



# 'EVERY MOVEMENT THAT EMBRACED BEAUTY HAS FAILED'

## VIDEO ARTIST ANNIKA LARSSON FILMS MEN IN CHARGE AND CUT THEM IN PIECES.

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 Images: Fire. (c) 2006 Annika Larsson  
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Two suited gentlemen train a dog. A group of adolescents watch a transgender singer on stage, and one of them goes home to have a fantasy that turns against him. A group of riot-gear police officers beat a man with nightsticks. Two men warm up for tennis in front of a mirror but never actually play the game. In an empty stadium, a one-on-one hockey match. The auto-tanning of a businessman. The lighting and smoking of a cigar.

The Swedish video artist Annika Larsson, preparing a new exhibition at the Unkers Kulturhus in Helsingborg, has only ever been interested in men: the power games they play with themselves and each other, their idolization of the imagery, and perhaps even the latent evil in the banal routine of their gestures. Larsson is seduced by it all. She especially likes pallid skin tones and stubble, stained teeth and spectacles. In the same way that Nabokov renders a world where everything is erotic and absurd, right down to the leaves on a tree, Larsson's vicious eye for detail brings out the cruelty in the erectness of a dog chain, the pucker of lips, and a dull-eyed gaze.

**Your work seems to be about power, weakness and failure?**  
 I think failure is one of the most important things you have to work with as an artist. It's about risk-taking and daring to allow something to become a failure. Where failure comes into my work it is more about the process of working, how I create a video.

**How do you create a video?**  
 I'm kind of a lone worker. I'm interested in an

image that you can connect very easily to a very high production value, or expensive, image. I'm interested in the language and the power behind those types of images, and seeing whether it is a language or the result of a very expensive machine behind it, but most of the time my productions are pretty inexpensive.

**Is it that weakness and power coexist in all your characters and the gestures they make?**  
 Yes, there is weakness in the images that I use. It's all about the person watching. We watch something uncomfortable or a person who seems to be in control but then loses control, and it's about our response to that. So in that sense it's a dialogue with power and weakness, and failure.

**What position do you think it puts the viewer in? In the police video for example, you're going to feel like a nasty voyeur. Is that the intention?**  
 I think it puts you in a kind of vulnerable or exposed situation. I don't censor images that I find uncomfortable. For me it's more interesting to send out an image and say, Can we look at this, can we discuss it? Most of the time the films or acts or images I use are pictures that I have already found. There is a lot of stuff out there. I am on the Internet and that's the evidence, they already exist and I feel that I have the right. Humans are complex and we tend to not want to talk about those images or aesthetics or products that we actually spend a lot of time with. I find it interesting that we have such a paradoxical relationship to these things. I'm interested in the official version of human beings and the non-official, dark side of human beings.

**Looking at your work, Lars von Trier came to mind. What do you think of him?**  
 The Idiots is one of my all-time favorite films. He's a storyteller, so I appreciate his films, but I have never felt the need to tell a story. Nor am I good at telling stories. I'm not trying to present a finished product. That's also about failure. If I leave an edit of a cut or a scene too long or too boring and uncomfortable – do I dare? Is it a failure to leave that in, even though I know it's an ugly shot? That's something that I'm struggling with and thinking about daily in my work.

**A deliberate failure like that is different to a**

normal kind of failure. It's interesting, especially as the stills in your work seem so carefully chosen. I was very impressed how an attitude flows through all of the details – they all seem somehow cruel. How do you make the fur of a dog seem cruel and upsetting, even though it's just the fur of a dog?  
 I don't know. I guess I'm good at observing things. That's probably one of my talents, or maybe not even a talent – one of my problems. I see it in everything. I'm definitely interested in the seductive side of images. That's why I keep coming back to those images that both seduce me and also that have a mainstream seduction value, but I also have a very big interest in things we consider ordinary or almost boring. When I cast people I am definitely not looking for the most beautiful. For me beauty doesn't exist. It's an evil construction. History tells you that beauty is no good. Every movement that embraced beauty has failed. If you put beauty into politics it becomes very scary. It's about excluding things and not accepting failure. It's about not accepting non-perfection.

**Are you bored of being asked why you only use men in your films? People don't ask male artists why they only use women in their art. Is that an issue for you?**  
 I always get that question, but I can also understand it. For me, I hope that future generations of female artists don't have to get that question because, as you say, there are a lot of male artists who use women in their work without discussing it. There are a lot of men, I guess, because there is an erotic charge in the work. I've only ever been interested in filming men. But it's a very complicated thing. I guess you have to go back and analyze me to get the answer to that. It's a combination of me growing up as a very boyish girl interested in computers from the start and having a very close connection to what are considered male subjects of interest. I'm not interested in changing stereotypes. If I did use an image of a woman playing a very masculine game, that image would have to be about a political goal of representation. My work has never been about that. It's a combination of people that I find attractive and interesting to film and my interest in images. If women would look more like men I would probably film some women too. For me

it's not about the male society or that we still live in a patriarchal society. It's not anything to do with that; it's much more from a personal point of view.

**What are you working on at the moment?**  
 Now I am editing a new work that I filmed in Sweden this spring. I don't know what to call it yet. At the moment the title is a power symbol. It's sort of a video showing a group of people that I named "anarcho-geeks" outdoors on a hill. There are a lot of symbols in the video referring to technology but there's no technology in the video. It's kind of a techno-romantic video. It's spring; there is a power symbol on the ground. There are a lot of sounds from computer games and CPU fans.

**Is there somehow a relationship to masculinity in your obsessive repetitive style of editing?**  
 I never thought of it that way. I spend a lot of time editing. It's probably what I'm doing most. I have been here all weekend, curtains down. When I'm editing I need to be isolated. It's like starting all over again, looking at what I filmed, what I can do with it. A lot of things I play with when I'm editing are to see if things make sense, if it's believable or not. It's pure manipulation. A lot of the time it's edited to a rhythm, to beats. It's slowed down or speeded up depending on how long I want a spectator to watch that scene. It's edited more closely to advertising or pop videos than classic film.

**Do you feel like you control things as much on the set as you do during post-production?**  
 I remember one of my first videos. I wanted to film an older guy looking very intense at a younger guy smoking a cigar. And he fell asleep! I felt like it was a big failure. But I have to admit I feel like that after every recording. I guess that's part of it.