



Pilvi Takala, *The Real Snow White*, 2009 © Pilvi Takala & Carlos/Ishikawa London.

Evig besøkende

Gjennom performance og video undersøker og forstyrrer **PILVI TAKALA** de sosiale strukturene som omgir oss, og avslører dem som skjøre og mindre naturlige enn man skulle tro. Selv om hennes intervensjoner er subtile og harmløse, ser de ut til å rykke folk ut av sine komfortsoner og inn i en gråsoner der de uskrevene reglene for sosial omgang ennå ikke er etablert.

AV ESPEN JOHANSEN

OVERSATT FRA ENGLSK AV DAVID ALMNES

I verket *The Trainee* (2008) simulerte Pilvi Takala i en måned at hun jobbet i markedsføringsavdelingen hos Deloitte. I løpet av perioden dokumenterte hun kollegaenes reaksjoner når hun ikke forstod arbeidstedets sosiale regler. Som da hun satt hele dagen ved skrivebordet og bare tenkte, til hennes medarbeideres forundring og ergrelse. Da folk spurte, forklarte hun at hun simpelthen gjorde litt mentalt arbeid, og at hun fra tid til annen forsøkte å «klare seg uten datamaskin». Ingen konfronterte henne angående denne underlige oppførselen, men en ansatt konstaterte i en e-post at Takala hadde en sinnslidelse og skrev at: «Folk bruker vanvittige mengder tid på å spekulere rundt dette.» Prosjektet ble stilt ut som en rekke videoer og en PowerPoint-fremvisning ved samtidskunstmuseet Kiasma i Helsinki.

I Paris i 2009 dokumenterte Takala episoden da hun forsøkte å komme seg inn i Disneyland kledd som Snøhvit. Hun ble avvist fordi hun (angivelig) ikke var *The Real Snow White*. Barna som flokket seg rundt henne for å få autograf stilte ingen spørsmål ved hvorvidt hun var ekte vare eller ei, men en sikkerhetsvakt kom raskt til stedet og forklarte at hun ble nektet inngang fordi hun ville bli «forvekslet med den virkelige figuren som jobber her».

I *The Committee* (2014) gav Takala £7000 av Emdash-premiepengene sine til en gruppe barn. Den eneste betingelsen hun ga, var at barna



PILVI TAKALA (f. 1981) har en MFA fra Kunstakademiet i Helsinki og jobber med performance og video i offentlige og halvoffentlige rom, der hun undersøker den til tider absurde logikken og strukturene i sosiale grupperinger, institusjoner og samfunn. Gjennom kunsten synliggjør hun de uskrevene reglene som styrer normal sosial adferd, og tvinger publikum til å reagere og finne nye måter å hankses med unormale situasjoner.

sammen måtte avgjøre hvordan de skulle bruke pengene. På premisset at det ikke fantes noen riktig eller galt svar, gikk ungene grundig gjennom ulike beslutninger og fant en løsning i fellesskap. Etter å ha vurdert tur til fornøylespark og kjøp av iPhone eller kunst, investerte de til slutt i et enormt hoppeslott, som de kunne leie ut eller ta inngangspenger til, og gjøre fortjeneste.

I løpet av epost-korrespondansen med Takala la jeg merke til at det stod telefonnummer til henne i fem forskjellige land i signaturen hennes. Den finskfødte kunstneren har i så lang tid bodd her og der, at det lenge var vanskelig å si med sikkerhet hvor hun til enhver tid holdt hus. Dog er hun nå i ferd med å slå seg ned i Berlin, etter et seks måneder langt residency i New York.

EJ: Har det at du har bodd mange ulike steder gjort deg mer oppmerksom når det gjelder å legge merke til de sosiale strukturene du undersøker i verkene dine?

PT: Å rykkes ut av rutinen er viktig del av min kunstneriske praksis, men nå som jeg ikke egentlig bor noe sted, kan jeg ikke engang si at jeg bryter med egne rutiner ved å reise til et nytt sted. Jeg er en evig besøkende. Kanskje er det en egen væremåte? Jeg starter alltid nye verk ved å dra et sted og spørre: «Hva skjer her?»

EJ: Har denne «besøkende livsstilen» påvirket



–Jeg har alltid vært interessert i sosial adferd, helt siden jeg var barn, og særlig alle slags gruppesituasjoner som er litt kunstige.

metoden din og tematikken du utforsker, eller har du alltid latt deg fascinere av uskrevne sosiale regler?

PT: Jeg har alltid vært interessert i sosial adferd, helt siden jeg var barn, og særlig i alle slags gruppesituasjoner – à la leirskole eller skole – som er litt kunstige. Jeg elsket skolen av flere grunner, men det jeg husker best er det sosiale som skjedde der. I Finland har de forskjellige distriktene vinterferie til forskjellige tider, og da jeg var barn dro jeg til kusinen min og ble med henne på skolen i vinterferien. Det var supert, siden jeg ikke måtte noe som helst. Og jeg slapp å være nyankommen og finne venner, siden jeg automatisk fikk samme sosiale aksept som kusinen min. Det er ikke det at jeg er noen ekspert på å få innpass, det handler mer om at jeg ikke har noen frykt for ikke å passe inn.

EJ: Om man ser godt nok etter, finner man pussige sosiale strukturer og uskrevne regler overalt. Hva er det du opplever som fascinerende ved visse sosiale omgivelser?

PT: Jeg er alltid på søken, men noen ting opplever jeg ganske enkelt som mer komplekse og mystiske enn andre. Da forsøker jeg å se om jeg kan gjøre noe med dem, for eksempel *The Real Snow White* som baserer seg på intervensjon, der jeg valgte en handling som tydelig forvirrer situasjonen.

I andre verk gjør jeg ikke annet enn å være tilstede, og prøver heller å beskrive og dokumentere en situasjon som allerede finnes. I de verkene mine

som omhandler lukkede samfunn, er det allerede en iboende spenning i situasjonen, så bare det at jeg er der, forstyrret.

EJ: Kan du utdype? Hvordan jobber du med disse minimalistiske inngrepene i motsetning til mer eksplisitte interaksjoner med publikum? Verkene dine er avhengige andres reaksjoner, så jeg lurer på om du har en klar tanke om hva utfallet av en performance vil bli, og hvor godt dine forutsigelser om andres reaksjoner til dine verk stemmer.

PT: Når man gjør noe som er mer eksplisitt, er det mye lettere å gjette hva slags reaksjon man vil møte, og det er ofte ikke like spennende. For min del handler det mer om å se på en allerede eksisterende situasjon, og finne forskjellige måter å reagere gjennom minimale inngrep. Jeg prøver å velge den typen handling som ikke har én bestemt mening, men som heller stiller seg åpen til så mange reaksjoner som mulig.

For eksempel; hvis jeg bestemmer meg for å reise til Disneyland kledd som Snøhvit, så er verket nesten ferdig. Jeg regner ikke med at de slipper meg inn siden det er så nøye kontrollert. Men måten de behandler meg på derimot... Vil de gi meg en gratis hamburger for hederlig innsats, eller fjerner de meg raskt fra folks åsyn og fører meg til «Disney Guantanamo»? Jeg visste ikke om det fantes andre besøkende som kler seg ut, men det virker jo som rimelig ting å gjøre før man drar til

Disneyland, så personalet må jo ha en rutine for å ta seg av folk som kommer i kostyme. Jeg visste bare ikke hva rutinen var.

Planen min var å late som jeg ikke kjente til den virkelige Snøhvit, og at jeg bare prøvde å være grei og leve ut en drøm. Jeg skulle ikke være smart. Så da jeg hadde kommet frem til denne planen, gjaldt det bare å dokumentere så mye av det som skjedde som jeg kunne. Mange faktorer bidro til at det lyktes som verk innenfor dette rammeverket, men mye var også bare flaks.

EJ: Finnes det noen prosjekter der utfallet har overrasket deg spesielt?

PT: Det er alltid spennende når det skjer ting man ikke kan forutse.

The Trainee var et vendepunkt for meg, på grunn av performancens varighet og intensitet i den intime settingen. Det var fysisk utfordrende å motstå sosialt press og ikke gjøre det alle ville at jeg skulle gjøre. Alle var sånn: «Vær så snill, bare ta mobilen i hånden.» Hadde jeg bare plukket opp mobilen, ville alle vært fornøyde. Det er helvetes skummelt å gjøre ingenting, fordi det er øyeblikket før du gjør noe, og det du gjør kan være hva som helst.

Forlegenhet takler jeg svært godt, og da jeg gjorde *Snow White* følte jeg meg overhodet ikke flau. Men under *The Trainee* ble følelsen av å være en utstøtt i den typen fellesskap en reell følelse. Tanken på at folk trodde jeg var gal og ikke ville være venner med meg plaget meg, men samtidig bestemte jeg meg for å fortsette å gjøre hva enn det var som gjorde at de oppfattet meg slik. Siden den gang har jeg jobbet mer i situasjoner som er mer intense, innsperrede og intime. Der er innsatsen høyere, og de sosiale båndene sterkere og mer komplekse. Hvis du gjør noe ute på gaten, bryr ikke folk seg; de tror bare du er en gærning. Men hvis du er en gærning på en arbeidsplass så er det langt mer urovekkende og interessant. Så

The Trainee var – kanskje ikke overraskende – det mest utslagsgivende verket i min praksis.

EJ: I The Trainee var noen av de ansatte ved Deloitte inneforstått med hvorfor du egentlig var der, og du hadde dermed en unik anledning til å samle informasjon om hvordan dine kollegaer oppfattet deg. Hva skjedde så? Hvordan var tilbakemeldingene fra Deloitte?

PT: Jeg ville ikke kunnet få den jobben med min egen kompetanse, å bli praktikant hos Deloitte er en ettertraktet stilling. Og med tanke på de skjulte kameraene kunne de saksøkt meg i hjel dersom jeg ikke hadde søkt om lov. Så vi gjorde en avtale, et tykt juridisk dokument. Poenget var ikke å overvåke noen i firmaet, men snarere situasjonen rundt meg og de som snakket med meg. Etter praksistiden brukte jeg tre måneder på å redigere videomaterialet, før jeg kontaktet personene i videoen og spurte om tillatelse til å vise den frem. Innen den tid hadde de slått seg til ro med dette. Ingen ble sinte da de fant ut den egentlig grunnen til at jeg hadde vært der, i stedet ble de lettet da de fikk høre at det ikke var på ordentlig. Faktisk er dette noe de burde ta til seg, siden de er et firma som selger tanker og ideer. Senere fant jeg ut at de hadde diskutert nettopp akseptable arbeidsmåter etter at jeg dro.

EJ: Når man tenker på store bedrifter, er ofte klisjefylte «moteord» som «streamlining» blant assosiasjonene, noe som høres veldig umenneskeligjørende ut. Det du derimot gjorde i dette prosjektet, er noe jeg ville beskrevet som ytterst menneskelig. Et annet interessant aspekt er kunst i bedriftshovedkvarterer: da tenker man som regel på malerier på veggen eller skulpturer i lobbyen, hvilket gjør prosjektet ditt veldig annerledes.

PT: Ja, det var en utveksling som fungerte, og Deloitte var helt med. For dem handlet det i hovedsak om markedsføring, tror jeg. Ved å la meg gjøre som jeg ville, fremstår de som åpne, fleksible og kule.

– Konseptet penger er også fascinerende, det er så abstrakt at ingen helt kan forklare det. Det er en enhet man kan måle, men penger er ikke like for alle.

Derfor gikk de med på det. Jeg har blitt kritisert for å være løpegutt for dem, men jeg synes det var en rettfærdig avtale. Jeg fikk gjøre det jeg ville og det jeg syntes var interessant, og de fikk noe som var nyttig for dem. Dersom det hadde vært et sted der jeg hadde ønsket å være i opposisjon og gjøre noe ødeleggende, tror jeg ikke det hadde gitt gode resultater. Hvis en enorm bedrift og en kunstner slås, er det vanligvis kunstneren som taper.

Når det gjelder min kunst, handler det ikke om å slåss mot store firmaer, men heller å erkjenne at de finnes og snakke om hvordan de fungerer. Det er alltid en rotete blanding av påvirkning, utbytte, og det ene med det andre, men når det gjelder *The Trainee* var den eneste måten å få det til på å lage en avtale der også de fikk noe ut av det.

EJ: Gjennom dine performancer synliggjør du strukturer som vi alle som regel følger i blinde. Er muligheten til forandring viktig i kunsten din?

PT: Du kan ikke forandre noe hvis ikke du vet hva noe er. Mine verk handler om å se på verden, men jeg vil ikke foreskrive noen idé om hvordan den bør endres. Ved å vise dem til folk får de kanskje nye assosiasjoner, og det kan trigge forandring.

Jeg har mine meninger og ingenting er nøytralt, men kunsten min er ikke et sted jeg prøver å drive propaganda eller utforske ting jeg allerede tror på. I de tilfellene vil jeg heller være med på en underskriftskampanje eller stemme på noen.

EJ: Ja, jeg tror at dine verk stikker kjepper i hjulene, der du — istedenfor å foreslå en eksplisitt løsning til en bestemt sosial situasjon — utfordrer publikum til å revurdere sin lydighet mot de reglene du synliggjør.

Generelt sett virker det som dine verk omhandler dagligdagse sosiale miljøer, men flere av verkene tar for seg kapital som en katalysator for disse sosiale situasjonene. Er det en bestemt grunn til at økonomi er gjennomgående i dine arbeider?

PT: Penger og handel er en så stor del av vår sosiale virkelighet at jeg ikke vet hvordan skille dem ut. Økonomi er en del av måten vi lever sammen på, en del av hele opplegget. Konseptet penger er også fascinerende, det er så abstrakt at ingen helt kan forklare det. Det er en enhet man kan måle, men penger er ikke like for alle. Det er konkret og abstrakt på én og samme tid.

I *The Committee* virket mange av de voksne redde for at barna skulle mislykkes og bruke pengene på en dum måte. Jeg mente at det ikke fantes noen dum måte å bruke pengene på. Barna kunne ha kjøpt så mye godteri at de kunne svømt i det — og det ville vært helt greit for meg — men i stedet begynte de å planlegge investering så de kunne få flere penger. De var åtte år gamle, og så visste de allerede om dette. Dermed endte det med at de lyktes på en urovekkende måte — på en så perfekt måte at alle de voksne var fornøyde.



‘What are your thoughts on sponsorships, both private and state?’

‘Over the past 20 years, during which we’ve focused on oil in our work, we’ve realised that cultural sponsorship is absolutely crucial to keeping oil corporations in business. What’s BP to do when its name is increasingly associated with destroyed Gulf of Mexico shores, murdered trade unionists in Colombia, and climate chaos? Their PR strategy is focused on gaining “social licence to operate” (PR professionals’ term) from “special publics”, i.e. civil servants, journalists, NGOs, artistic elites. And sponsoring prestigious art spaces like London’s Tate Gallery is a crucial part of how oil companies gain this “social licence”. That’s why we’re part of a growing movement against oil sponsorship of the arts.

‘Every arts organisation and artist has to face difficult questions about how to finance their work – and everyone we’ve talked to draws these lines differently – but we believe that public investment in art is a great and necessary thing.’

‘Platform London has shed light on the relationship between the oil industry and the arts. In Norway, the art world receives heavy public funding, with institutions being mainly state- or artist-run. Private (and commercial) galleries are few and the art market almost non-existent. There have been protests against funding from oil companies such as Statoil; funding from the Department of Culture, however, is accepted, even though this in reality is also “oil-money”, albeit in a sense white-washed through a socio-democratic system of government grants. What are your thoughts on this? Can this situation ever be avoided, and if so, how?’

‘You might say, “What difference does it make, if state funding for the arts may also come from questionable corporations?” The difference is that state funding does not produce legitimacy for a climate-wrecking business model. State funding can be more democratic and accountable, and support art that is more diverse and challenging than the prestige high-value stuff corporations favour. In the UK, state arts funding has been ruthlessly cut by a conservative government over the past five years, and this has really threatened the survival of the more experimental, community-based, minority ethnic art projects. Art needs public funding!’

‘And further to that, if an artist makes art that isn’t saleable and thus can’t live off her work, who should then pay the bill?’

‘So much of the most important art is not saleable; this is partly why public funding of art is so important. But also, with things like crowd funding and Patreon, there’s lots of new ways for communities to support art that’s important to them. To me, the crucial thing is that artists consider both what their art and what their art’s *funding* are doing to the wider world!’

‘In your opinion, what is the ideal way to finance the art world?’

‘There’s no one-size-fits-all solution, but see my other answers.’

‘Finally, how is Platform London funded?’
‘Our funding is a mix of [donations from]

charitable foundations, research grants, individual donations and EU grants.’

Page 32

Creative Capital

The arts organization Creative Capital was established in 1999 to provide financial support and advisory services to innovative artists in all artistic disciplines. Their integrated approach is adapted from the way that venture capitalists work with fledgling businesses.

BY MONICA HOLMEN

‘On your web page, it says that Creative Capital are “investing in artists who shape the future”. Based on your approach you seem to have a clear idea on how to do this best. Can you elaborate on this?’

‘We have a four-part approach to working with an artist: support the project idea financially; support the person beyond the project, to help them build skills and relationships that will stay with them long after we are out of the picture; build and nurture the community of artists so that they can be resources to each other throughout their creative lives, and also help other artists connect with professionals working in their fields; and engage the public through extensive promotion of the artists and projects, mostly online.

‘Many artists have told us that this approach has helped them to think bigger about their work and really consider its impact.’

‘According to the site, Creative Capital also provides funding at strategic moments and helps direct the project to its most successful completion.’ How much do you intervene in a project?’

‘We don’t; we don’t see that as our job. Some things work, some don’t. We say we’re a provider of “risk capital” to the arts and culture. If you are committed to taking risks, not everything will succeed. We do allow artists to change their projects, but that is initiated by them, not us.’

‘From what little I know, the American art world seems much more dependent on the commercial aspect of art and private collectors, which in turn may be restrictive for an artist working with art that doesn’t easily sell. How do you see Creative Capital’s role in this context?’

‘We fund work that is for the most part emphatically non-commercial, although it is important to acknowledge that many of our artists have had significant commercial success. In general, our artists exhibit their work through the non-profit cultural infrastructure as represented by regional theatres and exhibition societies, at university galleries

and non-profit art spaces, through public art commissions, et cetera. Many of our artists are succeeding across all these platforms. Our role is to help artists articulate the success they hope to have, and then to strategize with them what a path to that success might look like.’

‘In contrast to the American art world, Norway’s art scene is heavily funded by the state, one consequence of which is a virtually insignificant art market. In your experience, what would be the ideal way to finance the art world?’

‘To me, the ideal way to finance artistic endeavours would involve a rich mix of government grant support at the local, state, and national level. It would include grassroots support through crowd funding sites like Kickstarter. It would include grants from private sector foundations, large and small, or other NGOs, if appropriate to the issues in a particular project, and it would also include direct donations from larger individual donors. These sources would be in balance so that there’d be no fear of censorship from the government or intrusion from any individual’s particular point of view.

‘Once work is completed, we also need a robust community of exhibitors of all sizes and in communities large and small, and we need a community of patrons and collectors.

So, basically, we need a broad base of diversified support!’

‘Can you give some examples of artists that have had particular success after being supported by Creative Capital?’

‘There are several blog posts to be found online with testimonials of how artists have used our support, among others Nick Slie, part of the performance group Mondo Bizarro, who said in an interview:

“Creative Capital was a game-changer for many reasons that weren’t primarily financial to us; the collaboration with the staff, the idea that people really had our backs and wanted to see this work live and flourish in the world. Then of course, it’s awesome to have a healthy amount of financial resources behind the project. This idea that the granting organization is a partner in your project is progressive and amazing.”

‘How is Creative Capital it self funded?’

‘We have a number of major foundation and individual donors, including our board of directors. In addition, we are always doing grassroots campaigns to attract smaller donors.’

Page 33

ArtLeaks

ArtLeaks was founded by an international group of artists, curators, and art historians and critics in 2011. Their aim is to speak out against the appropriation of

politically engaged culture, and to expose instances of abuse, censorship, and wrongdoing and submit them to public inquiry. KUNSTforum spoke to one of their members, Corina Apostol.

BY MONICA HOLMEN

‘On your web page you write that Art Leaks works “in response to the abuse of their professional integrity and the open infraction of their labour rights.” Can you give some examples?’

‘There are different kinds of abuse that we refer to: censorship, blackmail, cooptation, bullying. – are almost commonplace nowadays in the neoliberal art world. We have kept an archive of all the cases of abuse that we have covered over the years on our web page. There, you can find the outcome of each case. In some instances, the cases have been resolved, in others; there was no concrete outcome.

‘One example is from 2011, when we reported on the case of Jerusalem-born artist Larissa Sansour, who had submitted an competition entry for the prestigious Lacoste Elysée Prize for photography. She was one of eight finalists for this prize, which was organized by the Musée de l’Elysée in Switzerland. Each shortlisted artist received a stipend of 4,000 euros to produce a portfolio. Three photographs from Sansour’s series, *Nation Estate* – inspired by the Palestinian bid for UN membership – were selected by the jury. At the same time, someone from the Lacoste management demanded that Sansour be removed from the list of nominees, explaining that her images were too pro-Palestine. Her name was subsequently deleted from the website that listed the other nominees and her work was erased from an issue of *ArtReview* that focused on the nominees. The museum then had the audacity to ask Sansour to approve a press release stating that she withdrew from the shortlist “in order to pursue other opportunities”. She refused and leaked the information to ArtLeaks and the international press. After much negative publicity Lacoste withdrew their sponsorship and the prize was eventually suspended. The museum offered Sansour the opportunity of a solo-exhibition, which she declined.’

‘As a web page, pamphlet and perhaps a kind of whistleblower, where do you see yourself in the art world?’

‘ArtLeaks not only functions as an online resource and publication, we also organize get-togethers, workshops, and on the ground investigations in different contexts around the world. Also, we collaborate with international groups with related concerns such as W.A.G.E., Arts&Labor, Occupy Museums, Haben und Brauchen, PWB, Critical Practice, and the Art & Economics Group. We emphasize that only an internationally coordinated front of solidarity will be able to expose and denounce exploitation and censorship in contemporary culture, and collectively imagine new types of organizational constellations that can respond to the needs and desires of political subjects that

arise where the current economic, politic and cultural transformations intersect.

‘The art world is notorious in having people work for free, artists and others alike. What are your thoughts on this situation and the underlying structures that seem to facilitate the acceptance of artists and others often working for free, and why are they so difficult to get rid of?’

‘ArtLeaks takes into account the fact that a sort of domino effect of exploitation happens down the line. If we just secure artists’ position and fail to address the condition of many others who perform unpaid labour, and yet may endure even more abuse and humiliation, then we’re merely scratching the surface of the inequalities in the contemporary art world. It is not just about these exclusive, one-sided contracts, but also non-contractual practices which directly affect various cultural workers. It is important to also consider the role of those who work in a nearly feudal relationship to blue-chip (or superstar) artists or their overlords. As we know, the art market is not made up of just galleries and artists, but also of people who guard or move the work, clean the floors, do all sorts of unpaid or poorly paid work within cultural institutions. This landscape of exploitation runs the gamut from unpaid translations to front-desk volunteers. ArtLeaks strives to change this culture of exploitation by discussing the specifics of how and where this happens, and sharing different strategies to prevent people being forced into these precarious situations.’

‘If an artist makes art that isn’t a conventional saleable object, and is thus in practice working for free, who should then pick up the bill and pay for the artist’s work (and others)?’

‘Creativity is not something that you can easily quantify, although there are NGOs like W.A.G.E. who have formulated a practice-smodel on how artists in the United States should be remunerated.

‘We are more interested in how artists and cultural workers in general enter the art economy how they are treated by private and public institutions, from political governments to auction houses to museums, and – more importantly – how to organize ourselves into associations that promote improved working conditions.’

‘In your point of view, what would be the ideal way to finance the art world?’

‘There is no ideal way to finance the art world, as art and culture do not exist in a sphere that is disconnected from the rest of society, which is governed by the neo-capitalist economy. One of our ideas, though, is to formulate demands through a union for at-risk workers. We believe that a Cultural Workers and Artists Union of vulnerable workers can formulate relevant standards and exert international pressure. This strategy may help both when dealing with local contexts and in linking these struggles across geopolitical and economic dimensions.’



Kajsa Dahlberg, *Reach, Grasp, Move, Position, Apply Force*, 2014–15, Video still. ©Kajsa Dahlberg

Page 34

A Constant Visitor

Through performance and video, Pilvi Takala investigates and disturbs the social structures that surround us, revealing them as more fragile and less natural than one might think. Even though her interventions are subtle and perfectly harmless, they seem to jolt people ever so slightly out of their comfort zone and into a grey area where the unwritten rules of social conduct have yet to be established.

BY ESPEN JOHANSEN

In *The Trainee* (2008), Pilvi Takala pretended to work as an intern at Deloitte’s marketing department for a month, and documented her colleagues’ reactions when she failed to understand the social rules of the workplace. One day was spent sitting at an empty desk just thinking, causing severe confusion and consternation amongst her co-workers. When asked, she simply explained that she was doing some brainwork, and that she from time to time tries to ‘manage everything without a computer’. Nobody confronted her about her unusual behaviour, but in an email, another employee concluded that she had a mental problem, saying, ‘people spent a senseless amount of time speculating on this issue.’

Page 34

A Constant Visitor

The project was shown as a series of videos and a PowerPoint presentation at the Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art.

In 2009, in Paris, Takala documented her attempt to enter Disneyland dressed as Snow White, only to be rejected on the grounds that she was not *The Real Snow White*. None of the children who flocked around her for autographs seemed to question whether she was real or not, but a security officer quickly appeared on the scene and explained to her that she was being denied entrance because she would ‘be confused with the real character working here.’

In *The Committee* (2014), she gave 7000 pounds of her Emdash Award prize money to a group of children, asking only that they decide collectively on how to spend the money. With the premise that there was no right or wrong answer, the kids went through a thorough decision-making process, finding a solution as a group. After considering visiting theme parks, buying iPhones or art, they ended up investing in a huge bouncy house they could rent out or charge admission to and make a profit.

During our correspondence, I noticed that Takala’s email signature lists phone numbers to reach her in five different countries. The Finnish-born artist has been living here and there for such a long time that it was difficult to say with any certainty where she lived at any given time. However, she is now about to settle down in Berlin, after a six-month residency in New York.

BY ESPEN JOHANSEN

EJ: Has the fact that you’ve been living in so many different places made you sharper at spotting these social structures that you investigate in your work?’

PT: Displacement from the routine is very grounding to my art, but now that I don’t actually live anywhere, I can’t even say I am breaking my own routines by going to a new place. I am a constant visitor. Maybe it

is a mode of being? I always start new works by going to a new place and asking: ‘What’s going on here?’

EJ: Has this ‘visiting lifestyle’ affected your artistic method and the themes you explore, or have you always been fascinated by unwritten social rules?’

PT: I have been interested in social behaviour, ever since I was a child, and especially in any kind of group situation – like camp or school – that are somewhat artificial. I loved school for several reasons, but what I remember the most is the social stuff that went on there. In Finland, different regions have winter holidays at different times, and as a kid, I would go with my cousin to her school when I had my holidays. It was awesome, because I did not *have* to do anything, and was free from being the new girl who had to make friends, since I automatically got the same social standing as my cousin. It’s not that I’m an expert at fitting in, it’s more that I lack the fear of not fitting in.

EJ: If you look hard enough, you will find puzzling social structures and unwritten rules everywhere. What is it about certain social environments that you find fascinating?’

PT: I am always searching, but some things I just find more complex and mysterious than others. That’s when I try to see if I can do something with them, for example in my intervention-based work like *The Real Snow White*, where I chose an activity that clearly disrupts a situation.

In other pieces, I don’t really do anything except be there, and rather try to describe and document a situation that already exists. In my works that deal with closed communities, there is an inherent tension in the situation already, so just me being there is disruptive.

EJ: Could you elaborate on that? How do you work with these minimal interventions as opposed to more explicit interactions with the public? Your work relies on the response and

reactions of others, so I'm curious if you have a clear perception of the outcome of a performance, and how accurate your predictions of other people's reactions to your work are?

PT: When you do something explicit, it is much easier to guess the reactions you will get, and that is often less interesting. For me, it is more about looking at an existing situation and inventing various ways to react through minimal interventions. I try to choose the kind of action that does not carry one particular message, but rather leaves open as many ways to react as possible.

For example, if I decide to go to Disneyland dressed as Snow White, then the piece is almost done. My prediction is that they will not let me in, because the level of control is so high. But the way they treat me... will they give me a free hamburger for trying so hard, or quickly take me out of sight and bring me to Disney Guantanamo? I was unaware if other people dress up in costumes, but it makes total sense to dress up before going to Disneyland, so the staff there must have a routine for handling people coming in costumes. I just did not know what the routine was.

My plan was to pretend that I did not know about the real Snow White, and that I was just trying to be nice and live the dream. I was not going to be smart. So, when I had arrived at this plan it was just about recording as much as I could of what happened. Many conditions helped make it successful as a piece within that framework, but many things were also just pure luck.

EJ: Are there any projects where the outcome particularly surprised you?

PT: There is always excitement when things happen that one cannot anticipate.

The Trainee was a turning point for me, because of the duration and intensity of the performance in this intimate setting. It was physically challenging to withstand social pressure and not do what everyone wanted me to do. Everyone was like, 'Please, pick up your mobile phone.' If I had only just held my phone everyone would have been happy. Doing nothing is scary as hell, because it is the moment before you do something, and that something could be anything.

I am really good at dealing with embarrassment, and when I did *Snow White*, I did not feel embarrassed at all. But in *The Trainee*, the feeling of being an outcast in that kind of community was an actual feeling. I was feeling really bad about people thinking I was crazy and not wanting to be my friend, while at the same time deciding to continue doing whatever it was that made that happen. Since then, I have been working more in situations that are more intense, closed off and intimate, because there, the stakes are higher and the social ties are stronger and more complex. If you do something in the streets, people do not care; they just think you're a crazy person. But, if you're a crazy person at someone's work, it's so much more disturbing and interesting. So *The Trainee* was – maybe not surprising – but the most significant work in my practice.

EJ: In *The Trainee*, some of the people at Deloitte were in on the true nature of your stay, and thus you had a unique opportunity to gather information about how your colleagues

perceived you. What happened afterwards? How was the feedback from Deloitte?

PT: I would not have been able to get that job with my own skills, because becoming a trainee at Deloitte is a sought-after position. Also, given the hidden cameras, they would sue me to death if I hadn't gotten permission. So, we made a deal, a heavy legal document. The point was not to surveil anyone except me and the people who talked to me. After the internship, I spent three months editing the video material before I contacted all the people in the video, asking them for permission to show it, and by then it was already something they had resolved in their minds. No one was angry when they found out, but they were relieved to find out it was not real. Actually, it is something that they should embrace, since they are a company whose product is thoughts and ideas, and I later found out that they had been discussing acceptable ways of working after I left.

EJ: When you think of big corporations, cliché buzzwords like 'streamlining' come to mind, which just sound so dehumanizing. What you were doing during this project is, however, something I would describe as very human. Another interesting facet is that with art inside corporate headquarters, one normally thinks of paintings on the wall or sculptures in the lobby, which makes your project very different.

PT: Yes, it was an exchange that worked, and Deloitte embraced the whole thing. For them, I think, it was mainly about marketing. By letting me do whatever, they appear open-minded, flexible and cool. That is why

they did it. I have been criticized about being so useful to them, but I just think the deal was fair. I was able to do what I wanted and what I thought was interesting, and they got something that was useful for them. If this were somewhere where I wanted to be in opposition and do something destructive, I do not think that would have produced good results. If there's a fight between a huge corporation and an artist, the one who loses is usually the artist.

With my art, it is not about fighting big companies, but rather acknowledging that they exist and talking about how they function. It is always a messy mix of influence and benefits and this and that, but with *The Trainee*, the only way I could make it happen was to make a deal where they also got something out of it.

EJ: Through your performances, you make visible these structures we all follow blindly most of the time. Is the potential for change important to your art?

PT: You cannot change something if you do not know what it is. My work is about looking at the world, but I do not impose any opinion on how it should be changed. Maybe by showing it to people, they will make new connections, and that can trigger change.

I have my opinions, and nothing is neutral, but my art is not the place where I try to do propaganda or explore the things I already believe in. In those cases, I would rather sign a petition or vote for someone.

EJ: Yes, I think your work acts as a spanner in the works, where you – instead of proposing an explicit solution to a certain social

situation – challenge the public to re-evaluate their adherence to the unwritten rules that you make visible.

Generally, your work seems to deal with everyday social environments, but several of your pieces deal with capital as a catalyst in these social settings. Is there particular reason economy is a recurring theme for you?

PT: Money and exchange are so tied into our social reality that I do not know how to separate them out. Economy is part of how we live together; it is part of the whole arrangement. Also, the concept of money is fascinating, because it is so abstract that nobody can fully explain it. It is a unit that you can measure, but money is not the same for everyone. It is tangible and intangible at the same time.

In *The Committee*, many adults seemed to be afraid that the kids would fail and spend their money in a stupid way. I didn't think any way of spending the money would be stupid. They could have bought so much candy that they could have swum in it – and that would have been fine by me – but instead they started planning to invest it so they could get more money. They were eight years old, and they already know all about this stuff. So, they ended up succeeding in a disturbing way – in such a perfect way that every adult was happy.

FACTS

Pilvi Takala (b.1981) has an MFA from the Academy of Fine Arts in Helsinki, and work with performance and video in public or semi-public spaces, through which she investigates the sometimes absurd logic and structures of social groups, institutions, and communities. Through her art, she makes visible the unwritten rules that dictate normal social behaviour and forces her audience to react and find new ways to handle abnormal situations.



Patricia Cronin, *Memorial To A Marriage*, (detail) 2002. Carrara marble. Cronin-Kass plot, Woodlawn Cemetery, Bronx, NY. © Patricia Cronin,

—Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936)

To break the "spell of the personality", as Walter Benjamin described in his seminal essay, is to decisively break away from that which drives a singular personality into the hands of public: money. If an artist creates a work where neither the artist nor their work were reliant on the accumulation of capital, Benjamin would, presumably, consider this "Art" (with a capital "A"). An even bolder gesture would paint money as a caricature: numbers, figures, and assets piled together in one self-indulgent mass, a character in a perpetual tragicomedy. Andy Warhol, Hans Haacke, Barbara Kruger, and Tracey Emin have initiated this kind of capital critique before. None of these artists (and few outside of this listing) have transformed in the way of Brooklyn-based multidisciplinary artist Patricia Cronin. From paintings serving as a blistering commentary of money's value and the values of money, her practice has arced into a project at this year's Venice Biennale that focuses on almost every element that money cannot (and never will) express, inspire, or purchase.

Cronin's capsule entitled *Luxury Real Estate Paintings* (2000–2001) appears harmless at first, almost elementary. What the works demand, however, is a harder look at how capital is at odds with, and inextricably linked to, an artist's production. She gathered photographs sourced from Sotheby's International

Realty, selected images of homes that could only be photographed from above (given the scale of the property and the elevated social status of their owners), and recreated the images in the guise of small-scale oil paintings. The title of each work contains the listed cost of the property and its general location: a sprawling estate in Connecticut is called "\$10,000,000 (Greenwich)", and a private island in the lower Florida Keys is "\$2,300,000 (Emerald Isle on Money Key)". Added to the tongue-in-cheek humor that Cronin found in shifting these real commodities into aesthetic objects, composition and timeliness were key factors. "I made sure that there was no horizon line," she says. "It was the most expensive source material. They [Sotheby's] had to hire a plane or a helicopter, a photographer, and a pilot to get the image. The price tags listed for each work also locate them in time. What were they worth then?"

The series is brimming with double meanings. Just as the values of private property appreciate with time, so does the value of art; in this case, the value of the physical artwork, itself, is dwarfed by the thing it references. While the property prices in Cronin's paintings seem large in our collective imagination, their grandeur is diminished both in the tiny slots allotted to them within an issue of *Travel + Leisure* or *Condé Nast Traveler* and in Cronin's intimate squares of oil on linen. What's more, the chance to personally visit these homes is afforded only to a select few. Cronin's work unwittingly parses the class

politics and demographics of viewing art. Suggesting that critical observations of art are universally democratic is a dangerous path to tread; her *Luxury Real Estate Paintings* are stark reminders of an imposed isolationism within the fiscal and cultural elite.

Luxury Real Estate Paintings was executed at the same time that Cronin was developing a larger, public project called *Memorial To A Marriage* (begun in 2002). In the most traditional sculptural material (Carrara marble), in the most traditional of media (19th century American Ideal and Baroque Italian sculpture), Cronin's body lies on a bed, tenderly intertwined with her real-life partner (artist Deborah Kass). The unapologetic intimacy between them could be made public only after their deaths, as a "living" legal union was (at the time of its inception) invalid. It does not immediately refer to currency exchange, but the work does recall the fiscal power that lobbyists and activists may wield to ensure that same-sex unions (in the United States) remain immoral and unconstitutional in the eyes of the public (the two terms are not mutually exclusive). A bronze version of *Memorial To A Marriage* was accessioned in 2012 to the permanent collection of the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum in Glasgow. It is publicly funded, thus free and open to the public. The current socio-political climate in the United States would be intolerant to public tax dollars being spent on an artwork where a nude, lesbian couple is depicted so candidly.



Pilvi Takala, *The Real Snow White*, 2009 © Pilvi Takala & Carlos/Ishikawa London.

Page 40

Patricia Cronin and the Art of Bucking the "Buck"

BY SHANA BETH MASON

"The cult of the movie star, fostered by the money of the film industry, preserves not the unique aura of the person but the "spell of the personality," the phony spell of a commodity."