



## ***Gandydancer's Dream*, Mark di Suvero**

### **Gandydancer's Dream**

Mark di Suvero

American, 1988

Painted steel

Top section: H: 17 in.; W: 54 in.;

D: 64 in.

Bottom section: H: 58 in.; W: 73 in.;

D: 49 in.

### **Questions for Teaching**

Begin by displaying an image of *Gandydancer's Dream*. Describe the different components that make up this sculpture.

List the shapes you see in this sculpture. What shapes are organic? Which ones are geometric?

Display an alternate view of *Gandydancer's Dream* and ask students to describe what they see. How does an alternate view change the way the sculpture looks? Does it look like the same sculpture? Compare the two views to better understand where the pieces of the sculpture fit together. How are the shapes in the alternate view similar or different?

How is this sculpture balanced? Where is the center of gravity? How would you describe the base of the sculpture? Where do you think most of the weight of this sculpture rests?

Gandy dancers were railroad workers who worked in groups and timed their movements through musical chants. Are there any elements of this sculpture that make you think of music? What type of music might you hear if you listen to this sculpture? What elements of this sculpture remind you of rhythmic movements like music?

While impossible to tell in the images, the red piece of tangled-looking steel, with the depiction of pliers, pivots, or rotates, freely on the black pin structure. Imagine the circular movement of this part of the sculpture in relation to the rhythmic movements of gandy dancers who shift their weight in unison to move the rail track.



Courtesy of Mark di Suvero and Spacetime C.C. Gift of Fran and Ray Stark

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Compare this sculpture with Adrian de Vries's *Rearing Horse* (<http://www.getty.edu/art/gettyguide/artObjectDetails?artobj=1333>). How are the two sculptures balanced? In what ways are they similar? In what ways are they different?

The title of this work is *Gandydancer's Dream*; speculate about what the "dream" part of the title might refer to.

### **Background Information**

Mark di Suvero's hard-edge, painted steel sculpture *Gandydancer's Dream* is a maze of parallel and perpendicular geometric planes that interlock and overlap playfully, forming a complex shape that defies easy description and does not reveal itself in its entirety from any one angle. The sculpture, painted in di Suvero's signature red and black paint, rests tenuously on a delicate parallelogram-shaped base. Emerging at approximately a forty-five degree angle from the base is a red, roughly circular piece that is perforated and might recall a wheel from a railroad engine.



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Extending horizontally from the red wheel shape in the opposite direction is a thick black beam, which is the counterbalance that stabilizes the sculpture. A thin black pin extends vertically from the black beam. Balancing on top of the pin is a sundial-like tangled mess of cut steel shapes, some in the form of wings, and a pair of oversized industrial pliers. This part of the sculpture is kinetic and can rotate and sway.

The title of the work, *Gandydancer's Dream*, refers to workers on the railroad lines who made sure that the tracks stayed in alignment after vibrations would cause the tracks to shift. The gandy dancer used rhythmic call-and-response songs that synchronized the workers so that they could unify their movements and push the tracks back into place. The term "gandy dancer" is thought to be named for the tool, a gandy, that was used as a lever to move the tracks.

The gandy-dancer songs, or chants, with their rhythms and lyrics that reflect the hard work on the rail lines and the oppression of African American people in a time prior to civil rights, are known to be a major influence on the development of the musical genre, the blues.

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### **About the Artist**

Mark di Suvero (American, born 1933)

Mark di Suvero (born as Marco Polo di Suvero) is an American sculptor, born in Shanghai, China, in 1933 to Italian expatriates. He came to San Francisco, California in 1941 with his father. From 1953 to 1956, he attended the University of California, Berkeley to study fine arts, although he ultimately earned a degree in philosophy. He then moved to New York City, where he was surrounded by the work of abstract expressionist artists and was influenced by sculptor David Smith. In this period, di Suvero was working primarily in wood. In 1960 di Suvero was injured in a freight elevator accident that changed the course of his art. During the rehabilitation of his legs and back, he began to orchestrate large-scale constructions in steel.

His exploration of steel gave way to the use of I-beams and heavy-gauge metal pieces that no longer fit inside gallery walls. Many of the pieces contain sections that are allowed to swing and rotate, giving the overall forms a considerable degree of motion. Today, di Suvero's monumental sculpture can be found around the world. Di Suvero's large-scale, seemingly impersonal works made of industrial materials may seem beyond human scale, but the titles that di Suvero gives his works often allude to poetry, music, or literature.