

Annika Larsson
by Gigiotto Del Vecchio

"In D.I.E. I've decided that blood shouldn't appear, and that's not purely for aesthetic reasons. Above all, though the violence I refer to seems physical, it's essentially of a different kind. Forcing someone to act as if he was dead is in itself an unheard of experience, showing power in its purest form. It arbitrarily destroys other people's existence, takes their free will and control of their body. It's a macabre game, where by simulating physical death is like setting up inner death and the loss of dignity."

These words, used by Annika Larsson to introduce 'D.I.E.', shown at the Venice Biennale, encapsulate the central theme of this Swedish artist: manifestations of power, and the forms it takes.

The mechanisms in the works of Annika Larsson have to be analysed in relation to the balance of forces within. In 'Cigar' the power is held by the man placing the cigar whilst the other figure, a young smoker, is a passive and subject to an external will. In fact a more careful view will see that the dynamic relationship between the two figures is one of absolute equilibrium. The dominant figure is beholden to the passivity necessary for pleasure.

In 'Covered car' a solitary man hides in a forest to perform a weird yet useless ritual: he covers his own Mercedes with plastic sheeting. The man's wellbeing depends on the fulfilment of the action. This silent passion remind us of "The Wheelbarrow", a Pirandello story in which the protagonist, a lawyer, forces his dog to walk on its front legs while he holds its posterior legs as if with a wheelbarrow. He steers the dog for ten steps each time, declaring that "I had to be sure that my action was not uncovered"

The power is immanent here to the will of the individual, and Annika Larsson's tale differs from Pirandello's in that the man in 'Covered Car' isn't uneasy about acting as he does.

"The people I use in my works, rather than creating characters, become figures lacking individual history or depth; they are mere ciphers. I do not mean to just represent Everyman, rather each one of them is the carrier of a wider dialogue strictly related to myself and my intimate being".

This cold, elegant aesthetic separation comes out of a disciplined attention to all the elements of the video - clothing, movements, composition and photography.

This attention suggests an aesthetic inclination that is partially deniable as the artist returns forcefully to the interior of the work, an authoritarian exercise which reduces her characters to functional entities without personality and perhaps dignity itself.

From inside rather than outside the masculine world Larsson shows us, she can adopt the persona of Herr B, the man who photographs dancing (Inbjudan till Herr B), the players of Mikado with their tearing slowness in "Perfect game", and the man with the dog in "DOG".

Their ambiguity belongs to her. The dialectic discussion of power, seen throughout her work, allows her to discuss herself through neutrally evoking inner images. The discourse becomes complex when we recognise that the video exits outside the screen, making us complicit in our support of the only true dictator: the artist herself.

Annika Larsson makes us aware of the power she is wielding as narrator. This self-aware knowledge reminds us of the cinematographic tradition of a director contemplating his omnipotence position.

Annika Larsson is currently showing at the I.C.A in London. Her latest video works are POLIISI and DOG, both produced in 2001. You can find more about it on [Annika's site](#).