

Time Out

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Left: Pipilotti Rist, 'Selfless in the Bath of Lava', 1994. Right: Laurel Nakadate, '365 Days: A Catalogue of Tears', 2011

Art

Pipilotti Rist: Eyeball Massage/Laurel Nakadate

EXHIBITIONS OF THE WEEK



Hayward Gallery/Zabludowicz Collection Major spaces

Video projections that cascade across different surfaces; super-saturated colours that meld and overlap; gauzy images that gibber and ooze from dark corners.

Pipilotti Rist's 30-year survey is one of the most discombobulating exhibitions I've ever experienced – in a good way. Often, it's unclear where works begin or end. Detailed projections on to the floor and curtains are suddenly traversed by coloured discs of light, for instance; or the pure white objects that make up 'The Innocent Collection' become tainted by brilliant sunset colours from another projection. The sense is of different elements combining and intermeshing to create something thrillingly overwhelming, a kind of amniotic wash of imagery and sound.

If the wonders of the video age are one of the Swiss artist's big themes, then the other is the human body – its sensuousness, its strangeness, its manipulation by different media. Various projections depict close-ups of masticating teeth, glistening vulvas, or a whirling, cyclical journey between the artist's anus and her enveloping mouth. Elsewhere, there's a giant, triangular object, like a solidified projection beam – putting your head through one of its holes creates a sensation of bodily disconnect as you watch the video within. And everywhere you look, there's a sense of delirious, boundless metaphor – images of nature and fecundity in the queasily trippy video triptych, 'Lobe of the Lung'; or a sexually suggestive installation of velvet-lined handbags and curving seashells (all containing more miniature video screens).

Occasionally, though, the symbolism feels overworked, even within the context of Rist's gaudily excessive style. Take, for instance,

'The Little Circle': a crazy video mixture of sexual imagery, framed by a blinking eyelids motif, with the screen itself positioned inside a model of a bacterium, which then sits inside a child's cot, finally surrounded by swaying diaphanous curtains, themselves catching further random projections. It's the ethos of the show carried too far, until the dizzying layers of meaning simply feel like a distraction.

Such metaphorical overkill, on the other hand, is hardly an issue for American artist Laurel Nakadate, whose decade-spanning retrospective at 176 is her first UK exhibition. Her themes, too, involve the body, sexuality, and media representations, but her work is more stringent and schematic – a sort of direct embodiment, in which the artist performs various roleplays in front of a static camera.

Her videos generally fall into two categories. In one type, she collaborates with strangers met by chance or through classified ads (mainly, middle-aged men of the

overweight, sad, and lonely variety), their activities ranging from the salacious – romping with feather pillows, pretending to be dead, dancing to Britney Spears – to the overtly sexual or threatening – such as a tit-for-tat striptease, or asking to be followed around a gas station at night. In other works, she performs alone – dancing to pop music in various states of undress; or, as a kind of logical conclusion to such teasing abandon, performing sex acts with an imaginary partner in Japanese 'love hotels'.

All of which might sound like a straightforward illustration of ideas to do with the 'male gaze', were it not for the sense of Nakadate's own power and enjoyment, the way she clearly revels in the vulnerability and yearning of her co-performers. Her photos, especially, are wonderfully unsettling – particularly her project of meeting strangers in the desert in total darkness, the camera flash itself constituting the only moment of sudden, stunning exposure. Gabriel Coxhead