

# Saskia Holmkvist

In Saskia Holmkvist's work, questions of agency and professionalized language are explored through fractured narrative, employing performance, orality, film and improvisation. A hybrid form of realism, Holmkvist appropriates typical interview scenarios to serve as allegory and example. The works address consequences of power structures in communication such as translatability of subject positions as well as historical trajectories and post colonial presence by interacting with methods of communication borrowed from fields such as interpretation, psychology, journalism, and improvisational theatre.

The work retools the aesthetic strategies of documentary with performative interaction to focus on verbal speculation by the subjects invited directly from their professional fields. In the process the negotiation of undertaking roles is explored and many works use the interview as storytelling. The interview has been a central area of Holmkvist investigation that touches the politics of interview techniques, developing critical and ethical approaches to question institutional agency. By creating mostly performative encounters between protagonists invited directly from their professional fields to interact through improvisation and in relation to site specificity each of the projects can be seen as a platform to perform, narrate, and share strategies, discourses or resistance.



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<http://vimeo.com/user11054240/videos> Password: security

## WORKS

### **Performance**

Procession Action Tour 2018

Dog is Dog 2017

Transference 2016

Tautology in Act 2012

It's Magic 2012

The Communication of City - A City Tour 2009

Press Conference 2009

Artist Talk 2008

Senior High Classes will come 2006

### **Video**

Sicherheit 2017

In Translation 2011

Cold Blooded Company 2010

Blind Understanding 2009

Role Control & In Character 2008

Internship in Private 2007

Represent 2007

Interview with Saskia Holmkvist 2005

Eight Martini 2004

System 2001

## PROCESSION ACTION TOUR

Commission for the Riga Biennale-RIBOCA starting June 2018.. A performative city tour of 90 min.



Some people can perform acts that function as a node: small, barely apparent, sometimes even absurd, stories that have changed the path of history. Michel Foucault calls these “monumental narratives”. In Riga, these nodes crystallized in the form of small groups of intellectuals and artists—Helsinki-86, NSRD, rock bands, film makers—all who insisted on making apparent the glitches in a system where there existed almost no opportunity to express oneself. Procession Action Tour speculates on such nodes and their radical strategies of transmission by listening to, remembering, and acting out a number of small manifestations that together acted as a catalyst for Latvia’s democratic awakening in the 1980s, actions that seem anachronistic from the perspective of Riga today.

Procession Action Tour is a performative tour taking place in the city of Riga on an unstable timeline. The tour reflects on the transmission of subjectivity and freedom of speech, sites of conflict and contestation, radical strategies, creative language and its potential for change. The tour offers an opportunity to enter into a narrative and experience a different time, and draws attention to the importance of the way that news and events are told, retold and translated—each detail having the potential to enable us to engage with, move within, and change a place.



Procession Action Tour- 2018-Riga Biennale



## SICHERHEIT

Per capita Sweden is one of the world's largest weapon exporters in parallel with the self-promotion of a peace-making nation worldwide. *Sicherheit* is a film that subjectifies the shift in the Swedish relationship to war and weapon industry by examining how it is expressed at an individual level. The film moves between sites and voices in Sweden that functions as active testimonials to this change by the way they manifest themselves visually in the landscape and through the histories they tell. The sites in the film are silent and peripheral in an interplay with a global manufacturing society which creates employment opportunities, reproduction of families, national security, financial and technological development, colonization, peace-keeping troops, instability, migration and death.

The film's title refers to essential research on the term *Sicherheit* used by the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman to describe how security solutions are built on a false sense of security, – which can only be compensated for with more security, since they create more fear out of which an escalation of conflict follows. In the work with the film connections are drawn between questions of security, migration and weapon export in order to approach a self-image of a country like Sweden on an individuals level.

A collaboration between Saskia Holmkvist, Corina Oprea and Ellen Nyman

Length of Film: 24 min

Year of Production 2016-2017

Vimeolink: <https://vimeo.com/233565095> Password: security



Sicherheit- Gibca 2017



Konsthall C 2018

DOG IS DOG -30 min. 2017

*Dog is Dog* is a performance and score that involves agency and radical translation practice in the aim to communicate linguistic, cultural, political and psychological differences rather than omitting them. Four professional interpreters invited perform according to formats they have developed in resistance to the idea of the interpreter as a non-biased and objective person in the conversation, interview or solicitation. The performance turns around aspects of interpreted repetition and staged characteristics like parroting, mimesis and memorising through the legacy, agency and ethics of the interpreter self.

The performance looks at how interpreted language can make situations from different contexts seem similar where in fact Dog is Dog, the title deriving from an example by linguist Saussure using a Dog to describe words and ultimately language as arbitrary, can be two very different dogs, in two very different environments and just as well be two very similar ones.

The score for the performance was rehearsed and developed together with the inviting artist Saskia Holmkvist in collaboration with the choreographer Mette Edvardssen, a scenographer and four invited interpreter/protagonists. The aim with the workshop and rehearsal was to create a discourse amongst the interpreters themselves that could be mediated through an interpreted performative act where examples of agency and difficulties of interpretation could take place rather than be described. Improvisation was a key element to the development of the score as the performance is acted by professionals invited directly from their area of expertise within interpreting and translations studies.

As a point of departure for the score an exercise from interpretation studies was incorporated using intra-lingual repetition rather than interpretation into other languages. Through the exercise the differences by repetition, delays, rhythm, intonation, transformations, can easily be sensed.





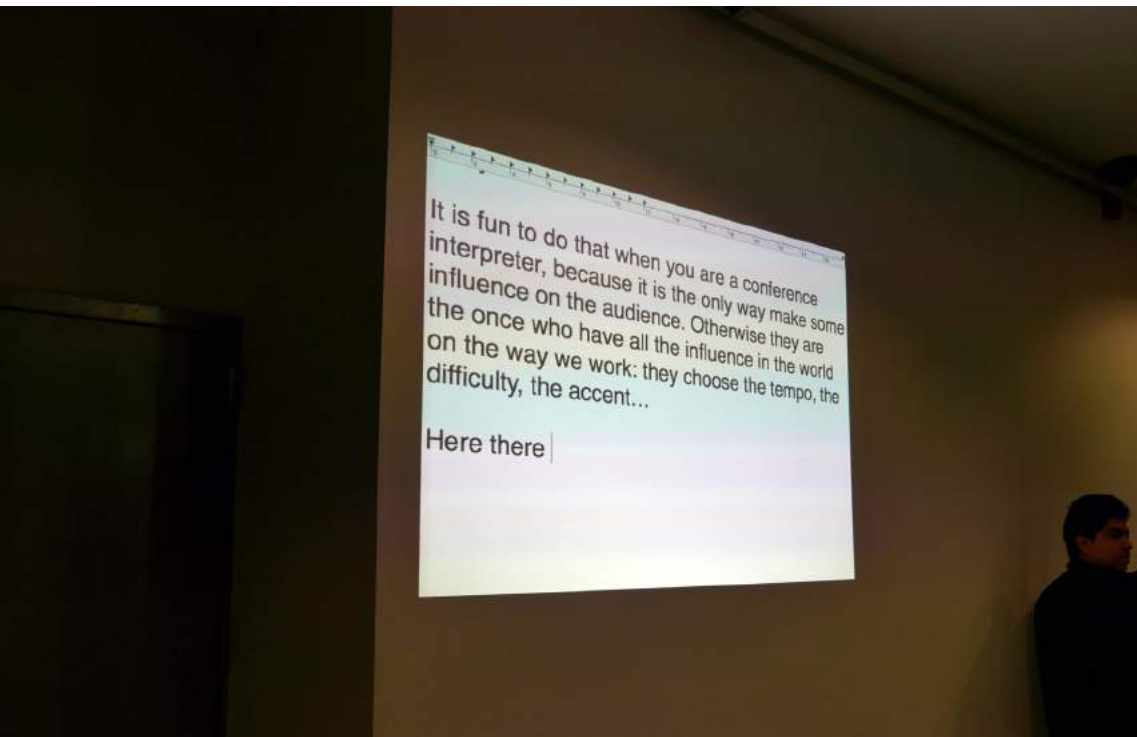




CAC Vilnius and Uppsala Konstmuseum 2017

TRANFERENCE is a collective performance, made of language, movement, culture and registration. The main protagonists of this collective performance are multimodo interpreters, a choreograph and the audience of the art space. There is a strong accent on the scene of verbal interpretation as an object of research, as experts in the notion of complex acts of 'transference'. In this respect the research refers to multimodo interpretation which acknowledges more than verbal aspects of transferring a situation such as cultural differences, emotions and politics.

In this performance multimodo interpreters are invited to apply their method on the exhibition room and its' visitors. The interpreters are typing their "interpretation" of what they percieve of the room live and the text is projected meanwhile writing on the wall. Asked to both write what they register of the space in terms of heard, fealt and seen but also be self reflexive on negotiating pre-knowledge and heritage working as interpreters as well as their capacities. The task of the choreographer is a parallell on a bodily level to interpret the rooms' architecture as well as visitors of the exhibition.



Transference at CAC in Vilnius 2016



Transference at CAC in Vilnius 2016





## TAUTOLOGY IN ACT

Three professional conference interpreters were invited from the legendary School Ecole d'interprètes de Genève (EIG) known as one of the first schools for interpretation studies, originally set up 1941 to educate interpreters for the upcoming post-war trials. The performance takes its departure in an exercise within education of interpreters consisting in interpreting in your mother tongue. The exercise omits the translation into a second language to primarily focus on the act of memorising and analyses of the message conveyed.

ProductionYear: 2012

The interpreted discussion in front of an audience departed from instructions focusing on questions of interpretation and translation acts such as invisibility, anecdotes, culture, ethics, humour within interpretation. The doubling effect creates a parrot like situation that can be followed by the audience where changes happening in the transference can be detected both in the verbal but also in the performative act from one embodiment to another.



## IN TRANSLATION

How much power does the interpreter have during an asylum seeker's application for residence hearing? What influence does an interpreter have when politicians negotiate across the language barrier?

The first film presents an interview with the interpreter Yassine Saeme and the asylum seeker Mohamed Aslaoui concerning an asylum hearing and the demands of interpreting for someone one does not know. An incorrect translation could have dramatic consequences; people like Aslaoui are fully dependent on the neutrality of the interpreter's presentation.

In the second part, Holmkvist interviews Latvia's former president Guntis Ulmanis and his interpreter of many years standing, Ieva Zauberga, who is now a senior interpreter in Brussels. In this case, the relationship between the interpreter and the person being interpreted is much closer and more direct.

Vimeolink: <https://vimeo.com/63971027> <https://vimeo.com/63847310> password:security





## COLD-BLOODED COMPANY - Cross-examination for real

In 'Cold Blooded Company' the differences between cross-examination in reality and in fiction are explored. Two crime police, a police student and the actress Stina Rautelin normally starring in the role of a detective agent in the Swedish crime series "Beck" are discussing and improvising around what an "authentic" scene of a cross-examination could be. The 4 protagonists sit around a table in a typically vacant room for cross-examination. During the 50 minutes of the film the discussion looks into questions of ethics, handling feelings, victimisation, prestige, performing at work and the improvisation of a scene.

Title: Cold-Blooded Company

Production: Saskia Holmkvist

Camera: Lars Siltberg, Mikael Krotkiewski

Length of film: 50 min

Year of Production: 2010

Vimeolink: <https://vimeo.com/64370477> Password: Security





## BLIND UNDERSTANDING

The image in the film is of one long slow shot sliding down a river. The image has clear ties to the cinematic way of portraying an inner process of change, inspired from *The Heart of Darkness*. Along with the imagery a voice over is heard narrated by the artist herself. Loosely linked stories are told. First about black birds moving into cities adapting their patterns, then about work songs, how a people can change their mother tongue and how a drivers license is thought to make you behave differently. The text concentrates on different aspects of language and assimilation. The persons being treated want, must or without knowing are changing by adapting. The ways in which it's done stand against each other – the wanting or not wanting to understand, change, assimilate.

Title: Blind Understanding

Production, Text, Voice over: Saskia Holmkvist

Camera: Lars Siltberg

Length of film: 13 min

Year of Production: 2009

Vimeolink: <https://vimeo.com/62425170> password: security

## IN CHARACTER & ROLE CONTROL

The films Role Control and In Character are complementary in as much as they reciprocally develop a narrative investigating social strategies and role-play. The titles refer to sociological role-plays inspired from the sociologist Ervin Goffman and his research on social patterns in daily life. The two films originate in four kinds of 'conversation situations' with diametrically opposite aims; the job interview, the interrogation, a therapy and political mediation.

Conceptually the films approach methodical similarities used in these different situations i.e. the intersubjective position within professions dealing with the format of the interview. By using the same actors the common points within the professions and situations are underlined. During the course of the films, the actors gradually swap positions and force the conversation over a boundary where the dialogue changes meaning and forces the viewer towards a new interpretation of the situation.

The manuscripts are based on research with persons in these professions. In Role Control the dialogue deals with conflict management going from a private psychological perspective to a political scenario. In Character links a job recruitment and a cross examination at the police where the interviewer is trying to get behind a presupposed facade of the interviewee only with different strategies. The works raise questions relating to the fine line between dialogue and the demonstration of power that may occur on private as well as political levels.

Title: In Character, Role Control

Manuscript, Direction, Production: Saskia Holmkvist

Actors: Eva Millberg, Lars Mellfors, Alexandra Zetterberg

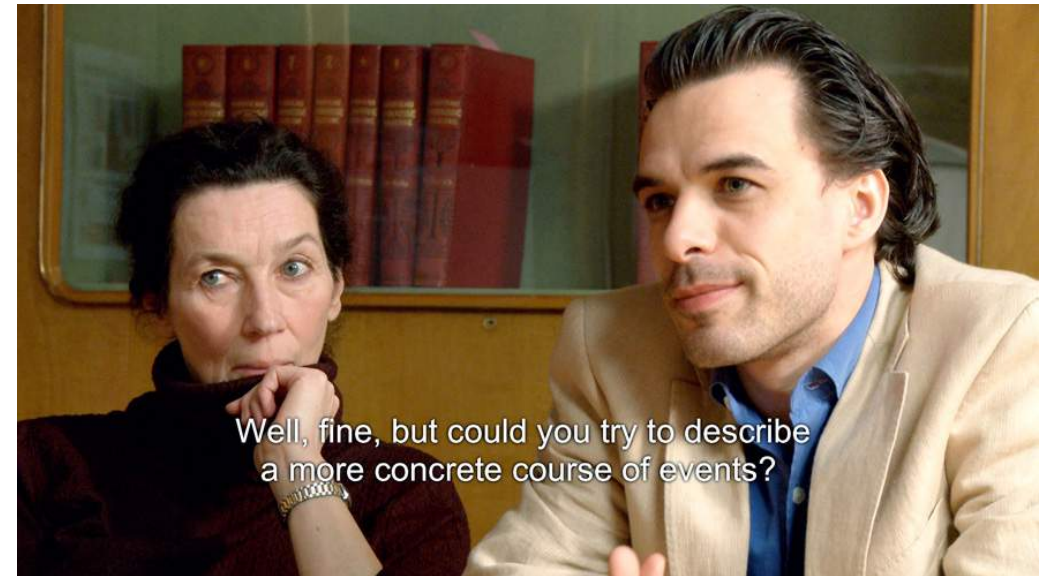
Camera: Fredrik Redelius, Lars Siltberg

Light: Tobias Hagström Ståhl

Sound: Calle Wachtmeister

Length of films: 9+8 minutes

Vimeolink: <https://vimeo.com/63557727> <https://vimeo.com/62608013> Pass:security







Exhibition view Henie Onstad Kunstsenter  
In Charcter & Role Control



Exhibition view Arnolfini-Bristol  
In Charcter & Role Control



Exhibition view 0047-Oslo



Exhibition view Frankfurter Kunstverein



three-age system, was invented



## IT'S MAGIC!

This consciously placed statement uses typography as a visual alert similar to how advertisement operates: A contrasting aesthetic comment focusing on the numerous statements and categorizations presented in a in the building in a “neutral” way, which are in fact politicized decisions. The fact that it’s free of charge to enter the National Museum is the result of a political decision driven by the ultra right sitting in the government as part of their politics to provide free and equal acces to cultural heritage. Equally the archaeological categories of stone- bronze- and iron age - known as the

Site specific project developed for the National Museum within the exhibition Skabt af Tiden  
Production year: 2012

three-age system, was invented by Danish Jürgensen Thomsen in 1818 and presented as an alternative to the religious notion of human development, instead referring to materials used by humans. The system is still used worldwide and J.Thomsen is referd to as an uncontested figure on the walls although the categorization has has been much criticized within the archeological field for other parts of the world for it’s heavy eurocentric focus and that these categories don’t work for other parts of the world where other materials where dominant.

## THE COMMUNICATION OF CITY – A CITY TOUR

Title: The communication of City - A City Tour

Site specific guided Tour in Biel/Switzerland

Concept: Saskia Holmkvist and Andrea Thal

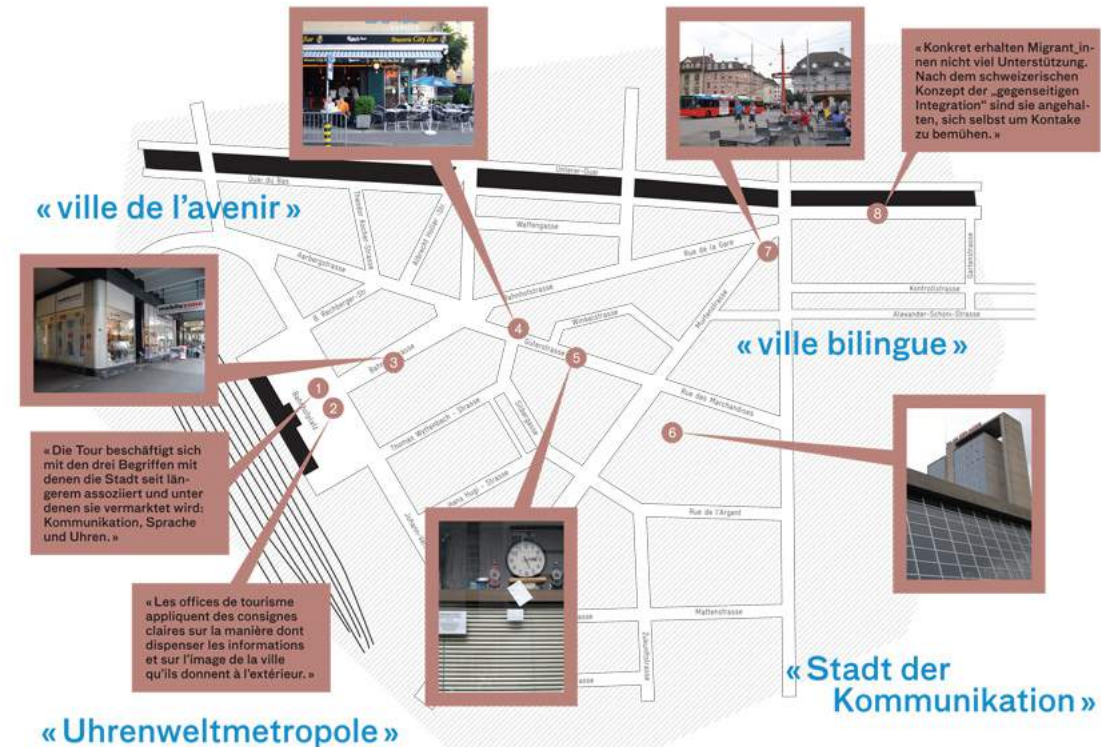
ProductionYear: 2009

Text from Catalogue:

The equally interesting and problematic sensation of being immersed in a city's history to develop an art project in a comparatively short period of time made us want to slide into an existing structure rather than highlight a moment of art. In The communication of City - A City Tour, we aim to engage with the city as well as the art tourists trekking through the city searching for exhibits.

Our choice to work within the format of a city tour is based on Biel/Bienne's strong emphasis on communication on a marketing level, and on our own interest in questions of representation. Another aspect is the relation to the exhibition we are taking part in as well as the broader discussions around art tourism, which involves using art as a propagating tool to attract tourists to a city. By appropriating an existing format of communication with tourists as well as with the citizens of Biel/Bienne, we add another city tour to the existing list of tours through which the city has communicated itself in different times. The communication of City tour guides' performance to a small group is a central part of the tour. Instead of taking the seemingly apparently, "objective" stand of a tour guide, they interact with the visitors and questions the very format of the guided tour itself.

City Map indicating tour stops



## PRESS CONFERENCE

Press conference is a re-enactment of the press-release text of the exhibition. The performance act alters the roles between the spectator and the exhibition producer and comments on the power dynamics between curator-artist-viewer and the expected exchanges going on between them.

The performance is a rehearsal, memorization and learning process of the press release and treats levels of understanding the communication of an exhibition. To learn a text by heart is to know the exact words but in order to learn the lines the content of the words have to be understood, which in turn will help the process of learning. During the performance the expected roles of the situation itself are altered. Saskia Holmkvist giving the speech needs the audience who has the manuscript in their hands i.e. the press-release to help her perform the text.

Title: Press Conference  
Performing: Saskia Holmkvist  
Year: 2009



## ARTIST TALK

A performative preview talk

A person claiming to be Saskia Holmkvist appears and tells us what her work is about. A few minutes later the same person announces that she would like Saskia Holmkvist to step forward and perform this. This time the artist Saskia Holmkvist comes in and starts her presentation of the exhibition stating the exact same two first phrases as the first person did. The first person claiming to be Saskia Holmkvist appears to be a Pr-person and while Saskia is explaining the exhibition the Pr-person interrupts to ask the audience how things that were said came across. This intervention creates interaction with the audience to take part in the performance and respond to the questions and Saskia Holmkvist is asked over and over again to explain or re-state what she has just said.

Title: Artist Talk

Year: 2008



Performance at the opening at Arnolfini in Bristol

## INTERNSHIP IN PRIVATE

Internship in Private, looks into the working conditions of interns in the art system through a initiating 'therapy' sessions. This led to conversations between a psychoanalyst, former interns from recent years and the current curators of the Shedhalle. In the sessions and the video of the meetings produced parallel, the participants describe how they personally deal with symbolic rewards, ambitions, fears, their understanding of collective work, and the implicit hierarchical structures in teamwork.

Placed in a broader context, the project highlights the issue of remunerating interns in small art institutions which can only afford to pay meagre amounts or often enough nothing at all, although the input of these interns is indispensable for carrying out challenging and discerning programmes. There are practically no opportunities available to small and medium sized institutions to apply for temporary intern salaries; these have to be paid from the institutions basic financial resources, which given budgetary constraints are limited in scope or not even possible, although an internship in many institutions is tantamount to gaining qualified training in the area of contemporary art.

Title: Internship in Private

Site specific project for Shedhalle

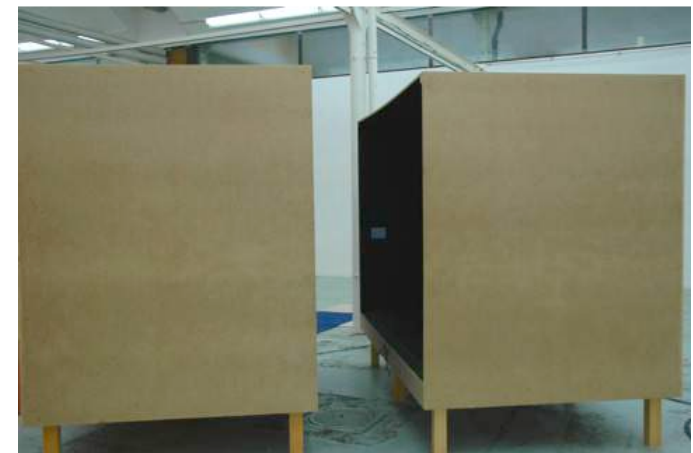
Participats: Sönke Gau, Lisa Mazza, Olaf Knellessen, Katharina Schlieben, Christopher Schneider, Valerie Thurner,

Concept &Production: Saskia Holmkvist

Cameras: Magnus Liistamo, Saskia Holmkvist

Length of film: 90 min.

Production year: 2007







## REPRESENT & SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL CLASSES WILL COME

In two different collaborative projects with art institutions I have involved PR companies. The purpose was to alter the roles between the institution, artist and audience. The institutions Gasworks and Göteborgs Konsthall were small and budgets would not allow for any external PR help as bigger art institutions work with. For the exhibition project a PR company was commissioned to step into the routines of the institution and to shift the focus from the exhibiting artist to the work of the institution itself in their PR work.

The investigation addresses how the artist, institution and audience would react to the ideas and strategies proposed by a PR company. The investigation also comprised finding out how far or close one positions oneself in relation to the proposed ideas. A situation was created where we could meet and discuss but also get more knowledge about communicative strategies and still come to different conclusions.



## REPRESENT

Before arriving in London to do a residency period of three months at Gasworks 2006, I already knew that the organisation was going through a transition. The group of six recently employed staff were, to a certain extent, changing the focus of Gasworks. I proposed to bring in a PR company in order to make that process visible to themselves, me and the audience.

We decided upon an arrangement on a pro bono basis with a Pr company. This in effect meant that Cow PR worked on a consultancy basis with Gasworks for about a year. The work was discursive on how Gasworks wanted to profile themselves. We then started putting into place some of the recommendations that were proposed which Gasworks staff thought of as interesting to try out.



One exercise was to make contact with press, visitors, arts professionals and have a structured conversation in order to hear what they thought and knew of Gasworks. This procedure was filmed and was later presented in the exhibition with two films; Media Friends and General Audit. In the exhibition - Represent - only parts of the process could be seen such as the videos; Presenting Nav Haq, Media Friends and General Audit together with a survey for the visitors to fill out.

In the film Presenting Nav Haq, I asked Gasworks curator at the time, to present the institution, his ambitions, introduce the exhibition -Represent-. It was shown in the entrance of Gasworks, aiming for a transparent introduction to Nav Haq, Gasworks and the path behind the exhibition.



Title: Media Friends & General Audit  
Concept, Film editing, Production: Saskia Holmkvist  
Camera: Saskia Holmkvist  
Length: 9 min.  
ProductionYear: 2006

Title: Presenting Nav Haq  
Concept, Film editing, Production: Saskia Holmkvist

## SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL CLASSES WILL COME

Prime, one of Sweden's leading public relations agencies, was commissioned to focus media attention on the pedagogical activities pursued by Göteborgs Konsthall. I was invited to exhibit and I started to investigate how using the services of a PR agency could shift media focus temporarily from the individual artist to the gallery itself, and in this way cast light on the background factors determining how a work of art is observed. The aim was to reveal some of the mechanisms behind the attention an artwork can generate.

Among the strategies devised for this purpose was the conducting of a poll in collaboration with Göteborgs Konsthall of senior high school teachers in Gothenburg. The hope was to learn about teachers' knowledge of art and how they viewed the possibility of incorporating contemporary art in their teaching, a wish that Göteborgs Konsthall had. Sections of the results from this survey were then sent to the local media in hope that they would write about the Konsthall's pedagogical activity. Visitors to the exhibition were able to see the media coverage which the campaign stimulated.

The work was presented in the entrance hall of Göteborgs Konsthall and the overall stages of the process were written on the wall. A folder containing the survey, that had been conducted amongst all senior high school teachers in Gothenburg was attached to the wall. Enclosed in the folder was the survey with the statistics put together of the answers and the two different press releases written from the information that we had produced from the survey. During the exhibition period two articles appeared. One in DN and one in Svenska Dagbladet regarding the art project. In addition an interview film with the Director of Prime pr was presented where Carl Fredrik Sammeli lectures me in how pr strategies work within the cultural field.

Title: Senior High School Classes will Come

Concept: Production: Saskia Holmkvist

Pr Concept: Tom Beckman

Participants: Carl-Fredrik Sammeli

Length: 30 min.

ProductionYear: 2006



## INTERVIEW WITH SASKIA HOLMKVIST

It's about how we comprehend something as being honest and true, states Saskia Holmkvist. Over the eight minute film, Holmkvist is instructed in body language, posture, voice timbre, eye contact, in a process more associated with political careerism than artistic development. 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 is always engaged in – a performance. However, the revelation of the performance is itself carefully constructed. Shot in the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, from several angles using hand-held and fixed cameras, the film's visual language of authenticity is itself a construction, a language created by media such as reality television. So, our supposed access to reality never quite resolves itself.

When we see the title Interview with Saskia Holmkvist we expect to see an interview with the artist Saskia Holmkvist but few minutes into the film it is revealed to us that the situation is another. Saskia Holmkvist has hired a media relations expert to train her to deliver a short statement about her work with apparent sincerity and authority. The short statement that Saskia Holmkvist repeats in their training describes her practice with direct reference to this process.

Title: Interview with Saskia Holmkvist

Production: Saskia Holmkvist

Camera: Magnus Liistamo, Ulrika Larsson, Ivan Petersson

Length of film: 8,40 min

Year of Production: 2005

Vimeolink: <https://vimeo.com/63562642> Password: security



## EIGHT MARTINI

If a serious expression is connected with a playful, one starts to question the trustworthiness of what is being presented. This is what happens in the film Eight Martini. During the entire 4 minute film the viewer is put to correlate an image and a story that do not have any evident connection. Not until the end when we are to get the answer it is revealed that it's three different expressions that have points of contact but no evident connection; a historical documentary, a didactic narration, and a party game.

Eight Martini was an internal expression within the CIA and the coming into being of it is told to us in the film. The expression was synonymous with successful results and external acknowledgment which was something the remote viewers within the CIA did not have. So how did they present their results to those who were sceptical so that they would find them successful in order to get acknowledged?

This leaves us with the question, when is a presentation of a result believable to us?

Title: Eight Martini

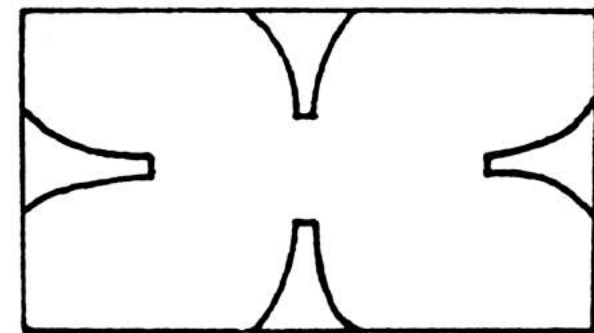
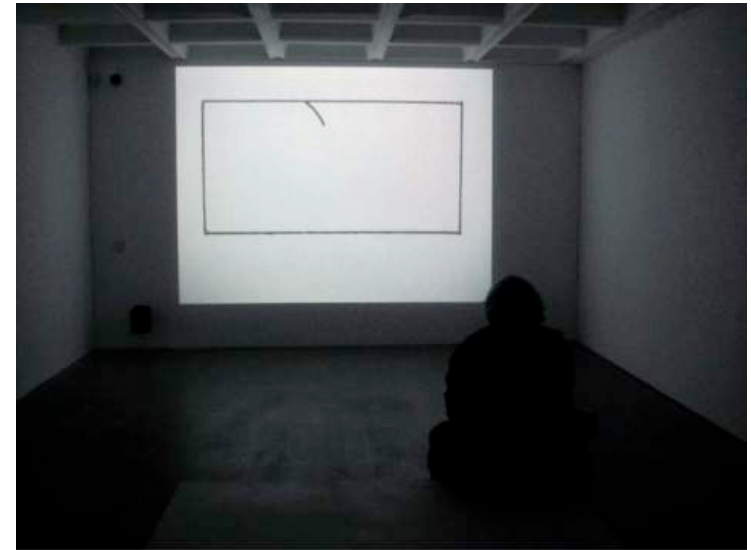
Production: Saskia Holmkvist

Voice over: Lara af Rentien-Horn

Length of film: 5 min

Year of Production: 2004

Vimeolink: <https://vimeo.com/63846680> Password: security



Four elephants drinking from a water hole



## SYSTEM

In the film *System*, we confront what happens when apparently rational decisions prove to have devastating results in real life. How deeds can hit back on themselves if multiplicity isn't respected. A dilemma that one has to deal with as every act can't be foreseen and we don't want to stop development.

On the screen an insect is seen. It keeps flying seemingly tireless on its path. At the same time we hear three stories, based on reality. They are gathered from China, Libya and Australia. Different kinds of problems emerge and to solve them, efficient systems are created.

Title: *System*

Concept, Text, Film editing, Production: Saskia Holmkvist

Voice over: Josette Bushell-Mingo

Length of film: 5 min.

Production year: 2001

Vimeolink: <https://vimeo.com/63725011> Password: security