

OCT 13, 2018 - MAR 10, 2019

PAOLA  
PIVI:  
ART  
WITH  
A VIEW

Paola Pivi's oeuvre is diverse, surprising, and enigmatic—appearing to be the work of multiple creative minds. With ambitious and spectacular acts, as well as simple gestures, Pivi playfully appropriates cultural symbols, resulting in unexpected visuals that also appear familiar. In each work, subject and materiality are manipulated leading to surprising transformations. The complexity of Pivi's work is deepened by an intentional openness to interpretation. Each piece is multi-layered, offering the potential of deeply personal readings and mutable meaning based on current affairs.



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*Art with a view* brings together iconic past works with ambitious new productions. Fish fly through the sky as polar bears adapt to a changing climate by sprouting feathers. A canvas of real pearls converses with spinning, feather-dressed bicycle wheels evoking dream catchers. A giant mattress structure elicits childhood memories of pillow forts and invites you to crawl in it. Memory, imagination, and the quotidian commingle to comprise a vision uniquely Pivi's own.

Ambition forms the core of her world—a drive to make the seemingly impossible, possible. In 1997, as a student, Pivi placed an 18-wheeler truck on its side as part of the exhibition *Fuori Uso* in Pescara, Italy. Two years later, she installed an upside-down G-91

fighter jet in the Venice Biennale's Arsenale.

*Art with a view* presents the range of Pivi's practice and focuses on her ability to take the familiar and, through slight alteration or mass accumulation, transmute it into the sublime. This is Pivi's alchemy. *Cool strange light ball* (2018) and *I am a cool strange light ball too* (2018) are comprised of miniature chairs from the design manufacturer, Vitra. The miniatures become a lamp and are in turn transformed into shapes and shade due to the introduction of light. In a 2005 untitled series of photos, Pivi placed these small chairs on the back side of a nude woman. The piece calls attention to the playfulness of Pivi's work and the tongue-in-cheek rivalry between artist and designer.

Pivi's *Untitled (pearls) (beautiful day)* (2015) similarly depends on the amassing of the unexpected. Comprised of countless natural pearls displayed in a cascading gradient, the work presents a simple, yet ambitious gesture. The result is seductive.

A nomad at heart, the artist has lived around the world from Italy to India, but considers Anchorage, Alaska to be her home. Each site plays a prominent role in forming her work. *Untitled (donkey)* (2003), created while Pivi lived on the Italian island of Alicudi, appears to be conjured from fantasy, but

it is in fact an essential part of the reality of those living on the island. In this community, there are no roads, only steps, so donkeys are used for transport. At times, they are brought from one side of the island to another by boat. After witnessing such a transit, Pivi staged this surreal reenactment at dawn and had the image captured by collaborator photographer Hugo Glendinning.

Animals are a subject central to Pivi's practice. She draws upon their perceived geo-specificity and instills them with human mannerisms. Her brightly





colored feathered bears practice yoga, hang from trapezes, and converse with one another. Inspired by Pivi's chosen home of Anchorage, Alaska, the bears embody the contradictions present throughout Pivi's oeuvre—they are simultaneously surreal and real, whimsical and intimidating, cuddly and imposing. Each sculpture is created from a true-to-scale custom taxidermy form, laboriously hand-covered in fluorescent plumage.

While the bears are fabrications straight from Pivi's imagination, her zebra photographs are a collaboration with nature. For this series of images, one of which is presented at The Bass, the artist borrowed two zebras and let them frolic and roam free at Gran Sasso Mountain in Italy. Her crew followed and photographed, capturing

playful and tender moments as the zebras took to their surroundings. The images are undoctored. What is documented is genuine and unprompted, yet heightened by surprising surroundings.

Similarly, *I wish I am fish* (2009), utilizes a surreal context to reframe the familiar as something completely unexpected. The film was created during a 2009 performance commissioned by One Day Sculpture in New Zealand. For the performance a plane was flown to Auckland International Airport and, in each seat, sat a fish in a bowl. *I wish I am fish* captures the journey of the 84 flying fish and speaks to the fantasy of travel and exchange. The fish appear completely oblivious to the sudden, radical shift in altitude as they blissfully swim in their bowls.

What is real and what is not, and at times the inability to discern between the two, runs throughout Pivi's practice. Nowhere is this clearer than in her latest work, *Lies* (2018). The immersive installation is comprised of 92 television screens, 40,000 images of reality, and 200 recorded lies. Pivi conceived of the piece in 2013 while entangled in a court case surrounding the custody of her adopted son. During this period, she experienced the opposition using inflammatory lies in order to paint her and her family in a negative light. Since this incident, she has become more and more aware of the prevalence of lies in politics, the media, and quotidian experience. Lies are a powerful tool of aggression and

manipulation. Pivi brings attention to our complicated relationship with perception, control, and truth, as well as the glut of information we engage with on a daily basis.

In contrast, *Art with a view's* other premier, *World Record* (2018), offers a moment of padded muted peace, protected from the outside world. The work exists as both a sculpture and an audience-activated performance. A base and roof of 80 mattresses are transformed into horizon lines or oceans—playing with our relationship with space and scale. Participation in the work demands a personal physical recalibration as each participant must crawl on all fours, lounge, or recline to reconcile





with the dimensions of *World Record*. In doing so, inadvertently animal-like stances are adopted. Simultaneously, the constructed space affords an unexpected intimacy in both the space and with other participants, as if to say, both literally and figuratively, “we are all in this together.”

Paola Pivi (b. 1971, Milan, Italy) has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions including *I did it again*, SCAD, Savannah (2018), *I am tired of eating fish*, curated, La Rinascente, Italy (2017), *Ma’am*, Dallas Contemporary, Texas (2016), *Tulkus 1880 to 2018*, FRAC Bourgogne, France (2014), *You started it ... I finish it*, National Gallery of Victoria, Australia (2014), *Tulkus 1880 to 2018*, Witte de With, Netherlands (2013), *Share, But It’s Not Fair*, Rockbund Art Museum, China (2012), *How I roll*, Public Art Fund, New York (2012), *It’s a cocktail party*, Portikus, Frankfurt, Germany (2008), and *It just keeps getting better*, Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland (2007). Pivi has exhibited internationally at institutions including Stad Kortrijk, Belgium, Anchorage Museum, Alaska, Fondazione Prada, Italy, Hamburger Bahnhof - Museum für Gegenwart, Germany, Whitechapel Gallery, United Kingdom, Fondazione Nicola Trussardi, Italy, Malmö Konsthall, Sweden, MOMA PS1, New York, and the XLVIII Biennale di Venezia, Italy.

## Images

- 1 Paola Pivi: *Art with a view*, The Bass installation view, October 13, 2018 - March 10, 2019. Image courtesy of the artist and The Bass, Miami Beach. Photography by Attilio Maranzano.
- 2 Paola Pivi, *I am a cool strange light ball too*, 2018. Miniature chairs by Vitra, light bulb, electric cable, aluminum. Image courtesy of the artist and The Bass, Miami Beach. Photography by Attilio Maranzano.
- 3 Paola Pivi, *World Record*, 2018. Mattresses, wood, steel, denim. Co-produced by Davide Quadrio for Arthub, Shanghai/Hong Kong. Image courtesy of the artist and The Bass, Miami Beach. Photography by Attilio Maranzano.
- 4 Paola Pivi, *Untitled (muskox)*, 2008. Muskox, coffee. Image courtesy of the artist and The Bass, Miami Beach. Photography by Attilio Maranzano.
- 5 Paola Pivi, *Lies*, 2018. 92 televisions displaying 40,000 images of reality, recorded lies played through a sound system, steel, acrylic. Image, courtesy of the artist and The Bass, Miami Beach. Photography by Attilio Maranzano.

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Paola Pivi: *Art with a view* is curated by Justine Ludwig, Executive Director at Creative Time and former Chief Curator at Dallas Contemporary. The presentation at The Bass is organized by Leilani Lynch, Assistant Curator, The Bass.

The exhibition is generously sponsored by PHILLIPS. Additional support provided by PERROTIN and Massimo De Carlo, Milan, London, Hong Kong. Production support provided by Davide Quadrio for Arthub, Shanghai/Hong Kong. The exhibition is supported in part by the Diane W. Camber Exhibition Fund. The Bass is generously funded by the City of Miami Beach, Cultural Affairs Program and Cultural Arts Council, the Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs and the Cultural Affairs Council, the Miami-Dade County Mayor and Board of County Commissioners, and sponsored in part by the State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs and the Florida Council on Arts and Culture.