

STOCKHOLM

Pipilotti Rist

MAGASIN 3

Otherworldly femininity, vivacious color, and trancelike fantasy sum up the qualities many viewers have found in the art of Pipilotti Rist. By now overused and hollowed out, whatever these terms once evoked seemed beside the point of her retrospective “Gravity, Be My Friend.” Eight installations (and fifteen videos available on demand in the installation *Das Zimmer* [The Room], 1994/2007) spanning Rist’s work since 1986 offered more perspective and substance than phrases like *visual poetics* can handle. Retrospectives are occasions to sharpen judgment and revise early conclusions. Here are a few:

Rist is an entertainer. True, to most ears in the art world that sounds patronizing, but along with that of kindred spirits like Mike Smith, Rist’s critical contribution to contemporary culture has been a renegotiation of art’s relationship to entertainment. I don’t mean the “I’m messing up my room” insubordination of Paul McCarthy—just making a scene. The puckish young woman brandishing a steel flower in *Ever Is Over All*, 1997, is exemplary, but Rist digs deeper and in richer territory in *I’m Not the Girl Who Misses Much*, 1986, in which her performance is as cathartic as it is sympathetic—as Rist herself says in the exhibition catalogue, it “invokes a positive form of hysteria.” Two decades ago, using music videos as her springboard, Rist anticipated that a then-unknown medium like YouTube (where *I’m Not the Girl Who Misses Much* can be seen) could one day be a venue for art. Rist worked both the pop- and the high-culture sides of the street, exploding the MTV format into an architectural scale. And significantly, this exhibition casts Rist as one of our few convincing interpreters of Joseph Nye’s notion that entertainment is a resounding and unambiguous if underused form of “soft power.” For all of its clowning, *Ever Is Over All* promotes values that are individualist, antiestablishment, pluralist, voluntaristic, populist, and free.

Rist is an actress. In *Small Suburb Brain*, 1999/2007, she is in a car going nowhere in particular, while her rambling chatter steers her into



Pipilotti Rist, *Gravity, Be My Friend*, 2007, mixed media, dimensions variable. Installation view.

the same old emotional cul-de-sac. A string of dark clues reveals the character’s psyche: She is resentful for having been raised traditionally—“We were taught to look for truth, goodness, and beauty”—now that life and love have not worked out as she imagined, even though she followed all the rules. Isn’t it always heartbreaking to see someone who is naive and knows it? Rist brings intensity to her role, summoning flustered melancholy dusted with despair.

And of course, Rist is an artist. *Gravity, Be My Friend*, 2007, a new installation for Magasin 3, is an immersive experience. Rather than adapting her work to an agreeable setting as she did for *Homo Sapiens Sapiens*, 2005, in the Church of San Stae in Venice, here she constructs her own world. Two curved screens suspended from the ceiling hover in a colossal, darkened space. Beneath flickering videos, two islands of supple carpet invite the public to take five and enjoy the show. Rist designs time to make it disappear, though time is her subject. This new work completes a trilogy that began with *Homo Sapiens Sapiens* and continued with *A Liberty Statue for Löndön*, 2005. Rist says that in the Venice piece her character Pepperminta was “in a time before the fall, before original sin,” whereas in the midst of the London episode, time shifts, and she “returns to civilization.” In *Gravity, Be My Friend*, Pepperminta floats in a timeless ambience, smiling down as her audience is “transported to a place at the origin of time or possibly the future,” in curator Richard Julin’s words.

Rist tells stories: Some are isolated tragedies (*Small Suburb Brain*), others showy comedies (*I’m Not the Girl Who Misses Much*)—and now, she embraces larger-than-life themes. Looking up, Pepperminta’s eyes met mine, and Tintoretto’s *Origin of the Milky Way*, 1575, came to mind. Tintoretto invented the movies, art historians sometimes say, making old stories entertaining with a dramatic slant. Sound familiar?

—Ronald Jones