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## **‘Tenant Of The Street’ By Eve Gentry Analysis**

In 1929, America was faced with the Great Depression after the stock markets crashed, which had an enormous impact on the people of America, leaving them homeless and unemployed. A Dance community called the New Dance Group came together during the Depression and created dance works in response to the social, political and economic issues to both stimulate and educate the society. Their works focused on themes of racial equality, sacrifice, sorrow, and the loss of power in a society. The artists of the group were all communists and felt responsibility in changing the art in the 1930's due to the instability of the United States. Eve Gentry, an American choreographer, created a solo work 'Tenant of the Street' in 1938 as part of the New Dance Group. This essay will discuss how 'Tenant of the Street' spoke about the social and political issues of that time surrounding the Great Depression in America. Gentry drew inspiration from a childhood memory and from Käthe Kollwitz's expressionist artworks and used movement ideas of a woman scavenging, story telling, the use of space, and staging techniques to enhance notions of poverty and economic inequality.

'Tenant of the Street' was originally danced by Carrie Ellmore-Tallitsch. The solo work had two movement and thematic intrigues. One was from a personal childhood experience. Gentry saw a woman bent over a trash barrel and asked her father what she was doing. "Looking for something to eat" he told her. Gentry never forgot that moment(Farr, 2009).The other influence for the work was drawn from the imagery from an art work found in a book by Käthe Kollwitz, a German artist. "I never made a dance without looking at this," Gentry stated(Wiley, 2000). Käthe Kollwitz was the first ever female to be elected to the Prussian Academy of Arts in 1919, however was expelled by the Nazis, who appropriated images for own propaganda(Hess, 2011). She passed away in World War II when her Berlin apartment was destroyed. Most of Käthe Kollwitz expressionist art works had depictions of death within them. During her depression she created art that represented illness, and the inability to love, work, and even think. Eve Gentry wanted to create a story behind Käthe Kollwitz's art works, and create the same energy and expression that her art works showed.

### **To create the image of being poverty stricken, the first glimpse of the work 'Tenant of the Street' was Ellmore**

Self-portrait with Hand in Death, 1924. Käthe Kollwitz Tallitsch in an all black costume, with a long skirt, top, fingerless gloves, and bandana. The music built up in volume and intensity throughout the work in communication with the dancer, and used a simple one tone of white noise to further draw focus on the dancer. Ellmore-Tallitsch walked on into a clear space and a mystical pool of light covering the stage. The costuming, sound, and lights all assisted in creating a sense of darkness and mystery to the piece to draw audiences in.

Ellmore-Tallitsch walked on stage in a slow suspended manner, with her back hunched over, her knees bent, and great focus drawn to her hands, with each finger reaching far away from another. Her body leaned over in the direction of her hands as if they were leading the way and every step was reaching closer to her goal. The intimacy of the solo draws audiences in. The dancer is fully engaged with the audience at all times and had very precise and specific intentions for every single moment in the dance. There is almost a script to the movement and a

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full story to be told. The work had a nonlinear specific theatrical subtext, highlighting what it is to express a state. The state was to show how it feels to be no-one and to have nothing in a society. The whole body expressed this statement so that audiences from far would make the same connection without maybe seeing the face. The dancer showed emotion when holding her head with her hands and looked towards the audience, to demonstrate her suffering and ask for help.

To further assist in story telling some movements were done as a mime. The cradling of a baby that would usually represent love and joy was contrasted with the sudden stabbing and dropping of the child, a moment of aggression to show pain and sacrifice. Although this was just a moment in the work, there were 8 gestured motifs incorporated into the movement throughout the piece. The fast footwork and shuffling was one of the repeated movements that demonstrated the shivers of angst and the need to scavenge for food. These movement motifs and moments of suspension, tension, and angularity were used effectively to channel the pain. Most of the time, Ellmore-Tallitsch was a sequence of triangles: sharp, relentless, almost abstract. It was horrifying, which is clearly what some of the N.D.G. dancers wanted to be, some of the time (Acocella, 2013). This movement juxtaposes to the moments of lightness, flow, and breath that highlight the strong technical outline to the work. Although the work challenges the standard ballet principles, movements are controlled and suspended which can link to Eve Gentry's interest and knowledge in pilates. The movement's simplicity showed that leg height and big movements aren't necessary to create meaning in a piece.

The work was structured like a map, where layers are added progressively throughout the solo. The spacial map is a pathway of the journey the dancer is going on. Her relationship and intimacy with the space is very clear. The idea of using bound tension all the time seems very challenging. The space is dynamic through the accenting of movements, travel, and tension. The space is almost like a partner to the dancer. She presses against the space and also is supported by it, like a wall. The space is alive and vibrant. The same movement performed to enter the stage in the introduction of the work was done in the end, creating a loop effect. Therefore, audiences knew the story was going to end, however were struck with the harsh reality that life would go on in the same way for those who were unemployed and homeless unless changes would occur. Ellmore-Tallitsch moved back into the darkness and slowly disappeared into nothing and into no-one.

'Tenant of the Street' by Eve Gentry spoke about the economical and political issues in America surrounding the Great Depression by demonstrating the pain, suffering in a very personal and engaging manner. The solo takes audiences on a journey that highlights the reality of survival through poverty. "The dance is a weapon in the class struggle" (Performing Eve Gentry's "Tenant of the Street" (1938), 2011) is one of the groups saying that manifests the importance of their works during Americas's struggles. In my eyes, Eve Gentry created a story that could loop, to show the reality that if nothing was done, then America would stay in poverty. The work transcended the time and refused to be ignored during that time. Through the intensity and abstraction shown in 'Tenant of the Street', audiences were able to see the importance of finding an answer to the unsolved issues in America around the Depression. Eve Gentry's piece has made a lasting impact until today and won't be forgotten for America.