

## Pilvi Takala

### Breaking Ranks Object Archive

The following artifacts trace Pilvi Takala's practice from its earliest experiments to the present. These fragments from larger artworks – costumes, uniforms, badges, etc. – are portals into interventions where the artist deliberately entered existing spaces and systems to disrupt them. This interventionist approach – inserting art into real-world contexts outside galleries to reveal hidden social dynamics – allows Takala to expose institutional power, social boundaries, and our collective willingness to conform.

#### 1 *Event on Garnett Hill, 2005* Book, courtesy of Helsinki City Library

This book, *Event on Garnethill*, documents an intervention that took place in January 2004 in a Glasgow neighborhood where Takala was living and studying – an area that also housed a private Catholic school. Made during her Environmental Arts studies at Glasgow School of Art, the artwork is an early example of Takala's method: identifying and disrupting social systems, then transforming the encounters into art. The intervention is presented as almost accidental through Takala's diaristic record – the process seeming like a natural progression of following curiosity into ever escalating situations, but clearly lays a foundation for much of Takala's later works. The book was distributed in British public libraries, including all the libraries in Glasgow, with some copies also held in Finnish libraries and private collections.

Supported by Finnish Academy of Fine Arts

#### 2 *Ice Breaker, 2007* Ice-cream cones

The ice-cream cones here are representative of Takala's 2007 intervention *Ice Breaker*. *Ice Breaker* took place several times over the course of a week in a Reykjavik shopping mall ice-cream bar, as part of a festival of public art: *Miðbaugur og Kringla: Leisure, Administration and Control*, curated by Berglind Jóna Hlynisdóttir and Bjarki Bragason. The performer, Amalia Sverrisdóttir – an older Icelandic woman with an auburn bob and bright coloured clothes who stood out against the white uniformed teens working the counter, entered the ice cream bar through the back door, unannounced, and during the busiest times of the day. She then started tasting the ice cream. The action went on for half an hour at a time. The staff pretended not to notice anything unusual and wouldn't answer any questions concerning the performer.

The work very simply demonstrates the power of breaking an accepted social norm, but also the power of withholding. The censure of the ice cream bar staff from answering questions about the intervention prevents it from being dismissed as, for example, 'some performance art thing' framing the action through a different social contract.

Supported by Nordic Culture Point



Pilvi Takala, *Ice Breaker*, 2007, performance. © Pilvi Takala 2026, courtesy the artist; Carlos/Ishikawa, London; and Stigter Van Doesburg, Amsterdam.

#### 3 *The Trainee, 2008* Deloitte lanyard and key card

The lanyard and key card here are taken from *The Trainee*. The key card allowed the artist access into the building but also, as with many of the other items in this collection, shows how small a gesture can be and still help someone assimilate into a group or environment.

*The Trainee* is one of Takala's best known works and a marker of what would become a recurring methodology of inserting herself into companies and social systems to subvert or observe them. In this case Takala spent a month in the Helsinki office of the multi-national consultancy firm Deloitte. Only certain senior staff knew her real identity. To her co-workers she was 'Johanna Takala', a marketing intern. Quickly it became apparent that this intern wasn't contributing very much. Days were spent staring into space in various offices, and one day where she just rode the elevator up and down for the entire shift.

The longer the month went on the more confused, amused and irate the colleagues around her became.

Disguising laziness with apparent busyness and browsing Facebook during working hours are among the generally tolerated behavioral patterns in a work community. However, sitting at an empty desk with your hands in your lap, just thinking, disrupts workplace harmony and breaks your colleagues' concentration. The provoking aspect of Takala's behavior, outside its apparent strangeness, is its element of resistance. The simple refusal to 'do', or at least appear to be doing, challenges so many of the conventions of our late-capitalist society that even the most politically liberal can be easily aggravated by it.

Supported by Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art and the Finnish Cultural Foundation

## 4 *Real Snow White*, 2009

Costume wig & hair bow

Another of Takala's breakthrough works *Real Snow White* – installed in the gallery behind you – was filmed at Disneyland Paris in 2009. Takala is dressed as Snow White and was openly recorded by artist and friend Raphaël Siboni. Here you see replicas of the wig and bow worn by the artist, part of the costume which caused such consternation with the guards. Filming in public like this is normalised now with social media influencers and the general capacity for people to just take a picture or video on their phone whenever they like. In a sense, back in 2009, a tourist-heavy location like Disneyland would be some of the only places you could record in this way whilst still going relatively under the radar. This is also a moment just before people become hyper-conscious of being photographed or recorded, back in the early days of social media and a full understanding on the level of the general public of just how public our lives and images would become.

This marks one of the last occasions where Takala uses this approach, whether covert filming with hidden cameras as in *The Trainee*, or direct filming of interventions without direct prior consent as seen here in *Real Snow White*. Future works would adopt different approaches to confront the ethical challenges of intervening in unsuspecting people's everyday lives and how those people's images are used and shared.

Supported by Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten and Masa Projesi.

## 5 *Lost Pigeons*, 2012

Posters, 30x42 cm

These posters are taken from *Lost Pigeons*, a project developed in the Belgian city of Ghent. Takala became fascinated with the local community of pigeon fanciers. A simple, and slightly whimsical piece, the work also highlights the impact of sub-cultures on society and our social spaces. It also sheds a different light onto a creature we share our cities with, but usually offer little other than contempt. Whilst top racing pigeons are auctioned for high prices, losing birds is an unfortunate part of the sport; in fact all of our street pigeons are lost racing pigeons and their offspring.

During the racing season of 2012 Takala collected information from bird fanciers in Ghent, and made 'lost' posters to announce each lost pigeon discovered through this census. By calling the phone number on the posters, an audience member would be connected to a recorded phone conversation between the artist and a fancier, offering insight into the economy of the pigeon sport, but also the affection these individuals have for their birds.

Commissioned for TRACK by S.M.A.K., Ghent, Supported by: Fonds BKVB/The Netherlands Foundation for Visual Arts, Design and Architecture

# LOST



"Lady Gaga" BE 11 - 4100602

If you see this poster please call:

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Pilvi Takala, *Lost Pigeons*, 2012, intervention, posters, 5:00 audio. poster, TRACK, S.M.A.K., Ghent, 2012. © Pilvi Takala 2026, courtesy the artist; Carlos/Ishikawa, London; and Stigter Van Doesburg, Amsterdam.

## 14 *The Pin*, 2025

Enamel pin, 2x2cm

Can you keep a secret?

Co-commissioned by the High Line and Frieze, *The Pin* debuted in New York in 2025. Pin-wearers approach passersby asking if they'll keep a secret – revealing it only after they agree. Participants who accept receive a pin, transforming them into performers who recognize other wearers creating an ever expanding network. *The Pin* centres on a very simple power structure we are all familiar with – the 'in' crowd and the 'out' crowd. Those with the pin, and those without.

The creation of social hierarchies through knowledge, both shared and concealed, has been a feature of all Takala's work to date in one way or another. From early performances where only she was aware of the parameters, to co-opting ice cream bar staff, to embedding into companies and covertly observing their environments, there have always been those in on the game and those left in the dark. Navigating this ethical minefield of who needs to know what has been something that Takala has become adept in, but not without lessons learned along the way. Her work reminds us that everyone holds power through knowledge and secrets. The question is how we choose to use it.

Look out for *The Pin* in Trondheim during 2026.



[Performance documentation] Pilvi Takala, *The Pin*, 2025. A High Line Performance co-commissioned by High Line Art and Frieze. Photo by Charlie Rubin. Courtesy of Friends of the High Line and Frieze

Exhibition *Breaking Ranks* is curated by Adam Kleinman and Joe Rowley and is supported by Frame Contemporary Art Finland and The Finnish-Norwegian Culture Institute.

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 The Finnish-Norwegian Cultural Institute

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8 *Invisible Friend*, 2015  
Poster, 42x59cm

*Invisible Friend* was a free text message service for anyone who wanted to have an anonymous, personal conversation with someone who would always reply. Running during the darkest part of the year in November and December, 2015, the work was commissioned by Helsinki Contemporary and materialised across the city through posters, like the one presented here, which were pasted around Helsinki. The idea for *Invisible Friend* came from Takala's experience working at a text message service in the US, where users pay to have a fictional girlfriend or boyfriend text them.

During the two months *Invisible Friend* was running, more than 1,000 users exchanged some 18,000 messages with the dedicated team of writers who staffed the service. To participate, one simply had to send a text message, and *Invisible Friend* would reply shortly after. The team of writers entered the conversations without any agenda of their own, allowing users to direct the conversation, their improvised replies responding to the users' input. No ultimate goal needed. No problem that must be solved. No specific structure.



Pilvi Takala, *Invisible Friend*, 2015, text message service. © Pilvi Takala 2026, courtesy the artist; Carlos/Ishikawa, London; and Stigter Van Doesburg, Amsterdam. Photo: Vanessa Forstén / Helsinki Contemporary.

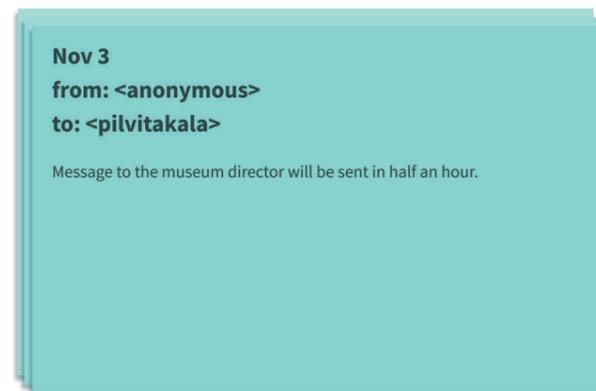
9 *Admirer*, 2018  
Contact on A4 paper

The contract presented here forms the core of *Admirer*, an agreement negotiated with an anonymous person via email. Negotiated over a two month period the contract is an attempt to define the terms of their communication, and implement clear boundaries and objectives within their interaction.

Takala started to receive messages from "Anonymous" in response to her 2015 free text-messaging service *Invisible Friend*. However it didn't take long for things to escalate with Takala receiving a torrent of unwanted and often aggressive messages across a range of digital platforms from the unknown individual. *Admirer* evidences a certain kind of gendered, online behaviour, one in which the risk of reprisal is minimal. These attitudes are echoed across parts of our society, with the work being both about the themes which surfaced in the message (e.g. entitlement, misogyny, harassment framed as romantic persistence) and the actual management of these issues.

Both parties exercised power in this process, with Takala's agency stemming from her clear intentions and control over the art-making process, whilst Anonymous' power lies in the concealing of their identity.

Supported by AVEK / The Promotion Centre for Audiovisual Culture, Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art, Taika / Arts Promotion Centre Finland



[Still] Pilvi Takala, *Admirer*, 2018, 1:57:00 nine-channel video installation, contract. © Pilvi Takala 2026, courtesy the artist; Carlos/Ishikawa, London; and Stigter Van Doesburg, Amsterdam.

10 *The Stroker*, 2018  
Approach maps, 59x84cm

*The Stroker* – displayed in the galleries above – was recorded with actors faithfully recreating interactions Takala had while posing as Nina Neiminen, 'the Stroker'. These interactions were documented by her assistant Iona Roisin during the artist's intervention at Second Home, an East London co-working space. The real interactions would be observed, covertly recorded and annotated. The compiled material was then reviewed, much as one might in a sociological or anthropological study, with selected instances marked for reenactment. Takala then returned to Second Home with a group of actors and recorded the reenacted interactions in-situ. This strategy of reenactment allows for a more gentle approach, preserving anonymity of otherwise possibly unknowing participants in the work, whilst also giving much more control to the artist in the visual composition of the final film.

The maps shown in this archive track some of these interactions and shed light on the processes used by Takala and (assistant) to observe, record and then later recreate the scenarios depicted in the installation in our upper gallery. These maps reveal how Second Home's social conventions and spatial architecture both shape user behavior and influence reactions to uncomfortable situations. They also give some insight into the level of rigour Takala's projects involve in faithfully revealing social and power dynamics.

Supported by AVEK / The Promotion Centre for Audiovisual Culture, Finnish Institute in London, Koneen Säätiö, Second Home, Taika / Arts Promotion Centre Finland

11 *If Your Heart Wants It (REMIX)*, 2020  
'SLUSH' lanyard and *Say What* business card

The lanyard and business card here are taken from *If your heart wants it (remix)*, a work produced whilst Takala was artist-in-residence at Aalto Business School. This video work focuses on the annual tech startup event SLUSH, itself conceived at Aalto University and founded by former students in 2008. As with many tech fairs, SLUSH sets out to solve the world's 'Big Problems'.

Together with an interdisciplinary research team and camera crew Takala attended the 2018 edition of the fair, representing a fictional startup called *Say What*. Together, the team attended talks and afterparties, milled around the booths and documented everything that they came across. The film is constructed from that material.

Takala set out to study the behaviours and attitudes encouraged by this environment, such as how those within the culture deal with the constant pressure to be positive and social, all whilst desperately trying to prove their 'entrepreneurial worth'. They frequently witnessed attendees being self-aware of the performativity of the environment, but in spite of all the positive self-affirmations, there is often a feeling of insecurity alongside the bravado. In a world where success is framed as the result of individual determination, dedication and creativity, it is equally the individual that has to shoulder the blame when failure comes around. Framing success exclusively in this way gives increasing power to narcissistic individuals who cultivate personal myths of rising from obscurity, while simultaneously belittling success born of teamwork, solidarity, or unearned advantages.

Commissioned by Aalto University School of Business, Finland  
Supported by KRIEG/PXL-MAD School of Arts Hasselt, Belgium

**12 Close Watch, 2022**  
 Catalog from debut presentation at the 59th Venice Biennial as part of the national pavilion of Finland, curated by Christina Li, Securitas tie clip, Securitas tie, two velcro uniform patches

*Close Watch* – displayed in the galleries above – is a stand out amongst Takala’s works in part because it focuses on fitting in rather than standing out. She allowed this inversion of her usual process to work on her, recording and reflecting on how she reacted and why that might be the case. The publication accompanying the artwork, which you can find here with the archive, reveals many of these moments of personal conflict. The feeling of power when surveilling a suspicious customer. The excitement felt when chasing a thief. The confusion around why she didn’t speak up when racial slurs were used. This side of the work acts as a useful reminder of how easy it is for power, or a basic need to conform, can lead individuals to be carried along by group behaviours – and guard against them.

Shown here are some of the uniform items worn by Takala while working for Securitas, a leading global security company. Private security uniforms worldwide mimic military aesthetics through protective vests and velcro patches. This visual language can lead security workers to identify with – and emulate – police and military authority beyond their actual role. Also fascinating is the tie clip. A uniform item that feels somehow incongruous, but also displays design elements reminiscent of military service ribbons. These various elements of military role-play, tactical uniform and dress uniform, can easily lead those with a tendency towards authoritarian behaviours overstepping the line.

*Close Watch* was originally commissioned and produced by Frame Contemporary Art Finland for the Pavilion of Finland at the 59th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia, in collaboration with Saastamoinen Foundation. Special thanks to Securitas. Additional support: AVEK The Promotion Centre for Audiovisual Culture, The Arts Promotion Centre Finland (Taike)

**13 Feeling Defensive, 2025**  
 Velcro name patch, Finnish Coastal Brigade commemorative metal cup

*Feeling Defensive* is an ongoing project with much left to explore. *Part 1*, shown in the upper galleries, represents just one facet of what is clearly fertile territory for Takala’s practice. These archival objects relate to military role-play – this time deployed more explicitly as a tool to build military solidarity among participants, some of whom might not otherwise support such institutions. The National Defence Course (*Maanpuolustuskurssit*) in Finland brings together leaders and people of influence from various fields, including culture in the case of Takala; academia, like Johanna Vuorelma, who features in the film upstairs; but also figures from industry, government, media; and a few professional soldiers. The outward purpose of the course is to increase preparedness in the event of a crisis and an understanding of the role of the military in national security – but it is also an exercise in creating ambassadors for the military in various fields including those which may traditionally be less supported by. Using military dress-up (like the velcro name patch included here) and shooting competitions (Takala won the metal cup included here as a prize in one such event), and the more general infantilising of the participants in a structure which is deeply reminiscent of school, seems an odd way of creating an informed trust in a body – and perhaps masks a form of psychological manipulation. Amid growing global tensions, societies are being pushed to fear ‘the other’ and accept military force as the only answer – a dangerous repetition of past failures.

Commissioned by Meduza for the exhibition No, 2025  
 Supported by Arts Promotion Center Finland and Linnamo Foundation



[Still] Pilvi Takala, *Feeling Defensive (Part 1)*, 2025, 15:50 video. © Pilvi Takala 2026, courtesy the artist; Carlos/Ishikawa, London; and Stigter Van Doesburg, Amsterdam.

**6 Vergunningvolle Zone, 2013**  
 Information signage

*Vergunningvolle Zone* (Permit-Full Zone) was realised as a part of the *Call of the Mall* exhibition in Hoog Catharijne Shopping Mall, Utrecht in The Netherlands; with Takala working closely with the curator Huib Haye van der Werf. *A Vergunningvolle Zone* is a special area where fewer regulations exist than in a usual public space or a mall in the Netherlands. Inside the zone anyone is allowed to spontaneously engage in activities that normally require a permit. The signage present here in the archive are replicas of the signs used in Utrecht explaining the parameters of the zone. Outside of these info signs, there was no organisation or scheduling of the events. If conflicting activities occurred at the same time, it was up to the people themselves to find a way to share the space.

The artwork both creates a space of permission in what are usually tightly controlled spaces, but also encourages a set of relationships between members of the public to occur naturally. It creates a space of negotiation mirroring something more reminiscent of an old market street than the restricted corporate spaces malls currently are. Shopping malls repeatedly appear through Takala’s practice, and the artist has long expressed her fascination with these spaces. Social melting pots presenting as public spaces, but actually being private, and as such subject to surveillance and control, they are one of the defining social environments of our time.

Commissioned by Stichting Kunst in het Stationsgebied / City of Utrecht



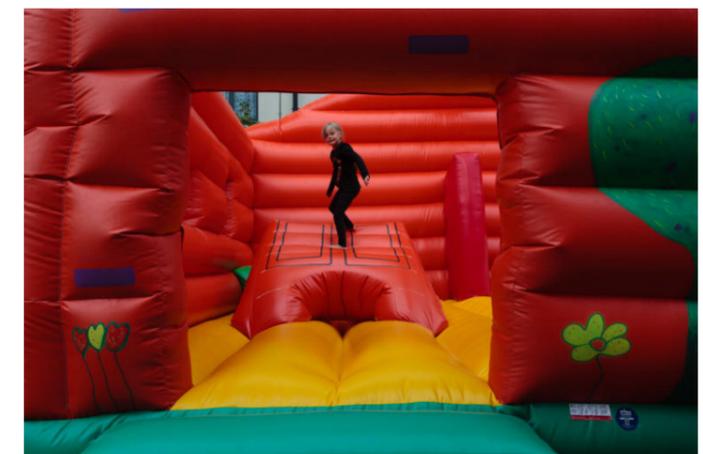
Pilvi Takala, *Vergunningvolle Zone*, 2013, public art piece. Installation view, *Call of the Mall*, Utrecht, 2013. © Pilvi Takala 2026, courtesy the artist; Carlos/Ishikawa, London; and Stigter Van Doesburg, Amsterdam. Photo: Stichting Kunst in het Stationsgebied & City of Utrecht.

**7 The Committee, 2015**  
 Event advertisements, 42x59cm & 15x21cm

In 2013 Takala was the winner of the EMDASH Award, a prize awarded for innovative performance art practices, aimed towards the production of a new artwork for Frieze Art Fair, London. She invited a group of children aged 8 to 12 who were regulars at a youth centre in Bow, East London to spend her award. They were free to spend the money any way they wanted, as well as to choose how they would formulate decisions as a group.

The project is formed of several parts. The workshops with the children at the youth centre, the proposal that the group decided on, and a video work titled *The Committee* – the video is formed of interviews with the children as they explain how they decided to spend the £7,000 prize money, they discuss the process of decision making, and the values guiding their decisions. The posters shown here are for the launch of the proposal the children eventually settled on – a bouncy house complete with furniture, a garden and pool where everything is bouncy. Striking, as always with the accounts of children, are the wildly varying remembrances of the process and the ability to frame their decisions in a way that mimics rationalisations exhibited by adults around them (charitable works, community value, business possibilities) at the same time as reveling in how epic a ball pit would be.

Made possible by the 2013 EMDASH Award, supported by Rennes Biennale



[Still] Pilvi Takala, *The Committee*, 2014, 15:00 video. © Pilvi Takala 2026, courtesy the artist; Carlos/Ishikawa, London; and Stigter Van Doesburg, Amsterdam.