

Do divers and gymnasts violate the law?

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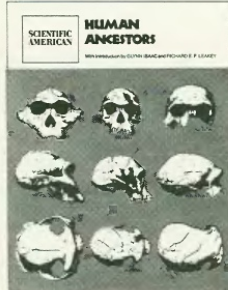
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We are accustomed to seeing divers and gymnasts begin to twist and somersault long after they have left the springboard or the floor. Indeed, in order to win gold medals divers need to perform such complex feats in midair as the forward two-and-a-half somersault with two twists. But, you may ask, doesn't this violate the law of conservation of angular momentum? It postulates: *In the absence of torques, or rotational forces, the angular momentum of a body is conserved.* In the March SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN you will see how this paradox is resolved. You may be relieved to learn that divers and gymnasts (and free-falling cats, too) perform their midair rotations without violating any laws of physics. Moreover, the underlying

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