, I learned a lot, not only about Edgar Degas, but also about what "creativity and imagination" looks like when it transforms from an idea to an art form.

—Amanda Snyder, 10<sup>th</sup> grade

To learn more about this project and others visit the HTH Digital Commons and Tara Giannini's digital portfolio at <http://www.hightechhigh.org/dc/> and <http://staff.hthcv.hightechhigh.org/~tgiannini/>