

# Dance, challenge and photography

*Early photographers, like Muybridge in England and Marey in France, soon found themselves wanting to try to capture motion on film. While they did manage to produce blurred images representing birds in flight, or near-pornographic ones of nude women ascending a staircase, there was clearly something missing. As Roland Barthes put it, in front of a camera we are neither subject nor object, “but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death [...]: I am truly becoming a specter.” (Camera Lucida, 1981, p. 14).*

*This is why dance, an affirmation of life itself, is a challenge for a photographer—to say the least. Degas, who was interested in both dance and photography, was unable to do much with Disderi’s photographs of ballerinas.*

*Of course there was another approach to the world of dance, one that seemed better suited to photography: the documentary. Photographers went behind the scenes to capture exhausted dancers, dancers slumped in their chairs, a dance instructor leaning on his cane... in an attempt to use their cameras in a fashion to which they seemed better suited.*

*So photography had to find its place, somewhere between capturing motion and static images. That place, it turned out, lay in portraying a moment. Unlike painting or film, a photographic moment demands a true face-to-face meeting between the photographer and the subject, so that the photographer’s presence is always felt in the photo. It has been said that photography is less an icon of reality than its index, less a resemblance of what it shows than a pointer to its subject. And it is this immediacy, this combined presence of the photographer and the subject, that makes the dancers’ images presented here so moving. The photographs of Raymonde April, Evergon, Pascal Grandmaison, John Hall and Jesús Vallinas are marked with each artist’s particular sensitivities, of course. But they also offer us a glimpse of a privileged moment, an instant really, a “click” in time—in each person’s existence. That is what touches us here. Because for each of us, too, life offers us these moments that live on in our memories, like a photograph.*

François-Marc Gagnon