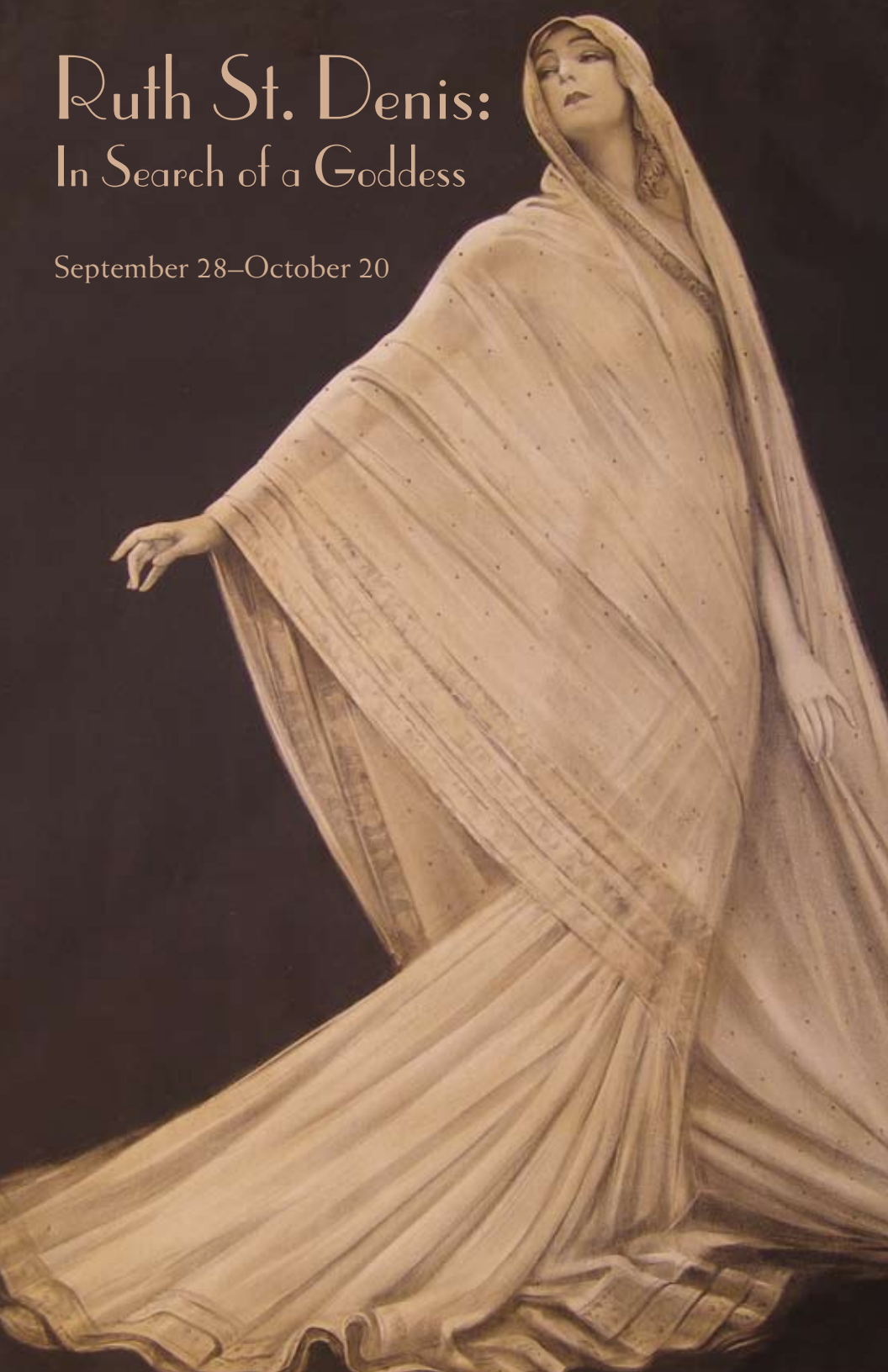


# Ruth St. Denis: In Search of a Goddess

September 28–October 20









# Ruth St. Denis: In Search of a Goddess

An exhibition commemorating the 70th Anniversary of the  
founding of the Adelphi Dance Department

September 28–October 20, 2008

A collaboration between the Adelphi University Archives and  
Special Collections; Dance Department; Exhibitions Program,  
and Performing Arts Center.

Catalog by Mary Manning

Introductory essay by Michael Stepniak

Welcome by Frank Augustyn

Adelphi University  
Garden City, New York

2008

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Photography, scanning, and image preparation by Nik Davidopolous, Eliz Alahverdian, Rubina Siddiqi, and Mary Manning.

Design and editing done by Adelphi University's Office of Promotion and Outreach.

Cover: Image from photograph by Soichi Sunami of *Tagore Poem* (1929)

Frontispiece: Photograph of Ruth St. Denis by Marcus Blechman

# Welcome

As the Chair of Adelphi's Dance Department, I want to welcome you to our wonderful exhibit celebrating the life and work of Ruth St. Denis. The current academic year is going to be one of the most exciting since the Dance Department's inception. Our Dance Department was founded 70 years ago by Ruth St. Denis and was one of the first dance programs outside the field of physical education. Prior to coming to Adelphi, Ruth St. Denis toured Europe, the United States, and Asia with dances based on Asian styling, elaborate costumes, settings, and theatrical characters. This exhibit features materials primarily from Adelphi University Archives and Special Collections as well as items on loan from Jacob's Pillow and other institutions and private collectors, including original costumes, headdresses, and jewelry that St. Denis wore in her some of her most famous dances, including the *Egyptian Ballet*, *The Legend of the Peacock*, and *Radha*. The exhibit also includes books, pamphlets, posters, photographs, and original correspondence. Her passion, creative thinking, and spirituality shine through in every aspect of her work. It is with this spirit that we open this exhibit, our tribute production to this Goddess, and our new Performing Arts Center. We graciously thank you for your support and interest in dance and dance history here at Adelphi, and we look forward to an exciting future!

Frank Augustyn

# Ruth St. Denis and The Dance Department at Adelphi University

## One American Original Helps Create Another

By Michael Stepniak

Based on the original research of Ben Munisteri

For seven decades now, Adelphi's Dance Department has housed a veritable Who's Who of North American dance artists and educators: Ruth St. Denis, Jack Cole, Jane Dudley, Louis Horst, Hanya Holm, Juana de Laban, Paul Taylor, Viola Farber, Martha Meyers, Nancy Topf, Dan Wagoner, Yuriko, Pearl Lang, Norman Walker, Carmen de Lavallade, Rebecca Wright, and Frank Augustyn. The department, which has evolved from a non-professional dance program into a conservatory training program today, is about to move into exceptional new facilities and gain a further strengthened and enlarged curriculum. Dance at Adelphi, that is to say, is poised to begin an exciting new chapter in its history.

The story surrounding the 1938 founding of the department by St. Denis is a dynamic one. And it illuminates the chaotic energy that typically accompanies intensely creative and original personalities and the development of new ideas. One of the first dance departments in American higher education to be founded outside of the field of physical education, Adelphi's was the first to be expressly created independent of any existing



academic department. Reflecting the values of its famous and certainly quixotic originator, the new Dance Department was aimed neither to further women's physical education nor to promulgate the "new" or "modern" dance. Instead, the nascent department's goals were aligned with spiritual enlightenment and expression.

A full version of the story of how the intensely original dancer Ruth St. Denis ended up establishing Adelphi's innovatively oriented Dance Department has not been told, until now.

The 1930s were not a good time for Ruth St. Denis. The formidable 50-something dancer/choreographer/teacher was—as Suzanne Shelton, her principal biographer, puts it—"hopelessly broke." By 1935, she was receiving welfare subsidies for a tiny New York City apartment. She had little or no work.

These were not unusual circumstances for Americans during the Depression, but St. Denis had been the toast of Europe's early-1900s "high-art" audiences and then a headliner on 58-week American vaudeville tours. In the 1920s, the West Coast Denishawn School she owned with her husband/partner, Ted Shawn, had flourished, thanks in part to Hollywood studios that sent many of their silent-film actors there to study gesture. Her dance company, also called Denishawn, had toured the Orient and sold out an unprecedented four nights at Carnegie Hall in 1927. As historian Walter Terry has described, the company's domestic tours had "dazzled a nation with the most elaborate costumes, settings, and productions that America, very probably, had ever seen."

But by the late 1930s, critics were no longer thrilled by her interpretive dances and odes to Orientalism. Compared with the burgeoning Modern (or "New") Dance, St. Denis' Delsarte<sup>1</sup>-based poses and theatrical characters were seen as overdressed and shallow. Two of her former students had grabbed the spotlight from her. Martha Graham's visceral angularity mixed with latent sexuality, and Doris Humphrey's wonderful kinetic flow, were seen as vital and fresh. St. Denis maintained her dedication to Dance as an expression of spirituality and religion, with beauty originating from the head and the heart. She eschewed social dancing, vernacular dance, and any dance whose purpose was not to facilitate getting closer to God.

Resolute, St. Denis throughout the 1930s continued her mission to make American Dance a more respectable art form—but no longer as a performer for huge audiences. Her modest evening workshops on her ensemble dances—known as the Rhythmic Choir—

attracted a small number of devoted followers to a rented studio on West 44th Street in Manhattan. These classes, in which religion (especially Christianity) was expressed and intensified through movement, were not exactly liturgical in design, but they seemed to meet a need. One of her students was Isabel Eddy, the wife of Paul Dawson Eddy, President of Adelphi College. The Eddys were intrigued by St. Denis' ideas about dance as a mode of religious worship. President Eddy, the former head of the New York quarters of the International Council of Religious Education and executive director of the Religious Education Foundation, was also an ordained minister.

In 1938, Eddy took a bold and unprecedented step—to create a dance department at Adelphi. Unlike almost all other dance departments in higher education at that time, Adelphi's was to be located outside the Physical Education Department. After one of her "temple evenings" in early 1938 at the MacDowell Club in New York City, St. Denis greeted her guests, including the Eddys, whom she had not seen since the studio evenings a few years earlier. A year later, St. Denis would memorialize this auspicious reunification in writing, recalling that Eddy announced to her then that she was "going to be released again into action:"

"So to my little apartment a few days later [the Eddys] came, and it was indeed a momentous evening. I sat listening to them, and could hardly believe my ears. Before they left, such an ambitious project unfolded itself that I suddenly knew why my other projects had not come to fruition. I listened with a prophetic awareness to Mr. Eddy's words of his vision for this college. He asked me to create a dance department, where the technical and artistic phases of the modern and the Oriental would be balanced by certain manifestations of the temple, which he felt made a definite contribution to the integration of religion and the arts."

But what of these "other projects" that "had not come to fruition?" And what was the temple to which she refers? Shelton writes that St. Denis—though dissembling frequently to others—never lied to herself. Her real interest in Eddy may have lain in cultivating a donor for her lifelong pursuit of real property dedicated to her art—in this case, the Temple of the Divine Dance.

Still desperate for money, St. Denis received a cash advance (\$145) from Adelphi College soon after President Eddy hired her. Despite her impoverished situation, she was still thinking big. The same month she wrote an article for *The American Dancer* magazine that announced her plans for a Temple of the Divine Dance (alternately called the Temple of

Religion or the Temple of Wisdom-Beauty, which may have sounded more in tone with an academic institution):

"Just now this crazy thought came to me...I want a million dollars! Then I sort of stood still in my tracks and asked myself, "What do you want a million dollars for?" I want a Temple of Wisdom-Beauty.... We have colleges and schools for educating the youth of the land in trades and mechanical devices and merchandising and all the countless lateral circumstances of our common living. But we have no Schools for Wisdom where the message of the prophets of all ages can be known and practiced."

There is a considerable difference between \$1 million and \$145, and she may have reasoned that an alliance with Adelphi could provide a bridge. Between the pages of her 1938 diary entries is an undated letter—handwritten in pencil—from an unknown friend, advising her to take the position at Adelphi as both a divine gift and a means to an end:

"Adelphi: It was sent you. College atmosphere [illegible]. God has given you an opportunity here. Don't shirk it for other seemingly more interesting prospects in NYC. Growth of new life will come thru definite contacts with key persons in student body. It will come about without effort. They will ask you about new quality of life. You can't sell Eddy idea of "new life" thru bigger [illegible] of college, nor by arguments. He must see demonstration in student body. He won't be left behind. His motive must be pure."

On September 8, 1938, St. Denis notes in her journal that her staff—former Denishawn dancers Jack Cole, Anna Austin, Ada Korvin, and Begenau—met with President and Mrs. Eddy at the Garden City campus "to start Dance Department." A glossy brochure, which served as an addendum to the Adelphi College Bulletin, was published in 1938 to announce the "New Department of the Dance." It listed only three faculty members—St. Denis, Austin, and Begenau—presumably because at the time it was printed, Jack Cole had not yet agreed to teach. Gracing the cover was a grand photo of a regally posed St. Denis—outfitted in a flowing pleated dress and holding a pair of cymbals above her head. Inside the brochure, a telling sentence indicates that Adelphi's "New Department of the Dance" would take a very different approach than other college dance departments. Stressing neither objectives that address women's physical education nor those that confer professional dance training, the Adelphi dance curriculum's purpose was nonetheless clear: "Joy will be the keynote of all the teaching in the Department of the Dance."

The first Adelphi Dance Department concert event was held on October 28, 1938, which coincided with the College's annual Board of Trustees meeting. President Eddy likely

considered this inaugural performance auspicious and a source of pride. In a letter to Fred H. Maidment, the College's new president of the Board of Trustees, Eddy announced that the annual meeting would be followed by dinner and then:

...the formal opening of the new Department of the Dance. The program will be presented by Miss Ruth St. Denis and the members of her staff. Wives, husbands or friends of the Board of Trustees may attend the dinner and the dance program. Two complimentary tickets will be mailed on request.

St. Denis' journal entry on that day was hopeful for "success" at her evening performance at Adelphi. Hours before the concert, she writes of "Paul Eddy and I on our knees asking guidance." Several student groups performed (e.g., the Modern Group, the Oriental Group, the Social Dance Group, and the Religious Dance Group). St. Denis performed the *Black and Gold Sari* solo as part of the Oriental Group.

Though there is little evidence that St. Denis ever aspired to be a college professor, her endeavors at Adelphi were clearly important to her, even though they competed with many other interests. The performance that evening reconnected her to the cherished performer she had been and confirmed her religious convictions. The next day she wrote in her journal: "Last night our little dancing performance—the formal opening of the Dance Department—went off very well.... Last night was the reverberation of the past!" Her initial success at the inaugural concert was followed later that semester with another, perhaps more overtly religious performance at Adelphi of her 1934 dance *A Ritual of the Masque of Mary*, on December 14, 1938.

But a month later, her enthusiasm for the department waned when she considered the fate of her Temple. Her journal entry on November 24, 1938 says: "Strangely alone... [I] wonder if Paul Eddy wants a Dance Department much more than wants the Temple? Well I have given him a Dance Department.... I wonder if anyone believes in me?... Perhaps I am in a mood of self pity—a poisonous mood which believes that no one needs what I have [to offer]... stupid and ungrateful." She was perhaps reacting to a letter to her from Adelphi, dated November 9, 1938, which nixed her proposal that the college establish a center for her—"the Arts Institute"—which might finally give a permanent home to her temple and artistic endeavors. But she never got her Temple—not from Paul Dawson Eddy or anyone else.

St. Denis was noticeably absent during the summer of 1939 from the College's plans for

the next semester's dance program. When she wrote to Eddy from California, where she was on leave, she struck a personal note:

"You and Isabel know how suppressed and defeated I have been these last ten years. It is true that your offer to create the Dance Department at Adelphi just about saved my reason and I am grateful for it beyond words."

She went on to request an additional two-week absence, claiming that she must remain in California because she wanted "to form what we call a 'team' of absolutely surrendered and dedicated dancers who live in California, to return to when I can." In a fashion that was by now not unfamiliar to President Eddy, her letter continued by outlining myriad and conflicting goals. On the one hand, she wanted to play a leadership role in the department, and she expressed great irritation that, despite her absence from campus, she was not consulted about the next term's dance courses for the Adelphi Bulletin. But she also waxed passionately on imperatives, her work on the Moral Re-Armament movement, her lecture tour entitled "The Rhythm of the World," and her plans to be filmed in color by way of a collaboration between Max Factor beauty parlors and her nephew, who, as it turns out, owned an amateur movie camera.

In February 1940, St. Denis requested that the Eddys lend their names as sponsors of her new Temple fund-raising endeavors. She enclosed a draft of a solicitation flier. A few months later, the Eddys apparently chastised St. Denis for her unreasonable demands. In an undated and hastily typed missive delivered to the Eddys the next day, St. Denis was emotional and deeply apologetic. She blamed her artistic temperament and her strong will. She seemed to be clinging to her job: "Even as you do not feel that the College—for a hundred reasons (ninety-nine of 'em money and one of them a clearer vision) has struck its real stride yet, so I don't feel that my integration is anywhere near as good as it can be." Even as she summons great religious fervor in her contrition—referencing Moses and her sincere efforts to be a "Christian soldier in spite of my bad manners"—she is desperate.

In a letter to St. Denis, dated August 7, 1940, President Eddy informed her of the Dance Department's disintegration, which had occurred in light of financial struggles and the dismissal of various faculty. Dance courses for the fall term would be reduced to two—Modern Dance, and Social and Folk Dance—taught by part-time instructors. St. Denis would no longer be on the Adelphi faculty. (Indeed, she may have been entirely absent

from the campus during the spring 1940 term: A “lecture-recital” program from May 16, 1940 contains no mention of St. Denis—her name previously always included in all Dance Department written materials.) Eddy’s tone is still hopeful: “I’m still convinced that our original idea was right and worthy and that ultimately we shall see at Adelphi College the fulfillment of our hopes for the dance art.”

President Eddy’s hope for dance at Adelphi would indeed be fulfilled, and Hayna Holm—another of the elite “big four” of the new American modern dance—would shortly thereafter arrive to be the next chair of the growing department beginning in 1943. And despite St. Denis’ departure, her connection to the school and to the Eddys was not severed. She would return to Adelphi in 1950 and again in the 1960s after 20 years of inchoate plans for various Temples and religious arts centers that might bear her name. And she was even memorialized by the Children’s Centre for the Creative Arts at Adelphi with an annual Ruth St. Denis Day, a day that she was happy to participate in through the last years of her life.

Despite some ulterior motives and decisions that seemed occasionally capricious, St. Denis nonetheless succeeded in founding a place for dance in higher education that was unlike any other. That she never achieved her desired goal of building a Temple may be unfortunate, but takes nothing away from her achievement at the University. It took enormous energy and profound determination to oversee the start of dance at Adelphi in 1938. That it had an unruly beginning 70 years ago speaks not to a lack of creativity and innovation, but to their almost overabundant presence.

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<sup>1</sup> Francois Delsarte was a French singer and theatre artist who developed various aesthetic poses, gestures, and movement sequences that were widely taught in the U.S. in the early 20th century.

# Catalog

Selections from the exhibit

*Of the Egyptian Deities advertisement, Ruth St. Denis said: "It was. . . a universal symbol of all the elements of history and art which may be expressed through the human body."*

—Ruth St. Denis

## Early Career

On January 29th, 1894, at the age of 16, Ruth Dennis launched her professional dancing career at Worth's Museum on Sixth Avenue in Manhattan. In the late 1890s, she toured Europe and the U.S. acting, dancing, and singing in David Belasco productions, and it is he who provided her with her stage name "St. Denis." Inspired in 1904 by an Egyptian Deities cigarette advertisement featuring the goddess Isis, the first dance she choreographed was *Egypta*. However, it was initially too expensive to construct. Consequently, the first dance she produced was *Radha*, which premiered privately in 1905 and publicly in 1906.

Headdress from *Radha*, which was first publicly performed on January 28, 1906 at the New York Theatre. Ruth St. Denis performed this dance throughout her career, and this headdress is from a later performance.

*On loan from Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival Archives*







Costume (*left*) and  
ornamentation (*below*) for  
*Egyptian Ballet*, one of the  
dances originally performed  
in *Egypt* and revised for the  
1915–1916 Denishawn tour.

*On loan from Jacob's Pillow Dance  
Festival Archives*





Necklace (*right*), arm cuff (*below right*), and bracelet with rings (*below left*) used by Ruth St. Denis in performance.

*On loan from Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival Archives*





Headdress (*left*) and bodice (*below*) for *Legend of the Peacock*, which premiered in 1914 and was based on a traditional Moslem theme. The dance told the story of the Rajah's favorite dancer, who, after poisoning the Rajah's wife, was condemned to live out the remainder of her life trapped in the body of a peacock.

*On loan from Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival Archives*

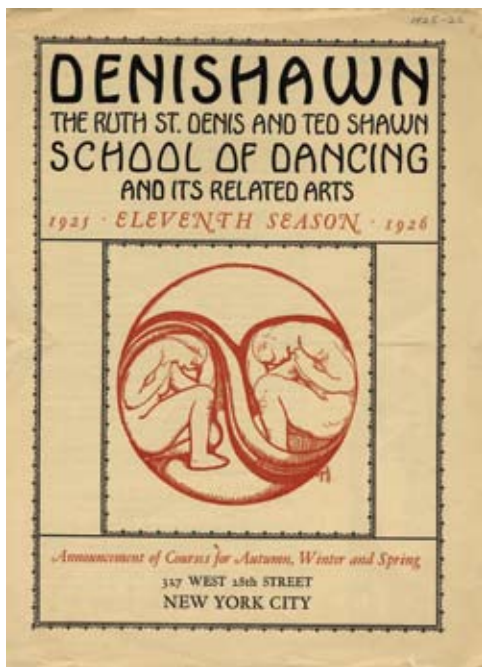


*"His whole being leaped to an organization which would take care. . . of those elements of art, those techniques and that culture which we were bursting to give. . . My part was to supply, in the unfolding years, the color of the Orient, certain concepts of musical visualization inspired and derived from Isadora's attitudes toward music and the dance, and such spiritual inspiration and teaching as could be given within in the close and hurried activities of a school of the dance."*

—Ruth St. Denis

## Denishawn and Ted Shawn

When Ruth St. Denis met Ted Shawn, they shared a mutual fascination in the confluence of spirituality and dance, and their first conversation continued well into the evening. Ten days later, Ted Shawn joined Ruth St. Denis in the Southwestern Tour (1914), and they married in August of that same year. Together, they formed Denishawn Company and School in the spring of 1915. Denishawn produced a number of notable dancers including Charles Weidman, Doris Humphrey, and Martha Graham. In 1931, New York Denishawn was reorganized, becoming the Ruth St. Denis School of Dancing and Its Related Arts while Ted Shawn went on to found Jacob's Pillow School and Festival and Ted Shawn and His Men Dancers.



(left) Announcement of courses for the Denishawn School of Dancing and Its Related Arts for its 11th season (1925–1926).

From Adelphi University Archives and Special Collections

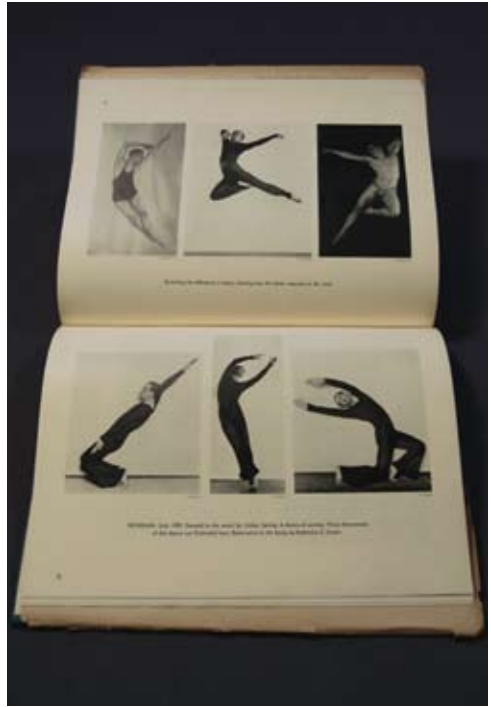
(bottom) Typed manuscript of Ted Shawn's choreography of *Frohsinn* with musical score by Paul Linke and photograph of Ted Shawn performing the dance.

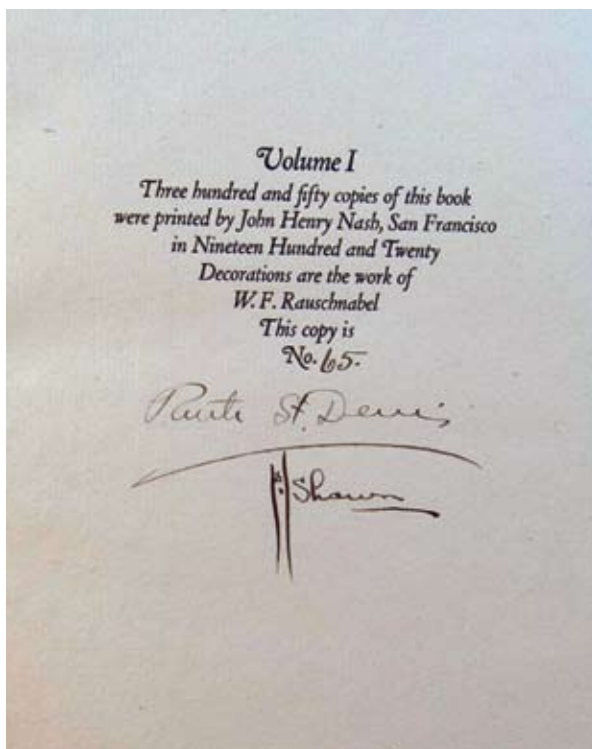
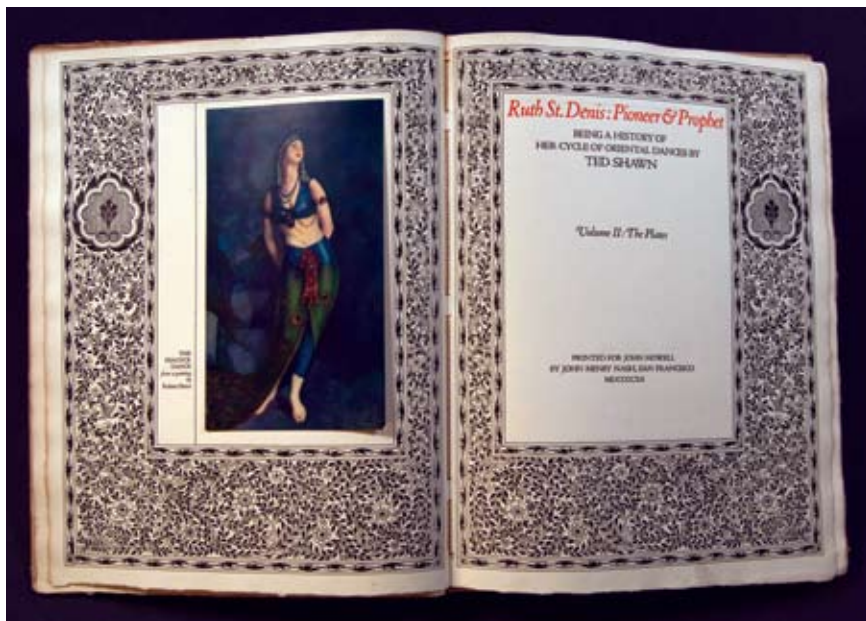
From Adelphi University Archives and Special Collections



*Shawn the Dancer* by Katherine S. Drier (1933) (right) and *How Beautiful upon the Mountain* (1947) (below) are just two of many books by or about Ted Shawn held in Adelphi Library's Special Collections. In the second title, Ted Shawn documents the story of his dance company Shawn and His Male Dancers at Jacob's Pillow School and Festival in Beckett, Massachusetts.

*From Adelphi University Archives and Special Collections*





Ted Shawn's *Ruth St. Denis: Pioneer and Prophet* (1920). Frontispiece and title page of volume two (*above*) and imprint of volume one (*left*). Both volumes are numbered, limited editions and signed by Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn.

*From Adelphi University Archives and Special Collections*

*"I would build a Temple of the Dance."*

—Ruth St. Denis

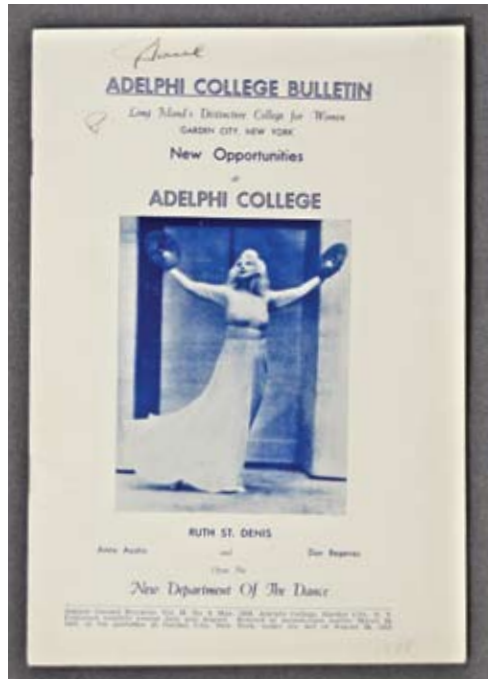
## Adelphi Years

In the 1930s, Ruth St. Denis reassembled her Rhythmic Choir and among those who regularly attended were Paul Dawson Eddy (president of Adelphi University from 1937 to 1965) and his wife Isabel. President Eddy invited Ruth St. Denis to launch the Adelphi Dance Department in 1938. Ruth St. Denis maintained a relationship with the Eddys and Adelphi University into the last years of her life by participating with the Children's Centre for the Creative Arts and its annual Ruth St. Denis Day.



The 1938 *Adelphi College Bulletin* (right) describes the new Dance Department founded by Ruth St. Denis, who is pictured on the cover. Also shown is a printer's block of the cover image (above).

From *Adelphi University Archives and Special Collections*







ALFRED FRANTZ STURY,  
DIRECTOR

**RUTH ST. DENIS  
CENTER**

3433 CAHUENGA BLVD. WEST  
HOLLYWOOD 28, CALIF.  
HO. 4-9992

May 16, 1963

Dr. Paul Dawson Eddy, President,  
Adelphi College,  
Garden City, N. Y.

Dear Paul:

The announcement about the degree sent my blood pressure  
up and I had to calm down!

What is this I read in Bernice's letter about Adelphi  
being now a University? Does that mean that my approach  
is now on all fours - mentally speaking?

Your devoted,

RSD:mn

A letter from Ruth St. Denis to Adelphi President Paul Dawson Eddy on letterhead from the Ruth St. Denis Center in Hollywood. Dated May 16, 1963, Ruth describes her reaction to learning that she will receive an honorary Ph.D. from Adelphi: "The announcement about the degree sent my blood pressure up and I had to calm down!" The letter also mentions that Adelphi College will become a university that year.

*From Adelphi University Archives and Special Collections*

Two pamphlets from Adelphi's Ruth St. Denis Day (1961, *below left* and 1957, *right*) and a photograph of Ruth St. Denis leading a class of students from Adelphi's Children's Centre for Creative Arts (*bottom of page*). The Children's Centre sponsored the annual Ruth St. Denis Day, which began in 1955 and continued through the 1970s.

*From Adelphi University Archives and Special Collections*



*"We can hear the silent voice  
of the spiritual universe within our own hearts."*

—Ruth St. Denis

## Later Solo Career

During the Denishawn years, Ruth St. Denis began choreographing group "music visualizations" and "rhythmic choirs." Rhythmic Choir choreographies parsed Christian texts, including hymns and the psalms, and were interpretive dances based on acting techniques. Yet, like many of her dances, they were based on Delsarte's observations of basic human movement. For many years, Rhythmic Choir was her major project. As Suzanne Shelton claimed in *Divine Dancer: A Biography of Ruth St. Denis* (1981): "She wanted to make dance a prayer, rather than a profession." She also continued to perform from her repertory of Asian-inspired dances while creating new ones. She performed publicly until she was 87 years old, with her last performance of *Incense* at Orange Coast College in California in 1966. Ruth St. Denis died just two years later on July 21, 1968.

(right) An advertisement for a series of historic dances at the Carnegie Chamber Music Hall in New York City (1941). Ruth St. Denis performed *Incense*, *White Jade*, *Radha*, and *Cobras*.

From Adelphi University Archives and Special Collections

(below) The publication of her autobiography, *Ruth St. Denis: An Unfinished Life* (1939), marked a turn in her career, and Ruth St. Denis began to receive the recognition she deserved as an important figure in the development of modern dance. From this point forward, she was known as the “first lady of American dance.” A signed copy of her autobiography and the typed manuscript for the book showing changes of Ruth St. Denis and her editor.

From Adelphi University Archives and Special Collections

**RUTH ST. DENIS**  
**CARNEGIE CHAMBER MUSIC HALL**

Four Performances:

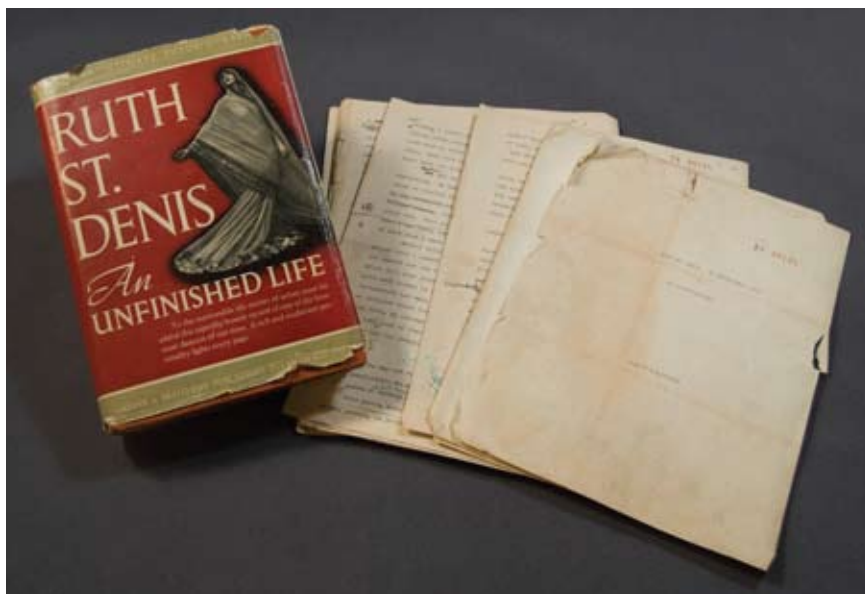
**Thursday Evening, Dec. 4**  
**Friday Evening, Dec. 5**  
**Saturday Matinee, Dec. 6**  
**Sunday Evening, Dec. 7**

Evenings at 8:45; Matinee at 2:45

Tickets, \$3.30, \$2.20, \$1.65, \$1.10, 83c

Mail orders now. Must be accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Management: **FERN HILSCHER**  
Hotel Winslow, 55th St. at Madison Ave.  
Telephone: Plaza 3-8800





This collection of pamphlets document Ruth St. Denis' later solo career, particularly the dance methodology she developed called "Rhythmic Choir," which was a religious dance group that originated as a discussion group for her Denishawn dancers but continued in one form or another throughout the remainder of her career.

*From Adelphi University Archives and Special Collections*



Photograph of Ruth St. Denis as the Gold Madonna. Ruth St. Denis' *Color Study of the Madonna* was a ritual pageant designed for presentation in a church. For each vignette, the Madonna donned symbolic veils of different colors; the gold veil symbolized assumption. This dance was the first major production of *The Rhythmic Choir* (1934), but Ruth St. Denis performed this dance, also called *The Masque of the Madonna*, until the end of her career.

*From Adelphi University Archives and Special Collections*



Photograph of Ted Shawn, Martha Graham, and Ruth St. Denis at the latter's 80th birthday party at the Martha Graham Studios (1960).

*From Adelphi University Archives and Special Collections*

*"Hers is the face that has lured me like a lonely star  
and it still does. . . Though a dance is never still, Marcus  
Blechman has caught the quality of her movement."*

—Ted Shawn

## Marcus Blechman, photographer

For over 30 years, Marcus Blechman captured the spirit of Ruth St. Denis in photographs and in a color film of *The Cobras*, *The Yogi*, *The Dance of the Black and Gold Sari*, and *White Jade*, which he directed and produced in the 1950s. Adelphi University Archives and Special Collections holds over a dozen large Blechman portraits, all of which are displayed in the exhibit.



A portrait by Marcus Blechman of Ruth St. Denis performing *White Jade*. Inspired by her experience at the Outdoor Altar of Heaven in Peking, *White Jade* (1926) was an attempt to study stillness through dance. While critically acclaimed, Ruth St. Denis' vaudeville audience did not understand it, and she was asked to remove it from the program on her 1927 Ziegfeld Follies tour.

*From Adelphi University Archives and Special Collections*





(left) Marcus Blechman portrait of Ruth St. Denis performing *The Yogi* (1908), which was one of Ruth St. Denis' earliest dances. Along with *Nautch*, *The Cobra*, *The Incense*, and *Radha*, *The Yogi* was one of her five East Indian Dances, all of which remained a strong part of her repertoire throughout her career. *The Yogi* portrays a devout servant of God and was a lesson in meditation, quietitude, and bliss.

From Adelphi University Archives and Special Collections



(left) Marcus Blechman portrait of Ruth St. Denis performing *Radha*. Opening at New York Theatre in 1906, Ruth St. Denis' first performed choreography *Radha*, also called the *Dance of the Senses*, became a prototype for later dances in which a virginal goddess or priestess descends from an exalted place of purity, wrestles with sin, is redeemed, and returns to the peaceful sanctity of her throne. In *Radha*, a statue of the chaste temple goddess comes to life to teach the path to nirvana by freeing the soul from bondage to the five senses.


From Adelphi University Archives and Special Collections







 AUDANCE

 ADELPHI  
UNIVERSITY  
GARDEN CITY, NEW YORK