



Pipilotti Rist/MATRIX 136
Ever Is Over All

05.03.98 *THROUGH* 09.06.98

Wadsworth Atheneum
Hartford, Connecticut

*This MATRIX exhibition is supported by
funds from the Lannan Foundation.*

“Rites, meditation, ecstasy — they are all duties I attribute to art. Video installations, above all, can — like a handbag — contain paint, technique, word, music, movement, horrid fluid images, poetry, speed, foreboding of death, sexuality, and kindness.” Pipilotti Rist

Pipilotti Rist is a Swiss artist who scripts, films, edits, and, often, acts in her own videos. This MATRIX exhibition presents the artist's recent work, *Ever Is Over All* (1997), an installation composed of two video sequences — simultaneously projected on two gallery walls which are adjacent to one another at right angles — and sound. Rist also composed (together with Anders Guggisberg) the musical score, and, in this case, performed the vocals that accompany the piece.

On one wall, a narrative unfolds: a young woman wearing a flowing blue dress and red high-heeled shoes is seen in slow-motion, walking down an urban sidewalk, carrying what appears to be a single, long-stemmed flower, popularly known as a “red-hot poker.”¹ Suddenly and without provocation, the woman wildly swings the flower, smashing the side window of a car parked alongside the street (the “flower” is actually a metal facsimile). The reassuring soundtrack of lilting, child-like vocals, under-pinned by electronic keyboard and sampler accompaniment, is abruptly interrupted by the much louder and far more distressing sounds of shattering glass.

Hardly breaking stride, the woman's mounting pleasure is evident as she destroys the side windows of several successive cars. Surprisingly, the occasional passing pedestrian seems to take little interest in the woman's activity. The camera does register a police officer rounding a corner in the distance. As the officer slowly gains on the woman, the vandalism continues and the viewer's tension mounts. Eventually, the distant figure comes into focus, and the officer — assumed by most viewers to be a man — turns out to be a woman. The two figures exchange a sly smile and the officer passes out of the camera's field of vision. The adjacent video projection — which overlaps the corner of the room — shows the vivid blossoms of the red-hot poker in a rapidly-edited series of close-ups. Although each sequence is only four minutes long, the video projection continuously repeats and the action is presented as a seamless, endless loop.

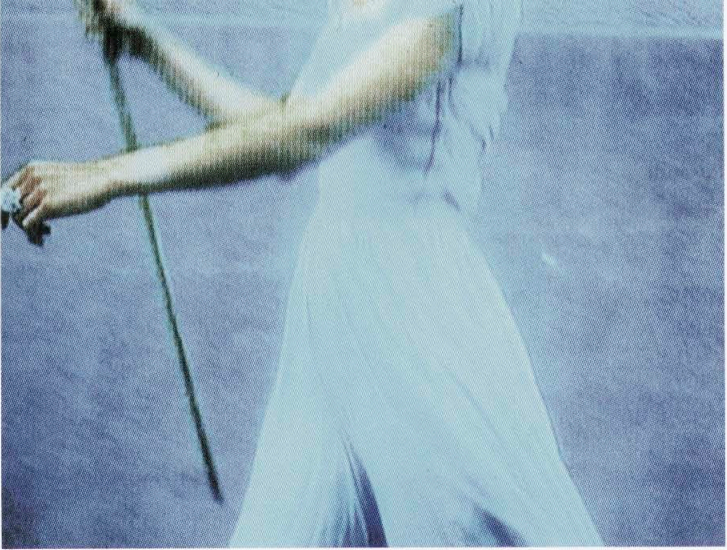
In both formal and conceptual terms, Pipilotti Rist's work has grown out of the genre of the music video. In fact, Rist came to video art by way of Pop music. As a student in Vienna in the 1980s experimenting with Super-8 films and animation, she began to design stage sets for an Austrian rock band. Later, as a student in Basel, she



worked as a set designer for the band ***Les Reines Couteaux (The Queens of the Knives)***. As a singer and musician herself (she plays flute, bass, and percussion), Rist was drawn to a collaboration with the three-women rock band. Together, they founded a new band, ***Les Reines Prochaines (The Next Queens)***, an all-female group that has since developed a substantial following in Europe. With this **MATRIX** installation, Rist successfully continues her campaign to extend the vocabulary of the music video into a fine art context.

Both the narrative and the non-narrative sequences of ***Ever Is Over All*** are marked by the use of over- and under-exposures, rapid shifts in camera angles, and computer-altered, super-saturated colors. The resulting images are deeply sensual and lush, evidence of Rist's interest in introducing painterly concerns into video imagery. "I see video as behind-glass paintings that move," the artist has said.² Eschewing the objective appearances of documentary-style realism and the polish of technical perfection in favor of what she calls "dirty pictures," Rist embraces the subjective, even surreal, effects made possible by a variety of new video technologies. The artist has described her manipulations of the recorded image as a technique "similar to painting where expressiveness or tackiness comes closer to the truth than a perfectly sharp, slick representation."³

The title of Rist's work, ***Ever Is Over All***, is a play on words which both articulates and resolves a fundamental paradox. The word "ever" describes an endless state of being or an infinite potential (i.e. *forever and ever...*) that is contradicted by the word "over." (i.e. *the party is over.*) With the word "all" at the end of the phrase, the boundless possibilities of the proposition are restored. "Ever" (i.e. *forever and ever...*) is affirmed as "over all" (i.e. *supreme, above, everywhere...*). On another level, the phrase leads to paradox because it conflates temporal (i.e. *forever and ever...*) and spatial (i.e. *over your head*) relationships. The title describes, in the form of a conundrum, a fantastical, quasi-religious condition or place that exists outside of real time and real space. In short, Rist's linguistic play locates the action in the realm of the imaginary and invites a suspension of disbelief. Precedents for this narrative strategy abound. In popular terms, a concept like Heaven, or, in literary



terms, magical destinations like Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Xanadu, J.M. Barrie's Neverland, C.S. Lewis' Narnia, and Frank Baum's Land of Oz all rely upon similar illogic.

Indeed, Rist's video piece invites a series of compelling comparisons to Victor Fleming's 1939 musical film version of Frank Baum's novel *The Wizard of Oz*. The protagonist of *Ever Is Over All*, identified by the artist only as "the mythic woman," wears a blue dress and bright red high-heeled shoes, an outfit reminiscent of the now iconic blue-gingham dress and ruby slippers popularized by the actress Judy Garland as the lead character Dorothy Gale. Like Dorothy in Oz, Rist's mythic woman seems to exist in a waking dream-state, a self-created world where existing social relations are altered and subliminal desires can be exorcised. And although the poetic "yellow brick road" has been replaced by a prosaic urban sidewalk, the narrative structures of both Fleming's film and Rist's video are built around the notion of one woman's fantasy journey.

The two escapades are, however, quite distinct. As a point of departure, Dorothy's tentative, shy, and anxious explorations in Oz stand in sharp contrast to the bold, confident, and jubilant stride of Rist's mythic woman. The difference in their respective postures is telling. Throughout the film version of the *Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy is subjected to a vast array of strange and aggressive forces. Among the many perils she faces, for example, is a field of red poppies. For Dorothy and her companions, exposure to the potent opiates delays their progress toward The Emerald City and lulls them into in a hallucinatory "dream within a dream" sequence. Rist's protagonist is, unlike Dorothy, firmly in control of her own situation. In the context of *Ever Is Over All*, the blooming field of red hot-pokers does not represent a poisonous obstacle; rather, for the mythic woman, the flower is a source of both power and pleasure. While Dorothy was forced to negotiate a treacherous path between good and evil, safety and danger, Rist's heroine — like an ancient goddess figure — embodies the potential for creative as well as destructive actions. And suspended in the endless loop of a video projection, the mythic woman is never forced to return home to the reality of the waking world.



In all of her major video works to date, Pipilotti Rist creates and manipulates a tension between sound and image, humor and pathos, memory and nostalgia, sexuality and anxiety, pleasure and discomfort, reality and dreams. Many of her past video projects have poked fun at what she considers to be dogmatic feminist doctrine. In *Ever Is Over All*, the artist continues to flaunt convention and to assert her particular notion of a transgressive female power. As always, Rist crafts her message with a keen aesthetic sensibility, a sophisticated approach to the technical aspects of her chosen medium, and, most importantly, an eccentric sense of humor.

James Rondeau
Associate Curator of Contemporary Art

¹ *Wyman's Garden Encyclopedia* describes this popular garden plant from Africa, whose botanical name is *Kniphofiam* as having "broad, grass-like leaves forming a tuft of foliage from the center of which is produced a very conspicuous spike of red or yellow flowers, giving rise to the name red-hot poker."

² Pipilotti Rist in "Pipilotti Rist in Conversation with Christoph Doswald," *Be Magazin* (Berlin) no.1 (1994), p.92.

³ Rist, op. cit.

Born Charlotte Rist in 1962 in the Rhine Valley in the village of Grabs, Switzerland, the artist was called Lotti by her family and later nick-named Pipi after Pipi Longstocking, the fiercely independent, iconoclastic, and adventurous character created by children's book author Astrid Lindgren. Rist studied commercial art, illustration and photography in Vienna at the Institute of Applied Arts (1982-1986). She returned to Switzerland to study video at the School of Design in Basel (1986-1988). Currently, the artist lives in Zürich, Switzerland.

Work in MATRIX

Ever Is Over All, 1997. Two video projections, sound. Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, NYC. *Featured performers*: Silvana Ceschi, Gabrielle Hächler, Tom Rist, Anna Rist, Mich Hertig, Gian Hertig. *Producer, musician*: Anders Guggisberg. *Vocalist*: Pipilotti Rist



Selected One Person Exhibitions

Kunsthalle St. Gallen, Switzerland *Die Tempodrosslerin saust* '89; Galerie Walcheturm, Zürich *Nett, dass du mich begleitest durch die Kanalisation* '92; Galerie STAMPA, Basel, Switzerland *Schwester des Stroms* '93; Galerie STAMPA, Basel *Yoghurt on Skin/Velvet on TV* '94; Kunstmuseum, St. Gallen *I'm Not the Girl Who Misses Much* '94 (also installed at Neue Galerie Graz, Austria '95; Galerie Lehman, Lausanne, Switzerland '95; Kunstverein, Hamburg, Germany '95); Galerie Franck+Schulte, Berlin '95; Galerie Akinci, Amsterdam *De kop van der cat is jarig en zijn pootjes vieren feest* '95; Chisenhale Gallery, London *Slept In, Had a Bath, Highly Motivated* '96; Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva *Shooting Divas* '96 (also installed at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago '96); Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago *Sip My Ocean* '96; Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, Germany *The Social Life of Roses or Why I'm Never Sad* '96 (also installed at Kunstmuseum Solothurn, Switzerland '97; Museum Villa Stuck, Munich '97); Hamburger Bahnhof, Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin *Remake of the Weekend* '98.

Selected Group Exhibitions

Kunsthalle Basel *Balser Künstlerinnen und Künstler* '89; Kunsthalle Basel *Projekt Schweiz* '92; XLV Biennale di Venezia, Italy *Aperto* '93; Museet for Samtidskunst, Oslo *Transitt* '93; Kunsthalle Basel *Weltmoral* '94; Kunstverein München, Germany *Oh Boy It's a Girl!* '94 (also installed at Kunstraum Wien, Austria '94); XXII Bienale Internacional de Sao Paulo, Brazil '94; Norrköpings Konstmuseum, Sweden *Dialog mit dem andet* '94; Galerie Eigen+Art, Berlin *private mix* '94; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago *Use Your Allusion: Recent Video Art* '94; Hong Kong Museum of Art *Beyond Switzerland* '95; Kunsthaus Zürich *Zeichen und Wunder* '95; Nicolaj Copenhagen, Contemporary Arts Center, Denmark *I Confess* '95; Centro Galego de Arte Contemporanea, Santiago de Compostela, Spain *Signos e milagres* '95; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam *Wild Walls* '95; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaeck, Denmark *NowHere (Get Lost)* '96; Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Barcelona *Mirades* '96; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (Soho), NYC *Rooms with a View: Environments for Video* '97; XLVII Biennale di Venezia, Italy *Futuro, Presente, Passato* '97; 2nd Kwangju Bienale, Korea *Unmapping the Earth* '97; 4th Biennale de Lyon, France *The Other* '97; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (Soho) *Hugo Boss Prize* '98.



Selected Bibliography about Pipilotti Rist

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Babias, Marius. (translated from German by Kam Gi Chak and Alex Karrusch) "Pipilotti Rist: Galerie Franck+Schulte, Berlin," *Frieze* no. 26 (March/April 1996), p.76.

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Colombo, Paolo. (translated from Italian by Stephen Sartarelli) "Shooting Divas," *Parkett* no.48 (1996), p.112+.

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"Rist for the Mill: Hans-Ulrich Obrist Talks with Pipilotti Rist," *Artforum* vol.36 no.8 (April 1998), p. 45+.

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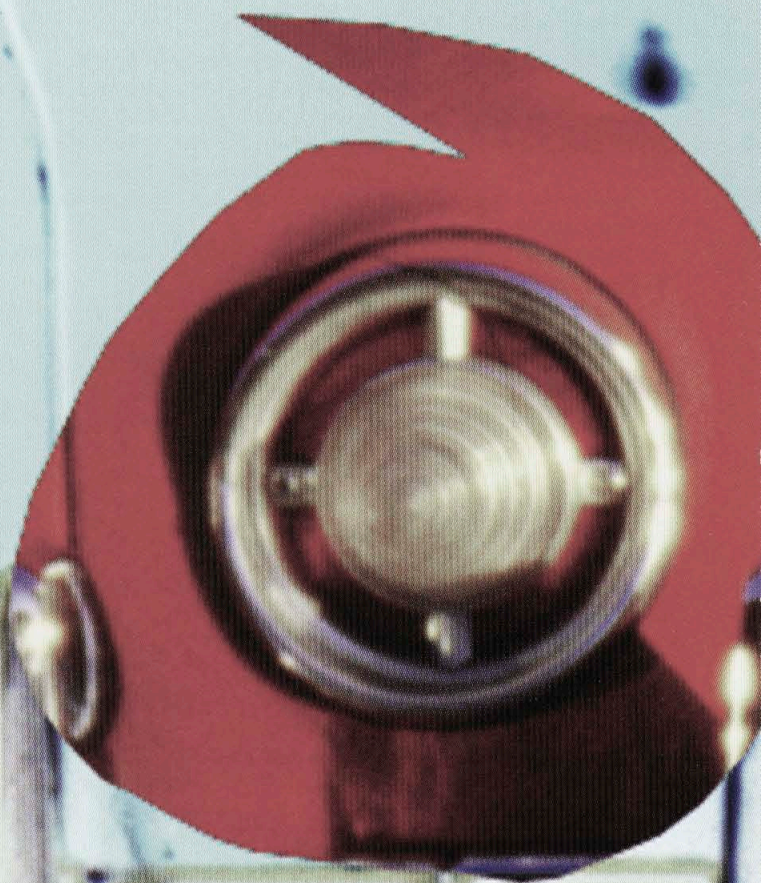


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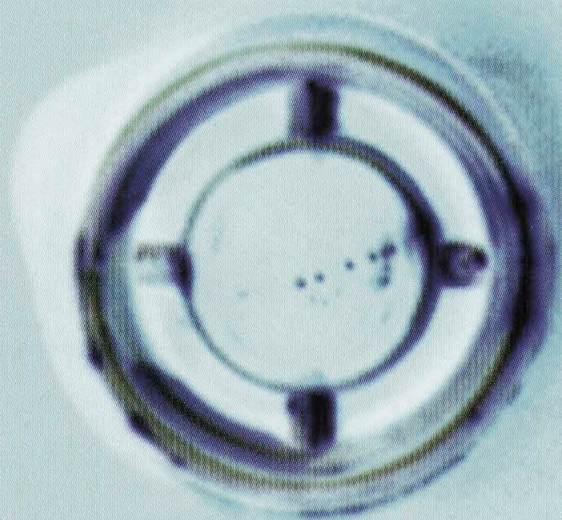
Andrea Miller-Keller, Emily Hall Tremaine Curator of Contemporary Art, will present a gallery talk on the artist's work on Tuesday May 5, 1998 at noon.



Pipi



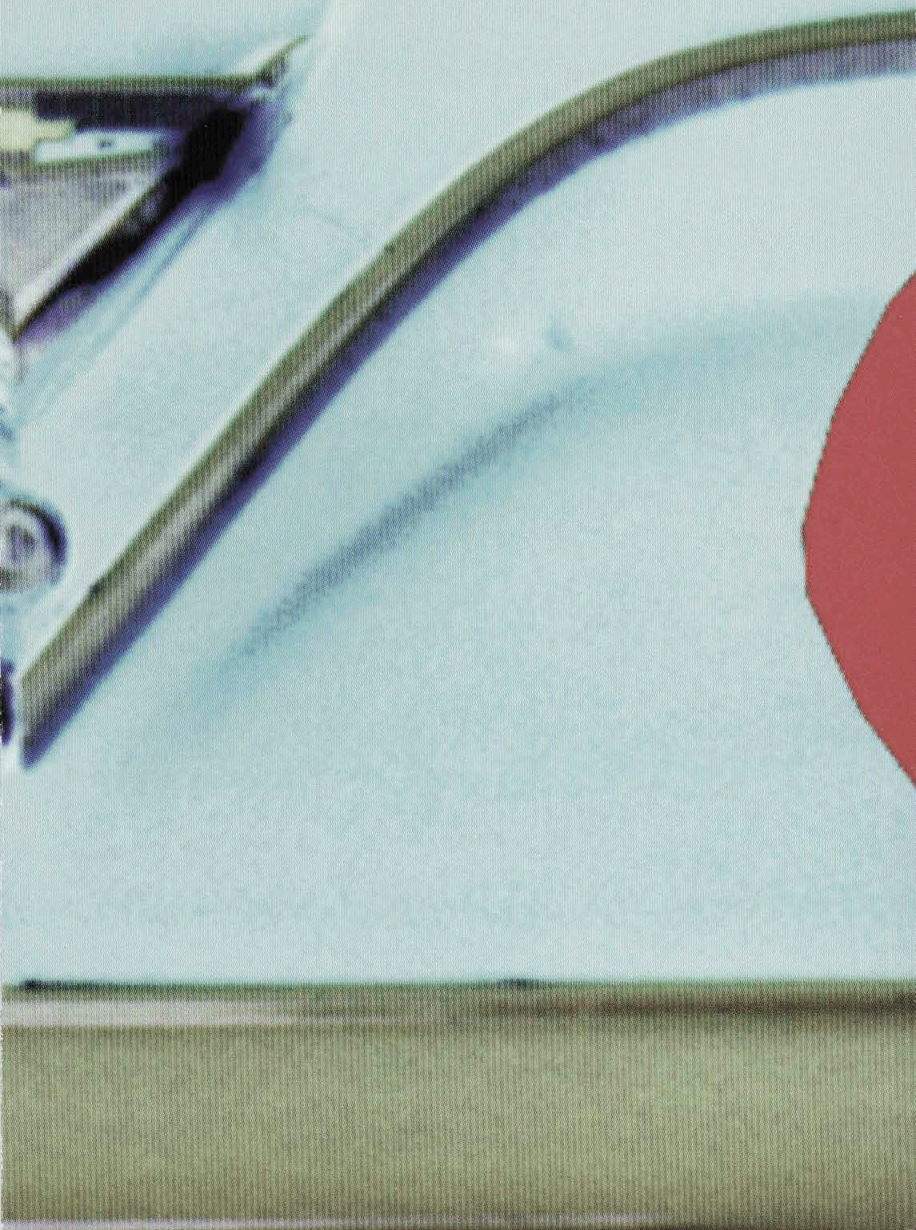
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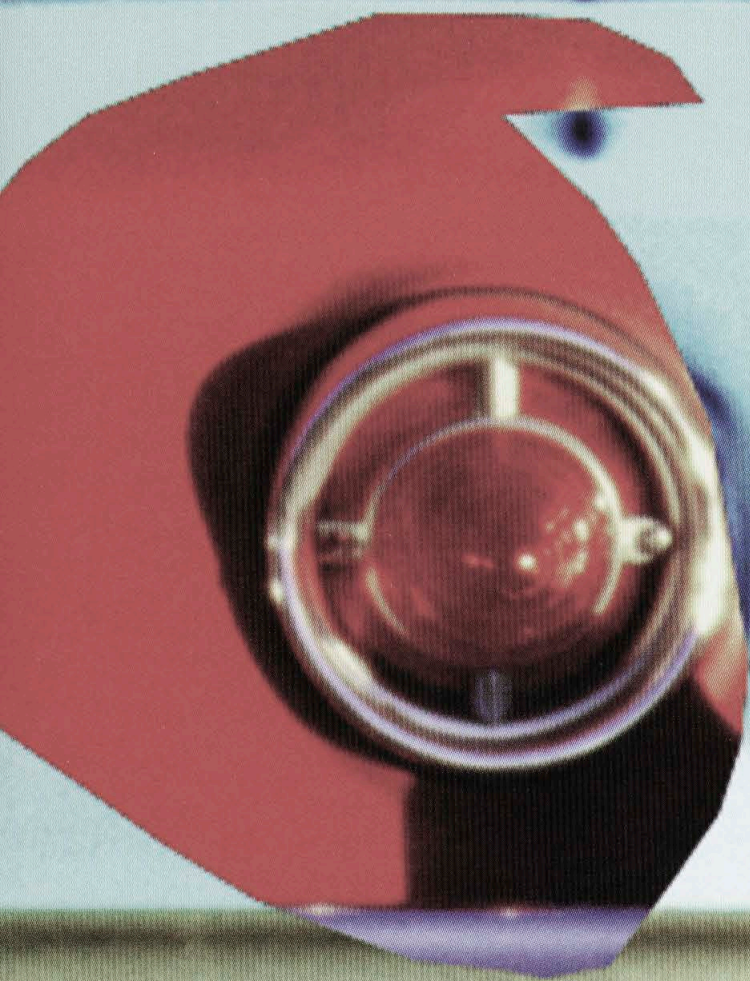
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