

October, 1993

About The Exhibition

We celebrate Bill Bales, the dancer, with this exhibition.

Bennington has always been a place of creating and making rather than a place of recording, but I think this exhibit proves that we are very fortunate to have some record of the past in dance. As I have worked over a year's time to find and gather these images together and finally hang them in Usdan Gallery, I have thought about the importance of bringing this rich period in Bennington's history to the attention of the present community. I hope from this point of view the exhibition is both instructive and inspiring.

We have included the Muybridge motion studies, which reach back to 1885, as examples of photography's first successes in capturing movement. The photographs of Nijinski, Pavlova, Wigman, Kreutzberg, Ruth St. Denis, and Ted Shawn represent some of the important sources the Bennington dancers were interested in as they approached their own new dance. The rest of the exhibition is devoted to images of Bill Bales and the many talented people who contributed to the development of dance at Bennington in the early days, from about 1932 to 1950. The majority of the photographs are by Thomas Bouchard and Barbara Morgan. Bouchard was the official photographer for the Summer School in 1936, 1937, and 1939. Morgan came to Bennington briefly as the official photographer during the summer of 1938. Although some of her images in this exhibit were shot at Bennington, most were done later as she followed the careers of the "Big Four", Martha Graham particularly, but also Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman and Hanya Holm. Morgan considered her Bennington work experimental in nature, and it was not until the famous Bennington pieces were premiered in New York that she photographed them seriously, almost never in performance and mostly in a remarkably small studio. Even though Morgan aims for the "decisive moment" in her photographs, a term made famous by the photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson, and Bouchard's images seem less definite, less perfect, more open and transitory, I find their photographs wonderfully complementary, dynamic and expressive when hung side by side.

Then I come to the question of what these photographs, records, really tell us about the past. How close do they get us to what was really going on? What is the difference between viewing a still photograph on a gallery wall

and seeing the continuous motion of a dance on stage? How do you record an artistic process? I can't answer these questions fully, but I do know that these photographs tell us a lot about collaboration, the meeting of disciplines. I think Neil and I have tried to become part of and extend that collaboration in the way we have arranged the photographs in the gallery. For me it has been a choreographic process. I have attempted to make each image refer to another, each image anticipate another, suggesting a path and leading or propelling the viewer from one area of the gallery to the next, sometimes only because of something you are seeing in the distance or by peripheral vision. It made sense because all the directions and impulses already existed in the photographs. I wanted the experience of the whole gallery to be physical as well as strongly visual. The fire and passion of the period is evident as is the beauty. A belief in the new dance as the way to express the most profound human ideas and emotions is clear.

I want to thank Lloyd Morgan for working with Neil and me and for being so generous with his time and his mother's remarkable photographs.

Susanne Rappaport