

Anna Gritz

Pilvi Takala's "Random Numbers"

Long before Ali G's Borat, Andy Kaufman was touring the East Coast with his stand-up comedy character Foreign Man, an ambiguous entertainer from a fictional island in the Caspian Sea, who, with his overtly strong accent, inept punch lines, and naive questions, created awkward moments on stage of almost unparalleled dimensions. With staple lines like "T'ank you veddy much," he cradled his audience in a faux security that made them simultaneously cry with laughter and far more receptive to his messages and hidden criticisms.

The all-too-familiar figure of the jester embraced by comedians and artists alike is cleverly reworked in Pilvi Takala's farcical fables about social conditioning. Through a combination of homemade reportage, hidden-camera recordings, and absurdist situational humor, Takala promotes a technique of rudimentary interaction based on deliberate confusion, misreadings, and the insertion of subtle, subversive gestures into everyday settings. In doing so, she creates characters—such as the woman dressed in a Snow White costume who is denied access to Disneyland—whose mere presence undermine modern codes of conduct. Often the artist's body functions as a questioning presence, her gestures as subtle stumbling stones that force the people she encounters to question the logic behind their actions—causing small cracks in the coherency of a given system.

In her current show, "Random Numbers" at Carlos/Ishikawa, Takala continues her ongoing observation of insular belief systems and their, at times, arbitrarily imparted rules, presenting two works that focus on the world of chance games and how the inherent logic of the number game seeps into social consciousness. *One in a Million* (2012) comprises three videos accompanied by two oversized lottery tickets and the related correspondence. The connecting theme is the postcode lottery game, a subscription lottery that operates via the drawing of postcodes. The format was first established in the Netherlands in 1989 and has since expanded to Great Britain and Sweden. The installation follows two narrative threads, the first being a case of lottery fraud in the Netherlands, in which a woman demands compensation for the temporary dispensation of her postcode and the resulting damages from having paid to participate in the lottery without the chance of winning. The result is an absurd conversation with the lady from the local council authority that reveals the impenetrable jungle of the bureaucratic chain of command. The second strand chronicles Takala's attempts to register with the UK lottery under the postcode for Buckingham Palace, SW1AA 1AA. Both projects follow the painful negotiations with local authorities and the comical correlations between luck and postcode, or, much more, fortune and being fortunate.

The other work in the show, the short video *Players* (2010), portrays the laid-back life of an enclave of Scandinavian online poker players based in a hotel (known in poker circles as the "Scandi Tower") in Bangkok.



View of Pilvi Takala's "Random Numbers" at Carlos/Ishikawa, London. All images courtesy Carlos/Ishikawa, London.

Financially enabled by the success of their online poker games, the group live out a lifestyle of luxury and thrills, or, as they call it, "being baller." "Baller" refers here to the extravagancies their lifestyle affords them, a term that can mean anything from renting out private helicopters to having ice cubes made of ice tea in their ice tea. Narrated by Jaakko or Jasu, his online identity, the video shows how flipping and betting has infiltrated the life of the group not only as a strategy of earning a living, but also as a mode of decision making and gaining consensus that replaces "old fashioned" modes of reason and argument. The piece differs from Takala's previous works in that the body of the artist no longer intervenes, challenges, or probes, but instead illustrates a condition: all six men are played in the video by Takala herself. These avatar characters present an insightful take on the blurred identities of the players. She stands in as a literal body double for men whose lifestyle depends on daily interactions via an avatar.

Takala states that the fiction in her work "is often so real-like that making a distinction between real and fiction becomes unimportant." And yet it is exactly her obsession with fictions that intrigues in her work: the hairline fractions in the constructs of competing realities we invent

to satisfy an urge for coherency, to make sense of a situation that she identifies and probes until they whittle away. It's a technique that prompts us to reevaluate the invisible rules, value systems, and codes of conduct for their practicability and significance, actions that lay a seed for subversive thoughts that may only unravel over time.

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