Guide to the Photograph Collection on Ruth St. Denis

Processed by Cyndi Shein; machine-readable finding aid created by Cyndi Shein
Special Collections and Archives
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Descriptive Summary
Title: Photograph collection on Ruth St. Denis
Date: 1893-1949
Collection Number: MS-P070
Extent: 0.3 linear feet (1 box and 1 oversized folder)
Languages: The collection is in English.
Repository: University of California, Irvine. Library. Special Collections and Archives.
Irvine, California 92623-9557
Abstract: The collection comprises over 100 photographic prints of Ruth St. Denis, who influenced the development of American modern dance. The photographs feature St. Denis posing alone in costume, with fellow dancers, traveling, and at leisure with her husband and partner, Ted Shawn. Several of the photographs are autographed by St. Denis and some have annotations on the reverse.

Access
The collection is open for research.

Publication Rights
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Preferred Citation
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For the benefit of current and future researchers, please cite any additional information about sources consulted in this collection, including permanent URLs, item or folder descriptions, and box/folder locations.

Acquisition Information

Processing History
Processed by Cyndi Shein, 2008.

Biography
Ruth St. Denis was an innovative dancer, choreographer, and instructor who pioneered early forms of modern dance. Born Ruth Dennis in Newark, New Jersey in 1877, she performed in musical comedies and vaudeville shows during her youth. She adopted the stage name "Ruth St. Denis" in 1906 when she achieved success as a dance soloist in New York City. She approached dance as a philosophical and spiritual experience rather than as entertainment, and incorporated Eastern and Western cultural and religious themes into her work. In 1914 she married her dance partner, Ted Shawn, and in 1915 they founded Denishawn, a dance school and company in Los Angeles. Denishawn was one of the first significant schools of dance in the United States, molding young dancers such as Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey. The non-ballet movements developed at Denishawn became known as "modern dance." St. Denis also founded the Society of Spiritual Arts, the dance department at Adelphi University, and the School of Natya. She was often called the "first lady of American dance." She died in Los Angeles in 1968.


Collection Scope and Content Summary
The collection comprises over 100 photographic prints of Ruth St. Denis, primarily featuring St. Denis posing in costume alone or with fellow dancers. Many photographs include her husband and partner, Ted Shawn. Some of the dances portrayed include The Cobra, The Yogi, The Peacock, and The Nautch. The collection includes cabinet cards, professionally produced black-and-white prints, and personal snapshot shots of St. Denis traveling and at leisure. Several of the photographs are autographed by St. Denis and some have annotations on the reverse. The collection also includes a handwritten index, compiled by a previous owner, providing a brief description of the subject of each print. Not all photographs are numbered and not all items listed in the index are represented in the collection.

Collection Arrangement
The photographs in this collection are numbered on the reverse and arranged in rough numerical order.

Indexing Terms
The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library’s online public access catalog.

**Subjects**
St. Denis, Ruth, 1880-1968 -- Archives.
Denishawn Dancers.
Modern dance.

**Genres and Formats of Materials**
Photographic prints -- 19th century.
Photographic prints -- 20th century.

**Occupations**
Dancers.
Choreographers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box : Folder 1 : 1</th>
<th>Index of photographic prints created by a previous collector undated</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Box : Folder 1: 2-7</td>
<td>Photographic prints 1893-1949, undated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box : Folder FB-30 : 6</td>
<td>Oversized photographic prints 1948, undated</td>
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