

The Anti-Social Majority Kunsthall Oslo

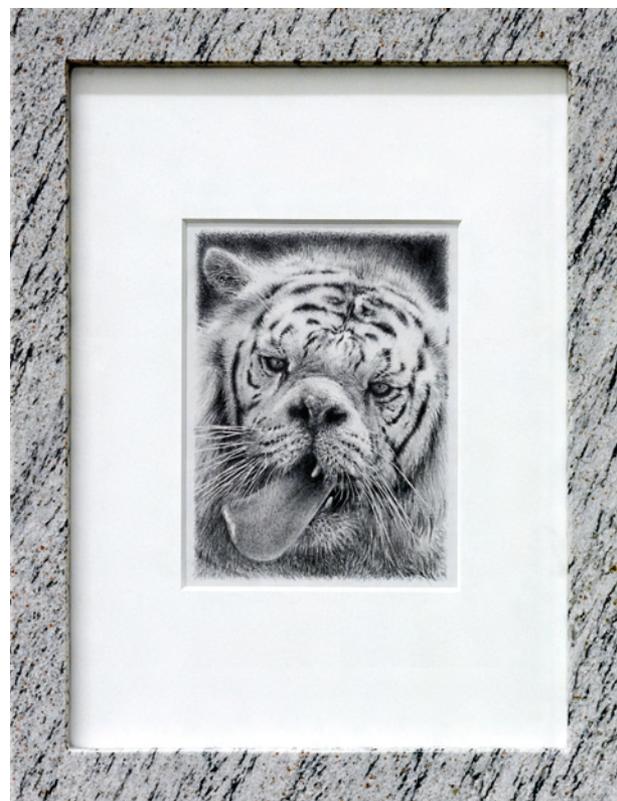
'The Anti-Social Majority' was an exhibition of five collaborative works made by Norwegian artist Lars Laumann and seven of his friends and fellow artists: Kjersti Andvig, Vela Arbutina, Benjamin A. Huseby, Jeanette Main, Dan-Ola Persson, Stewart Uoo and Rein Vollenga. The show's title was suggested 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



Andrea Romano
Claque & Shill
2011
Pencil on paper and
Meera White granite
46x36x4 cm

Andrea Romano Gasconade Milan

Although artists raised and educated in the same region over the same period can share similar experiences, at the moment there's a tendency to group them together for superficial reasons. Such criticism could be aimed at the programme of Gasconade, a newly opened not-for-profit venue directed by curators Michele D'Aurizio and Luca Castiglioni, who have made clear their aim of mapping the landscape of Milanese artists born in the 1980s. In this case, however, the project's intentions make sense. There is no high-profile public art institution in Milan, and most established galleries in the city are risk-averse, which leaves emerging artists with no real outlet to show their work. The wish to cater to this lack – along with a growing list of private initiatives (such as Milan-based Peep-Hole, Brown Project Space and O') that are attempting to make up for the institutional silence – also explains Gasconade's ambiguous status: a not-for-profit venue sharing its space with a commercial gallery, Vava, run by Federico Vavassori.

'Claque & Shill', Gasconade's first ever solo show, by Andrea Romano, was an explicit statement of the space's aims: a neat-looking exhibition of drawings by a Milan-based artist born in 1984. The images are highly accurate pencil reproductions of photographs of a Royal White Tiger. The selective breeding needed to create the animal's white coat causes severe malformations, which, at first glance, aren't obvious: once you notice them, it's difficult to know whether to ascribe them to the animal's deformity or to the artist's lack of skill. The frames further reinforce this initial ambiguity: carved and polished from different coloured marble rectangles, they lend the pictures a markedly sculptural →

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



Alessandro Pessoli Collezione Maramotti Reggio Emilia

Is painting a dying language whose only significance lies in its legacy? Or does it still present artists with an opportunity for invention? Alessandro Pessoli's latest project, 'Fiamma pilota le ombre seguono' (Pilot Light the Shadows Follow), is the painterly equivalent of a double leap into the void: it both challenges perceptions of painting being a dying art and, with its references to Christian iconography, responds to the evolution of the medium.

Specially commissioned by the Maramotti Collection, Pessoli's three large-scale paintings represent the development of a concept the artist first explored – with his series of 30 works depicting a mixture of religious figures and fictional ones – at the 53rd Venice Biennale in 2009. In the new paintings, however, the art-historical association is stronger and more ambitious. Pessoli has taken the Crucifixion as his starting point, an image entrenched for centuries in Western visual culture, to devise a reinvented, anti-classical iconography, in which the sacred and the historical become features of a pared-back, visionary contemporary landscape.

Depicted without a cross, but with exceptionally long arms and enormous hands and feet, Christ occupies the central space of *Fiamma pilota* (Pilot Light, all works 2011). The powerful, distorted form of his bright pink body, reminiscent of a vivid torch, acts as the focus of the scene, with the remainder of the composition comprising a loosely sketched landscape occupied by a number of ghostly characters who, as the artist noted, 'attempt to do things in a somnambulant state – their actions hollow and without consequence'. This is a fervent image, one that hovers somewhere between apparition and dream. Elements that are archaic, almost child-like, are rendered in bold colours using a stencil and spray-paint, while other seemingly

primitive and amorphous components are rich in art-historical references. The face of Christ, for instance, references a painting in London's National Gallery, *A Head of Christ Crowned with Thorns* (after Guido Reni c.1640), while his feet take their inspiration from Matthias Grünewald's crucifixion from the Isenheim Altarpiece (1506–15); the body is massive, while the large hands recall those painted in Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* (1937).

In his painting, Pessoli positions art's relationship to time and memory at centre stage, demonstrating how painting is still capable of inducing wonder in its viewers. Yet at the core of his approach is a lengthy process involving stratification, revision, deletion and destruction. Speaking of two works in the exhibition – *Le figure tornano a casa* (The Figures Return Home) and *Testa farfalla su matrice locomotiva* (Butterfly Head on Locomotive Matrix) – the artist commented that 'one painting seems to be the dream of the other', a genesis that leads to the creation of an imaginary place between art and reality. This notion of place is also invoked in the title of *Le figure tornano a casa*, Pessoli's reimagining of the Flight into Egypt, which he perceives as a picaresque journey in the dark in pursuit of ghosts. *Testa farfalla su matrice locomotiva* is, perhaps, the most enigmatic painting in the show. An homage to Futurism, it's a summation of the principal elements of the other works: the crucifix is dematerialized in a curious, dark-hued interpretation of the Annunciation, around which extends a luminous, indeterminate landscape, populated by new ghosts.

Marinella Paderni

Translated by Rosalind Furness



presence. Their excessive weight and sturdy geometrical appearance further underline the fragility of both the medium and the subject of the drawings: the tigers seem overwhelmed by their container to the point of making them seem incidental – which, of course, they're not. But the doubt persists.

The feeling of something being off or misleading in Romano's show was made explicit by its title: the claue and the skill – respectively a group of people who are paid to clap in a theatre, and a 'plant' who enthusiastically spreads the word about a product or service – are two ways of influencing an audience's reaction. As a statement of intent for the gallery, the exhibition highlights a common trait displayed by the artists it is planning to work with: they often deliberately lead viewers in the wrong direction, disguising in-depth research behind the conventional, apparently one-dimensional appearance of a drawing.

Romano plays down the subject of his drawings, not only by declaring them as reproductions, and by choosing a fairly banal, if exotic, subject, but also by stressing their decorative aspect through the use of imposing, sculptural frames. However, this deliberately conceals the fragility of both the subject and its medium, which is the main focus of Romano's exploration. The white tiger's malformation results in its premature death; similarly, the only way to reproduce this malformation in a drawing runs the risk of ascribing such distortion to the author's ability – or lack thereof.

An almost-hidden sixth work by Romano is the one gesture that makes the artist's intentions explicit. Placed on the mantelpiece of the gallery's unused fireplace, a letter the artist sent to the curator two weeks before the opening – ripped open but still in its envelope – positioned Romano's project in a wider, more complex frame than might have initially been assumed. Few visitors to the show would have noticed the letter but if they did – like a member of an audience seeing the director of a play hand a wad of cash to a man enthusiastically cheering in the second row – they would have read: 'We won't be who we say we are, and we'll all pretend it's the first time.'

Vincenzo Latronico

Letter sent to Gasconade gallery by Andrea Romano
2011

Alessandro Pessoli
Testa farfalla su matrice locomotiva
(Butterfly Head on Locomotive Matrix)
2011
Oil, enamel and spray-paint on canvas
2x3 m

