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Degas at the Ballet ("On the Stage", 1876-77; Art Institute)

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Everything billows: chiffon gowns, long hair.
Arms circle over heads, blues and whites become fluid
magic.

Nothing can be pinned down: not the silky
slippers, nor the light.
Everything is vanishing, as flying legs leap offstage
and a smile lasts only as long as a note.

Bright blossoms, satin dresses, dance your joy
and hope that Degas can capture changing lilac shades
and regal youth; dreams of eternal music.

In this illusion, the painter lives, eyes trained
on a scene that can last
only if his brush is pure and sure.