

MC Escher

There is some artwork that offers something new with each viewing. This is the case in the work of MC Escher, the Dutch graphic artist who reveled in drawing mathematical conundrums. His woodcuts and lithographs have enthralled successive generations, fascinating mathematicians and fellow artists alike. He was born in 1898, with his full name being Maurits Cornelis Escher. He originally intended to study architecture but transferred to decorative arts instead, learning many of the techniques he was to employ through his long career.

Despite his obsession with geometry and optical perception, he did not study mathematics at a high level. His sense of humor and surrealist sensibility was expressed in his art as he playfully distorted perspective. As a young boy studying carpentry, he did have grounding in the practical world around him, but he preferred to show the impossible. When the viewer looks at an MC Escher creation, there is a sort of logic there and one can stare at a drawing for hours without ever getting to the bottom of it.

Geometric shapes such as cones, spheres, spirals and cubes adorn his works and he was influenced by the symmetrical patterns of Islamic art. He was a nature lover too and would incorporate insects, birds, fish and reptiles. MC Escher art is displayed in galleries all over the world and a museum in his name was opened in 2002 in The Hague. He is one of the most reproduced artists with works presented as album and book covers, jigsaw puzzles and fridge magnets. He speaks to a modern generation and has been referenced in rock songs, television shows, movies and computer games. A recent TV commercial for Audi cars featured an Escher inspired scene. In the film, Donnie Darko, the disturbed young man has a poster of one of his works on his bedroom wall. The British rock band, Mott the Hoople used an illustration on their 1969 album, showing a line of lizards emerging from a drawing.

Every fan has their favorite image from the great man who died in 1972. Some of the work has become iconic, such as Drawing Hands from 1948 in which a pair of hands are seen to be drawing each other. MC Escher often placed his self-portrait into a drawing, as in Hand with Reflecting Sphere in 1935. His face stares out from a mirrored ball. His finest example of intriguing perspective is probably Relativity from 1953. This shows a series of stairs in an odd connection with each other.