

# What Is Artistry and How Do I Develop It?

march 31, 2009 by [nichelle \(admin\)](#)

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## **art·istry**

(ärt is trē)

*noun*

artistic quality, ability, or work

The above is Webster's definition of artistry. It is accurate and concise but doesn't tell us much about this term which is thrown about a lot in dance.



Degas Painting Photo by Frank K.

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## **My Perspective**

Technical polish and accuracy are spoken of sometimes as if they are on one side of a coin while artistry, which is considered to be the "soul" in dance, is on the other. Technical prowess usually plays a big part in our perception of great artistry, however. Therefore, I like to think of artistry in dance as the whole picture, of which technique and "soul" are important and perhaps equal pieces. Someone showing superb artistry, then, would be a dancer that has worked hard to put all of the puzzle pieces together into a dazzling picture.

## **How does one display artistry in dance?**

No two dancers are alike. The pieces of a great dancer's puzzle fit well together because they have spent much time and energy shaping each piece. Certain skills or strengths will stand out above the others, meaning a dancer might be known for displaying prowess in a particular area but, generally, great dancers develop outstanding skill in *all* of the following areas:

- **Technical ability or virtuosity** (impressive skills),
- **Musicality** (ability to connect with the music, interpret it, phrase and add dynamics to movement in relationship to the music in a way that is unique or interesting),
- **Acting ability** (a talent for displaying emotion, depth of character, or communicating intent/motivation)

- **Performance** (being engaged in the movement, the expression, or emotion of the piece, check out these [seven secrets of super performers](#))
- **Movement quality** (making smooth transitions between movements/steps, attacking sharp/strong movements or exhibiting control with smooth or sustained movements, etc.)
- **Creativity** (taking the choreography in and then making it your own, an expression of yourself).

Some of these abilities will come more naturally to a particular dancer and some will require additional attention to achieve. Not all dancers will become great dancers, but all dancers – young, old, beginning, advanced, career-minded, or recreational – can strive to develop artistry in dance.



Photo by Erik Cleves Kristensen;  
 Painting by Lilia Cleves

### How can I develop artistry in dance?

Perhaps your teacher has asked to see more artistry in your dancing. Or perhaps you are looking for ways to discover what this term means. Artistry is rarely something one can just ‘do’ as if they were turning on a light switch. Artistry is cultivated, encouraged, fostered, emphasized, and grown. The environment at your studio, the outlook of your teachers, even the support you receive at home will play a vital role in helping you develop artistry in dance. There are ways that *you* can take that next step toward becoming a dance artist, however.

1. **Watch dance professionals!** You can learn so much from watching those that are at the top of their field. Study their performances and ask yourself what specifically makes their performance special or spectacular. At first, it may be hard to get beyond being awed by impressive choreography or wishing you had what they have, but try to watch closely whenever you have the opportunity to see a pro at work.
2. **Be engaged in your dance classes.** Dance class isn’t always exciting. It is sometimes tedious work that requires diligence and discipline, often without immediate result or reward. Make the most of your classes, however, by *practicing your performance skills* while you are there – it can actually improve your technique. *Dance with energy and with attention to details* like head, focus, arms, toes, etc. *Dance mindfully, thinking about how or why you are practicing a certain step, and how you might improve it on your own* – don’t wait for the

teacher to tell or remind you. *Dance purposefully, moving with confidence*, going for it even when you're unsure, and remaining alert and focused. No one will do these things all the time but doing them most of the time is important to improving your skills, which in turn develop artistry.

3. **Find opportunities to be creative (in dance or otherwise).** I've found that improvising and creating movement allows a performer to explore and experiment with a wider range/variety of movements and movement qualities. It can definitely help to have guidance in this so that you are pushed to discover new things, however, I think any creative experience (choreographing, painting, writing, acting) is worthwhile and expands a performer's horizons.
4. **Ask questions.** Not only of your teacher, who is there to help you and usually happy to give specific ways you can improve or to help you discover and define great artistry but, ask questions of everyone, including yourself. Become an investigator. Great artists are typically hungry for knowledge and curious about their art.

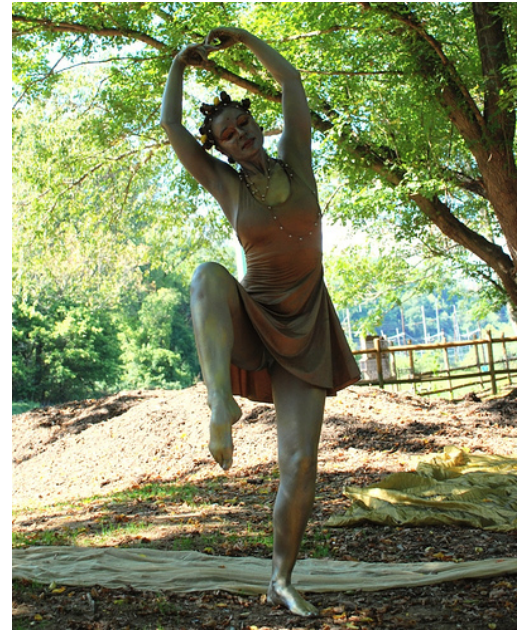


Photo by Michael Tracey