Digital Storytelling Grant
Hocking Hills School of the Dance
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Final Report

Hocking Hills School of the Dance interweaves narrative and visual storytelling with scholarly research. Organized into an online platform produced in the model of a digital archive, the set of texts and photographs that comprise this project recreate the history and aesthetic of early 20th century American modern dance. In the development of this project we utilized archival research and visual analysis to reconstruct historical dances, create new choreographic studies based on modern dance aesthetics in the 1920s, and devise theatrical dance portraits.

The project is accessible digitally at *hockinghills.kenyoncip.org*. The site is organized into three sections: an image archive that contains our visual storytelling material, a fictitious history that narrates the origin and provenance of the constructed images, and an academic text that situates our work in the historical context of American Delsartism and expressive dance.

Costumes for this project were produced based on historical images and patterns for dance practice clothing in the early 20th century. Hair was similarly styled following period aesthetics. In addition to the dance practice clothes constructed for the project, theatrical costumes were designed and styled to visualize the historical intersections of modern dance and vaudeville performance during this era of modern dance.

Production was completed in two parts: in May 2018 we had four shoot days at outdoor locations around Ohio, including Hocking Hills State Park, and in January 2019 we undertook three days of studio photography at the Wright Center at Kenyon College. The outdoor photographs reconstruct the aesthetics of summer dance institutes as well as the close

choreographic connection between early modern dance and themes drawn from nature, while the indoor photographs reflect the practice of producing dance portraiture for use in print advertising when the first modern dance companies toured to theatres on the vaudeville circuit. Together, these two styles of dance images reflect the multiple types of photographs that constitute dance archives from this era.

This project directly involved 14 students at Kenyon, including a wardrobe assistant, film production assistant, makeup assistant, and hair and wig assistant in addition to the ten dancers in the cast. Beyond involving students in a multi-day professionally run film production experience, students were integrated into the creative process during the development of this project. Students assisting with wardrobe, makeup, and wigs were included in planning meetings in advance of production. During this process we collectively discussed historical images and period style, integrating these students into the process of selecting final aesthetic choices for the performers' looks. These discussions in advance of filming allowed the student assistants to work independently during production, where they oversaw the implementation, approval, and maintenance of the looks for each dancer throughout every day of filming. For the students involved as dancers, we organized a presentation and discussion on the research completed as part of this project, then undertook a multi-day rehearsal process. This allowed students to directly connect historical topics and movement philosophies to active, participatory work in the dance studio. During the rehearsal process students worked closely with archival videos and images, as well as scholarly texts on movement stylization. Through this, students engaged with several pieces of historic dance repertoire and learned how to physically articulate the aesthetic premises of early modern dance in their own performances. Additionally, students worked collaboratively to activate their learning in the creation of new choreographic studies based on

the compositional concerns and choreographic structures of the dance artists they were examining as part of this project.

The cast and creative team of *Hocking Hills School of the Dance* with Ted Schnormeier on location at Schnormeier Gardens.