

Press Release

Michel Auder: *Dreams that Money Can't Buy* Curated by Adam Szymczyk

17 September – 30 October 2021

Opening Friday 17 September 2021

I am tired, I am weary
I could sleep for a thousand years
A thousand dreams that would awake me Different colors made of tears

(Venus in Furs, Velvet Underground, 1967)

“Everybody dreams. Everybody travels, sometimes into countries where strange beauty, wisdom, adventure, love expects him.” The opening line of “Dreams That Money Can Buy” (1947), an experimental color film made in the U.S. by a German surrealist artist and Dada movement chronicler Hans Richter (with contributions by, a.o. John Cage, Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst and Man Ray) could well serve as an introduction to the work of Michel Auder, which today spans nearly six decades of continuous filming, from the earliest 16mm films, through several video formats the artist used from the early seventies, to the latest works using digital images recorded on the artist’s mobile telephone.

Auder was born in Soissons, France in 1945. At the age of 18, he was drafted into the French army and sent to Algeria, where he spent most of his time in military jail, convicted for abandoning his duties. Upon return to France, he lived in Paris, trained as a commercial photographer’s apprentice and worked as photographer until he began to make his own films, including feature length “Keeping Busy” (1969, featuring Viva, Auder’s then-wife and Andy Warhol Superstar)—billed as “a film novel about what they did to keep busy,” As others kept busy making calls, posing, dreaming and hanging out in hotels, including Chelsea Hotel, the bohemian nest where Auder used to live as well when he moved to New York in 1970, he kept working, quietly and persistently recording people in their natural surroundings—rooms, studios, galleries, hangouts, rooftops, gardens, streets and beds—and turning his attention to the unclassifiable rest that is still, for lack of a better word, called “nature”: birds and butterflies, trees and flowers, skies, clouds, lightnings, snowstorms, oceans, rivers and countless other things and phenomena of this world. He also filmed broadcasts on TV screens, images on computer screens and captured intimate scenes as they played in remote windows of buildings across the street, in hotels, offices and apartments: *La Vie mode d’emploi*, life and how to use it, to quote another Frenchman’s title of a literary vivisection of a building and lives it contains.

Jonas Mekas, the founder of Anthology Film Archive and one of Auder’s few reliable supporters over many years, famously used to describe himself as a “filmer,” not filmmaker— drawing a line between his own rigorous, idiosyncratic, personal practice of filming and the organized industry of filmmaking that ultimately alienates the artists from the fruits of their work. As filmer, Auder chose intimate modes of address. Some of his favorite genres are chronicles, travelogues, diaries—epic formats that weave together various times and locations of filming to enable multiple stories to emerge: the “Mythical and Ironical Songs and Stories,” as he called his 1983 videotape subtitled “about man/nature,” which could be a concise definition of Auder’s subject matter, his open approach during filming and meticulous rendering of contents in editing process.

Auder worked in the second half of the long century of the spectacle and commodification of (analogue) image, and continued working in changing conditions of accelerated image production in digital era, the “Spectacle 2.0” of digital capitalism. From early on, the 20th century spectacle society was organized

through collective dreaming managed by cinema industry. Dreams were considered a promising speculative commodity: see, for instance, Konstantin Vaginov's "Harpagoniada" (1926), a novel about illegal trade in dreams during the Soviet New Economic Policy era in the early 1920s; Franz Kafka's "Amerika" (1927), an unfinished novel about a 16-year-old émigré exploring coldly capitalist New York, a drifter called Karl Rossmann. Another case in point is the abovementioned postwar reconstruction era film by Hans Richter about a man setting up a business of selling finest dreams to clients that have none, which was Richter's attempt to conquer the cinema by producing a possibly commercially successful avantgarde film in the U.S.—another dream, from which one awakes in someone else's. Richter's late avantgarde movie, in its grand ambitions, may remind of Auder's "Cleopatra" (1970), his only (and from the start subversively half-hearted) foray into a "regular" film production, with a cast of Superstars including, Vi va, Gerard Malanga, Ondine and others, a self-destroying portrait of decay of a contemporary Empire of dreams. "Cleopatra" remained proudly unfinished, and the production ended up in a "scandal" as private financing was cut and the copy of the film taken hostage. Dreams did not turn into money.

After this experimental demonstration of the film industry's innate incapacity to accommodate excess and improvisation, Auder remained faithful to his handheld video cameras and kept working while keeping his modest "means of production" under his own control. His exhibition at Karma International features one hundred films made between 1967 and 2021, selected by the author, arranged in alphabetical order

of titles and played as single projection in one continuous loop of approximately 40 hours through six weeks of the show, in a setting of a film salon furnished with plastic granulate carpets and vintage Monobloc chairs (both courtesy of Kueng Caputo), and Ikea sofas with faux-baroque flower patterns (selected by Dan Graham for his 2015 show at gta Exhibitions, ETH Zurich).

Those who enter, experience the dreams as they unfold before your eyes, fade away, then unravel again.

Adam Szymczyk