

Pipilotti Rist

"I'm provoking a warm situation where deep reflection can happen"

PIPILOTTI RIST first found fame as a musician in the Swiss all girl band Les Reines Prochaines. But from the late 1980s onwards, she developed a body of work in video, installation and sculpture which has placed her at the forefront of contemporary art. Hilarious, sensuous, and anarchic by turns, her vividly coloured works swing erratically from wit and fantasy to violence and fear. Rist increasingly finds new ways to display her video works: Gravity Be My Friend (2007) was viewed on ceiling screens, while À la Belle Étoile (2007) was projected on to the piazza of the Pompidou Centre in Paris, its surreal imagery – including a disembodied head and a globe adorned with birthday candles – all the more spectacular on this epic scale. *INTERVIEW: Jessica Lack*

Your name is not the one you were born with, is it?

When I was 19, and the first time I moved from my home village in Switzerland to Vienna, I started to introduce myself using a combination of two of my nicknames. I recommend that to everybody: add your wished name to your given names. [Rist's real name is Elizabeth Charlotte.]

Was art your first love?

Not directly. I preferred the police and their uniforms and I thought policemen were very close to emotions and pure life. As a teenager I was good at mathematics at school and loved music and dance. I was convinced that I could find the basic sense of life in science or art, and that both have the same conclusions in the end. As it was harder to get into art school than to get into the technical university, and both were possible, I chose the design option.

You are also a musician: which gives you a greater high, music or art?

When I'm in the audience, the combination of visuals and music gives me the greatest high. As an artist I have to admit I'm more driven in the visual half. As a camera operator, I am mad about ultra-close-ups and wild-but-stable hand movements. I'm a bad musician and not made for the stage. I prefer the sound studio where [artist and collaborator] Anders Guggisberg has prepared some loops.

There is an anarchic vein to your art; did it come from performing in a proto-feminist punk band?

What do you mean by proto-feminist? Sounds good, anyway. You're right, taking to your room and singing loud has an anarchic dimension. The sound of Les Reines Prochaines – which means "the next queens" – was more folk-pop-chanson-klezmer. But, as I said, I could never get over

myself on stage. I always had to play and think – like a a a a, b b, g g g g – but it made it possible to understand composition. By the way, Les Reines Prochaines are still, 20 years later, performing very well without me.

You are always considerate to your audience, providing comfortable surroundings in which to watch your installations. Why do you do this?

I'm doing a service job. It is already hard enough for the audience to get out of their daily routine, paying more attention to their soul and body. So I'm provoking a warm situation where deep reflection can happen.

Your art is very sensual...

I try to feel, smell, see, listen, touch and taste in as much detail as possible. But I'm not satisfied with my capability yet.

You celebrate female neurosis – it's as if you'd released the madwoman in the attic to have fun. Or do you find such descriptions annoying?

Not annoying, but too narrow. I agree I'm consciously conjuring up the positive sides of mad or hysterical gestures – but it is more than fun. It's a survival tactic to let female characteristics shine in the sun, and turn around some of the negative prejudices by performing them positively.

How would you describe Gravity Be My Friend, which is going to be featured at Liverpool's FACT?

The audiovisual installation Gravity Be My Friend offers amorphous screens on the ceiling and an island of carpet layers on the floor to allow the visitor to lie horizontally. The video shows Peppermint [the Eve-like protagonist of several Rist films], played by Ewelina Guzik, in a dry and a wet journey. As the title implies, the installation wants to reconcile us with the permanent struggle with gravity.

What is the best thing about being Swiss?

The electrical cables and plugs are the most beautiful, functional and solid of all I have seen in the world. I like especially that everybody feels responsible for their work: that gives flatter hierarchies. I find Switzerland an idyllic and often protected workshop. I'm already preparing mentally for less comfortable times when bank secrecy ends [ie the legendary Swiss bank privacy laws], which will affect the whole standard of the country.

What single cultural event has had the greatest impact on your life and art?

The film Sedmikrasky (Daisies) by Vera Chytilová, a Czechoslovakian feature film from 1966. I saw it when I studied in Vienna in the 1980s. I admire it so much that I have succeeded in getting an agreement to use her film material in an installation I am doing in DOX in Prague next year. It will be her work, only interpreted by me. It coincides with her 80th birthday, and Jaroslav Anđel, the curator, is also organising a retrospective with another of her films.

Finally, if you could live with any work of art ever made, what would it be?

I am already living with a great photo piece by Marijke van Warmerdam – a hand in a Dutch landscape holding a little mirror reflecting another part of the landscape with sheep; an amorphous oil painting by Andi Holznecht showing a face with six eyes and three mouths; a light sculpture by Lutz & Guggisberg; a cut-out piece by Irene Düring; and a photo group by Aneta Grzeszykowska and Jan Smaga, in which they show a whole apartment from a birds eye view.

Exhibitions: FACT, Liverpool, 27 Jun–31 Aug; www.fact.co.uk; Marugame Museum of Contemporary Art, Marugame, Japan, 13 July–13 Oct; www.mimoca.org; Museum of Modern Art, New York, 19 Nov–2 Feb; www.moma.org

1 **Open My Glade (Flatten)** (2000), video installation

2 **Ever Is Over All** (1997) audio video installation (video still)

3 **Apple Tree Innocent on Diamond Hill** (2003), video installation (Postbahnhof, Berlin)

4 **Gravity Be My Friend** (2007) audio visual installation (Magasin 3, Stockholm)

Opposite: **Gravity Be My Friend** (2007) audio video installation (video stills)



Born 1962, Grabs, Switzerland Studied Institute of Applied Arts, Vienna; School of Design, Basel, Switzerland Lives and works Zurich, Switzerland Represented Hauser & Wirth, London and Zurich; Luhring Augustine, New York Artist's website www.pipilottirist.net



1-3 À la Belle Étoile (Under the Sky) (2007)
audio video installation (video stills)

Opposite: À la Belle Étoile (Under the Sky) (2007)
audio video installation (Pompidou Centre, Paris)

All images courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirtz, Zürich, London. Photo of À la Belle Étoile by Georgios Mavreaschian

