


Books

Dancers suspended in time and space as you've never seen them before

By [Sarah L. Kaufman](#) October 20 at 10:42 AM 

Dance lovers, here is your Rodeo Drive shopping spree, your Four Seasons spa day, your celeb-indulgence wrapped in intoxicating finery. All you need ask yourself is: Do I prefer my ballerinas in tutus or in ball gowns?



(Black Dog & Leventhal)

There are so many options in “[The Art of Movement](#),” an elegant coffee-table book in which the world’s leading dancers unfurl themselves across the pages like Botticelli angels in spandex and chiffon.

The book is the creation of the Brooklyn-based husband-and-wife photography team of Ken Browar and Deborah Ory. A few years ago, they started photographing dancers for fashion magazines and collecting their work on a website and popular Instagram account under their company name, [NYC Dance Project](#). Browar’s background in fashion and

Ory’s as a former dancer is evident in “The Art of

Movement,” their first book. Here, the dramatic lighting and compressed storytelling of a Vogue shoot are paired with gorgeous creatures who seem to be floating, flying or balanced on nothingness.

Tranquility is the dominant mood. Ocean-blue silk swirls stormily around her legs, but New York City Ballet’s Tiler Peck is somehow serene, betraying no effort from the spin that caused her gown to get excited. Hee Seo of American Ballet Theatre sails in midair, arms lifted like wings, toes tucked daintily underneath her white lace skirt. Her expression is so blissful that she could be advertising the rejuvenating effects of a face cream.



Hee Seo, American Ballet Theatre (Ken Browar and Deborah Ory)

Many of the most arresting photos feature members of the Martha Graham Dance Company. PeiJu Chien-Pott, a principal with that group, floats toward us with magical airiness, levitating off the ground in a courtly dance with the wind. Fellow company member Xin Ying, also airborne, has a more storm-tossed look, with her hair wild and eyes closed. Somehow, her remoteness feels more human; she's slightly undone, her dress slipping, and there is a fight in her arms. She looks as though she is eager to get back down to earth.

For the most part, "The Art of Movement" revels in the untouchable glamour of dancers. But what makes the book so rich and intriguing is that it also reveals their more secretive humanity, the part we can relate to.

Ask dancers how they feel about what they do, and chances are you'll hear about struggle and doubt. Where we see physical beauty and spiritual uplift, they see continuous challenge. For them, the magic moments are fleeting, and rare.

A dancer's relationship to his or her art is complicated. There's a tension between outer perfection and the inner vulnerability that aches and bleeds along the way. This is mostly hidden from us. Here, however, Browar and Ory include their subjects' words in addition to their pictures. Many pages are accompanied by a quote from the dancer in the photograph. Among the most revealing are those about early insecurities and the belated realization that it is okay not to be perfect.



Xin Ying, the Martha Graham Dance Company (Ken Browar and Deborah Ory)

“I spent most of my early years as a young dancer being really hard on myself and focusing on the mistakes instead of the victories,” writes Maria Kowroski, a longtime New York City Ballet principal. She has an especially majestic presence onstage, making this glimpse of uncertainty all the more astonishing.

Misty Copeland, the top-rank ballerina who broke the color barrier at American Ballet Theatre, looks down while sweeping a hand across her body like a queen sending doubters to the dungeon. It’s a fine character study of strength and will. Choreographer Bill T. Jones, his smooth, unlined face a sculptor’s dream, is captured

in meditation, eyes closed. He is veiled in shadow, and only his fingertips glow with light. Or is it inspiration?

What you realize after studying “The Art of Movement” is that it is not just a book about beauty, but it is also about having the patience to cultivate one’s gifts.

“Remember that there is something unique about you that brought you to dance in the first place,” writes Masha Dashkina Maddux, a Martha Graham dancer. “It is more than worth your time to explore why.”

Sarah L. Kaufman is the dance critic for *The Washington Post*.

THE ART OF MOVEMENT

By Ken Browar and Deborah Ory

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