

frieze

The Anti-Social Majority

Kunsthall, [Oslo, Norway](#)



Benjamin A. Huseby and Lars Laumann *You Can't Pretend to Be Somebody Else – You Already Are (The Tree)*, 2009–11, production still

‘The Anti-Social Majority’ was an exhibition of five collaborative works made by Norwegian artist Lars Laumann and seven of his friends and fellow artists: Kjersti Andvig, Vela Arbutina, Benjamin A. Huseby, Jeanette Main, Dan-Ola Persson, Stewart Uoo and Rein Vollenga. The show’s title was suggested by Henrik Ibsen’s play, *An Enemy of the People* (1882), in which a small-town doctor’s insistence on speaking the truth about a corrupt corporate scheme gradually alienates him from the bourgeois institutions that he previously held dear, in particular the nuclear family, political debate and the free press. This tip of the hat to a piece of 19th-century theatre marks somewhat of a departure for Laumann, whose recent video work has taken shape around the obsessions and practices of late-capitalist subcultures. Still, the words from the play’s famous last lines, ‘the strongest man in the world is he who stands most alone’, though a touch ironic in the context of a group exhibition, here

suggested less of a celebration of the individual in the face of an intolerant majority than a general interest in marginalized subjectivities past and present, including colonized peoples and homosexuals.

The dual slide projections showing documentation of the opening night's performance (featuring Laumann, Main, Persson and Uoo), for instance, were reminiscent of a Kenneth Anger-style freak show, complete with images of catacombs, a heavy-metal guitarist and a mysterious figure in drag. This imagery, accompanied by a loud audio recording of a droning guitar and Theremin, suggested a radically anti-communitarian politics of sex and death. In doing so, 'The Anti-Social Majority' evoked a much queerer, much more nihilistic vision of what 'anti-social' might be – that is to say, one that actually undoes notions of the self that reproduce normative ideals of mastery, coherence, resolution and hope for the future.

It is in this sense that the exhibition's unevenness and incoherence could also be considered one of its achievements. If such a thing can be thought to exist, there were few traces of Laumann's authorial voice to connect the works on view. Indeed, 'The Anti-Social Majority' displayed a formal diversity that ranged from *The Sami People's Flag in Neon* (2005), a flashing neon sculpture Laumann made with Andvig – who is also the subject of Laumann's documentary film *Shut Up Child, This Aint Bingo!* (2009) – to *You Can't Pretend to Be Somebody Else – You Already Are* (2009–11), a video made together with Huseby, which re-imagines the days prior to Nico's death on the island of Ibiza in 1988. In a series of fictional re-stagings, three drag performers (Woo, Keaton and Main) portray the German superstar at different periods in her life, while a voice-over recites her diaristic writings and biographical details. In an awkwardly choreographed dance routine that verges on camp, Laumann and Huseby treat the bodies onscreen as an inseparable trinity in a cult of desire, rejection and despair. While this problematizes notions of identity, the performances are also overly coded in the extreme, and call to mind Judith Butler's observation that there is no necessary correlation between drag and subversion. In terms of providing resolution or elaborating a politicized or 'anti-social' agenda, the video's treatment – along with its handheld shakiness – remains deeply unsatisfying. Yet it is precisely in this ambivalence – in the willingness to inhabit the in-between, the contradictory and the frustrating – where Laumann's signature could be found.

Matthew Rana