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DANCE

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Joan Duddy, Nurtured Dance and Joyce SoHo in Manhattan, Dies at 78

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Joan Duddy, an influential curator and advocate for new dance as the founder and director of the dance program at the Dia Center for the Arts (now Joyce SoHo) in Manhattan for 18 years, died on Nov. 7 in Cambridge, Mass. She was 78.

The cause was a brain hemorrhage, her brother David Duddy said.

Ms. Duddy was a familiar presence on the downtown dance scene until 2004, when she retired from Joyce SoHo. A former dancer herself, she made the theater, a bare-bones but pristine 74-seat space on Mercer Street, a welcoming home to artists ranging from the most fledgling of choreographers and dancers to established choreographers, among them Laura Dean, Molissa Fenley and Ralph Lemon.

“She was the mom of downtown dance,” said Robin Staff, a dancer and the producer of the DanceNOW festival. “Her net was wide.”

The theater, a former firehouse that was sold by the Joyce Theater Foundation in 2012, was known for the many dance festivals started by Ms. Duddy and Susan Osberg, a choreographer.

“A week before her death, she gave me stern advice about how to balance my artistic desires with budgetary realities,” said the choreographer Eva Dean, “yet within this conversation managed to convey that the strength of my work is the greatest resource I have.”

Ms. Duddy was born on Jan. 26, 1937, in Waltham, Mass., a suburb of Boston. She briefly performed with other companies before becoming a curator and producer.

She received a Bessie (New York Dance and Performance Award) in 1993 for “creating a safe haven for dance artists in an unsafe time.” She and a fellow award winner, the choreographer Merce Cunningham, received the most exuberant applause of the evening. Besides her brother David, she is survived by another brother, Walter; and three sisters, Karen Duddy, Mildred Sanders and Martha Taranto.

Her husband, [Ike Schambelan](#), the longtime director of [Theater Breaking Through Barriers](#), an Off Broadway company that casts disabled actors in prominent roles, died in February.