

ScheiblerMitte

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Judging from the recent sampling of ten videotapes (dating from 1977 to 1993) at Klagsbrun, Michel Auder should probably be named our Video Laureate. Auder, a 50-year-old Frenchman who has lived in the U.S. for more than 20 years, has (according to one press release) "shot thousands of hours of videotape over the past twenty-four years." One could imagine an "All Auder Channel" - I'd subscribe.

Auder's tapes can best be described as poetry or maybe docu-sonnets. He juxtaposes fragments of images shot from TV, magazines, photographs or real life with shards of sound; bits and pieces of conversation drift in and out, music plays or waves of noise rise and fall. These combine to form a rich, dilapidated, perishable picture of the real world.

Auder loves details. His camera lingers over things the way a dog sniffs and circles a possible rabbit hole. In Fishing (the old-fashioned way), 1980 (only seven minutes long - he has a great sense of time), Auder lingers over - almost caresses - a group of islanders as they cast a fishing net into the sea from the shore and then haul it in. His camera watches a man remove his straw hat and bathe in the gentle sea, rubbing his head in a spiraling motion, round and round. He loves flesh and voyeuristic views, which makes him a sexy artist, too. In Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling, 1986, he shoots women wrestlers directly off the TV and zeroes in on bits of exposed flesh and inadvertent crotch shots - playing them in seductive slow motion. On the soundtrack we hear a little girl's voice asking, "Who's the bad one?" to which Auder replies, "It's just a game."

In My Last Bag of Heroin (for real), April 1986, Auder turns his voyeuristic camera on himself. In this four-minute ode to sadness and despair we see Auder tapping out the white powdery contents of a little bag onto aluminum foil, lighting it (five times) from beneath and inhaling the fumes through a paper tube. Auder - in a stupor, his head only inches from the table - stares into the foil and says, "This is the last day ever in my life that I'm smoking that shit. Tomorrow I'm going to the hospital for good. Good-bye dope. Good-bye Monkey. I'm not chasing dragons anymore."

Auder's work is very direct and low-tech, though you get the feeling he's pretty picky about what ends up on the monitor. In the 1993 epic Voyage to the Center of the Phone Lines (Part I), Auder's skills, particularly with the soundtrack, rise to new

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heights. On the screen we see a series of picture-postcardlike views of sunsets, waves, rain, clouds and flowers. The soundtrack consists of telephone conversations that Auder "captured" via an electronic monitoring device. He splices the secret recordings together to make a Joycean smattering of human drama and banality: lovers planning a tryst; an estranged husband and wife worrying about their 18-year-old daughter's regular sexual liaisons with the local drug addict (Mother: "She's been sleeping with him - she slept with him last night - and she's not using any protection," Father: "I'll hit him with a fuckin' baseball bat"); a bookie taking bets; two women talking about sex ("I felt like I was dessert at the end of every night"); and, chillingly, two guys planning a "hit" ("Make him lie down in the woods then pop, pop, pop, pop ... we could do it Monday night"). Auder is trying to show us something big by using the smallest of parts and the simplest of means, and he's really good at it.

Jerry Saltz

Michel Auder at Nicole Klagsbrun
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