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La Ribot

03.01.11



Left: **La Ribot**, *Llámame Mariachi* (Call Me Mariachi), 2009. Production still, Salle Caecilia, La Comédie de Genève, 2009. Photo: Gilles Jobin. Right: **La Ribot**, *Llámame Mariachi* (Call Me Mariachi), 2009. Performance view, Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2009. Photo: Anne Maniglier.

Since the mid-1980s, the Spanish, Geneva-based dancer, choreographer, and artist Maria Ribot has been creating works that humorously merge video and performance art. Her 2009 piece *Llámame Mariachi* (Call Me Mariachi) will be performed during the Swiss Dance Days at the Dampfzentrale in Bern, Switzerland, on March 5 and 6.

IT'S VERY DIFFICULT to summarize the two parts of *Llámame Mariachi*. But let's try: The first part is a twenty-five-minute video titled *mariachi n°17* that consists of a single take. It's shot by the dancers—Marie-Caroline Hominal, Delphine Rosay, and myself—with a handheld camera; the camera is passed from one performer to another, and so the piece becomes a physical and sensorial exploration of the point of view of the body dancing. The video was shot over six weeks in the Salle Caecilia, a proscenium theater where you can work in both the stage space and the auditorium, at La Comédie de Genève. The set is mostly built from material found on site; but mirrors have been added, and also a collection of large-scale architectural photographs showing a new theater under construction by Miguel de Guzmán. In the video, the camera explores the perspectives in the photographs, generating a confusion between the real set and the space in the pictures. The "17" in the piece's title refers to the shooting process: The single take that I've used was the last, seventeenth take, which we shot just hours before we had to vacate the set.

The second part is a live, onstage performance in which the three dancers move in slow motion, read from books, and make funny improvised asides, foregrounding a pseudoanalytic and intellectual experience of live performance and the status of spectators and interpreters. Both parts pervert and question perception—of the space in the video and of the weight of time (historical, cultural, and performative) in the live part.

The inspiration for the video section came first. It derives from ideas that go back to my early camera explorations a decade ago, and that I've been working on ever since. The point of the handheld camera is to humanize the apparatus: When you watch the video, you're thinking about the hand (or the body in this case) behind the camera, not the machinery. The single take is the best way to stay close to the experience of live performance when you're working with video.

But the camera work also intensifies the video's quality of perpetual motion. I edited the music with my collaborator Clive Jenkins from a selection of pieces by atom™, a fantastic musician who can work with any music—from Bach to pop or Latin. In the edit we avoided any kind of repetition; we were listening for themes with a quality of flow, that kept on going and going.

That's also the quality I went for in the video extracts. As the camera travels through the set, it comes upon video monitors screening film clips; we watch for a moment and then move on. The clips come from Powell and Pressburger's *The Red Shoes* (1948), the 1974 disaster movie *Earthquake*, and Sam Raimi's 1985 *Crimewave*, and they all have a kind of paranoid quality where everything's in motion. But there are other cinematic inspirations behind the work—for instance, the wonderful last dance in Aleksandr Sokurov's *Russian Ark* (2002); or Zbigniew Rybczynski's 1987 video *Steps*; or the fantastic scene in Mikhail Kalatozov's *I Am Cuba* (1968) where the shot ends with the camera diving into a swimming pool.

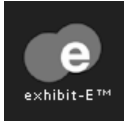
The second half of *Llámame Mariachi*, the live part, is essential, because, unlike the video, it keeps on changing. So far, we've performed it in three languages. Elements of it rely on the texts that we read from the books, but the improvised asides are the complicated part. Sometimes, although they are unscripted, they'll seem fake. There is always something to redo, to change, and for me that's the crucial part. Everything in life that interests me keeps on changing.

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— As told to Rachel Withers

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