

Annika Larsson’s film is a slow and orchestrated dance of seemingly chaotic lives woven to create an exciting narrative that keeps you glued to the screen

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Piero Golia



This spread: stills from Annika Larsson’s film *The Discourse of the Drinkers* (2017), in which the artist – also the director of photography and editing – explores the bar as a social and political space. The title is borrowed from a chapter in François Rabelais’s *The Life of Gargantua and of Pantagruel* and it was filmed in two Berlin bars, the Rote Rose and Rosi’s Club. Filming took six months and the project is completed by an artist’s book printed in a limited edition of 100 copies

The chaos of millions of identities on a fragile continent

You may have realised that there is a time lapse between my writing a piece and you reading it. This one will be published in the au-



turn but it is being written in the summer. I’m on holiday in Italy, trying to ignore the heat and wondering what to write that may be interesting when you read it in the cold. It’s hard for those who live in California and perspire in a peaceful Gaeta to imagine the cold and I’m desperately seeking something that reminds me of it. A city springs to mind — cold Berlin, which I have always considered the apotheosis of freezing cold. A place where you are constantly rushing for shelter, a friendly

building that will harbour you while also connecting you with humans. The same Berlin that has, for the last 70 years, by definition, been a constantly changing city, where everything is non-stop re-thinking, rebuilding and reinventing. We are in a bar, or rather in two bars, in Berlin listening to people casually discussing identity, work, family and politics. The stories advance in symbiosis, weaving a fabric of emotions without ever overlapping or interfering with each other. Everyone

seems just to want to live in the moment. The title of Annika Larsson’s *The Discourse of the Drinkers* (2017) pays homage to a

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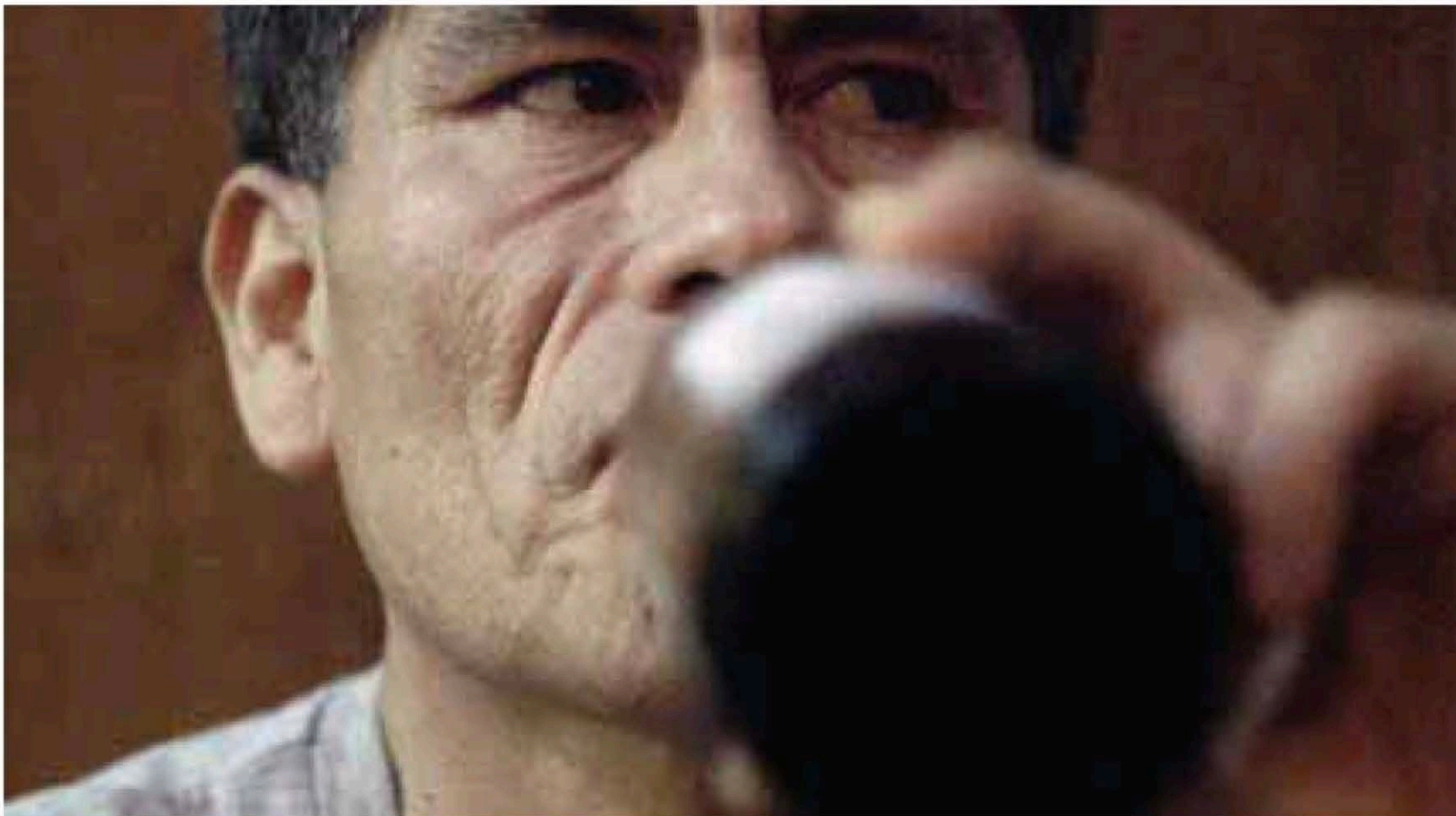


François Rabelais work and, in just under 40 minutes, the film is a receptacle of unprecedented human connections, stories and ex-

periences. It is a slow and orchestrated dance of seemingly chaotic lives woven to create such an exciting narrative that you remain glued to the screen. It is a succinct, direct and radical film, by no means to everybody's taste. A masterpiece of synthesis, it is a sample shut within four well-defined walls, a basic architectural space with no frills or aesthetic sophistication. The space is, in turn, bounded by the walls of a constantly evolving city that is a mystery, the chaos of millions of

identities channelled by the cornerstones of a constantly changing nation, an evolving

Continent that, however fragile, keeps moving forward. The wonderful thing about Annika is that she studies the detail of human lives, fully aware that these details move in a far larger environment. Although these details can be defined, it is virtually impossible to control the greater forces shaping the context. She speaks of architecture not as a building but as an





institution. She does not dwell too long on single individuals but allows the receptacle of humankind — the bar with its social functions — to breathe. We have all been in that bar and we shall return to it. We shall be pleased to be there and pleased to leave because we know it is merely one cell of an organism that breathes and moves in a far larger environment. Sometimes, however, that scale makes us feel alone and frightened. Freedom is arduous so it is better to enclose ourselves, not ideally,


never, just physically. That bar becomes a dark space where we can prove our existence. Those drinking are the real protagonists of this non-story and they mix just as we, in front of the screen, mix and project our ideas and experiences onto them because, in the end, we are all looking for the same thing. We are trying to out-live time, hoping to leave a trace, without highhandedness but something that leaves behind a memory of our individuality. Hope keeps taking us forward. At a cer-


tain stage, some regulars sing Kraftwerk's Das Model, a strange version accompanied by an accordion, slow and stripped of the original's seductiveness. Those notes pass by, a little like our aspirations. The bar is a stage and those regulars are the audience of something far bigger. By showing their true identity, they feel accepted and protected, almost never wanting to leave. What will happen when the evening is over? What will happen to the nice lady slightly on in years who proudly


declares herself “a socialist” not a communist; or the bearded muscular guy, and those who were singing in a mix of boredom and passion? I don't know and nor will you. The film ends violently, brutally, perhaps fantastically. I open the windows and see the sea again — hoping you will appreciate the autumn. Piero Golia (Naples, 1974) is an artist and impresario in Los Angeles. Annika Larsson (1972) is a Swedish artist, working mainly with film, video, performance and installation.


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