

Pipilotti Rist:

I Packed the

Postcard

in My Suitcase

Pipilotti Rist:  
*I Packed the  
Postcard  
in My Suitcase*

Australian Centre for  
Contemporary Art  
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Author: Juliana Engberg

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Australian Centre for  
Contemporary Art  
111 Sturt Street, Southbank  
VIC 3006 Australia  
Telephone +61 3 9697 9999  
Facsimile +61 3 9686 8830  
Email [info@accaonline.org.au](mailto:info@accaonline.org.au)  
[www.accaonline.org.au](http://www.accaonline.org.au)

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Cover image:  
*Laguna*, 2011  
audio video installation with replica of  
a veduta painting, 50 x 80 cm,  
1 projector,  
1 mount, 1 player, 1 sound system,  
cables and paint  
Video still

Courtesy the artist, Hauser & Wirth  
and Luhring Augustine, New York

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The philosophy underlying our collection is to build and maintain a seminal body of work that provokes thought while being inspirational. We also believe it upholds our commitment to support and encourage the artistic communities in places where we do business.

We are delighted and excited to partner with ACCA, supporting the intriguing and enchanting work of Pipilotti Rist in her first exhibition in Australia: *I Packed the Postcard in My Suitcase*. Pipilotti's work embodies the underlying values of contemporary art — to provoke and inspire.

Welcome to what we anticipate will be one of the outstanding exhibitions on the contemporary art calendar this year!

Clark F D Morgan  
Vice Chairman  
UBS Wealth Management Australia

## Foreword

ACCA is absolutely delighted to present the first major exhibition, in Australia, of works by Pipilotti Rist. For years Pipilotti's works have defined ground breaking practice in video production. Her vivid, sensory, sensation filled projects have made audiences and critics alike respond with rapture and excitement. This particular gathering of major projects — *I Packed the Postcard in My Suitcase* — has been specially devised for ACCA's unique spaces and offers an opportunity to contemplate the essential elements of Pipilotti's subject and content.

Ever since showing Pipilotti Rist's famous, *Ever Is Over All*, in her *HUMID* exhibition in 2001, it has been Artistic Director, Juliana Engberg's hope to bring a more substantial grouping of Pipilotti's works to Melbourne. This exhibition has been many years in the making, and we are especially grateful to Pipilotti, her team and representatives who have enabled, with great generosity, this presentation to finally become a reality.

ACCA's associate curator, Charlotte Day has been the coordinating curator on this project and has, as always, wonderfully overseen the many logistics between studio and installation. We are grateful to Pipilotti and her team for joining us in Melbourne to work with ACCA's excellent install crew to manage so much of the making on the ground. Matt Hinkley and Jane Rhodes have produced this beautiful catalogue with a marvellously evocative text by Juliana Engberg.

This exhibition is a major undertaking for ACCA and we are particularly grateful to our major sponsor UBS for their support, to Prohelvetia for assistance with travel and freight and to supporting partners Gibbon Group and Desso for the carpet which features in the viewing islands of *Gravity Be My Friend*. Thanks also to our special Pipilotti Rist Project Patron group who have personally helped us realise this ambitious project.

This presentation of wondrous works is a cool and captivating antidote for Melbourne's hot summer days. Enjoy!

Kay Campbell  
Executive Director, ACCA

The Philosophy  
of Water:  
Pipilotti Rist,  
in her Elements  
Juliana Engberg



1 “Perhaps all romance is like that; not a contract between equal parties but an explosion of dreams and desires that can find no outlet in everyday life. Only a drama will do and while the fireworks last the sky is a different colour.” - Jeanette Winterson: *The Passion*, Bloomsbury, London, 1987

Welcome to the wonderful worlds of Pipilotti Rist. Worlds made of humans, nature, and culture, re-created and re-presented through the reveries of Pipilotti’s abundant imagination. These are lush and organistic; small and big; secret and shared; tactile and sensory worlds. Fantasy worlds born of the poetic psyche which lives in the artist, and in us all, which Pipilotti hopes to infiltrate and activate.

These are gorgeous and generous worlds: ripe, potential and exciting. Colourful, exotic worlds that celebrate beauty, and contemplate the ecstatic, free mind. Worlds that revel in the metaphors of the fertile, feminine and maternal. Humanist worlds that are generated from the collective consciousness. Pipilotti’s worlds are ethical places made with deliberate joy and optimism — restorative, refreshing worlds for the times in which we live.

Please enter.

A Venetian sky is flooded with a kaleidoscope of images. It is a carnival. Fireworks explode and dissolve into cosmic festoons. Water becomes phosphorous and glows in the sky. A halo of flames rotates the cosmos. Bodies float. Buildings are saturated with improbable colour washes. The scene is lurid with festivity, transforming from air to liquid to fire, to the earthiness of flesh. It is a caprice — capricious most certainly — a scene of perpetual and flamboyant transformation — all is alchemically altered.<sup>1</sup>

Through the process of video admixture, Pipilotti translates a banal, touristic topography painting into the stuff of a fantasia. Like the bacchanalian festival it references, and rouses in the mind, there is masquerade and deception. The festivity is, in fact, born of the snippets of life and dreamscapes and debris of reality. Through this video conjuring act, Pipilotti materialises the Venice imagined by writers, Casanova, Jeanette Winterson, and Gabriel D’Annunzio, whose Venice is impassioned with fire and water, dazzled and refracted through the exotic molten glass made from the interaction of its active elements: earth, air, water and fire.

Pipilotti's lens and digital editing process is a newer alchemical production, but no less magical and mysterious in its stirring of the imagination as the ancient and liquefied transparence of blown glass. Like the master Murano glass-maker, Seguso, Pipilotti harnesses the transformative powers of translucence, refraction and reflection to charge her image with phantasmic results.

Water, and sky, made static and stable by the painter's paste, is once more volatile and petulant, sometimes sweet and fanciful, under Pipilotti's conversion of stasis to moving image. She alters the mundane into the miraculous, and restores to Venice its power as a city of visions and symbols — the early place of the zodiac and cosmological belief system: a psychologically charged city, open to the hot-bloodedness of the visionary imagination.

She ignites the inner fire of Venice to counter its other material self — water: the damp place, seized by the fog and mist, and the threat of rising tides. Venice is a city that requires the flame, the fire — *Il Fuoco* — to keep it from sinking into a melancholic state.<sup>2</sup>

Meditations on elemental matter — particularly as it pertains to earth, air, water and fire, cultivates an open imagination, suggested French philosopher, Gaston Bachelard. His was a most sympathetic and receptive study. A quest for the material imagination and an investigation into the laws that govern each element joined to its own system of poetic fidelity. For Bachelard, fire is the stuff of reverie — but it is also the thing that 'shines in Paradise and burns in Hell'. Like much that is matter, it has a dualistic nature in the repertoire of the imagination.<sup>3</sup>

Pipilotti's Venetian scene is a flight of fancy, a miniature fantasy included in the otherwise domestic arrangement of a table, chairs and a pendant lamp that make up this first room of her exhibition ensemble. Lit by the 'sun' lamp, the table and its chair attendants become like a heaven and earth. A familial setting, it anchors the space

<sup>2</sup> '...my blood is boiling'  
— Pipilotti Rist  
*Suburban Brain* 1990

<sup>3</sup> see: Gaston Bachelard:  
*Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*, Pegasus Foundation, Dallas, 1999;  
Gaston Bachelard, *Air and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Movement*, Pegasa Foundation, Dallas, 1988



Laguna 2011





*Gravity Be My Friend* 2007

- 4 The man, the woman,  
the children  
At the aerial table  
Resting on a miracle  
That seeks definition ...  
I am back again at my  
usual table  
On the cultivated earth  
the one that yields  
corn and flocks  
... I recognize the  
faces about me/  
With their lights  
and shades of truth.  
- Jules Supervielle,  
*Gravitations*, pp.183-  
185, quoted in Gaston  
Bachelard, *The Poetics  
of Space*, Beacon, (ed)  
1994, p. 170

- 5 'At this juncture of  
nature and culture,  
so persistently  
examined by modern  
anthropology,  
psychoanalysis alone  
recognizes this knot  
of imaginary servitude  
that love must always  
undo again, or sever'.  
In, Jacques Lacan, *Écrits:  
A Selection*, Tavistock,  
London, 1977, p. 7

and brings things back to ground.<sup>4</sup> Earth is now married to fire and dominates the scene — a bulwark against the quixotic instability of explosive things.

Groundedness — gravity — becomes a central character in Pipilotti's elemental ensemble. While she explores and unleashes the dramatics of fire, the fluidity of water and the flightiness of air, earth is needed to moor the unstable.

Without a sense of earth and without the anchoring weight of gravity we would be prey to the pull of *Ondines* and *Naiads* — the water nymphs who would tug at our psyche and take us to unfathomable depths from which there might be no retreat. We would be like Hylas, consigned to a watery place unable to return to land. Seduced by the water creatures and their sensuous offerings.

Pipilotti knows intuitively that we desire to break the water. We want to enter into it, and shatter the normal stillness that offers a serene, yet mortified mirror vision of the world. The motionless surface of the pond, or lake, becalms us only momentarily. It becomes breathless and agitating; the very opposite to its apparent tranquility. We feel the dread of stagnation. We hope for a ripple, a dragonfly or water sprite to dip and fiddle the surface so we might be relieved of the monotony of perfection, and be open to the flaws that enable reverie. It is a necessary Lacanian maneuver.<sup>5</sup>

It is for this reason that Pipilotti breaks the surface of her video world. The seamless vision provided by the perfecting lens of the camera is subjected to an editing process that restores an active materiality to her imagery. Images become trippy and psychedelic and abstracted. Colours become drenched, the corporeal floats, flies, sinks and separates — organisms are set free — then re-gather themselves. Life needs grit, as does the oyster to make its moon-stone pearl.

Pipilotti grubbies up her video world to provoke the potential for wonder. Like the dragonfly that tickles the water’s surface, Pipilotti saves us from a deathly, narcissistic, self-satisfied gaze — the illusion of a world perfect and brittle-stable — by creating a diversion, by disturbing the banality of things being fixed. Pipilotti courts flux.

The worlds of Pipilotti Rist may seem light and fanciful — joyous and full of abandon — and, they are. It is easy to be tempted by the sensory overload they offer. But it is sometimes a lure. Like the song of the Sirens, Pipilotti’s seductions might take you into mysterious and even dangerous places. In her world of elements — earth, air, fire and water — elaborately layered, diffuse and multiple, the viewer is beckoned into a world of myth and symbolism — a meta-poetical world of alchemically activated metaphysical investigation; and a psychological world of existentialism. Like most fairytales, these fantastical, festive demonstrations have their dark side.<sup>6</sup>

Having pricked the surface, and been joyously up-lifted we want to go lower. To plunge further into the possibility and mystery that water offers. But here is the dual dilemma of the matter, to be at one with water is to succumb to its pull and to accept its death, like Ophelia whose garments momentarily, and mermaid-like, bore her up, only to consign her to murky depths when heavy with the melancholic water. Pipilotti’s liquid romp begins with lightheartedness and then dives to darker places where reeds entangle, an ankle is bound, and the body is evaporated into video organism.<sup>7</sup>

We are enabled to be a part of this aquatic underworld from the safety and certainty of islands, made dense and weighted in their material of carpet. We are earthed on the under, other side of the drama of this turbulent coming-into-being in water. Gravity, our friend, keeps us fixed to our place. We are like Odysseus fastened to his mast, able to experience the exquisite seductions of the Siren, without succumbing to its fatal call. From our solid, grounded haven we can now experience the reverie of water tumbled, sky and air, the seasonal change of apples

6 O, that this too too solid flesh would melt  
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!...  
William Shakespeare  
Hamlet

7 QUEEN GERTRUDE  
There is a willow grows aslant a brook,  
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream;  
There with fantastic garlands did she come  
Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples  
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,  
But our cold maids do dead men’s fingers call them:  
There, on the pendent boughs her coronet weeds  
Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke;  
When down her weedy trophies and herself  
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide;  
And, mermaid-like, awhile they bore her up:  
Which time she chanted snatches of old tunes;  
As one incapable of her own distress,  
Or like a creature native and indued  
Unto that element: but long it could not be  
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,  
Pull’d the poor wretch from her melodious lay  
To muddy death.

LAERTES  
Alas, then, she is drown’d?

QUEEN GERTRUDE  
Drown’d, drown’d.  
From: Shakespeare,  
*Hamlet*, Act 4, Scene VII

8 ‘But just when it’s time for the story to begin, begin again, “it’s autumn.” That moment when things are still not completely congealed and dead.’ In Luce Irigaray, ‘The Looking Glass, from the Other side’, *This Sex Which is Not One*, Cornell University Press, 1977, p. 9

9 Anders Guggisberg and Pipilotti Rist compose and make the sounds, which are so cool.

10 How surely gravity’s law,  
strong as an ocean current,  
takes hold of the smallest thing  
and pulls it toward the heart of the world.

Each thing—  
each stone, blossom, child—  
is held in place.  
Only we, in our arrogance,  
push out beyond what we each belong to  
for some empty freedom.

If we surrendered  
to earth’s intelligence  
we could rise up rooted,  
like trees.

Instead we entangle ourselves  
in knots of our own making  
and struggle, lonely and confused.

So like children, we begin again  
to learn from the things,  
because they are in God’s heart;  
they have never left him.

and golden leaves, and enjoy the flowing flame-red hair of the water/fire nymph who peers at us as if we are the curiosity. She eats the apple for us. We are saved from temptation, and sin. We are on the other side of the mirror, as we must be in the wonderland of the imagination.<sup>8</sup>

We are kept in the moment of this reverie by Pipilotti’s use of a soundscape, which warps and folds around the space of our aquarium, providing us with another dimension of sensory experience. Hypnotic, trance inducing, Pipilotti’s music marries to her images in ways that confirm their alternative reality. The soundscape is essential for our levity while we remain in the friendly gravitational zone.<sup>9, 10</sup>

We know that we cannot remain too long in water — or under it. We must come up for air, or we perish and sink to the bottom, horizontal. We have to leave this being-toward-death and re-enter into being-in-the world. We need to move from one mood to another. Pipilotti takes us into the hills and mountains, up into the grounded air — or perhaps it is the heaven — a place of the pastoral, where she administers eternity.

Imagination requires a certain kind of psychological mobility — it is not born of fixed objects, but of the contemplation of images set free and floating. Imagination is responsive to dynamic stimuli; or as Bachelard would suggest, openness and novelty.<sup>11</sup>

Air is a particular conveyer of the imagination, the breeze that shifts matter, moves clouds, rustles leaves, plays on the surface of things.

To administer, in the medical sense, with its close companion, insufflate — to blow — remedies and resuscitates the body, and breaths the life back in.<sup>12</sup> Pipilotti introduces a kinetic, nebulous image-poem in her eternity project, which offers a sense of freedom and gentle meander. The viewer passes through and around the soft labyrinth of draperies. It is they, in-fact, who dispense — administer — the air for themselves; and the breeze, the air, they generate activates the movement of Pipilotti’s kinematic, alpine-fresh visual poem.



Pipilotti is careful that her images do not lodge too quickly through instant recognition. She needs to tamper with the cluster of identifiable tropes: the cows, sheep, meadows, and flowers — the elementary, primary content of the pastoral poet. It is for this reason, just as she does with pricking and messing with the surface of her video, that she intersperses graphic abstractions, like the data readings of sonic, or perhaps neurological and bionic radiography into this hill-top scenography. Like many artists before her, Pipilotti attends to the further dimensional — the emotional, or spiritual space that cannot be described by the Euclidian system. She plays with hyperbolic and elliptical ideas to produce a further poetic possibility. This is a physical and metaphysical space.

Here Pipilotti plays with transparency, transposition, layers and diffusion and the audience can luxuriate in the slow play of place and space, and the abandonment of precision. They can move through matter and feel the additional sense of touch — feather like and gentle on their face, hands, and bodies. This is an oneiric space, relaxed and free of geometric coherence. This is an elixir of a space, therapeutic and restorative. Ethereal dreaming.

However, we live on the ground: in the urban system of the everyday. We seek our supplies, forage in the supermarket aisles, and set up our habitat in the domestic space as earthly dwellers. Ours are modern lives, city lives — distant in time and temperament from our free childhood of stories and myths. Nevertheless our minds remain, or should remain full of spirit, and open and aware to the potential of fantasy — available to the poetic.

This is why, perhaps, Pipilotti hugs her urban-forest nymphs in her mind. Creatures of the night, only visible briefly, like fauna caught in the head-lights, then gone. They live inside Pipilotti’s head, close in the imagination, appearing now and then, here and there, skittishly, shyly, trying to tempt her away from the ordinary to the extraordinary experience. Her people/animals, like elks and fauns, are the

This is what the things  
can teach us:  
to fall,  
patiently to trust our  
heaviness.  
Even a bird has to do  
that  
before he can fly  
- Rainer Maria Rilke,  
*Book of Hours*

11 Gaston Bachelard, op  
cit, *Air and Dreams*, p.  
1-17

12 1.  
insufflate - breathe or  
blow onto as a ritual  
or sacramental act,  
especially so as to  
symbolize the action of  
the Holy Spirit;  
administer - perform  
(a church sacrament)  
ritually; “administer the  
last unction”

2.  
insufflate - treat by  
blowing a powder or  
vapor into a bodily  
cavity; insufflate - blow  
or breathe hard on or  
into care for, treat -  
provide treatment for;  
“The doctor treated  
my broken leg”; “The  
nurses cared for the  
bomb victims”

3.  
insufflate - blow or  
breathe hard on or into  
blow - exhale hard;  
“blow on the soup to  
cool it down”



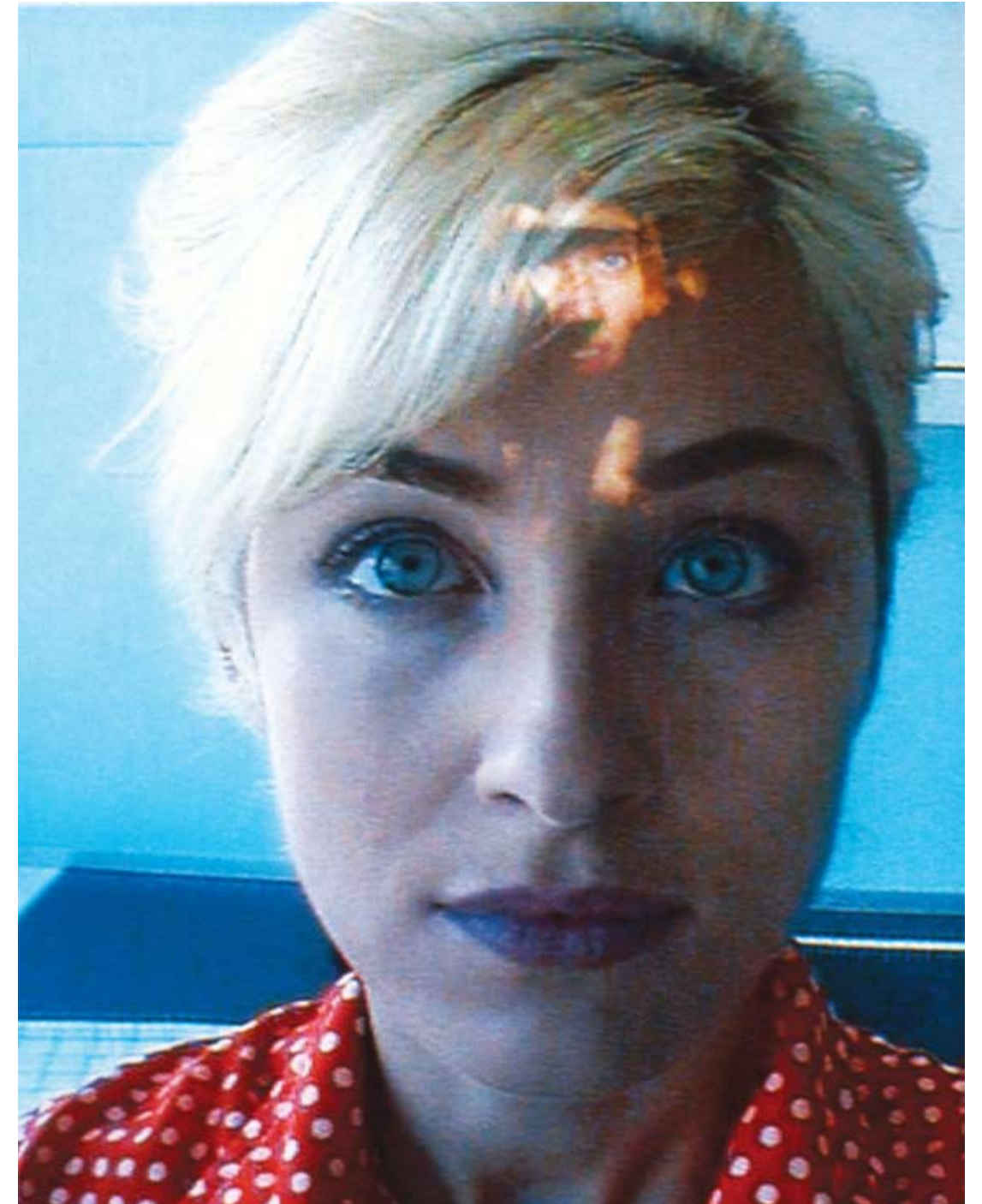
Administrating Eternity 2011

contemporary Pans who tug at the latent libido to lure us away from the duties of the commonplace.

In this self-portrait, a modern-day fable, Pipilotti is *Selena*, the moon-goddess, to her *Pan* companions who live in her psyche — susceptible to seduction. But she is also *Diana*, the other moon-goddess who rules the forest and the creatures in it. And she is *Egeria*, the water-nymph too, maker of laws and rituals. Pipilotti can keep her creatures in her imaginary place, in her mind's eye, privately playing their part of her urban reverie. It is important that she carries them within herself.

Being-in-the world necessitates that we sometimes, absent-mindedly, even purposefully, leave it temporarily so that we might explore our parallel universe of feelings and senses, and keep alive our inner, instinctive selves. The worlds created by Pipilotti Rist enable this transitory escape from the humdrum and ordinary life. They offer us the opportunity to momentarily accept wonder and sometimes swim to depths, ignite our passions, or fly in the air — happy and secure in the knowledge that we can trust our heaviness — because gravity is our friend.

*I Couldn't Agree With  
You More* 1999























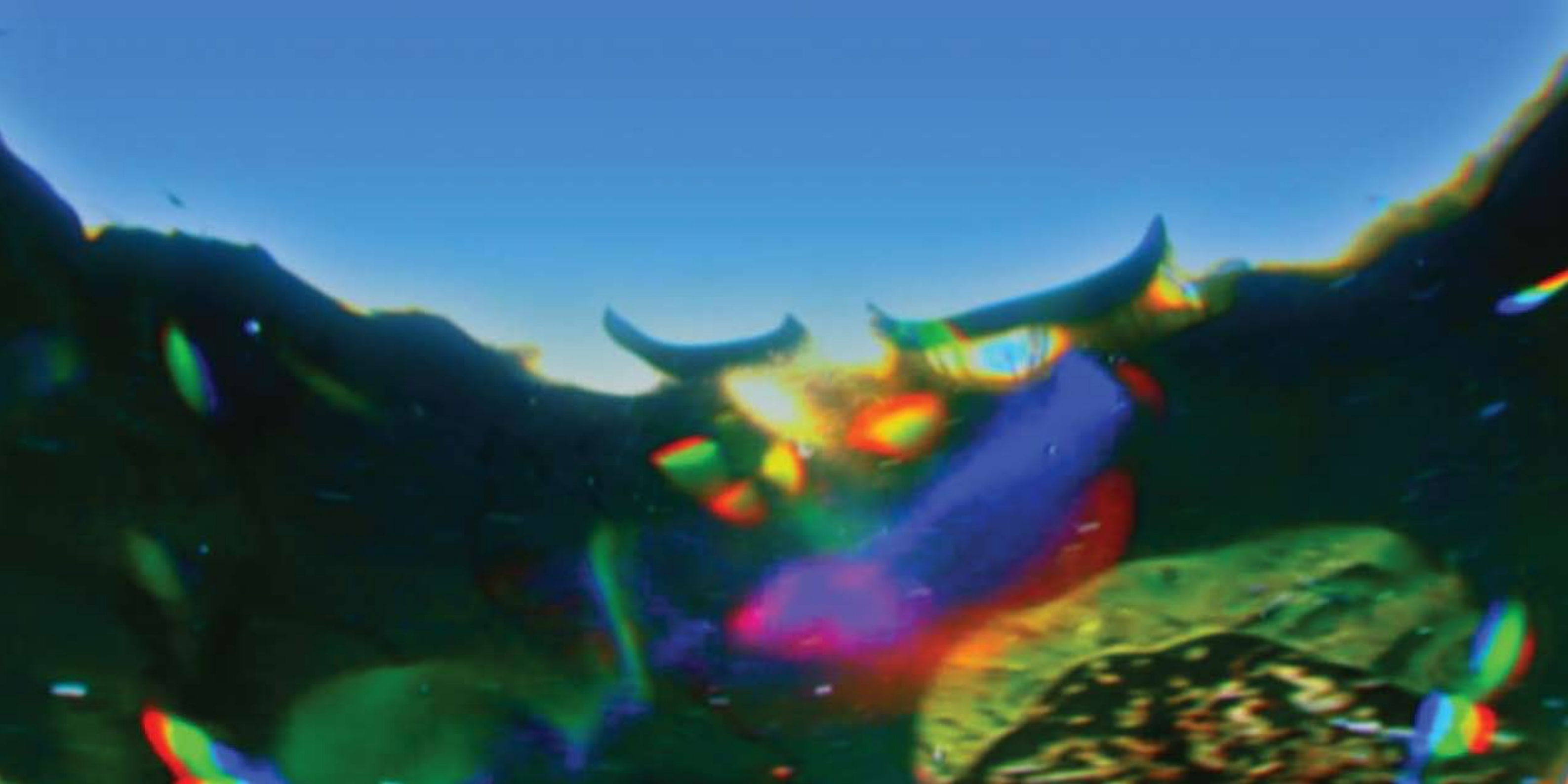


















































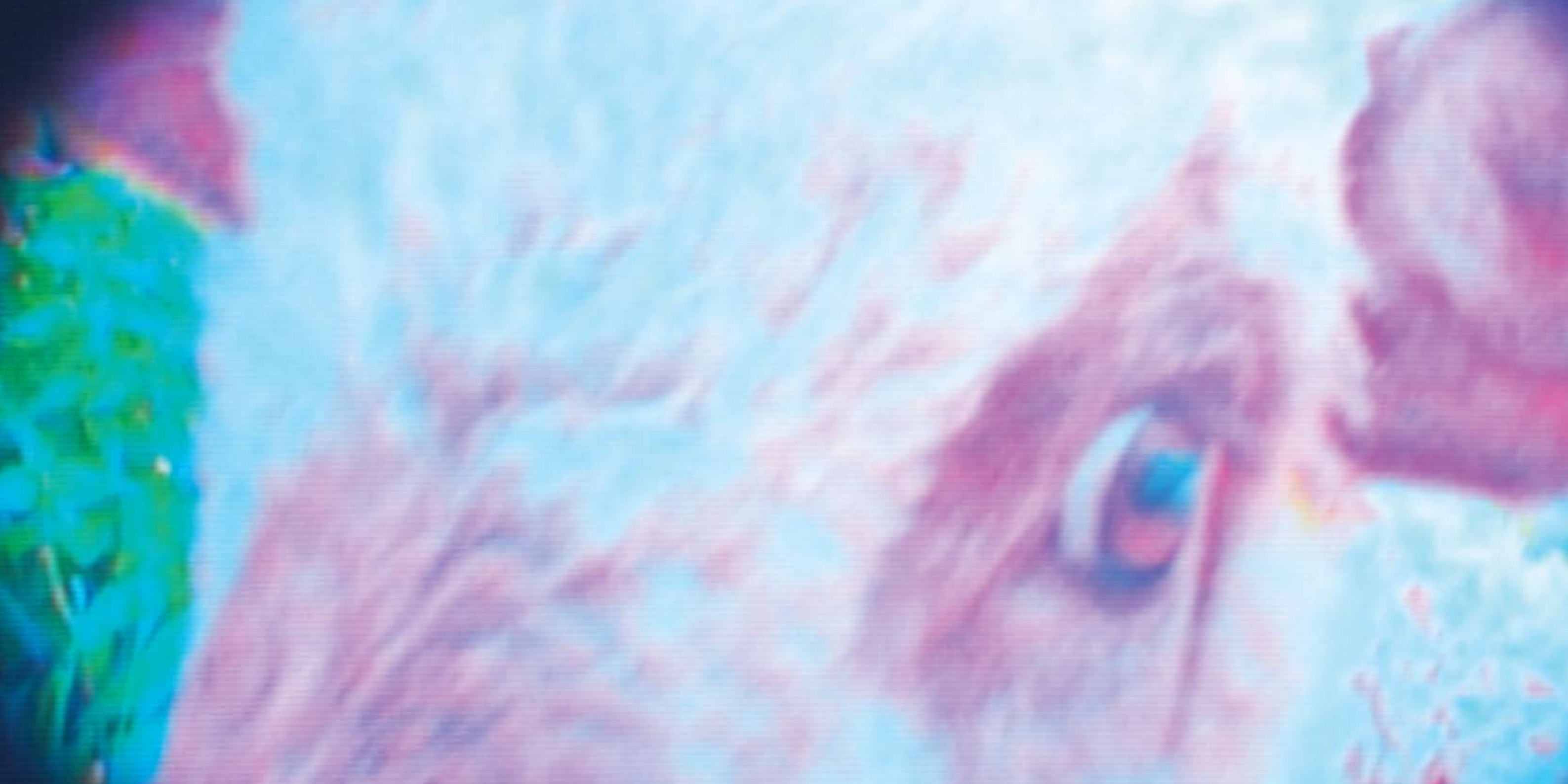




























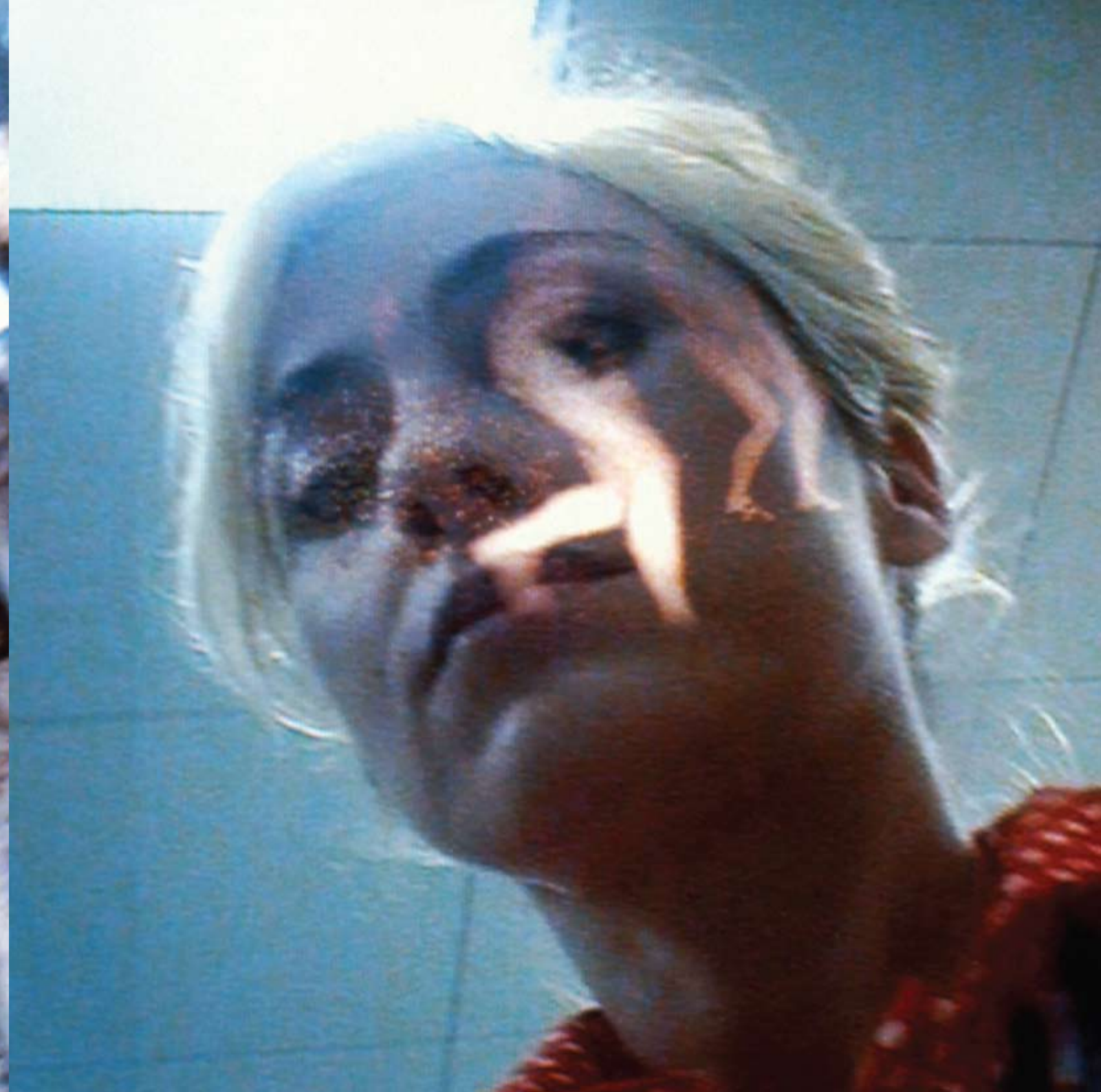








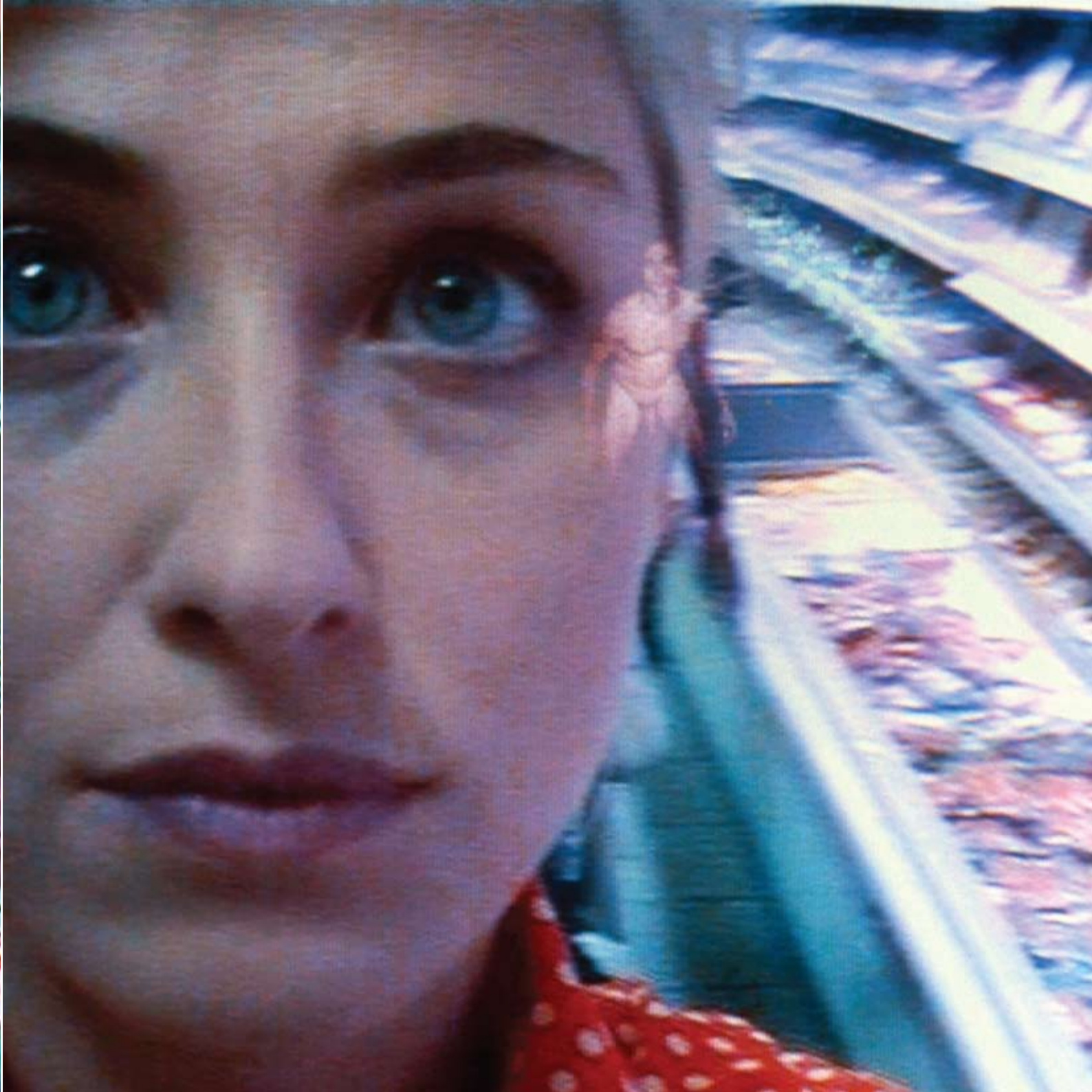














LIST OF WORKS

*Muddle Work*, 2011  
Video installation  
1 LCD monitor, 1 player  
Video loop

*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

*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

*Administrating Eternity*, 2011  
Audio video installation  
4 projections, 2 video mirror units,  
sound system, voile curtains, aluminium  
mounts  
Video loop: 9 minutes 28 seconds (fix) |  
24 minutes 51 seconds (fix)  
5 minutes 40 seconds (moving) |  
5 minutes 35 seconds (moving)

*I Couldn't Agree With You More*, 1999  
Audio video installation  
2 projections (overlapping), 2 media  
players, audio system and metal mask  
Video loop: 9 minutes 36 seconds | 8  
minutes 35 seconds  
Sound: Anders Guggisberg

All works courtesy the artist, Hauser &  
Wirth and Luhring Augustine, New York

IMAGE CREDITS

pp. 16 – 17, 22 – 23  
*Laguna*, 2011  
Audio video installation with replica of  
a veduta painting, 50 x 80 cm,  
1 projector,  
1 mount, 1 player, 1 sound system,  
cables and paint  
Video stills

pp. 18 – 19  
*Laguna*, 2011  
Audio video installation with replica of  
a veduta painting, 50 x 80 cm,  
1 projector,  
1 mount, 1 player, 1 sound system,  
cables and paint  
Installation views, *ILLUMInations*, 54  
Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte – La  
Biennale di Venezia, Italy  
Photo: Giovanna Zen

pp. 20 – 21  
*Prisma*, 2011  
Audio video installation with replica of  
a veduta painting, 50 x 80 cm, 1  
projector,  
1 mount, 1 player, 1 sound system,  
cables and paint  
Installation views, *ILLUMInations*, 54  
Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte – La  
Biennale di Venezia, Italy  
Photo: Giovanna Zen

pp. 24 – 29  
*Schliessen Sie mir das Kleid, Danke!*,  
2010  
Installation views, Museum Langmatt,  
Baden, Switzerland  
Photos: Nici Jost

pp. 30 – 51  
*Gravity Be My Friend*, 2007  
Video stills

pp. 52 – 65  
*Administrating Eternity*, 2011  
Installation views,  
Hayward Gallery, London  
Photos: Linda Ny lind

pp. 66 – 75  
*I Couldn't Agree With You More*, 1999  
Video stills

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Wirth and Luhring Augustine, New York

ARTIST ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Pipilotti Rist's team for ACCA:  
Installation: David Lang  
AV technician: Antshi von Moos  
Studio assistant: Regula Moser  
Coordination: Karin Seinsoth,  
Hauser & Wirth

*Tyngdkraft, var min vän*  
(*Gravity Be My Friend*):  
Music by Anders Guggisberg,  
Other credits: Ewelina Guzik,  
Pierre Mennel, Chris Niemeyer,  
Davide Legittimo, HC Vogel,  
Effie Wu, Markus Huber and  
Konsthall Stockholm Magasin3.

*I Couldn't Agree With You More*:  
Music by Anders Guggisberg.  
Other credits: Mich Hertig, Beni Kempf,  
Tom Rist, Anders Guggisberg,  
Olivia Oeschger, Silvana Ceschi,  
Maria Monika Ender, Pius Tschumi,  
Cornelia Providoli.

*Administrating Eternity*:  
Sound by Anders Guggisberg and  
Pipilotti Rist.  
Other credits: Judith Lava, David Lang,  
Antshi von Moos, Andreas Lippuner,  
Anna Rist, Walter Rist & Athos,  
Manuela & Iwan Wirth and their  
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BIOGRAPHY

Pipilotti Rist is one of the most highly respected and unconventional creators in video art today. Since her early single-channel works in the 1980s, she has molded the medium of video through both intimate works and expansive installations, and as a result radically changed the way we look at and experience moving image.

Born, Elisabeth Charlotte Rist in Grabs, Switzerland in 1962, she lives and works in Zurich and Somerset, United Kingdom. As a child, she decided to adopt the unconventional name Pipilotti, which combines Lotti, a nickname for Charlotte, with Pippi Longstocking, the Astrid Lindgren's character with whom she strongly identified.

Nominated for the New York Guggenheim's Hugo Boss Prize in 1998, Pipilotti won the Joan Miró Prize, organized by Fundació Joan Miró in Barcelona, in 2009.

Pipilotti has exhibited in solo shows at many of the world's leading art institutions, including Fondazione Nicola Trussardi in Milan and Hayward Gallery in London (2011); the Museum of Contemporary Art in Tokyo and Fundació Joan Miró in Barcelona (2010); KIASMA in Helsinki (2009); the Museum of Modern Art in New York (2008); Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris (2007); and Museo Nacional de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid (2001). She has participated in prestigious contemporary exhibitions such as the Venice Biennale, where she represented Switzerland (2005), and has exhibited (2011, 1999, 1997, 1993), the Biennale of Sydney (2008, 2000), the Istanbul Biennial (2007, 1999, 1997), the Moscow Biennale (2007), the Shanghai Biennale (2002), the Berlin Biennial (1998), the Biennale de Lyon (1997) and the São Paulo Biennial (1994).

In 2009 she made her first full-length film, *Pepperminta*, presented the same year at the Venice Film Festival, the Seville European Film Festival, the Miami International Film Festival and the International Film Festival Rotterdam. In 2010 it screened at the Sundance Film Festival.

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Peter Jopling  
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