



Pipilotti Rist:  
I Packed The Postcard  
In My Suitcase  
Education kit

## Who

Pipilotti Rist was born in Grabs, Switzerland in 1962. The second of five children, her given name is Elisabeth Charlotte Rist. When she moved away from home at aged 19 she began introducing herself as Pipilotti. This was a combination of her childhood nicknames- Lotti, from her second name and Pippi, after the children's book character Pippi Longstocking, known for her unconventional character and superhuman strength. She studied commercial art, illustration and photography at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna, then video at the School of Design in Basel. From 1988-1994 she played flute and bass in a band Les Reines Prochaines (The Next Queens) before leaving to pursue her career as an artist.

Pipilotti has exhibited widely around the world including the biennials in Sao Paulo, Venice, Istanbul, the Caribbean and Santa Fe. In 2000 the Public Art fund NY commission Open My Glade, was shown on the screen in Times Square. In 2009 She released her first feature film entitled Pepperminta, the story of an “anarchist of the imagination” who lives according to her own rules. The film was screened at film festivals and theatres around the world.

Recent solo presentations of her work include *Eyeball Massage*, The Hayward Centre, London (2011); Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, MOT Collection Special Feature: Pipilotti Rist Tokyo, Japan (2010); *À la belle étoile*, Centre Pompidou, Paris (2007); *Gravity Be My Friend*, Magasin 3 Stockholm Konsthall (2007); 'YuYu', MI-MOCA Marugame Genichiro-Inokuma Museum of Contemporary Art (2008); 'Pour Your Body Out (7354 Cubic Metres)', MoMA, New York (2008 – 2009); and *Elixir: the Video Organism of Pipilotti Rist*, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam (2009), which traveled to KIASMA Museum for Contemporary Art, Helsinki; Paço das Artes and MIS Museu da Imagem e do Som, Sao Paulo (2009). The Museum Langmatt, *Schliessen Sie mir das Kleid, Danke!* (cur. Rudolf Velhagen), Baden, Switzerland (2010) and the Fundació Joan Miró & Centre Cultura Caixa Girona Fontana d'Or, 'Pipilotti Rist. *Partit amistós – sentiments electrònics* (cur. Martina Millà), Barcelona / Girona, Spain (2010). She was awarded the Joan Miró Prize in 2009 for her unique creative activity and her outstanding contribution to the current artistic scene.

## What

Known for her immersive video/audio installations, Pipilotti Rist creates imaginary landscapes inspired by the natural world, the body and dreams. Not contained within the usual frames of television or cinema, her video projections are spread across spaces, on ceilings, underneath us, always changing in scale, and with choreographed viewing positions. Pipilotti create loops of mesmerizing fantasia, with lush over saturated colour and organic subject matter transporting the viewer into her imaginary worlds, laden with the mythology of the classical elements of Earth, Water, Fire and Air. Inspired by nature, the body, dreams and everyday objects, Pipilotti uses philosophical and elemental alchemy to playfully transport the viewer into the euphoric, the therapeutic, the mundane, the sensual, the melancholic and the utopian of her visual poetry.

“People often ask me about my subject matter and expect a one word answer, but they are missing the point. My subjects are amorphous, overlapping – a sponge made up of so many subjects from life that comes over and covers me up.”

Pipilotti Rist

# The Classical Elements

Empedocles (490-430 B.C.) was a Greek philosopher, scientist and healer who lived in Sicily in the fifth century B.C. He introduced the idea that everything was made up of four basic things that he called “roots.” Plato (428-347 B.C.) may have been the first to refer to Empedocles’ roots as elements. These four elements are: water, earth, air, and fire. These classical elements persisted throughout the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance, deeply influencing European thought and culture.



*Selfless In The Bath of Lava (1994)*



*Sip My Ocean (1996)*



*Homo Sapiens Sapiens (2005)*

## Fire

Symbolically, Fire is associated with light, fertility, creativity, masculine energy, assertiveness, and passion. In *Selfless In The Bath Of Lava (1994)* a little video is shown through a small cut out shape in wooden floor in MOMA PS1. The viewer looks down to see Pipilotti swimming in exploding volcanic lava, as if looking up as the viewer from hell, or conversely, from the beginnings of the earth.

## Water

Water is frequently associated with femininity because it is theorized that life first came from water, as new life comes from women and because of its nourishing qualities. It is also associated with the soul, feelings, sensations and the subconscious and represents beginnings, spiritual rebirth and inner freedom. In *Sip My Ocean (1996)* Pipilotti uses water to symbolize depth – alluding to what occurs below the surface. Pipilotti’s work features extensive use of water – rain, a swimming pool, rivers streams, the sea – as a container for the female body, and symbolising of water as a primordial state of being, and as a metaphor for the unconscious.

## Earth

Earth symbolises the material substance, heaviness and solidity, endurance, strength and the living thing. It is often depicted in minerals, like stones, crystals, as well as wood, metal, soil, dust, flesh and blood. In ‘Pour Your Body Out’ (2009) we see a hand digging into dirt, earthworms and a pig sniffing the ground, amplifying the natural cycle of growth and decay.

## Air

Air is associated with the immaterial, symbolizing thoughts, mental power, the intellect, as well as communication, freedom, wideness, boundlessness, the spiritual and the heavenly realm. ‘Under The Sky’ 2007 was projected in large scale onto the plaza in front of the Centre Pompidou. The imagery takes us amongst the stars, floating through space, yet we view the image underneath us, suspended above and free from gravity.

## Curatorial Rationale

Artistic director Juliana Engberg and Associate Curator Charlotte Day worked with Pipilotti Rist to create the first major survey of her work in Australia. *I Packed The Postcard In My Suitcase* brings together several key works from Pipilotti's recent exhibiting history, as well as a new commission which will spread across ACCA's gallery spaces with kaleidoscopic glee, even popping up in small projections in the foyer and public toilets. These selected works illustrate Pipilotti's ongoing use of elemental symbolism and alchemy in her immersive audio/visual poems. The journey through her imaginary worlds begins in Gallery 1, in a domestic space then takes us down to the bottom of the ocean in Gallery 2. Moving into Gallery 4, we come up above the water surface to breathe and move up into the Swiss Alps and the heavenly realm. Finishing in Gallery 3, we come down to earth and see Pipilotti's imaginary world as it is, colourful daydreams in her mind.



What classical elements do you notice in each installation?

How does the scale and angles of the video projections change in each room?

How has Pipilotti choreographed our viewing in each installation?

## Gallery 2

*Small Laguna* 2011

Video installation

1 projection, 1 player, 1 oil painting on canvas

36 x 57 cm

Video loop

*Upside Down Table*, 2011

Video installation

1 projection, 1 table, 1 player, 1 light fitting

Video loop

Turning the gallery into a domestic space, Pipilotti places a table with six chairs in the centre of the room, and a small painting on the wall. The Veduta style painting is reminiscent of Canaletto, depicting 18th century Venice in great detail. Pipilotti overlays this found imagery with a colourful video projection of undulating water and sky, which transforms the chocolate-box Venetian cityscape with psychedelic, celebratory fireworks bursting in the sky. Hanging low over the table, Pipilotti has placed a pendant lamp, projecting another video work onto the table, showing her interest in using video as a light source.



## Gallery 1

*Gravity Be My Friend*, 2007

Audio video installation

2 projections pointing to the ceiling, 3 players, sound system, 2 wild carpet sculptures, 2 suspended screens

Video loop: 11 minutes 10 seconds loop (wet), 12 minutes 37 seconds loop (dry)

Sound loop: 10 minutes 40 seconds

Sound: Anders Guggisberg & Pipilotti Rist

Commissioned in 2007 by Magasin 3 Stockholm Konsthall, *Gravity Be My Friend* is an immersive installation consisting of piled carpet islands in woozy liquid shapes that echo the amorphous screens on the ceiling. The audience must remove their shoes, lie down on the soft plateaus and gaze up at the projections. By reclining, Pipilotti intends the audience to relax their muscles and therefore affect their thinking, enhancing the meditative dimension of the work. The video was filmed underwater, giving the audience the same viewpoint as they gaze up at the projected imagery of Pepperminta, who has featured in several of Pipilotti's works. The topographic landscape of the carpet islands creates the feeling of being at the bottom of the ocean, yet is simultaneously inverted by the screen on the ceiling - perhaps we are looking down through an aquarium window.

*Gravity Be My Friend* is the final part of a trilogy including *Homo Sapiens Sapiens* (2005) and *A Liberty Statue for London* (2005). This mythological tale, laden with elemental symbolism takes the viewer on a journey through Pipilotti's imaginary utopia.

*"To make Gravity I went under water again. In fact it is the sister piece of Sip My Ocean (1996)... In the [Homo Sapiens Sapiens] piece, Pepperminta was in a time before the fall, before original sin, with her sister Edna. Beyond all social classes or temporal references. In [A Liberty Statue], she returns to civilization. In [Gravity Be My Friend] she is seen – simply speaking – transcending gravity and the seasons of the year together with another androgynous person. She flies away from the world. Gravity describes the fantasy of living beyond gender difference and simulates our dissolution into water, air and atoms."*

Pipilotti Rist



How did you feel when you lay down on the carpet island?

### Gallery 3

*Administrating Eternity*, 2011

Audio video installation

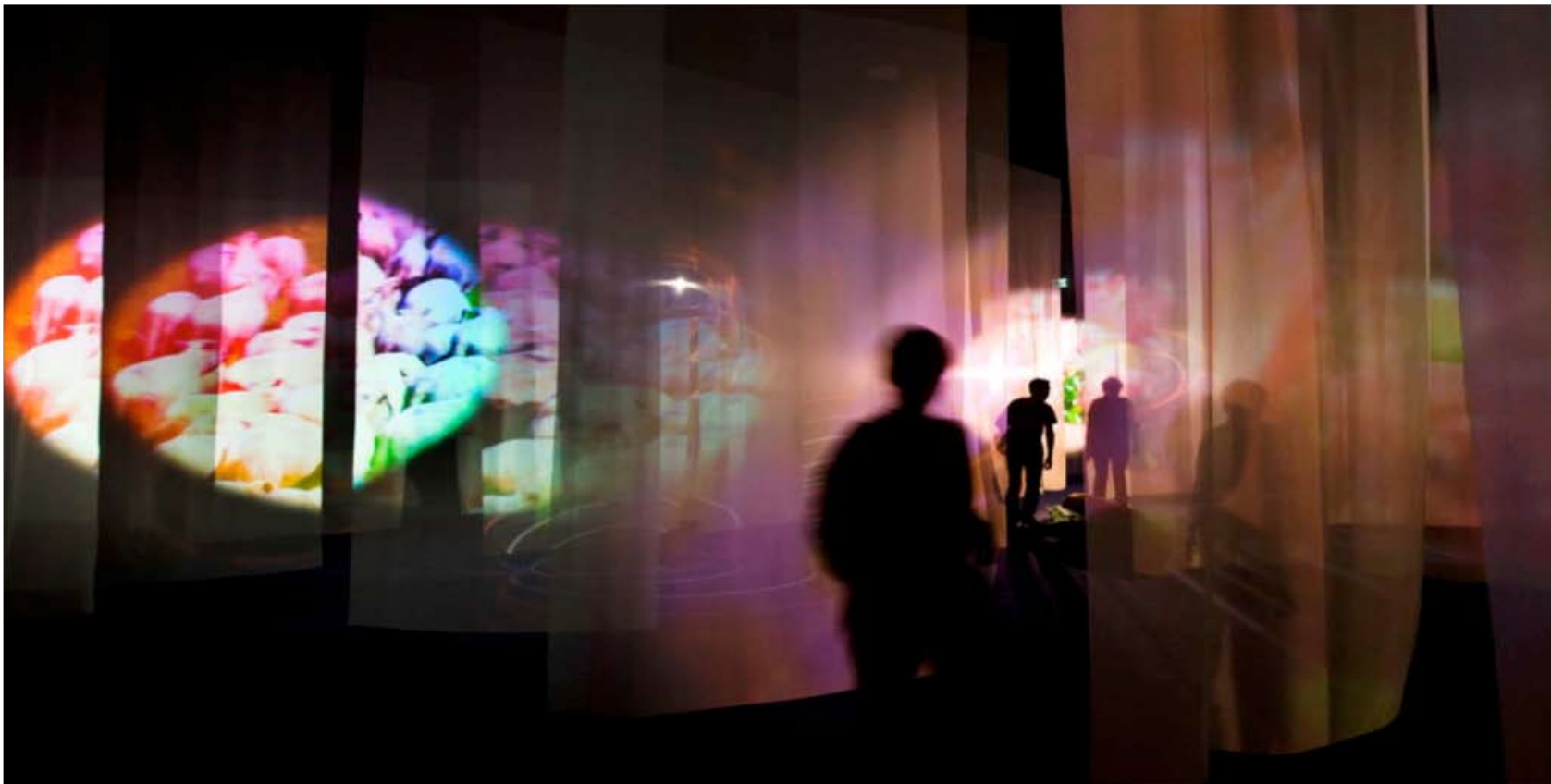
4 projections, 2 video mirror units, sound system, Voile curtains,  
aluminium mounts

Video loop: 9:28 fix | 24:51 fix | 5:40 moving | 5:35 moving

*Administering Eternity* (2011), features lengths of translucent fabric hanging freely in the gallery space. Though familiar as domestic curtains, moving within the installation is similar to a dreamscape or reverie. Video projections pass through the curtains on loop, bleeding through the layers and diffusing the imagery of picture perfect Swiss landscapes and swirling techno lights. There is no seating in this installation, and as the audience journeys through the maze of fabric, they become part of the imagery. The element of air is prevalent in this work, with the gentle swaying of the curtains and the tinkling musical box audio. The layering of imagery reflects our own inner visuals and memories.

*“Net curtains remind me of the lapses that occur in the brain. Images projected on to one curtain inevitably fall apart on the ones behind. They help diffuse the image in the same way our memory of the past encroaches on our waking consciousness.”*

Pipilotti Rist



#### Gallery 4

*I Couldn't Agree With You More*, 1999

Audio video installation

2 projections (overlapping), 2 media players, audio system  
and metal

mask

loop: 9 minutes 36 seconds, 8 minutes 35 seconds

Sound: Anders Guggisberg

In *I Couldn't Agree With You More* (1999), it is Pipilotti, not the viewer who is on a journey, and again the video features layered imagery. Unlike other works where Pipilotti shows us her imaginary landscapes, here we are firmly grounded on Earth, as the camera remains loosely fixed upon her head as she moves through her apartment, a tram, a supermarket. Throughout, a small projection overlaps this imagery, appearing on Pipilotti's forehead and eyes as a thought bubble. A nighttime fantasy featuring naked figures scampering around a dark forest, like earth nymphs, free of the mundanity of everyday life.



## Learning Ideas and Curriculum Links

### PRE - VISIT

- Discuss what contemporary art is and the variety of mediums contemporary artists use.
- Discuss what an installation is.
- Research Pipilotti Rist. Where is she from, what kind of art does she make?
- What are the classical elements?
- How does video art differ from films we see in the cinema?

### At ACCA:

ACCA's FREE education programs mean that students will engage in theory, language and practice while visiting the exhibition. For the Pipilotti Rist: I Packed The Postcard In My Suitcase exhibition, students may participate in the following programs:

#### TALK

Explore Pipilotti Rist's immersive installations with a guided tour from ACCA's qualified Education staff. Key themes are explained and tours are tailored to suit all year groups and subjects.

#### THINK

Use contemporary art as the stimulus for philosophical dialogue. After experiencing the wonderful worlds of Pipilotti Rist, search for meaning in our THINK workshop. Collaborative inquiry is used to investigate the concepts, symbolism and themes students have wondered about in the exhibition. Experience contemporary art as a mode of thinking, and ACCA as an ideas laboratory.

#### MAKE

Become a video artist at ACCA, using colour, sound and the classical elements to explore and understand the techniques Pipilotti Rist uses in her practice. This fun and inspiring hands on workshop fosters deeper engagement with exhibition content through haptic learning approaches.

### POST - VISIT

VELS [Level 2](#) [Level 3](#) [Level 4](#) [Level 5](#) [Level 6](#)

#### Elemental Collage [2](#) [3](#) [4](#)

Create four mind maps for the classical elements. As a class, brainstorm all the words associated with earth, water, fire and air, including colours.

Discuss why we associate different colours with these elements, and the sorts of textural properties they have such as coolness and heat.

Source magazines, various types of paper, fabric and other objects to collage.

Ask students to select paper colours, imagery and textures that fit the associations with a particular element.

Create collages for each element, and display each element on a different wall in the classroom.

### **Utopian Adventure** 2 3 4

As a class, discuss the classical elements and the positive and negative attributes of each element.

Draw a map of an imaginary land, including the elements and how they might feature in your utopia. Write and draw a description of your main character.

Create a story mountain to plan the introduction, problem and resolution in your story.

Write a story about your ideal imaginary land using expressive language to illustrate the details of how the landscape looks and feels.

### **Mythological Colour World** 2 3 4

Discuss and read the *Odyssey* (young readers edition). As a class retell a particular episode of the story, such as the Sirens. In pencil draw how you imagine the scene to look. Using colour pencils, textas, or paint, colour in the sketch with bright, saturated colours in the style of Pipilotti Rist.

### **Introducing Symbolism** 3 4 5

Introduce the word 'symbolism', explain how they are used to communicate an idea or a 'deeper meaning'.

Make a class list with three columns: Who uses symbolism (artists, religious leaders etc); what can be used as symbolism (objects, characters etc); where can we see symbols (paintings, stories, signage etc) Watch the *Wizard of Oz*. Select a few elements or objects in the film that can be used to discuss symbolism such as:

Why was there a cowardly lion, and not a cowardly fish? What do lions symbolize?; What does a heart and a brain symbolize? Is Yellow a cheerful or sad colour? Why was the brick road this colour? Why did the film turn from black and white to colour when Dorothy arrived in Oz? Was it a dream or reality when Dorothy arrived in Oz? Pipilotti Rist creates imaginary worlds in her video art. Look at *Gravity Be My Friend* – what do the colours represent here?

### **Audio/Visual Poetry** 3 4 5 6

Write a poem about all or one of the elements. Close your eyes and see if you can imagine what you have described. Draw a picture or create a musical composition interpreting your poem.

### **Body Landscape** 4 5 6

Discuss how Pipilotti Rist uses scale in her work, from filming up close, to amplifying and minimizing projections of her videos. Using a digital camera take a photo of a hand, arm or face in extreme close up so that it looks more like a landscape. Place the image in photo editing software and adjust the saturation and contrast to create a surreal landscape.

### **Elemental Installation** 4 5 6

Work in groups to create an installation about a particular element

Each group will come up with a design for the installation, including how the composition and selected objects relate to the element.

Each group must source or create own objects ie. bottles of water, rocks, torches. Objects can be painted or coloured to represent the element. As a class, discuss the different installations. Each student must think of one question to ask about each installation they view.

Discuss whether different objects selected successfully represent the element, and what sorts of symbols each installation is communicating.

## Need more Information?

Additional kits available for visiting school groups:

VCE Studio Arts – Pipilotti Rist: Materials and Techniques

VCE Art – Pipilotti Rist: Analytical Frameworks



## Further Reading:

<http://www.artlyst.com/articles/pipilotti-rist-a-sight-for-sore-eyes>

<http://www.mydaily.co.uk/2011/09/28/pipilotti-rist-hayward-gallery-eyeball-massage/>

<http://www.theartsdesk.com/visual-arts/pipilotti-rist-eyeball-massage-hayward-gallery>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2011/oct/02/pipilotti-rist-barry-flanagan-review?newsfeed=true>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2011/sep/26/pipilotti-rist-hayward-gallery-review?newsfeed=true>

<http://blogs.independent.co.uk/2011/09/27/pipilotti-rist-is-not-the-girl-who-misses-much/>

<http://db-artmag.com/archiv/2007/e/5/5/570.html>

[http://www.kiasma.fi/instancedata/prime\\_product\\_julkaisu/vtm/embeds/kiasmastructure/17024\\_k43\\_en.pdf](http://www.kiasma.fi/instancedata/prime_product_julkaisu/vtm/embeds/kiasmastructure/17024_k43_en.pdf)

<http://www.tokyoartbeat.com/tablog/entries.en/2007/11/deeper-than-the-water.html>