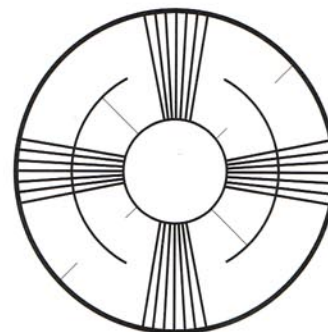


Keen (defn):

- a. characterized by strength and distinctness of perception;
extremely sensitive or responsive
- b. eager; interested; enthusiastic
- c. Slang. Great; wonderful; marvelous



A tour-guide, a talk-show host, a thrift-store operator and a one-time punk rocker, Christine Hill spent five weeks in residence at the Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland making *Pilot* (Cleveland), a talk show that was performed and taped on March 28. On view in the galleries now are the talk show's empty set, studio and abandoned production office, as well as a video installation of the taped episode. Hill situates all of her art projects within the context of business ventures of her umbrella company Volksboutique. Past projects include the original Volksboutique, a fully functioning thrift shop located in Berlin and later franchised for Documenta X; *Tourguide?*, in which Hill set up a unique tour operation in Soho; and *Pilot*, the creation, development and filming of a late-night talk show whose office and sound stage are located in a gallery setting. The offices of *Pilot* (Cleveland) are spotless, profoundly organized, undeniably comfortable and fully functional. Staffed by Hill and Dave Hermann (Hill's collaborator on *Pilot* and the show's "sidekick"), it is here that all the real art-making takes place. We caught up with them several weeks before the taping.

OFFICE AS STILL LIFE

Hill covets nice stationary, rubber stamps, leather-bound ledgers, note cards, German office supplies, dictionaries, and most things that come in volumes. She loves organization. Her aesthetic is impeccable and is central to every aspect of life and business. Her attention to detail permeates every inch of the office from the staplers and notebooks to the bulletin boards and guest chairs. She removes the labels from most products she purchases for a cleaner, more minimal look. Most, if not all, of her e-mails end with a dictionary definition of an appropriate word. "Inventory" for example. Or "pilot."

Kristin Chambers: All of your art projects are "organizational ventures" of the umbrella company Volksboutique. How would you define Volksboutique?

CH: Volksboutique was initially just a term that I coined and then it became the name of a second-hand store that I ran while I was living in Berlin. It was a riff on the Volks-Eigenen-Betrieb, a now-defunct production company in East Germany, which was basically the life management production company for everything the people needed. It was a kind of ridiculous, over-labored, cottage-industry, mass-production environment that most of the East Germans worked in. It loosely means products by the people, for the people. So Volksboutique became a boutique of the people.

I originally thought of it as this conceptual name for any work that was concerned with the discourse of appearance, or identity, excavation, or a kind of personal growth. After I closed the physical Volksboutique I re-established it as a brand or as a production label. Now I see the projects that it authors as three-dimensional definitions of what that word is.

KC: What is the Volksboutique aesthetic?

CH: My sister is always pointing things out as "this is volksboutique" or "that is volksboutique." It has become this adjective more than a name. I started thinking about what physical form these projects would take while I was in Switzerland. I visited a frame shop (that was also a cardboard manufacturer) where they had the most incredible display room/show room. It was just this utopia of boxes on shelves with little labels. Something like that is really "volksboutique."

KC: What appealed most to you, the aesthetic of it, or the organization of it, or both?

CH: I definitely appreciate a kind of aesthetic that is very hands-on. Accumulation, not reduction. The original Volksboutique was all about the recycling of second-hand clothing. Since then all of the projects have been about some kind of resuscitation or rescue of abandoned objects — like old furniture, old stationary supplies, remnants of ephemera.

ART IS WORK

For Hill, the role of production and of "keeping shop" is an essential element. Hers is a very punk, DIY approach. She cobbles together offices and businesses out of others' remnants. She is a self-made woman. In addition to artist, Hill has been a successful shop owner, tour-guide, talk-show producer and host, and handbag designer ... all in the name of life and art. I should also mention rock star. Hill was the lead singer of Bindemittel, a punk band that was skyrocketing to success when they called it quits.

KC: When people ask you what you do, do you tell them you are an artist or, like your business card reads, the "proprietor" of Volksboutique?

CH: Well, it depends. I would very rarely say "artist," especially living in New York. I would say "art-maker" if the context is correct. One of the people in my lecture here in Cleveland said, "it's funny that you identify yourself as a maker because I would think that you are just a producer of ideas."

KC: But you are a meticulous cataloguer, a prolific "maker."

CH: The complete construction of a vision is art-making. On the other hand, there is an enormous amount of industry going on as well. Like my handbag project. I probably could have done the project by drawing a handbag, making some measurements, picking a swatch of fabric and shipping it out to a museum to realize. Instead, I insisted on being involved in every painstaking step of that project. And it was exhausting...

KC: Because it wasn't about making a handbag, it was about becoming a handbag maker.



CH: Yeah, it was about learning how to do that, so it was hard, it was really a big project. The object is so innocent, you know. Every time I see the bag it represents so much labor to me. And it carries stuff around, so it's a container for that. So I do point people to that. But in other contexts I say I'm a small business owner, which is also the case.

KC: Would you rather be a tour-guide, talk-show host, or rock star?

CH: Oh, rock star, definitely.

NO SHTICK

While the interaction between "business owner" and "customer" is an important element of Hill's "ventures," it is not necessarily central. Her projects are not ironic. She does not take on superficial personae. She gets in and works; works hard. The so-called "performance" is real-life. It's behind-the-scenes.

KC: You must be a fan of Gordon Matta-Clark.

CH: I do like Matta-Clark. And his Food project especially. I liked the discipline and the usability of it. I thought it was very functional, it wasn't a stunt, it was something that really just came into being. A project like *Tourguide?* is a great illustration of that for me. It was my first project in New York and everyone thought it was some kind of promotional stunt or something to draw attention to my "real artwork," I guess. They thought it was fake. They were thinking, "there's no way that she would go to all this trouble to do this job, she's probably just waiting in there for journalists to show up." And so to me, Matta-Clark's Food project was so honest and such a pure thing. It's like "we want to feed people, we want to be fed ourselves, so we're going to go do it, go set it up."

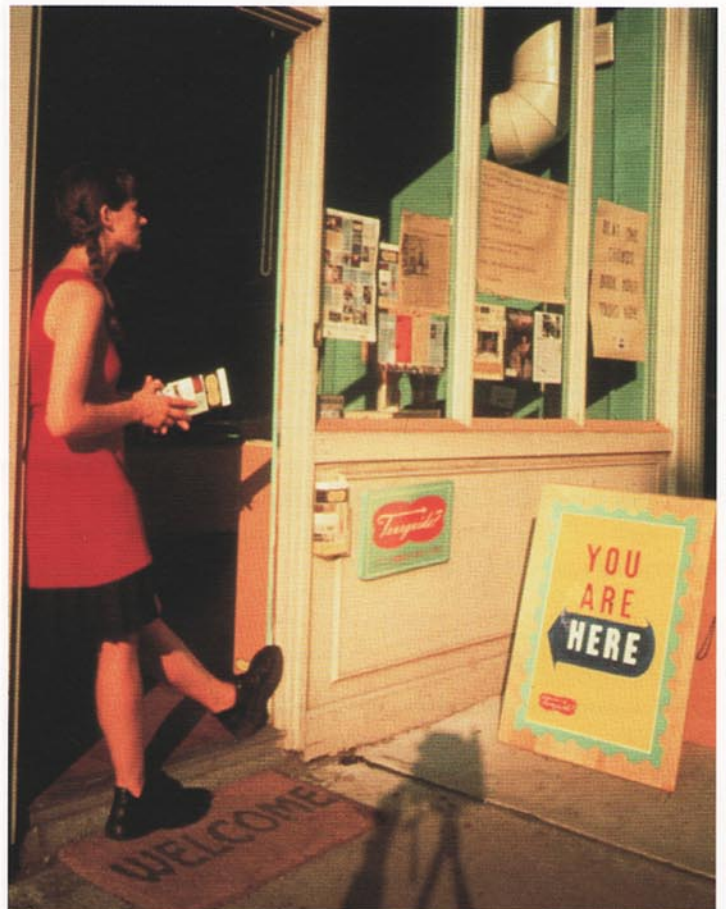
KC: Your work is often misunderstood to be about irony, communication, or social commentary. Where is the real core of these projects situated for you? In the ephemera that is produced? In the installation itself? In the performative aspects?

CH: For me a lot of these projects, and *Pilot* especially, are about helping to instruct in perspective shift. People do misconstrue *Pilot* as being a commentary on TV or celebrity or persona. Persona may be a part of it, but it's not in the forefront. It's not about fame, media attention or spectacle. It's really about helping people point their vision somewhere. I think that's what artists are supposed to do. They are supposed to say, "look, this is culturally significant, this is politically significant, this is aesthetically significant." And the role of the talk show host is moderator.

They say, "hey you, look at this." It's the same thing with a tourguide. What does a tourguide do? They point people in a direction and show them something.

The Volksboutique shop was initially like a funnel. Everything came together and it gathered in this shop and I would say that everything in the space is valid and is to be looked at. You can look at it from the outside or you can come in and look at it from the inside.

I get pigeon-holed as an artist interested in communication and that is just redundant. Conceptual artist is also redundant. If art isn't idea-based, then what is it? For me, the invocations of terms like communicative or conversational or anecdotal or conceptual are all repetitive.



CHRISTINE HILL: PILOT (CLEVELAND)
Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland
8501 Carnegie Avenue: 216-421-8671
Through May 4

Special Event:
"IS IT ART? CHRISTINE HILL: PILOT AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE
PERFORMATIVE IN CONTEMPORARY ART"
by Tom Mulready
Thursday, April 24, 7 pm
MOCA (see above)