

**Art & Culture** Michel Auder at De Hallen Haarlem

# Iconoclasms and tempests

Michel Auder is one of the first artists to use video as a kind of visual diary. It is art that you can let happen to you, without it being a problem if you miss something because your reality is different from that of the creator.

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**Polaroid Cocaine** lasts about five minutes. Michel Auder's film opens with a photo that has slowly yellowed or has once undergone a sepia treatment. The face we see consists mainly of two large black eyes, eyes that have seen something terrible or seem to suspect something more terrible. The title appears in decorative letters across the face, and as the image fades to black, we hear chanteuse Ingrid Craven, in a voice that sighs slightly under a French accent, saying: *'Another song by Jean Jacques Shuhl: Polaroid Cocaine.'*

## MARTOS GALLERY

First there are images of ruins, some probably the result of slowly passing time, others perhaps of short, intense bombardments. The destruction is accompanied by a piano that seems pregnant with disaster. Then guerrillas, children picking up ammunition from the street, human skulls with holes where eyes used to be and holes where a blunt object landed, the holes become eyes, the eyes become diving goggles and suddenly a romantic scene on a jetty: somewhere the sun is setting and the sea glitters as far as the eye can see. Eyes, lips, hands, legs: the entire film is made up of still images, careless images too. Of course, consciously chosen and placed in an order with care, but every individual image is also replaceable. The result is a visual poem that moves back and forth – sometimes swaying, sometimes wildly swinging – between suffering and longing, between distress and longing.

Shuhl, whose text is sung, may have won the Prix Goncourt, but the sound is damn loud.



## MARTOS GALLERY

The old-fashioned picture tube that shows *Polaroid Cocaine* (1993) is located with eighteen of its kind in the Vleeshal of De Hallen Haarlem. As busy as it is outside at the Haarlem Saturday market, it is just as quiet inside. It would be quiet, if it were not for the tangle of sound coming from everywhere and nowhere, a background noise that is clearly recognizable to the good listener as 'several video art installations that just barely manage to drown each other out'.

I could be wrong, but it seems to me as if there is a strange paradox about video art. While moving images in everyday life are often associated with laziness, preferring the news to the newspaper, preferring the film to the book, in museums and galleries – and increasingly on the Internet – it often seems to be the other way around. Video art, consciously or unconsciously, often seems even more elusive. And with a little imagination you can understand the way in which much video art is presented – played in a loop, and therefore with an almost invisible starting and ending point – as the medium itself going the extra mile to avoid being too easy to understand. contain.

Flowers, a clock, fruit, a split second in which someone is run over by a dirt bike



## MARTOS GALLERY

*Made for Denise* (1978) is shown on the same TV as *Polaroid Cocaine* and although there was a fifteen-year gap between the making of the two films, the choice is an obvious one. Both films are somewhere between a video clip and a poem. *Made for Denise* is a bit shorter, with a running time of three minutes, and in the same way, although this time the reason is not cocaine but an obsession. The music is by Philip Glass and in the background the voice of a man appears to be addressing a crowd: *'Two lovers on a park bench!'* he almost shouts. The image shows a palm clasp a photo of a young woman. The hand closes, very slowly, but it is not clear whether this slowness is caution or sadism. Will the photo, the young woman, be destroyed or protected? The image shifts to a controlled destruction of a large building played backwards, the sermon makes its way back to the foreground, past Philip Glass: *'You are the light of my life, my sun, moon and stars. You are my everything!'* Then the building still collapses: a cloud of gray dust, shaking because of the violence of the explosion and because the images seem to have been copied endlessly from video format to video format. *"Without you I have no reason for being,"* says the preacher. Someone smokes a cigarette while a trickle of blood slowly runs down his forehead. Flowers, a clock, fruit, for a split second a fragment of someone being run over by a dirt bike, a voiceover shouting excitedly: *'He's hit! He's leg run over!'* And then it's over.

What can be said about it other than that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts? Just as in a poem the meaning often seems to lie between the words rather than contained within them.





## MARTOS GALLERY

**Michel Auder** was born in 1944 in Soissons, one of the oldest towns in France – even Julius Caesar was reportedly aware of its existence – about a hundred kilometers northeast of Paris. He is still a teenager when he packs up his bags and moves to the capital, where he apprentices as a photographer. In 1961 he ended up in New York for the first time, the city he would call home about ten years later. That first time, after his two-week visa has expired, he stays there until he is deported. Back in France he is conscripted, as a member of the photo and film division of the French army he is stationed in Algeria for some time. Once freed from military service, he focuses on filmmaking. He is inspired by the great innovators of the moment, Godard, Pasolini, Warhol. Since 1968 he has been part of the so-called Zanzibar group, which consists of a dozen young filmmakers who are convinced that cinema is the medium par excellence to 'record actions and emotions and transform them into history', according to art historian Ondine Chavoya, in a text that accompanied a retrospective of Auder's work in 2004.

Also in the revolutionary year of 1968: Auder sees Andy Warhol's first major commercial success: *Chelsea Girls*. Not much later, when he sees one of the stars of the film, Nico, walking down the street in Paris, he speaks to her. Nico is in the company of Viva, one of Warhol's other 'superstars'. (Viva was seen in *Blue Movie*, the film that was initially going to be called simply *Fuck* .) Long story short: Auder and Viva get married in Vegas, move into the legendary Chelsea Hotel and make films together. When Auder's film *Cleopatra* is destroyed before its release by one of the financiers (who only put money into the project based on Viva's fame, and was disappointed in Auder's work, to say the least) he finally turns his back on the film world and he focuses on a new technique: video. Auder is one of the first to use video as a kind of visual diary. The new technology, more direct, less focused on the aesthetic and more focused on the experience of experiencing it up close, fits him like a glove. Fellow avant-garde filmmaker Jonas Mekas put it this way in 1991: 'When I visited Michel in the Chelsea Hotel, around 1970, the video camera was never far away, part of the house, part of his life, eyes, hands. Still. It's a beautiful love affair – no, not an affair, an obsession.'

## MARTOS GALLERY

**Five hours**, ten minutes and 21 seconds of footage can be seen downstairs in De Hallen. Upstairs, in a cinema setting, a different, often longer film each time. In mid-November, for example, the beautifully titled *Untitled (I Was Looking Back To See If You Were Looking Back At Me To See Me Looking Back At You)*, from 2012.

But today *Chelsea Girls with Andy Warhol 1971-1976* is showing. That big name may be tempting, but somehow it still feels as if the film is mainly interesting as a historical document. Not necessarily something you'll sit down for an hour to watch if you're not an obsessive fan.

And if you want to see a historical document, you better sit downstairs for *Cindy Sherman* from 1988. After his time with Viva, Auder also worked with the famous photographer for a long time and in this film you see little else for 45 minutes. his lover at work, you see how she gets ready for one of her self-portraits, the voice of Freddie Mercury sounds in the background, you see how she carefully cuts her negative strips into pieces and how she builds a set before she puts herself in it photographs, you hear her say: *'Just shaving my nose.'*

It all requires a little income, or a willingness to fall into something without being able to grasp it immediately. Associative iconoclasm and storms, mounted one after the other but without an immediately clear substantive line. Sometimes the museum texts written in a *matter of fact* tone on the signs next to or on the TV are enough guidance, sometimes you can do without. The nice thing about the excess is that you can quickly and without much regret abandon the hope of seeing through it all, of understanding it completely. It is art that you can let happen to you, without worrying if you miss something because the distance between your own reality and that of the artist who made the work is too great.

## MARTOS GALLERY

A wordless indictment of Ronald Reagan; an uncanny peek at pimps and their prostitutes, prostitutes and their customers, in a raw and raunchy New York; the 'gorgeous ladies of wrestling' whose bodies, suffering and effort are pure 'mantertainment'; the 1984 Olympic Games, captured from behind the television, with the video camera zoomed in so far that there is often little more to see than a pair of pixelated shorts, the image of a cross in which a penis happily swings back and forth before the diver actually takes off , sticks around. It all lingers.

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*Michel Auder: Large as Life , until November 30 in De Hallen Haarlem*

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*Image: (1) Michel Adler, Polaroid Cocaine , 1993. (2) Michel Auder, Endless Column , 2011. (3) Michel Auder, Untitled (I Was Looking Back To See If You Were Looking Back At Me to See Me looking BACK At You) , 2012. (De Hallen Haarlem Collection).*