

Michel Auder in Etablissement d'en face projects

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The Brussels collective Etablissement d'en face looks back on the forty-year career of Michel Auder. This French video artist achieved cult status through the raw documentation of his eventful private and social life in *downtown* New York from the late 1960s onwards. Initially active in politically charged Paris as a fashion photographer and filmmaker with the Zanzibar group, he underwent the influence of the *Nouvelle Vague* filmmakers. Through a rash marriage to *Factory girl* Viva Superstar, he ended up in the direct sphere of influence of Andy Warhol. His introduction to Warhol's non-narrative, purposefully annoying films and the Sony Portapak, the first easily portable video camera available on the market, marked the beginning of an almost compulsive urge to record the world as he experienced it in all its immediacy. At Etablissement, these earlier and longer productions are mainly discussed in the evening program (every Wednesday and Thursday evening), although visitors can also use a *video-on-demand* option during the day. Shown include *Keeping Busy* (1969, 67'), *Cleopatra* (1970, 154') and *Chelsea Girls With Andy Warhol* (1971-1976, 88'), in which Viva always figures as a *leading lady*, but also portraits of Cindy Sherman (Mrs Auder in the 80s and 90s, who surprisingly hated being filmed), sex guru and performance artist Annie Sprinkle and painter and best friend Alice Neel. While Warhol adopted the aesthetics of the machine as much as possible, Auder distinguished himself in his early work by his emotional involvement. He leans more towards the autobiographical-poetic videos of Jonas Mekas, who was an ardent defender of Auder's work. Auder likes to see his subjects and tries to get close to them, albeit always with a camera in between.

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The exhibition at Etablissement mainly focuses on the later, relatively unknown work. A special discovery are the two longer, unconventional travelogues from the 1990s that are displayed in the basement. In *Voyage to the Center of the Phone Lines* (1993, 55'), Auder has retreated to a beach house, alone (on rehab, or so the open secret goes), with nothing to film but his sea view. For an hour, the waves lap, the trees blow and the sun sets undisturbed to a 'soundtrack' of secretly tapped, confidential telephone conversations; from sweet conversations between mother and child to embarrassing *break-up calls* and ideologically charged discussions. Less moving, but visually all the more compelling is his *Roman Variations* (1991, 50'), in which the Eternal City is read both through its renowned ruins and through the trivial activities of its unsuspecting inhabitants, which Auder watches from his hotel room. In addition, he focuses his blatantly eroticizing gaze alternately on the genitals of mythological statues in the city and the nude models on television, and he confronts explicit representations of violence in baroque paintings with gory news footage of local shootings.

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In the actual exhibition space on the ground floor, a selection of Auder's shorter videos, mainly from the last two decades, can be seen. The space has been converted into a comfortable cinema room, including carpet; The aim is a viewing experience that approaches the intimacy and voyeurism of Auder's video work. The fact that the reviewer tended to doze off while viewing the exhibition was, for once, not a bad side effect. The recent *Narcolepsy* (2010, 22') focuses precisely on inducing such a buzz. The recurring opening image of a woman sitting upright and napping mixes with close-ups and ambient sounds of picturesque mountain landscapes, crackling fireplace flames, red-painted toenails, swimming torsos, running taps, white rabbits and the wolf that catches them. Originally intended as an installation with five monitors, the different parts now follow each other in one visual sequence. Just like the sleeping woman, the audience is invited to take a passive position and be carried away by the atmospheric and sensual images that Auder shot off the cuff with a simple digital camera, underwater equipment and mobile phone. However diverse their original context may be, Auder always allows one fleeting image to shine through behind another. Taken together, they suggest a *stream of unconsciousness* that wipes away all contrasts: the wildness of nature is just as much in our heads; There is also rarely a storyline in our dreams, we make the associations ourselves afterwards.

For the *found footage* fragments that mainly form the building blocks of his later video montages, Auder frequently drew from his own extensive archive. This includes, for example, a gem such as *Talking Head* (1981, released in 2009, 3'), a short film fragment in black and white that Auder recently dug up, but fortunately left untouched. A young girl (presumably his daughter) talks in complete isolation about something that was nothing, that never came back and was missed by everyone. That thing was a person, that's all we find out. Without interruption, she continues her monotonous and melancholy story, unconcerned with plot, ending, or moral.

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The photo works and objects displayed in the display room on the street side are somewhat out of place. The first thing we find is an enigmatic composition of plaster hands tied with cords above a gold bottle and a watermelon. In a strict sense, the work turns out not to be by Auder, but by the Norwegian artist collective DOR (Deadly Orgone Radiation). The trio, consisting of Sverre Gullesen, Steinar Haga Kristensen and Kristian Ø. Dahl, settled in Brussels in 2011 and opened the Gallery DOR. On the occasion of the inaugural exhibition, the Norwegians asked Auder to give them instructions for the execution of a work of art. In addition to the sculpture, the result also included three stills from Auder's early videos – including an explicit bedroom scene with Viva – which were framed, hung at an angle and irregularly described with, among other things, the tagline 'Situation as Object'. Although these works provide a useful link to the concurrent exhibition that Auder curated at Gallery DOR, they are a very misleading introduction. Not least because Auder has always considered himself a *loner* : 'No one has ever asked me to make work. 99% of it comes from obsession.'

- Michel Auder, until May 26 at Etablissement d'en face projects, Antoine Dansaertstraat 161, 1000 Brussels (02/219.44.51; www.etablissementdenfaceprojects.org).

- *Halo Africa* (curator Michel Auder), with work by Sam Anderson, Gunhild Dahlberg, Michael Stickrod and Rona Yeffman/Tanja Schlender, until May 27 in Gallery DOR, Merodestraat 11, 1160 Brussels (www.dor.org).