



INTERVIEW WITH
— LA RIBOT —

CRISTIANE BOUGER

for RELÂCHE – Casa Hoffmann e-Magazine (2004)

The artist La Ribot, who was born in Madrid, has lived and worked in London since 1997. Under the signature La Ribot, she created pieces that have received several awards, and exist in the intersection between contemporary dance, live art, performance, and video. Among her works are: *13 Piezas Distinguidas*, *Más Distinguidas*, and *40 Espontáneos*. She has among her inspirations, the French composer Eric Satie and the Catalan poet Joan Brossa.

Relâche: What can you tell us about your experience with Blanca Calvo and the dance group Bocanada in the 1980s?

La Ribot: Like every first experience, it was full of excitement and worth. At that time there were hardly interesting things on dance in Madrid. Then Bocanada became important in our lives and in the city. From Bocanada, artists as Olga Mesa and Juan Domínguez came out, for instance, and almost all of us, who shared that experience have been or keep working in the arts. This is very beautiful for me.

R: And how did the Distinguished Project start?

La Ribot: The Distinguished Pieces was for me a statement of the possibility of changing. Changing the experience in Bocanada to another one that seemed more pertinent and real for me—concepts as agility, speed, scale reduction, the way of producing, including the way of distributing (distinguished proprietors); multidisciplinary or indisciplinary, silence, longing, nudity.

R: What about the experience of seeing *Más Distinguidas* on Anna Williams' body? Was it the first time a work choreographed for your own body was presented by another performer?

La Ribot: When I saw Anna doing the pieces I became aware about the subtle message from those pieces and about the power of their image. Sometimes it does not matter who was inserted in the idea, her body or mine. The piece did not change.

R: Your option for nudity apparently has the goal of reaching the neutrality of the body. Can you expand on that?

La Ribot: I don't see it as a goal. Nudity supported the simplicity and the radicality of what I proposed. Silence, nudity, quietness, and simplicity were part of the first inventory. Nudity provided me with a way of showing the body as a cloth, I mean, showing its visual function—neutral, and not theatrical. Therefore, nudity allowed me to work with my body on the same level than the other objects and, including the audience itself, making me more vulnerable and receptive, blurring hierarchies among the various elements.

R: What prompted the assemble of the 34 Distinguished

Pieces to the *Panoramix* at Tate Modern?

La Ribot: The project I've been developing since 1993. *Panoramix* was a step forward in the discovery of horizontality, for instance, of the constant accumulation in the time and space of the objects, shapes, actions, of concepts that repeat themselves, transforming themselves during these 10 years, I mean, of the construction of the code itself.

R: In 1999, you produced *El Gran Game*. Can you talk about this work? Was it the first group production after years of solo work?

La Ribot: *El Gran Game* was the first group project I did in London. It was very interesting for everybody who was in it. I'm not sure whether it was as intense for the audience. It was a dice game that associated chance (very simple) with a very sophisticated code, a mix of British Sign Language with the codes used by dancers and choreographers in order to explain the steps without doing it, using arms and hands. Personally, the language of codes developed on this piece interested me a lot.

R: Regarding your latest creation, *40 Espontáneos...* the title of this project seems to refer to the bullfights...

La Ribot: The title refers to those who go into the bullfight arenas.

According to the *Real Academia Española* dictionary, the meanings may be: a) Spontaneous. From the Latin *spontaneus*. adj. Voluntary and with its own movement. That produces itself without culture or human caring. b) Spontaneity f. Quality of what is spontaneous. Natural and easy expansion of thought.

Still, in the bullfight code, spontaneous is the aspiring bullfighter who is anxious to be seen and jumps into the arena with no preparation or announcement. Actually this fact has become very rare, because of the bullfight regulation and police control. In fact, with the strong tourism improvement and the construction of new bull-

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La Ribot , 40 Espontáneos
2003 © Isabelle Meister

fight arenas in the 1960s, it was something that reappeared. The spontaneous is not welcomed by the fanatic ones because it presumes a rupture of the rhythm and of the movement sequences of the fight and art of the bullfighter. A bullfight is based on the ability and domain of certain rules; the spontaneous introduces an unnecessary overdose of risks and can turn it into proof of bravery or into a butchery.

Marina Moliner in her *Diccionario del Uso del Español* also defines “spontaneous” as irrational, instinctive, involuntary, inconsequent. Or as original and wild.

Personally, I am interested in working with certain aspects of these definitions of spontaneity, understanding the characters as the bull, something alive and sometimes angry, always different and changeable.

R: Did this project begin with the video installation *Despliegue*, from 2001?

La Ribot: Since 2000 I’ve been working horizontally *Still Distinguished*, *Despliegue*, *London–Helsinki*, *Panoramix*, *40 Espontáneos*. All the pieces answer to the same proposal. Different ways, different medias—video, stage, gallery...

R: In this project you have a partnership with the dancer

Juan Dominguez. Is it a co-creation?

La Ribot: I sign the direction and the idea. It is not a co-creation. Juan Domínguez is my assistant on this project. It is a much higher and different dimension project than the *Distinguished Pieces* and I not only worked with Juan, but also with Anna Williams, Corine Garcia, Daniel Demont, and 40 more people in each city. Each collaborator has his or her work. Juan is the closest and best interlocutor for me.

R: In *40 Espontáneos* you work with big groups and the research process takes place in different countries with different performers. Do these experiences have a cumulative result for you or are they totally independent?

La Ribot: Certainly it is cumulative. What I found out in a place I repeat in the next one keeping the research.

R: An interesting point of this work is that everybody who participates in the process will not participate in the final project/presentation. It seems very unexpected. Is this a conceptual decision or a practical impossibility?

La Ribot: Both of them. Constant and natural change interests me. And this aspect is established with the group changing in each city. Still, it would be too slow for me, moving a 40 people company abroad. In general, agility

La Ribot, *Panoramix* 1993–2003. Tate Modern, London. Photo: Manuel Vason, 2003.

Panoramix





La Ribot, *Panoramix* 1993–2003. Tate Modern, London. Photo: Manuel Vason, 2003.

“Spanish culture is so rich and amusing and I thrive on it. For instance, personally I don’t think I am a minimalist or something like that: it means nothing, but Castellan austerity. Austerity rooted in me as the garlic and the onion, the yellow and ochre color of the land, the violent color of the blood.” — La Ribot

interests me more than slowness, besides the fact that in this case, the weight is assured by the amount of people involved in the group.

R: How was the experience at Casa Hoffmann different from the other places where you developed *40 Espontáneos*?

La Ribot: In each place I work some different things. At Casa Hoffmann, talking about the general concept, the intelligent organism, collaboration, contamination, flexibility, etc... I wanted the agility, the accumulation of actions, and the impossible missions working.

R: In the workshop at Casa Hoffmann, the non-hierarchical choreographic leading was evident, as the whole work happened through a net, as everybody was part of the same intelligence or organism with very clear actions and decisions in the scene. Drawing on this and other experiences, what do you think about choreographic authorship?

La Ribot: For me, this project and the choreography are inserted in this general concept and not so much in its specific movement. The instructions and actions are clear and are given, the objects too. The individual interpretative particularities are not so important, although they are necessary, valid, and useful for me. Wasn't it Duchamp who stated that being an author is signing the piece?

R: Regarding your videos... how are the agreements between you and the video artist made? Do you usually participate in the video direction?

La Ribot: So far the five or six works I did on video have been directed, filmed, and performed by me. An exception is *Travelling*, in which Eduardo Bonito, Olga Mesa, and Gilles Jobin filmed themselves when they dance, under my direction. And in *London–Helsinki*, in which Gilles Jobin captures the footage from the airplane.

R: You have found an informal, but very sophisticated way of selling your Distinguished Pieces. Was that decision inspired by the performance art of the 1960s?

La Ribot: Above all inspired in Piero Mazoni.

R: How do you define your work?

La Ribot: My work is placed in a territory between the

visual arts, dance, and performance.

R: It seems that the composer Eric Satie and the poet Joan Brossa influenced your work. Would you like to mention any other influences in your creative process?

La Ribot: If I talk about the Distinguished Pieces, Satie and Brossa are fundamental. The first, because of the simplicity of his music, the transparency inherent to it, the repetition of obsessive motives, the formal and conceptual austerity. The poetry and the irony of the titles. His annoying and vibrant proposals. The second one because his colloquial language, the taste for the popular, the humor, the politics, the poetry and life are one and the same thing. Both of them for their indiscipline.

I could also cite Duchamp and sure, Cage, Buster Keaton, Pina Bausch, Cindy Sherman, Ítalo Calvino, conceptual art and the Póvera. Surrealism and Dadaism. The bull-fights, where presentation and representation are conceived in a genial way, the fruit and vegetable markets. The fabric stores.

R: You come from a country that has a passionate, obstinate, and intense culture. This can be seen in Almodóvar's movies, but also in Goya, Dalí, and Picasso paintings, in Lorca's poetry and in Cervantes' masterpiece. Do you identify the intensity of your work with the cultural and historical scene of Spain?

La Ribot: Yeah, I imagine so. The older I get, the more culturally rooted I feel about my country and its artists... Spanish culture is so rich and amusing and I thrive on it. For instance, personally I don't think I am a minimalist or something like that: it means nothing, but Castellan austerity. Austerity rooted in me as the garlic and the onion, the yellow and ochre color of the land, the violent color of the blood.

R: Are you planning to bring a piece to Brazil?

La Ribot: We are in contact; it would be a pleasure for me. *40 Espontáneos* must be seen more as a meeting than as a finished work and the meeting only makes sense if it takes place where people are interested in it. ♦

La Ribot and Juan Dominguez led the *Workshop La Ribot* at Casa Hoffmann – Centro de Estudos do Movimento, in Curitiba, Brazil, November 12–17, 2003.



La Ribot, *Still Distinguished*, 2000. Photo: Artist Archive.

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