

Art in America

MAY 2005

Annika Larsson
at Andrea Rosen

At the heart of Annika Larsson's artistic project is an obsession with masculinity or, more precisely, "homosexuality," an oft-cited term coined by literary scholar Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick to refer to the subtle erotic tension underlying social relations between men. In the videos she has produced since the late 1990s, Larsson has consistently sought to expose masculinity as a performance, and to explore male power plays of domination and submission. Her series of elegantly composed yet enigmatic mini-narratives, with no voiceover or audible dialogue, are made up of slow gestures, dramatic camera angles and extreme close-ups. All feature white Nordic men, often either performing banal activities or involved in implied or explicitly violent scenarios.

One of Larsson's recent videos, *New Gravity* (2003), is a slight departure from her earlier work. While previously she has filmed adult men, here she staged a rite of passage for four pimply-faced teenagers struggling to enter manhood. The nerdy boys move about in a dance club of pulsing lights and throbbing synth music (by the Swedish multimedia and performance artist Tobias Bernstrup and the Italian rock group Moravagine). Entranced at first by a transgender performer, they glance uncomfortably at one another, unsure of their bodies and sexuality. An animation of an oversize man enters and begins interacting with one of the boys, instructing him in a series of odd calisthenics that culminates in an ambiguous scene where we see the boy's feet dangling, with implications of either an ascension or a hanging. What begins, however, as a fascinating examination of the developmental stages of masculinity—a new, if related,

direction for Larsson—concludes badly, less perhaps due to the content than to the poor quality of the animation, which detracts greatly from the artist's sleek, polished style.

The other video, *Hockey* (2004), takes place at the Stockholm Globe Arena, where two unnamed hockey teams play in full gear before 13,000 empty seats in a slow-paced choreography, and in a game devoid of the violence generally associated with the sport. Players glide around the rink, accompanied by a soundtrack of synthesized hockey noises and music (also by Bernstrup), and are filmed at varying angles ranging from bird's- to worm's-eye views, in addition to close-ups. All constitute a style invoking that of the Russian Formalist Sergei Eisenstein, who believed in using tactical camera maneuvers to make the familiar strange. The brilliance of this piece lies not only in its sheer formal magnificence, but in its intertextual relation to Larsson's earlier work. For to tackle her subject at a sports event—the ultimate signifier of masculine hyperbole, not to mention homosexuality—is to take on an interesting challenge. To do it so well, as she has, is a real coup.

—Maura Reilly



Art in America 163

Annika Larsson: *Hockey*, 2004, DVD, 25 ½ minutes;
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