

Judson Dance Theater: 1962-1966

Marge Newton - (Lillian Gable - ?)

December 1 - 18, 1981

Udson Gallery, Bennington College

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ABOUT THE EXHIBIT

"There was new ground to be broken and we were standing on that ground."

--Yvonne Rainer, 1981

The early years at Judson Church were the crest of a wave of radical experimentation: they absorbed the influences of John Cage, Anna Halprin, and happenings, ~~and pop art~~, and initiated the forms that eventually became multi-media, performance art, contact improvisation, and post-modern dance. The Judson ^{group} ~~dancers or dance~~ constructions ^{of dances that} challenged the premises of modern dance as it was known and cherished in the '30s, '40s and '50's. They rejected the theme-and-variations format, the use of the body as a vehicle for expression, ~~and~~ the increasingly stylized/movement vocabulary, ~~they~~ and ~~dancers~~ virtuosity as a device to separate performer and audience. They ~~dancers and artists at Judson~~ pressed for a democracy of creators and materials and for a merging of art and life. Because their pieces addressed questions about the existence and essence of dance, one could say that at Judson, dance took its place among the other modernist arts as a self-examining philosophic entity.

Avant-garde activity of all kinds was at a peak in New York City during the early '60s. The Reuben Gallery, the Bridge Theater, ^{the Delancey Street Museum} Cafe Cino, and Yoko Ono's loft on Chambers Street were other ^{strongholds} ~~avid sponsors~~ of ~~defiant~~ insurgent art. ^{In preparing this exhibit,} We isolated Judson Memorial Church, on Washington Square South, ~~as the subject of this exhibit~~ partly because of its focus on dance, and partly ~~just~~ to delineate a finite portion of the sprawl of activity. ~~The concert series at Judson came out of compo~~

The concert series at Judson came out of composition workshops taught in Merce Cunningham's studio by Robert Dunn, a musician who played for Cunningham's classes and studied with John Cage. Dunn's wife, Judith Dunn, assisted the workshops, organized and took part in Judson events, and later came to teach here at Bennington in 1968. Judith ~~was~~ ^{the first major} link ~~if one need be identified~~ between Bennington and Judson.*

In December, 1978, Martha Wittman suggested that Judith Dunn's Dewhorse (1966) be taught as a repertory class. This idea sparked Tony Carruthers and me to conceive courses in experimental performance of the '60s. Both of us, it turned out, had been fascinated for years by that period. Neither of us had actually seen anything at Judson, but we felt its influence keenly, ~~Tony from the design and conceptual ends, and I from the choreographic and conceptual ends.~~⁹ In conjunction with our courses, we formed the Bennington College Judson Project, which has/had three parts: 1) a two-week residency with visits from Yvonne Rainer, Steve Paxton, Trisha Brown, and photographer Peter Moore, 2) a video project to tape interviews with, and reconstructions by, Judson artists, ^{was incorporated into our courses} and 3) an exhibit of photographs. The residency ~~was incorporated into our courses~~ during the spring of 1980. Rainer, Paxton, and Brown each reconstructed a 1963 piece as part of their work here. The video project began during the 1980 NRT with students Michael Rowe ('81), Amanda Degener ('80), and Meg Cottam ('79) as a taping and interviewing team. Sally Banes, ^{who was}

*Other links are Steve Paxton, who taught here from '72-76, Katherine Litz, who taught here in the early '50s, ^{and} Aileen Passloff, who graduated from Bennington in '53, Larry Loonan, ~~who taught directing here last year and had performed with Rainer at C. G. Ginn;~~ and Phillip Wofford, who had ~~performed in some of composer Philip Corner's Judson events.~~ Phoebe Neville, and Remy Charlip ~~can also be added to this list.~~ are more current examples.

~~where in Sneakers~~, was ~~the~~

working on a book on Judson, ~~and~~ agreed to conduct some of the interviews and serve as consultant. ~~And~~ Research for the photo exhibit ^ebegan by negotiating with Peter Moore, who had taken hundreds of thousands of ~~xxxxx~~ pictures ~~of~~ of performances of that period.

In search of support for ~~xxxxx~~ the different parts of the project, we made seemingly endless application to the National Endowment for the Arts and other sources. Because our proposal fell between established categories, fund-raising was a long and frustrating process. Finally, a substantial grant from NEA's Special Projects Program came through and

we could ~~start planning in earnest.~~ *go into it with a lot more plans.*

In November of last year, Tony had to return to England ^{indefinitely} on family business. ^{After} ~~For~~ one week of naively thinking I could carry the whole thing off myself, I was suddenly overwhelmed by the hugeness of the task, and proposed to Dan Cameron ~~that~~ ('79) that he take over Tony's responsibilities. Dan was the perfect ~~per~~ choice, as he is a free-lance curator and sometime performance artist, and ^{had} ~~was~~ ^{been} already involved as an interviewer for the video project. Dan agreed to gather the material, co-curate the show, ~~with~~ organized the catalog, and arrange the touring.

Dan and I have worked steadily for one year. Many times deadlines, promises, ^{or} pieces of information have gotten lost between Bennington and New York, but we've held strong to the original idea. We wanted ~~the~~ to show Judson in all its diversity, innocence, ^{i.e. not favor the artists who have become famous since that time} and wit; we wanted the exhibit to be historically just; and we wanted each photograph to stand on its own merits. Many decisions had to be made about what to include--where the nucleus of Judson began and ended. For these reasons the final selection was unweildy and difficult, but satisfying.

which is now
The catalog for this show ~~is in the midst of~~ ^{are now} being printed and will be available by ~~December 12.~~ ^{the end of the term} It includes ⁴¹ ~~2~~ photographs, ¹⁸ ~~12~~ artists' statements, a preface by Dan Cameron, and articles by Jill Johnston and Sally Banes. The retail price is \$6.00. If you are interested in buying one, please leave your name and address at the desk.

which will be available by the end of the term

In the absence of the catalog, ^{National Endowment for the Arts} let me mention here that this exhibit is funded by the ~~N.E.A.~~ the New York Community Trust, anonymous donors, and Bennington College Endowment. We would like to thank Sally Banes,

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Barbara Moore, Grey Art Gallery, and the Judson Church Archives for ^{giving} ~~their~~ generous ^{of their time and resources.} ~~time and interest.~~ The Bennington people who have made this exhibit possible are President Joseph Murphy, staff secretary Thelma vandale, and technician Dave Beach. We are grateful to Jim Vanderpol, Shirley Percey, Carol Holton, and Tyler Resch for their constant cooperation. Students who helped install the show are Steven Bluttal, Dan Froot, Robin Goodman, Mary Outten, Annie Sofield, and Brian deLacy. Miscellaneous help came from Shauna O'Donnell, Lynn Hood, and Judith Hoover. Both the Dance and Art Divisions have been supportive and accomodating from the start.

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After Bennington, this exhibit will travel to New York, where it ~~will~~ ^{and Study Center} ~~open~~ at Grey Art Gallery on January 12, 1982.

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On April 15 - 18, 1982, the following Judson artists will reconstruct performance pieces at St. Mark's Church in New York: Remy Charlip, ^{(Brian dePalma (a film))} Philip Corner, Simone Forti, Deborah Hay, Steve Paxton, Yvonne Rainer, Carolee Schneemann, Elaine Summers, James Waring (Aileen Passloff), and, tentatively, ~~perhaps~~ Judith Dunn (Cheryl Lilienstein) and ~~perhaps~~ Lucinda Childs. The pieces will be performed as a benefit, the proceeds of which ~~will~~ are to be split between St. Mark's Danspace and the Bennington College Judson Project.

Wendy Perron

Project Director

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