

HEIDI DUCKLER DANCE THEATRE Company History

Founded in 1985 by Artistic/Executive Director and choreographer Heidi Duckler, Heidi Duckler Dance Theatre has created memorable dance experiences in extraordinary locations for over two decades.



Laundromatinee (© Heidi Duckler Dance Theatre)

The company—originally named Collage Dance Theatre—began its site-specific work with *Laundromatinee*, a piece staged in a local laundromat. As dancers performed alongside whirring washers and dryers, *Laundromatinee* captured the collage ethos of the company, mixing art, movement, pop culture, and interactivity in found spaces. The performance established the company’s dedication to sharing the inner workings of its creative process, rather than sequestering it behind closed studio doors. Due to its artistic openness, the company also fostered unconventional, unique relationships to its (sometimes accidental) audience. “[Viewers] loved sitting on the washers and some brought us gifts of Tide and Cheer and fabric softener,” Duckler remembers. “One guy did his wash in the middle of the show and everyone applauded!”



Mother Ditch (© Heidi Duckler Dance Theatre)

Drawing from the success of *Laundromatinee*, in its early days the company continued to create site-specific works that were small, real, and witty. As the company grew, however, its exploration of everyday places grew in scale and depth. Experimenting with the outdoor environment as a theatre, Duckler animated locations ranging from a baseball diamond (*Stealing Home*, 1993) to an empty swimming pool (*Life in the Lap Lane*, 1994) and the concreted Los Angeles River (*Mother Ditch*, 1995). Duckler also created immersive experiences that not only invigorated total environments but included viewers as adventurous, mobile participants; in *Most Wanted* (1997), for example, the audience was fingerprinted before traveling with the dance through the hallways, security areas, and cells of the Lincoln Heights Jail. Simultaneously, performances engaged a staggering number of senses, pairing dance with live music, video, projections, text, and elaborate sets and costumes.

The company's site-specific reach did not go unnoticed, and a series of productions in iconic Los Angeles sites pushed it to national and international recognition. Works created in the Subway Terminal Building (*Subversions*, 2000), Herald Examiner Building (*Cover Story*, 2002), and the former Ambassador Hotel (*Sleeping with the Ambassador*, 2003) reimagined legendary locations with fresh, relevant art that responded to each site's colorful history. "We couldn't restore or save historic buildings, but we could offer people artistic perspectives on the past that were engaging, fun, intelligent, and celebrated our culture—and the size of the audiences grew and grew," Duckler remembers. Through subsequent opportunities in Hong Kong, Denmark, and Russia, the company reached international eyes and flexed its creative muscles to work in sites that had only been seen through photographs—in essence, creating site-specific work on the spot.



Sleeping with the Ambassador (Photo Credit: Dan Evans)

While it engaged locations on a worldwide scale, at the same time the company did not forget its Los Angeles roots, bringing dance to civic spaces such as the Los Angeles Police Academy (*C'Opera*, 2006) and City Hall (*Governing Bodies*, 2010). In 2010, the company also launched its *Expulsion* series, a collaborative performance that partners with local companies to tell stories of home, origins, and immigration, using vacant lots across the city as its stage. Building cross-cultural work with the Cambodian community in Long Beach, the Armenian community in Glendale, the Ethiopian and Korean communities in Mid-City, and most recently the Latino community in Boyle Heights, the *Expulsion* series uses performance as a means of community organizing and public engagement. Paired with a growing education and outreach program, the company infuses dance within the consciousnesses of multiethnic, underserved, geographically-diverse, and multigenerational communities that reflects the colorful urban fabric of Los Angeles.

From its beginnings in a humble laundromat, the company continues to push the bounds of innovative site-specific work and reimagine the ordinary and extraordinary places in which we live. "Sites can be real. Sites can be metaphorical. Site-specific dance can be defined by geography or defined by people who inhabit or visit a place," Duckler asserts, and recent performance at Linda Vista Hospital (*The Groundskeepers*, 2013) and upcoming performance at the Kunstakademie Dusseldorf in fall 2014 serve as testaments to constant new experiments in site. As the company looks forward to animating new locations within the vast landscape, one thing is certain—expect Heidi Duckler Dance Theatre in unexpected places.



Governing Bodies (Photo Credit: Andre Andreev)