

Kirsty Bell, *Lars Laumann*,  
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# frieze

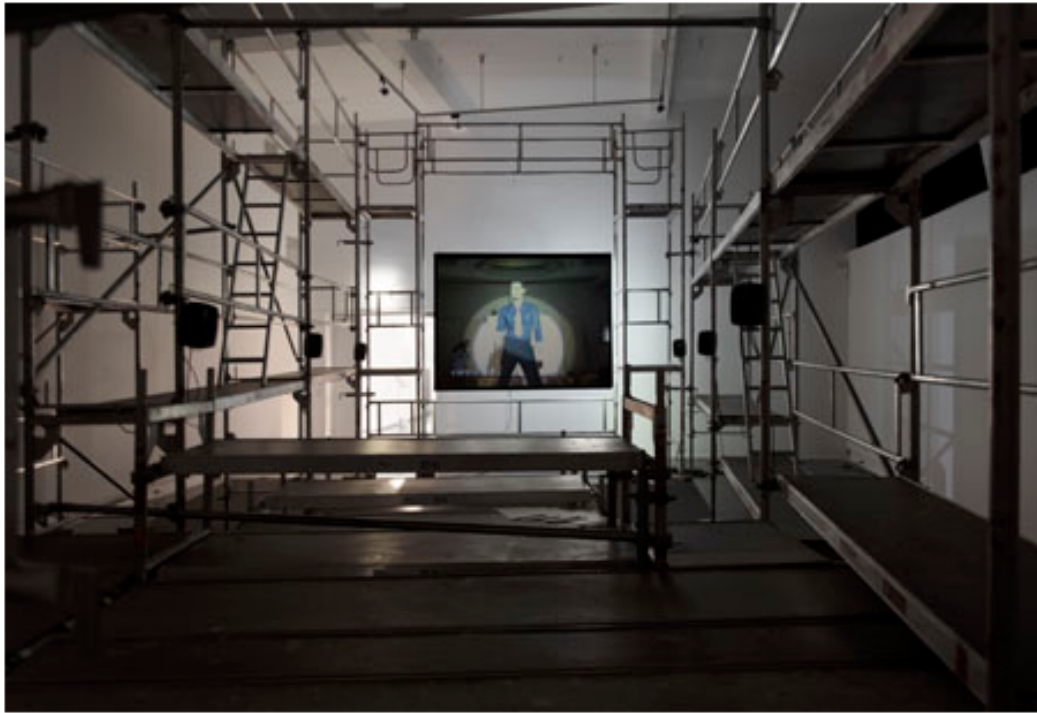
## Lars Laumann

KUNSTNERNES HUS, OSLO, NORWAY



Lars Laumann, *Berlinmuren* (with music by Dan-Ola Persson), 2008, video still

'Kompendium' is small in scale but broad in scope. The span of Lars Laumann's works takes in the fishing industries in Somalia and Northern Norway; Morrissey conspiracy theories; migrating puffins and marching bands; and Nico's last days in Ibiza. This survey of his work – the first time much of it has been shown in his native Norway – comprises six films on small screens or monitors in the upstairs exhibition halls of Kunstnernes Hus, while the newest piece, *Seasons of Migration to the North* (2015), is projected inside a scaffolding rig that fills up a whole ground floor room.



Lars Laumann, *Season of Migration to the North* (with Eddie Esmael and music by Cecilia Lopez), 2015, video installation and scaffolding; photograph Christina Leithe Hansen

The earliest piece on show is *Morrissey Foretelling the Death of Diana* (2006), in which Laumann deconstructs the lyrics of The Smiths' 1985 album *Meat is Murder*, track by track, to reveal a dizzying litany of references that appear to predict the death of Princess Diana, an analysis that teeters between being convincing and absurd. Five adjacent monitors play the same film, each one spoken in a different language (one for each country where the piece has been shown to date) and each in a conspicuous, regional accent (the English version is spoken in thick Mancunian). Against a looped background refrain by The Smiths, montaged clips from French New Wave, Kitchen Sink Drama or *Carry On* films obliquely illustrate the monologue's rollercoaster of incident. Truth and paranoia lie back to back in what is both an homage to Laumann's own early Smiths obsession, as well as the obscure lines of research facilitated by the internet.



Lars Laumann, *Morrissey Foretelling the Death of Diana*, 2006, video still

Laumann is attracted to stories that occur on the margins, or even the margins of the margins. His best known work, *Berlinmuren* (2008), tells the tale of a Swedish woman, Eija-Riita Eklöf Berlinermauer, who is 'objecto-sexual' and has fallen in love with and married the Berlin Wall. The outlandish story, narrated in deadpan fashion by the Swedish woman herself, evacuates the Berlin Wall of its usual symbolic political content and meaning: 'My love for the Berlin Wall has nothing to do with politics', she says. Without Laumann's own presence in the film, it's difficult to determine if the story is real or fabricated, creating an unsettling viewing experience that brings our own prejudices to the fore.



Lars Laumann, *You Can't Pretend to Be Somebody Else, You Already Are* (collaboration with Benjamin A. Huseby), 2009–11, two-channel video installation

Laumann's most recent work, *Season of Migration to the North*, takes on more topical territory. The film is a refugee story, told from the perspective of a young, gay Sudanese asylum-seeker, doubly ostracized through homophobia and Islamophobia. Again, the narration is in the first person – the protagonist Eddie Ismael reads his diary entries from just before his arrest in Khartoum to his departure for Norway, where he was sent to a refugee camp in the North before moving to Oslo. Eddie's arrest occurs at a fashion show in Khartoum that he helped organize and took part in. The police raided the event, arresting all of 'the boys who they thought looked gay' as well as the girls that 'looked immoral'. Original footage from this fashion show provides the visual backdrop – handsome, barefoot models parade on a carpeted catwalk, styled in casual designer clothes. The work draws its power from the gulf between the benign images and their role in the narrator's exile. At one point Ismael brings in a historical parallel, mentioning the diaries of Ruth Maier, an Austrian girl who came to Norway as a refugee from World War II, and fell in love with a Norwegian girl. History repeats itself, and the struggles faced by Jewish homosexuals during mid-20th-century fascism now find their echo in the experiences of Muslim homosexuals – minorities within a minority group.

The first-person narration in both of these films is direct and disarming, while the artist's own presence is reduced to the point of invisibility. Laumann's works are never documentary as such: the intense identification of artist and subject dissolves critical distance, rendering the relationship between them ambiguous. Voices, scripts and images are often borrowed, while several works are collaborations with artist friends. Just as Morrissey told his own story through a montage of quotes lifted from literature and films, so each of Laumann's works becomes an inhabitation of others' lives. 'My mind and my life are two different things', says Nico in the film *You Can't Pretend to be Somebody Else – You Already Are* (2009–11), in which a trio of transvestites are called upon to perform the story of Nico's life: 'My life follows me around.'

**Kirsty Bell**