

Amidst the Moments of Michel Auder's Well-Documented Life

Photographs and films by Michel Auder at the new Jeni Abramson Gallery splash us with dreamy visions of lost, lush time

By Andrew Berardini



Michel Auder, *Remains of the Day 25, 2022*, C-Print, 20 × 15".

MARTOS GALLERY

Through October 24, 2026—Michel Auder has spent more than sixty years catching his life on camera. Among the first artists to take up portable video in the early '60s, he kept recording as it all unfurled. On the opening day of this inaugural exhibition, “Remains of the Day,” at the new Jeni Abramson Gallery he held a standing-room-only crowd with his puckishly gleeful energy, trading stories of Andy Warhol and his second wife Cindy Sherman with Hamza Walker, director of The Brick in Los Angeles. Sherman appears here in a video still from 1992 (and not without humor of her own) licking an image of Keith Boadwee’s humongous balls. A scrawl of her name breaks across the image—signed in black marker, CINDY on one testicle, SHERMAN on the other, cinched just so with a gold chain (please, don’t miss the heart dotting the i). In the center of the gallery, a large screen, casually leaning against the wall, plays a shadowy self-portrait of the artist and a storytelling Agnes Martin in a stream of moving pictures.

Auder is now past eighty, and there is something wistful in these pictures. In a damaged, discolored photo, a hunky, naked Michel models from the prow of a wooden motorboat, sheer cliffs going violet behind him. Sex is here throughout, but only of the secondhand kind. A naked young man peeks thrice from a black-and-white photo strip on a wooden table piled with pens, papers, business cards, dried flowers, a single pale-green fruit, and a candle’s starburst flare. A duo of prancing, handsome male nudes arc and squat on a raft across a computer screen mid-edit. Ilona Staller and Jeff Koons, caught mid-coitus, tangle across an

MARTOS GALLERY

open book held down by the shine of a very new, if not entirely unsubtle, hammer. In a photo of a quartet of screens, one shows riot-helmeted police amid flames, another a black-and-white couple fucking on what appears to be a chaise. So much desire is mediated, often brushing against violence. A young Peter Beard stares out of a 1975 video still, a single line of blood running from his hairline down the length of his nose, his face split between light and shadow, gaze flat, as if the wound were someone else's. Elsewhere, we see a baby doll with its lips and cheeks smudged in soot, and a small skull on a windowsill against the summer-green light. In a low-ceilinged room, a striking woman in a slouchy beanie gives the camera side-eye beside John Giorno's black panel shouting LIFE IS A KILLER in orange.



Michel Auder, *Remains of the Day 04*, 2022, C-Print, 20 × 15".

MARTOS GALLERY

Many of the other images are of late-summer youthful idylls. Sun-kissed children wander a green garden heavy with peaches, unkempt grass is strewn with windfall fruit, and the branches of the trees bow low. Kids in two more photos watch tablets. In one, a calf suckles on screen above a white plate piled with pink shrimp. In another, a boy bends to his iPad beneath a print of a pegboard hung with pistols. Artists sit on benches in the grass (including Ari Marcopoulos, Wu Tsang, and Kara Walker), rapt and laughing. A luscious green-and-red pepper curls into a pink teacup, so deliciously surreal it looks like a tropical slug, the tongue of a fantastical creature, but it's really just a pepper.

And there is, of course, the exhibition's title, most famously shared with Kazuo Ishiguro's 1989 novel *The Remains of the Day*, in which a buttoned-up butler takes a summer journey of his own, holding it together until a sweeping romanticism breaks him at the bitter end of his tale—a life unlived, the opposite of Auder's. But the Japanese British author got the title from Freud, by way of the Dutch poet Judith Herzberg, who offered up the German *Tagesreste*: the debris and residue of our waking thoughts and daily events that reappear and shape our dreams. Licked with a little menace, Auder's images layer into themselves; they have a sweep of their own romance, a wave cresting over and splashing us with dreamy visions of lost time, still lush.