

ARTS &amp; CULTURE | DANCE

October 30, 2019





## Alexandra Bachzetsis takes stock of exchange in *Chasing a Ghost*

The choreographer's duets about changing partners takes over the Art Institute's Trading Room.

By Irene Hsiao @IreneCHsiao

[Sign up for our newsletters](#)

[click to enlarge](#)


*Chasing a Ghost*

MATHILDE AGIUS

**O**n the northeasternmost edge of the Art Institute of Chicago, where Columbus meets Monroe, stands an arch in a small plot of land, fenced in with tall grass and dead flowers. Shorter than the glass-and-aluminum facade of the Modern Wing, it hovers over the ground, allowing no roads through it. Viewed from the north, it is made of pink limestone; from the south, terra-cotta dense with ornate detail. "Chicago Stock Exchange Building," it announces, more like a landmark than an entryway. "1893."

Once this arch graced the LaSalle ingress to Adler and Sullivan's

celebrated edifice, considered by critics to be one of the masterpieces of modernist architecture by skyscraper pioneer Louis Sullivan. Despite frantic bids for its preservation, the Chicago Stock Exchange building was demolished in 1972, leaving only fragments—and bones: photographer Richard Nickel perished beneath the unstable structure as he attempted to retrieve historic ornaments. Nickel's body was not found for 26 days; his unfinished book on Sullivan was published 38 years later as *The Complete Architecture of Adler and Sullivan*.

In addition to the arch and Nickel's pictures, relics from the Stock Exchange—mail slots, panels, kickplates, an elevator grille—are scattered about the Art Institute. Most strikingly, the two-story-high Trading Room, with its elaborate polychrome stencils, stained glass skylights, brass sconces, and faux marble pillars, was reconstructed and incorporated in its entirety into the Rubloff Building of the museum in 1977.

Once a hub of finance where shouting men set the national price of meat, the room now stands quiet and empty, barring occasional use for "dinner, entertainment, and amusement" at wedding receptions and the like, functionally oscillating between an artifact to be examined and a setting for social events, sometimes a work of art treasured for its past, sometimes a backdrop to the present day.

"The theme of my piece is the uncanny—the strange discomfort we have with things we recognize but no longer know," says Swiss-Greek choreographer Alexandra Bachzetsis about *Chasing a Ghost*, commissioned by the Art Institute as part of its new performance series "Iterations," curated by Hendrik Folkerts. "The Stock Exchange Room calls for that through its aesthetics, its colors, its history."

To consider the uncanny through the body, Bachzetsis has created an evening of duets premised on exchange, producing a succession of doubles and doppelgangers. "Everybody has a duet with everybody, more or less. You have a different story with every person you meet or every situation you're in. [During this process], how do you shape identity? What is transmitted or inherited? There is always an uncanny aspect connected to exchanging someone for someone else. I don't believe people are exchangeable, but this is—brutally—what happens to all of us, all the time. It's the basis of all heartache and all impossible love, as well as all reality."

Like the series title, the rendition of *Chasing a Ghost* that premieres this week (performances are already sold out) is just one of many iterations—after which the work tours to other cities and other spaces in Canada, Luxembourg, Germany, and beyond. Bachzetsis anticipates adaptation.

"...s an entirely different experience to enter a black box, a white box, an opera, a stock exchange room, or an industrial hall," she says. "These are interesting problems for me to solve, how to relate work into the history of each space."

...three days in Chicago, the Trading Room transforms into a

theater for a performance of exchange. Then the performance trades places, once again making the exchanged room an Exchange Room. As an encore, Bachzetsis will perform her 2014 solo *Private: Wear a Mask When You Talk To Me*, on the duality of identity, before she vanishes from our midst. How uncanny. 📷

[More Dance »](#)

Tags: Dance, Alexandra Bachzetsis, Chasing a Ghost, Private: Wear a Mask When You Talk to Me, Art Institute of Chicago, Iterations, Hendrik Folkerts, Richard Nickel

Like 160

Tweet

REPRINTS

Share

## RELATED STORIES

### His City Is Gone

A new book of Richard Nickel's photos captures the Chicago he fought so hard to save.

by Lynn Becker

### What Comes Down Must Go Up

The cyclical nature of local development creates a fresh irony.

by Jordan Marsh

### The Preservation of Richard Nickel/Union's Revenge/News Bites

by Michael Miner

## LOCAL EVENTS & FUN

San Francisco ▼

Find Your Fun



Find Your Fun

powered by **saambaa**

160 **RE BY IRENE HSIAO**

### The music entices, but the story is corny in *Sombras Tango Cabaret*

Tango 21 Dance Theater's cabaret show lacks narrative sophistication.



by Irene Hsiao



---

***Rink Life* takes us on a circular journey through collaboration**

Lucky Plush's new ensemble piece uses the roller rink as a metaphor for community.

by Irene Hsiao



---

***This, That, and the Third* breaks down code-switching**

Rena Butler explores otherness and adaptation to new spaces in her contribution to Hubbard Street's Forge Forward program.

by Irene Hsiao

---

[MORE »](#)

---