

Art Review

By Robert Ayers

Pipilotti Rist: The Art World Tease

A MoMA star puts sexuality, and underwear, on view in Chelsea



All or Nothing (alles oder nichts).

There's a sexual undertow in the work of Zurich artist Pipilotti Rist that's been there since the very beginning of her now-superstar career. In her breakout video, *I'm Not The Girl Who Misses Much* (1986), she danced bare-breasted as the camera's focus grows increasingly blurry; in another, *Pickelporno* (1992), now in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, a pinpoint camera glides just above and around the nude bodies of a man and woman in extreme close-up, almost touching them as they stroke each other. Sexuality, delight and mystery have always been part of her work's allure.

So it was a good couple of hours after leaving her newest show, at Lühring Augustine Gallery, before I stopped wondering about what sort of underwear people were wearing, and what it might tell me about them.

The artwork that occasioned that unlikely train of thought was *Massachusetts Chandelier*. Hung above the heads of gallerygoers, it consists of a tiered metal framework ringed with rows and rows of underpants. The floating panties make for an absurdly intriguing anthropological study. There is lace embroidery here, odd buttoned inserts there and strange and presumably functional pocket arrangements somewhere else. In both men's and women's varieties, they tend toward vintage in style and commodious in size. (The formal description of the piece specifies, with reassuring precision, that they have been "previously worn and cleaned.")

ALSO OF NOTE ...

While you're on West 24th Street, be sure to see Liao Yibai's stunning, two-part "Real Fakes" show. It's on view at both the Mike Weiss Gallery at 520 West 24th and at Bill Brady's ATM Gallery at 542 West 24th. The artist offers a tongue-in-cheek paean to his countrymen's still-burgeoning industry in fake luxury items, and—entirely appropriate in the hazy wake of Fashion Week—to our culture's equally enthusiastic consumption of them.

Utterly different, though equally topical, is a show by another Chinese artist at Mary Boone Gallery, Chelsea (at 540 West 24th Street). There, you'll find Liu Xiaodong's brushily figurative paintings of Christians and Muslims living side by side in China's Gansu Province. The artist, born in Liaoning Province, China, in 1963 and now a professor at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, is perhaps China's best-known figurative painter, and his series of works of the Three Gorges area is famous. At first glance, the paintings themselves seem like nothing special, but ask at the front desk to see the catalog. This is a thorough journal of the making of the pictures, which totally transforms the meaning of the exhibition. Why the gallery—and the artist, presumably—have chosen to keep it under wraps is a mystery. —R.A.



Massachusetts Chandelier (2010).

Intimate yet enormous, the piece is more reminiscent of a hot-air balloon of innuendo than a lighting fixture. The garments are lit prettily from within, almost embodying them, and over the whole thing there runs a brightly colored, ever-changing abstract video. In the background, a somewhat mesmeric soundtrack plays—a slow, tuneless music box. The exhibition is one of the loveliest examples of artistic eccentricity anywhere in New York City.

It's been a little over a year now since Ms. Rist's installation *Pour Your Body Out (7354 Cubic Meters)* transformed MoMA's atrium into a trippy pleasure dome. For most New Yorkers, that show, and its fizzy success—gallerygoers lounged in it for hours, like a nightclub—was when they first became conscious of her artistic efforts. But Zurich-based Pipilotti (her tongue-twisting name is a fusion of her given name Charlotte and that of her childhood heroine, Pippi Longstocking) has been teasing the art world for some

time. And, though she is now in her 40s, she maintains a refreshing air of rebelliousness.

Like all of Ms. Rist's work, this new show has to be taken on its own very particular terms. She is, somewhat unfashionably in a jaded time and a jaded art world, one of life's instinctive celebrants. She loves the natural world as much as she enjoys punching its colors well into the realms of psychedelia. In the gallery's main space, for example, viewers discover the show's most substantial piece, *Layers Mama Layers* (2010). A series of long gauze drapes hang from the ceiling, forming parallel translucent tunnels. Scenes are projected onto them of sheep gamboling in an alpine glade. It is a technological meadow, and the evening I was there, no one seemed to wish to leave it.

The least successful work is at the show's entrance: *All or Nothing (alles oder nichts)* (2010), a sort of welcoming altar. Lit in an ambient pink glow is a small video triptych of semi-abstracted body parts. (These videos are actually

the least attractive part of Rist's work. The one in the center of this triptych—all scrubby pubic hair and dangling penis—is a particularly unpleasant example.) The videos are flanked by a vase of spider chrysanthemums, a shallow bowl of rice grains, a plate of apples, and—somewhat jarringly—a water cooler. You'd like a cup of water or an apple to refresh yourself before venturing into the show? Go ahead, the theory seems to be, help yourself.

Ms. Rist, refreshingly, doesn't worry that some people will find her enthusiasm merely silly. She doesn't want you to stand stiffly observing her art, but rather to relax and participate in it—walk through those tunnels, eat that apple! She provides the very best kind of evidence that in the 21st century, artists can put anything they like into their art and not necessarily end up with chaos.

Pipilotti Rist's "Heroes of Birth," Lühring Augustine Gallery, 531 West 24th Street, through Oct. 23.