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DANCE REVIEW; Hard but Unafraid Before Life's Truths

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The two new dances presented by Roseanne Spradlin on Thursday night at the Kitchen were not pretty, or even palatable. Embedded in "Ends of Mercy," in particular, were terrible truths about the life, death and most of all the decay of the body and the affections. But Ms. Spradlin is the rare artist who not only sees those truths but can also express them clearly and unsentimentally. And "Ends of Mercy" is so filled with daring that it is as restorative as it is devastating.

The piece, directed by Tere O'Connor, is essentially a series of filmlike frames that take Ms. Spradlin through episodic shifts of physicality and emotion. She strides, rolls slowly and pulls into a fetal curl on the bleak, bare stage, dressed most of the time in a gray shift, designed by the choreographer and Liz Prince, that defines dowdiness and depression.

Some of the strongest images in a piece filled with imagery have to do with her extremely gradual disrobing. There is also a moment, shockingly both playful and violent, in which Ms. Spradlin appears to be plucking out her organs. Snatches of sweetly soupy popular songs suggest that this is a woman who has broken up with a lover, though that is not a central theme.

A droning, booming score by Glenn Branca creates a dark larger framework, accented, like flashes of light on metal, by bits of music by Charles Ives. Doom envelops the woman, who in some ways is very like a Butoh antihero, expressing a primal pain in an almost purely physical way, without incorporating details of the character's life, with a gradualness and deliberation that is sometimes maddening.

A few of Ms. Spradlin's gestures seem to have been handed on from the young woman, lost and trapped, in "Egress." Paige Martin, who danced the solo, is both strong and endearing in her innocent search for a way out. But "Egress," performed to music by Miki Navazio, is an overdose of peppercorns to the slow-acting hemlock of "Ends of Mercy."