

Lux, Harm.
"Pipilotti Rist: A Cosmos In Her Own Right."
Flash Art.
Summer 1999, pp. 106-109.

LUHRING
AUGUSTINE

531 West 24th Street
New York NY 10011
tel 212 206 9100 fax 212 206 9055
www.luhringaugustine.com

The World's Leading Art Magazine Vol. XXXII n° 207 Summer 1999 US \$7 **International**

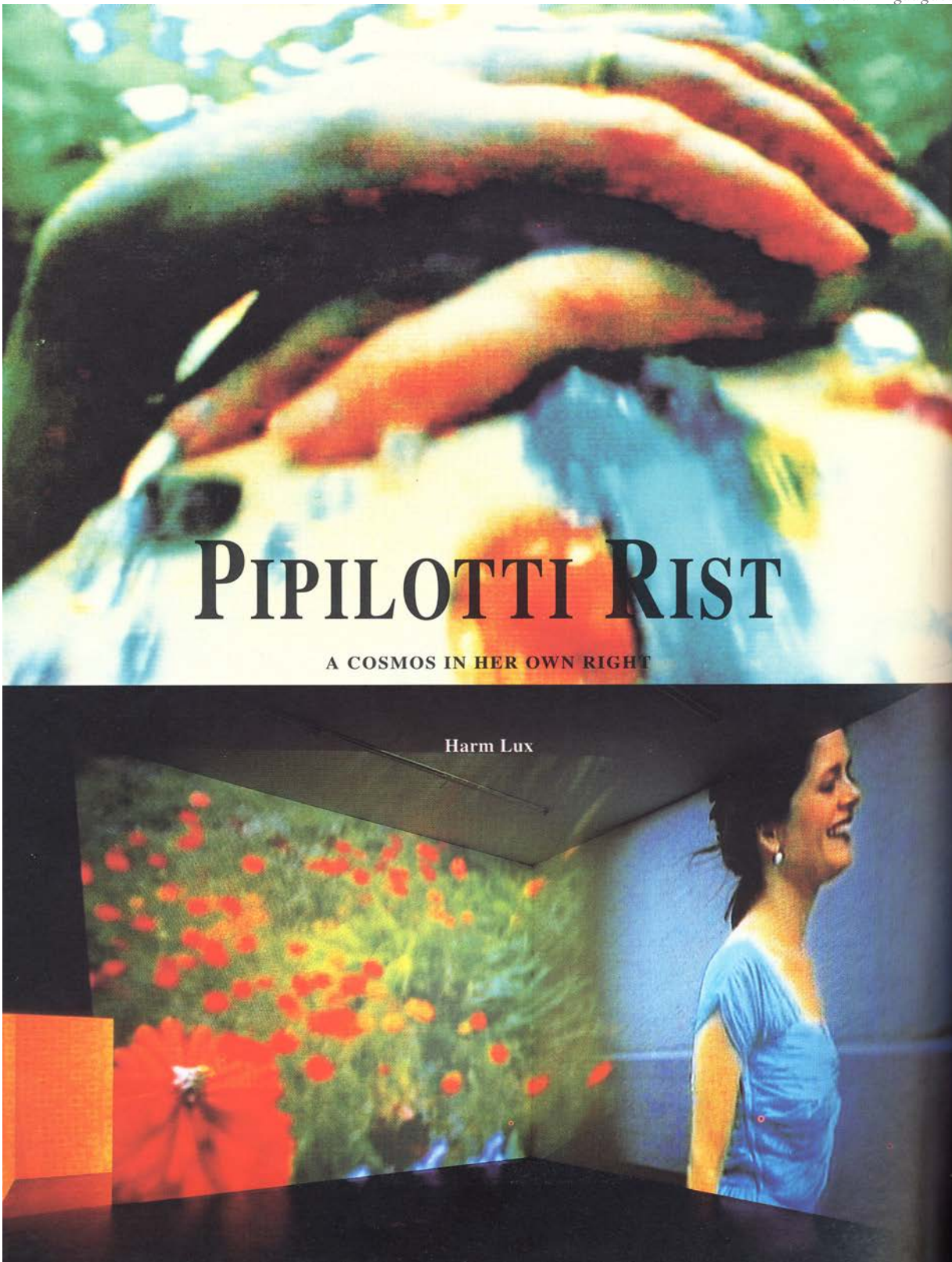
Flash Art



Lux, Harm.
"Pipilotti Rist: A Cosmos In Her Own Right."
Flash Art.
Summer 1999, pp. 106-109.

LUHRING
AUGUSTINE

531 West 24th Street
New York NY 10011
tel 212 206 9100 fax 212 206 9055
www.luhringaugustine.com



Lux, Harm.
"Pipilotti Rist: A Cosmos In Her Own Right."
Flash Art.
Summer 1999, pp. 106-109.

LUHRING AUGUSTINE

531 West 24th Street
New York NY 10011
tel 212 206 9100 fax 212 206 9055
www.luhringaugustine.com



Lux, Harm.
 “Pipilotti Rist: A Cosmos In Her Own Right.”
Flash Art.
 Summer 1999, pp. 106-109.

LUHRING AUGUSTINE

531 West 24th Street
 New York NY 10011
 tel 212 206 9100 fax 212 206 9055
 www.luhringaugustine.com

PIPILOTTI RIST'S WORK is the product of a kind of thought and sensibility that are not directed at “isms,” but at openings and variants where she always has an eye on tender and respectful interpersonal relations. The principal characteristic of her work and approach is that she stresses what is contingent.

In one of her very earliest works, Rist shows her awareness that deriving identity from classical names is a flawed approach. She does this by emphasizing that her own convictions and allocations are relative. In her work *You Called Me Jacky* (1990) she is already questioning what is given to us when we are christened — to identify us as we go along our way. In the image we see her standing in front of a landscape projection filmed from a railway compartment, and she is singing the song of the same name on the soundtrack. Our names are only a tiny orientation-point in our fight with societally determined existence, where we are thrown back upon ourselves. In this work Rist shows that the subject, the thinking and acting bearer of a name, is increasingly dependent on forms of speed

Anyone who does not take up a position (here in front of the compartment and the window), anyone who does not perceive, fight for it, and defend that position, has gone away from the window. But that would again involve a “free view,” and possibilities for the other.

Rist's vocabulary, her body language and texts, her language in general, are all at odds with power games, with a view of the world that is poor in hopes and dreams, and which is directed at the functional. Her works constantly return to articulation through an open attitude. Essentials and truth do not exist; at most they are articulated through the works being ready to allow themselves to fall. Rist wants to discover new terrain. She is ready to open herself up to the other, and she reveals herself, displays herself as defenceless and detached from anyone who may come. The body is used as her most personal tool for making every sense super-aware.

In the 1986 video *I Am Not The Girl Who Misses Much* the soundtrack reproduces the title as a line of a song that con-

ilotti Rist's work like a thread.

Remarkable works in the last eighteen months are the videos *Ever is Over All* and *Regenfrau* (Rain woman). In the former a woman, wearing a sky-blue summer dress and holding a large flower in her hand, strides smilingly along the pavement and smashes the windows of several parked cars. A policewoman says hello to her in a friendly fashion as she passes, smiles understandingly, and disappears from the image. And the show goes on and on. The soundtrack plays an attractive tune, and the smashing of the windows is accompanied by dramatic crashes.

The powerfully dramatic visual structure and the perfect co-ordination of sound and image gradually make the viewer identify with a person who is conveying joy, courage, energy, and drive, moving vigorously along the pavement as if carried by butterflies. In the scene in which the car windows are smashed her joy — and ours — increase, but perhaps it is delight in *schadenfreude* (happiness in destroying).

There is something for everyone to identify with in this video projection, from the eco-tourist to the post-feminist. Even the police are pleased. Only psychiatrists have a problem with Rist's cheerful destruction of the cars, which are parked precisely according to the rules of the game. As Rist sees it, there are no parked “Autos,” the well-behaved self, there is only — as the title has already said — an essence that constantly renames itself, which is in a constant state of flux, and reception. There is no intention to be a true or an essential existence, but a cheerful and playful one. If there were only true or essential existences, then Rist would give extra lessons to pilgrims to the temple of fixed order and free them of accumulated assumptions and prejudices. She uses her dramatic approach, but also the stress she places on joy and courage, and manages not only to ironize the system as a whole, but also some victims of their own wishes who like to identify with the work.

Irony and contingency help her to approach things from a distance and from a flexible position. The work *Regenfrau* (*I Am Called A Plant*) articulates itself as a mental elixir of life. The image shows the naked body of a woman lying motionless at the edge of a stream, sprinkled with drops of rain or dew. At first it is not clear whether she is dead or still alive. Splashing water can be heard on the soundtrack. In the Zürich Kunsthalle this video was part of a work called *Küche* (Kitchen). It was projected so as to fill the wall on to the grid of a kitchen cupboard, with the kitchen units with the sink in the middle underneath. The white kitchen units were clean, there was nothing lying around, the space between the video beam and the projection was empty.

The naked body with its gleaming red hair lying by the edge of the stream looks like a siren resting. Exhausted by constantly seducing, she is now enjoying the water as



Left: *Sip My Ocean*, 1996. Still from video installation.
 Right: *Yogurt On Skin — Velvet On TV*, video installation.



and ways of conquering distance that are made possible by social development. This dependency is illustrated by the artist placing herself in front of the projection of the railway compartment. This implies adopting a certain distance from nature, which is also represented in the work by a thin glass screen that separates the railway compartment from the landscape. Seen metaphorically, we are each in a little compartment from which the other can be reached only by words. The civilized man has broken the relationship with nature but he is part of a society directed at movement, communication, and overcoming distance.

stantly repeats itself and the image shows a woman falling over in the street and a field, with frequent seismographic “disturbances” inserted. The electronic disturbances in the form of a digital seismograph make it seem as though the subject is embedded in a completely electro-technical world. This anticipates the zapping age, strongly influenced by TV music stations; and without being clearly postulated, the flood of images became one of the factors driving her mental creativity and her being committed to narrative, and to open stories.

Rist has a fundamental need to play with identities. She tests personal sensibility and receptivity over and over again. The sensors have to be continually checked, cleaned, refined, and replaced, they have to be kept open to absorb uninterpreted vibrations floating before us in the space. Direction towards something she does not know, a constantly repeated metaphorical and real readiness to let herself fall, with no unambiguous image before her, runs through Pip-

Previous pages: top left: *Blauer Leibesbrief* (Blue Bodily Letter), 1992/98. Still from video installation. Bottom left: *Ever Is Over All*, 1997. Video installation, Kunsthalle Zürich, 1999. Photo Alexander Trochler. Top and bottom right: *Regenfrau* (I Am Called A Plant), 1998/99. Stills from video installation. Courtesy Hauser & Wirth, Zürich.

Lux, Harm.

"Pipilotti Rist: A Cosmos In Her Own Right."

Flash Art.

Summer 1999, pp. 106-109.

LUHRING AUGUSTINE

531 West 24th Street

New York NY 10011

tel 212 206 9100 fax 212 206 9055

www.luhringaugustine.com

an elixir of life and does not accept the kiss of the stranded man. She lies there motionless, her lips move briefly and almost imperceptibly, her tongue takes in the pearls, the drops of water, the elixir.

The splashing water, which accompanies the image as a space-filling and seductive sound, throws viewers back on themselves because of the lack of events in the image. If one questions the relationship between sound, video projection, and kitchen units, the superiority of the body is soon questioned, as though it can no longer hold back the elixir (the water), because of exhaustion and because of the constant process of ordering and adding (evoked by the large-than-life-size wall of kitchen cupboards).

At first, the lying body seems leaden, heavy, and like a dripping tap that is running out of energy. But this negative connotation disappears rapidly. The almost event-free, still image ties the viewer to it. Slowly the sound, the splashing water, takes over the role of the image. Something invisible but audible takes us into a state where the senses are drained. Harmony has the effect of a mental force. But this uneventfulness is also broken; at the end the red Venus stands up, and steals away — born to sing?

Last year, in her stagings of "Remake of the Weekend," which are scenically different from each other, the dominant space of the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin was filled with a rectangular fabric that echoed the shape of the space; it was used as a screen to show a flood of images. Between the fabric sculpture, which is fitted inside with video beams, and the walls of the building, there was a corridor. On the left-hand side, in front of the entrance to the main space, there was a font, and on the right-hand side a small cardboard box — a kind of symbolic coffin — to which table-lamp was fixed.

In the domed hall of the Kunsthalle in Vienna, the first gallery, she staged a dead and empty-looking birch-wood. Video-beams hung on the branches, which projected images on to the dome via mirrors lying on the floor. In the second gallery a mound of sand first of all concealed the sight of something that was audible but not yet visible, *Ever is Over All*.

In Zürich she staged *Das Eigenheim* (A Home of One's Own). The Kunsthalle was given a new division of rooms: *Hausum-schwung, Garage, Flur, Badezimmer, Küche, Wohnzimmer und Schlafzimmer* (Complete Change of the House, Garage, Hall, Bathroom, Kitchen, Living-room and Bedroom). The mainly large-format projections and the "accessories" in the various rooms make loose connections.

Rist distracts us, and draws even more attention to her interest in a poetic, sensual, and cheerful vocabulary. For this reason the link between these three exhibitions called "Remake of the Weekend" is not immediately clear: the title and the exhibition medi-

um no longer have anything to do with staging and a meaning that is to be conveyed. In Berlin she built a coloured run of images that has a logic and a dignity that is all its own. Pieces from older works were combined with more recent ones. As a whole they convey a coherent, self-referential system that — in a positive sense — is constantly weakened by external questions (e.g. "What is the function of the naked man running along by the motorway? Creating an apocalypse? Running for betrayal... to the next weekend!"). Images that tumble over and around each other, that seem like a river, form a constant movement — a Time-journey — that starts with the font and ends with the coffin, a little "boat," and at the same time makes a fresh start, rather like the end of Kubrick's *2001. A Space Odyssey*.

In Vienna she projected the images from the trees — from nature (or a kind of park) that seemed dead — on to the floor, mirrors cast the images on to the ceiling — on to the sky: something created by man becomes a cloud metaphor that is underlined by the transience and relativity of our positions and assumptions. Our life passes like a scrap of cloud, what is life, what do we live? Time, driven away by light?

As in Vienna, she also used the mound of sand in Zürich, again at the front of the exhibition, thus emphasizing aspects of play, of a "free" childhood and also aspects of the short-lived — as potential, collapsing sandcastles. After the mound of sand, which does not produce anything definite, life, and classification can begin. Pressure is balanced by making holes in the "Auto," remaking the therapist, being prepared to sing.

The exhibitions in Vienna and above all in Zürich are convincing because of their atmospheric staging, the use of light, and the accents given by sound. In Zürich the minimalist and meditatively operating *Küche* with the work *Regenfrau (I Am Called A Plant)* is followed by a brightly coloured living-room defined by the light-beams of the many little projections. The room is kept in red and orange, atmospherically lit, furnished to overflowing and projected out of the furniture. Visitors walk through an enlarged Advent calendar, working as a stage set, and stop in front of everyday intimacies and banalities.

In a bird's-eye, frog's-eye or floating view Pipilotti Rist goes in very close to herself, places us so that we are looking from the same place and at the same time remains quite close to herself, to us, to her own body. She builds a world of her own, in which she constantly uses her "old" images and keeps constructing new ones. The meaning of her works lies within herself and her work, it is Rist's *joie de vivre* and courage that makes her work what it is and demonstrates that the attempt to make something new of us is always worthwhile. Additionally her work carries a kind of universal openness within itself, the basic pre-



Mutaflor, 1996. Still from video installation.

requisite for the greatest possible measure of interpersonal communication. An openness that can be achieved only through social convention, and in the course of this, these chains that make freedom possible can not simply be retained: a cosmos in its own right demands to be built, and here all are welcome and have the same rights.

*Harm Lux is a critic based in Zürich.
(Translated from German by Michael Robinson)*

Pipilotti Rist was born in 1962 in Reinthal, Switzerland. Lives and works in Zürich.

Selected solo shows: 1989: Kunsthalle, St. Gallen; 1992: Walcherturm, Zürich; 1994: São Paulo Biennial; 1995: Neue Galerie, Graz; 1996: Centre d'Art Contemporain, Genève; Chisenhale, London; 1997: Villa Stuck, Munich; 1998: Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin; Kunsthalle, Vienna; Site Santa Fe; 1999: Kunsthalle, Zürich; ARC, Paris.

Selected group shows: 1993: "Aperto," Venice Biennale; 1994: "Use Your Allusion," MoCA, Chicago; 1995: "How is everything," Wiener Secession, Vienna; "Féminin/masculin," Centre Pompidou, Paris; 1996: "NowHere/Get Lost," Louisiana Museum, Copenhagen; 1997: "Rooms with a View," Guggenheim Museum, New York; Venice Biennale; Korea Biennale; Istanbul Biennale; 1998: Berlin Biennale; "Global Vision," Deste Foundation, Athens; 1999: Istanbul Biennale; Venice Biennale.