

Introduction
to the
exhibition

Saskia Holmkvist

Role Control

Galleries 2, 3, 4, 5

12 April - 15 June 2008

Saskia Holmkvist's videos document and try to unravel the ways that people and organisations communicate. By depicting and examining situations such as media interviews, documentary films, job interviews or counselling sessions, she attempts to reveal something about how people communicate impressions of themselves.

In **GALLERY 3** there are two works exploring the psychology of meetings, interviews and conflict management. The actors are performing scripts written by Holmkvist. **IN CHARACTER** (9 minutes) starts as a conventional job interview but the interviewers

occasionally 'speak their minds', revealing what is not normally spoken about in these situations. This includes explanations from the interviewers as to why they are asking certain questions. The interview starts with questions about the emotional character of the candidate and then moves to more practical issues concerning qualifications. Finally it shifts almost seamlessly to a very different kind of interview: an interrogation. The actors now take on different roles resembling detectives or investigators, a method that reveals different kinds of information about the interviewee.

The same actors appear in **ROLE CONTROL** (8 minutes) but as different characters. A single person leads the questions, this time acting in the role of counsellor. She prompts a man and woman to reveal “how they feel about the situation”, but she soon becomes the main contributor to the dialogue, talking far more than she is listening.

From the type of discussion they are having it can be assumed that they are talking about their personal relationship. However, towards the end a political context (“the election”) is revealed and it becomes clear that whatever is discussed or resolved in this meeting may have little or no impact on the impressions portrayed to others outside this room.

Whilst viewing these two films it is as though we are also attending a meeting, seated on a circular viewing structure resembling a smaller version of that found in political summits such as a United Nations assembly.

In these films (one an interview, the other an attempt at conflict resolution), Saskia Holmkvist explores the strategies employed for coaxing, mediating, cross-examining and disclosing information. Which is most effective? Which is fair? Which gets nearer the truth?

In **GALLERY 2** are two earlier works, each using the format of information-based documentary. As in **IN CHARACTER** and **ROLE CONTROL** they explore how truth is sought, presented and revealed.

SYSTEM (4 minutes) shows an insect flying against a surface. At the same time we hear three stories, based on real events. They are gathered from China, Libya and Australia and tell of problems and solutions. In each case the action taken is presented as an efficient solution. In reality, however, each decision brought about further problems that required further action: more legislation, new policies or acceptance of a situation.

The image accompanying the story told in **EIGHT MARTINI** (5 minutes) gradually emerges, only becoming clear in the last moments of the film. It appears to have no relationship with the spoken soundtrack but one way of making sense of it is to try and make connections. Is it one of the drawings resulting from the CIA Remote Viewing research referred to in the story? Is it a top secret plan or map? It is only at the end when we get an answer that it becomes clear that this apparently straightforward historical documentary may not be true or may just be a party game. Like the image being drawn, once we have an explanation of an otherwise confusing idea, it is difficult to see anything other than the official explanation on offer.

From its title, viewers of **INTERVIEW WITH SASKIA HOLMKVIST**, (8 minutes) in **GALLERY 4**, expect to see an interview with the artist, perhaps one similar to the video interviews provided in many galleries. However, a few minutes into the film it is revealed that this is a different kind of interview.

Saskia Holmkvist has hired a media relations expert to train her to deliver a short statement about her work with apparent sincerity and authority. Holmkvist is trying to appear as authentic as possible in communicating her statement.

“It’s about how we comprehend something as being honest and true,” states Saskia Holmkvist. During the film, Holmkvist is instructed in body language, posture, voice timbre and eye contact, in a process more usually associated with political spin and public relations than artistic development.

Artists are often seen by others as being true to themselves and authentic but it is clear this video is far from an honest portrayal. The interruptions, visible microphones and self-conscious pauses make it clear that even the most stereotypically authentic figure – the artist – is capable of, and possibly always engaged in, a performance.

The ways in which the video is created are also carefully constructed. Shot in Stockholm’s main modern art museum from several angles, the film’s visual language of authenticity is itself a construction, a language created by media such as reality television.

Further extending her interest in how artists are depicted and how they present themselves, Holmkvist turns her attention to this exhibition and Arnolfini in a new work in **GALLERY 5**. For the first week of the exhibition, a video of Arnolfini’s Director, Tom Trevor is

shown in this space. This video was not made as an artwork, but as part of a media training course and shows Tom reacting to different fictional scenarios (detailed on the wall) both as himself and in role play. It illustrates how such media situations can be planned, prepared for and responded to.

After one week, this work will be replaced with a brand new work, filmed during Holmkvist’s talk to mark the opening of this exhibition. At the talk a media trainer offered advice and comments for Holmkvist on how to present the best talk and the film documents this process.

Saskia Holmkvist, like any artist, is usually considered to know the ‘truth’ about her own work and what it really means. In the new work that will come into this gallery, and in this exhibition, it is revealed that, like this guide, they tell only one of many stories and ways of reading their own work.

Please ask a Steward if you have any questions. Further information about Saskia Holmkvist’s art and ideas can be found in the Reading Room on the Second Floor. Open Tue - Sun 12.00 - 6.00pm.

There are free tours of the exhibitions at 2.00pm each Saturday.

ART/FUN, an activity pack for the exhibitions is available from Arnolfini Bookshop price £1.