



Edgar Degas (French, 1834–1917). *Dancer*. Photo Credit: Art Resource, NY.

More than half of Degas's prodigious oeuvre translated the working lives of dancers. But he preferred to show "un-observed" movements—of dancers off stage, laundresses at the sink, bathers in the tub. His subjects stretched after exertion, yawned in fatigue, balanced on one foot to rub the sole of the other. In this painting (most likely pastel, charcoal, and chalk on paper and dating from the 1880s), a dancer bends almost impossibly forward, apparently stretching her spinal extensor and hamstring muscles, and perhaps tying her ballet slipper. Sashes were rarely worn by dancers, so some believe that Degas used the blue bow only to bring color into an otherwise muted scene; but the sash also serves to emphasize her flexibility.

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