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## Andy de Groat, Downtown Choreographer, Is Dead at 71



Andy de Groat performing his work "Rope Dance Translations" in 1978, using spinning movements he had begun to develop for Robert Wilson's work. "I think of spinning as the base for my dance," he once said. "There's something about spinning which just seems kind of present." *Lois Greenfield*

By [Roslyn Sulcas](#)

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Andy de Groat, a dancer and choreographer best known for his collaboration

with the director Robert Wilson, died on Jan. 10 in Montauban, France. He was 71.

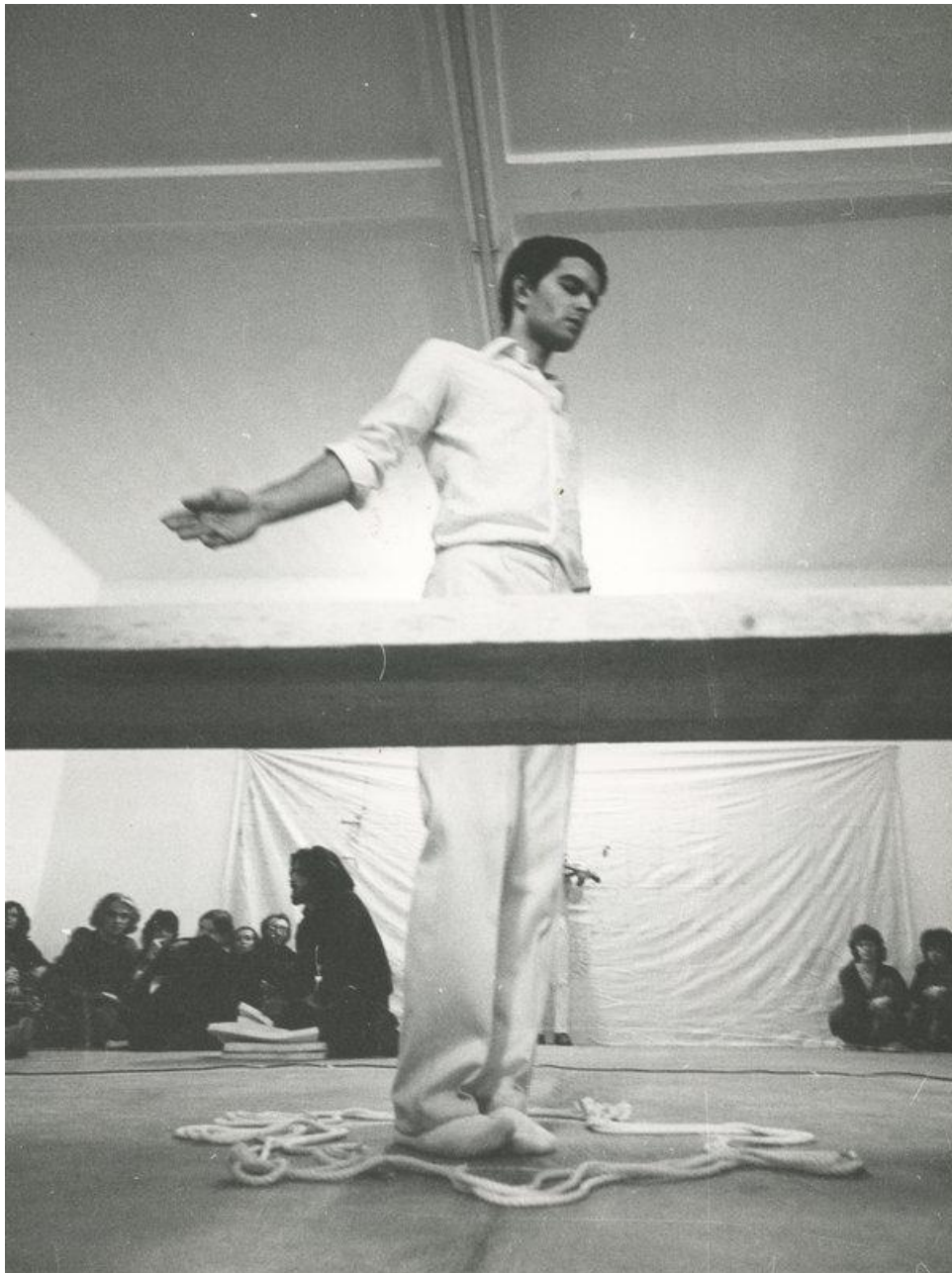
The cause was heart failure, said Catherine Galasso, a family friend whose father, the composer Michael Galasso, collaborated frequently with Mr. de Groat.

Mr. de Groat was a significant presence on the New York downtown dance scene and in Paris in the 1970s and '80s. Introduced to audiences through his work with Mr. Wilson, he later formed his own company and built a distinctive choreographic identity through his use of spinning, a technique he began to develop for Mr. Wilson's work.

Mr. de Groat's path into the dance world was unconventional. Born in November 1947 in Paterson, N.J., he grew up in a working-class family with little involvement in the arts. His father, a truck driver, was unsupportive of his interests, and Mr. de Groat had little contact with his family after leaving high school. He was studying painting at the School of Visual Arts in New York when he met Mr. Wilson in late 1966 at the Bleecker Street Cinema in Greenwich Village, where he had a part-time job.

Mr. de Groat began to participate in the performances Mr. Wilson was staging in his loft on Spring Street in SoHo, and the two began to work together on the pieces that Mr. Wilson called "theater activity." They collaborated on the visual outline of several of Mr. Wilson's early pieces — including "The King of Spain" (1968), "The Life and Death of Sigmund Freud" (1969), and "Deafman Glance" (1970) — in which the director established his starkly arresting visual style: fluid, fragmented dreamscapes evoked through painterly lighting and stylized movement and gesture.

For "Deafman Glance," Mr. de Groat also choreographed the movement and appeared as a dancer, amid Mr. Wilson's ensemble of performers, [known as the Byrd Hoffman School of Byrds](#).



Mr. de Groat rehearsed "A Letter for Queen Victoria" (1973), one of his many collaborations with the director Robert Wilson.  
via the Byrd Hoffman Water Mill Foundation Archives

After that show's premiere at the Center for New Performing Arts in Iowa City and a run at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, "Deafman Glance" went to Paris, where the Surrealist poet Louis Aragon [reviewed it in a French literary journal in the form of a letter](#) to André Breton. "If ever the world changes and men become like the dancer I spoke of, free, free, free ... it's through freedom man will have changed," he wrote. The dancer he referred to was Mr. de Groat; the text, Mr. Wilson later said, launched his theatrical career.

In 1973 Mr. de Groat founded the company Andy de Groat and Dancers in New York and began creating pieces that expanded on the spinning movements he had begun to develop for Mr. Wilson's work. "I think of spinning as the base for my dance," he said in [a 1975 interview with The New York Times](#). "There's something about spinning which just seems kind of present. I can't explain it."

In [a review of a 1977 concert](#) at the Merce Cunningham Studio, Anna Kisselgoff of The Times described Mr. de Groat as "very much a formalist," adding, "Most of the dances achieved their impact through the structure of their group

patterns, such as circles and diagonals, and the inherent value of the movements themselves — which mixed deliberate simplicity with an occasional leap or step from the ballet classroom.”

Mr. de Groat continued to work with Mr. Wilson, with whom he was romantically involved for many years. “They have true love in life & beauty is shed all over,” the choreographer Jerome Robbins wrote of the two in his journal in 1972 after a visit to Mr. Wilson’s loft.

Mr. de Groat collaborated with Mr. Wilson on “A Letter for Queen Victoria” (1973) and “[Einstein on the Beach](#)” (1976), for which he created [the choreography, to Philip Glass’s music](#), alongside Lucinda Childs.

“He made beautiful architectural structural drawings of movement patterns, but within the strict form he always had a freedom,” Mr. Wilson said. “He understood stillness, which is the key of all movement.”

In 1978, Mr. de Groat created “Waiting for Godot Fan Dance,” which in various incarnations (sometimes [called just “Fan Dance”](#)) would become his most frequently performed work, danced by both professional and amateur groups worldwide.



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His work was popular in France, where his company performed regularly, and in 1982 he relocated to Paris, renaming his company Red Notes. There he created several pieces for the Groupe de Recherche Chorégraphique de l’Opéra de Paris, the contemporary arm of the Paris Opera Ballet. He also created works for the Paris Opera étoiles Wilfride Piollet and Jean Guizerix, and for companies including La Scala Ballet, Ris et Danceries and Ballet du Nord.

Mr. de Groat also frequently worked in opera. He choreographed Mr. Wilson’s production of “The Magic Flute” (1991) at the Opera Bastille and Alfredo Arias’s “The Rake’s Progress” (1992) at the Aix-en-Provence festival, among many



others.

Until ill health curtailed his activities in the early 2000s, he created more than 60 works for his own company. Among his most successful pieces were his reworkings of well-known story ballets: “Swan Lake” (1982), “Giselle” (1992), “La Bayadère” (1993) and “The Nutcracker” (1995).

In 1985, he was named Officer of the Order of Arts and Letters by the French state; in 2000, he was given the title Commander of the Order of Arts and Letters.

Information on survivors was not immediately available.

In 1996 Mr. de Groat moved to Montauban in southern France, near Toulouse, where he and his company were resident at the Théâtre de Montauban. He also ran a children’s dance troupe, Wah Loo Tin Tin Co.

Almost 20 years ago, according to his former company manager Frédéric Nauczyciel, Mr. de Groat had a stroke that left both his movement and speech impaired. He nonetheless resisted using a wheelchair, and in 2002 he performed part of his work “Red Notes” at the Odyssud Theater in Toulouse, crossing the stage on his knees.

He continued to work after that, although at a slower pace. He presented his last major piece, “Amour de la Folie d’Igitur,” at the Hivernales d’Avignon festival in 2009.



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