

Michel Auder

G

BY GIGIOTTO DEL VECCHIO IN REVIEWS | 01 SEP 07



Michel Auder first started working with video in 1968, when he collaborated with the 'Zanzibar' group of independent filmmakers in Paris. In 1969 he produced his first home video diaries. These obsessive analyses were edited in the most basic way, if at all, enabling the viewer to observe the protagonists from a starkly intimate perspective as they go through their daily routines. Auder's entire oeuvre is characterized by this naturalistic, immediate style, which creates an intense relationship between subject and viewer. When he moved to New York in 1970 with his wife, Viva, one of Andy Warhol's muses, he turned his lens on life at The Factory, recording fragments of daily life there as well as personal experiences and encounters with people ranging from Cindy Sherman (to whom he was also married for a time) to his own daughter. His films offer an intimate portrait of life in 1970s' New York and place him at the forefront of experimental video art.

Very often Auder himself is the subject of his portraits. In 'Dope and Narcotica Series', his recent show at Galleria Fonti, he presented two video installations using a small fraction of the vast quantity of footage he filmed documenting his 30-year drug addiction. The presentation was austere, with each otherwise empty room containing only one screen and one projection: this was an installation that made no concessions to the spectacular potential of video and asked for nothing more than to be watched.

MARTOS GALLERY

In the first room was *Dope* (2006), a collage of two successive videos shown chronologically. The gesture of snorting cocaine is featured in two quite different moments: first, in the dark years of addiction, and the later, when the gesture has become a mere theatrical ploy. The first video, made in the early 1970s, is a black and white document of the artist taking cocaine, while the second video, made some 30 years later in colour, revisits the past by simulating the action portrayed in the original video but substituting the cocaine for salt. The second film doesn't dwell on the drama of the original; instead, it provides a fictional, almost humorous recreation of an activity the artist must have repeated countless times.

In the second room three videos were projected sequentially onto a column: *My Last Bag of Heroin (For Real)* (1986), *Polaroid Cocaine* (1993) and *My First Pipe of Opium since 1973* (2004). In the first film Auder positions the camera to capture himself in close-up as he smokes heroin. The drama lies in the gesture itself, certainly, but even more so in the words Auder utters: 'You know you're hooked on heroin when you start to say that each dose is the last.' *My First Pipe of Opium since 1973*, meanwhile, combines real and simulated footage in which Auder creates replicas of the implements used for smoking opium as a means of undermining the actual equipment required and thus reconfiguring his declared obsession with the drug. The climax comes with *Polaroid Cocaine*, a succession of found images combined with others photographed specifically for the work by the artist, which reflect on death, destruction and desire, accompanied by a melancholy soundtrack sung by Ingrid Caven with lyrics by Jean-Jacques Shul. Here the compulsive behaviour of the cocaine addict is replicated (and simultaneously disparaged) via the metaphor of rapidly changing images.

The videos come from a capacious archive; some are live takes, and others edited years after being filmed. This process of explicit recomposition is designed to reconsider the process by which certain situations are remembered in the light of the present. The artist's revelations of his drug use are not exhibitionist – one gets the sense that he never planned to show them when he filmed them originally. Auder does not attempt to deliver messages or to educate his viewers. He merely observes. This incredible voyeuristic curiosity enables him to seize on tiny details that might remain invisible to anyone else but which for him, and thus potentially also for all of us, prove to be essential.