

Left: Aurélien Fromont
'Fisherman's Knot', 2009,
inkjet print.

Below and right: Michel
Audier, 'Rooftops and
Other Scenes', 1996



○ London

Michel Audier
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Cubitt

Looking at Michel Audier's work, I feel I am seeing through his eyes, heart and mind; it is a great privilege for someone not only to allow you inside themselves, but to have the skill to be able to show you their vision. His Cubitt retrospective spans nearly 40 years of 'video diaries'. Created from over 4000 hours of video footage, Michel's work seems to embrace his life in its entirety, intimately encompassing his family, friends, and cultural time.

Drinking too many martinis in Old Town Bar, I am telling you (Jim) that Michel Audier's friends (the Cockettes, Annie Sprinkle, Bridget Polk, Andy Warhol...) give me a headache. They never stop talking. Their voices are so loud, so screechy, senseless noise. Their useless gossip and narcissism puts me to sleep. It's amazing that so much inanity led to so much freedom and creativity. But the reason I want to write about Michel is to express how he inspires my friends and I, for us he is a hero of sorts. You said let's find what we like in his work together.

But there wasn't any time. When you said the problem is there is not enough time, if you don't have any time, I try to describe to you the essay I am reading Samuel Beckett, Proust. Proust discovers limitless time through the destruction of habit – oblique memories emerge with such clarity that past is experienced in the present. Dissolving the boundaries of time and space is epiphanic, infinite. You say, we will find our time.

Walking into Michel's London private view,

there is a complete silence. People have come to drink and chat, but mesmerized they sit for 48 minutes watching 'Rooftops', 1996; images stream by, one flowing into the next, perfect timing, delicately metaphor after metaphor transit into one another. Long silences merge into sounds. A young woman speaking amusedly about her job as a sex worker where she tells her stories about animals passes silently into an older woman hunched over walking alone down the street. A couple observed through the window, making love, she slipping on her underwear, turns into a hairy man putting a diaper onto his child. (*Sam exclaims that was her first boyfriend, recently he wrote her a letter saying she was his one true love.*) The film moves slowly, real people, real time. The shots are often close-ups, obscure views, legs, feet, food, friends, relentless voyeuristic observations of sex, revealing intimate tender gestures, closeness. This Proustian sense of seeing as if observing someone/something for the first time is renewed again and again. Is this what creates a profound sense of depth? This work is not entertaining, there is no dramatic theme, but it is utterly engaging.

Sophie and I can't stop watching 'Rooftops'.

Finally we tear ourselves away from the

film, running into Andy at Madison Park.

He says Michael Jackson has just died,

Farrah Fawcett too.

I'll prove to you that there is nothing called John modern, there's nothing as the 70s, nothing with the 30s, it's all just now ... and when you're dead you don't know anything about it. So you see times haven't changed.

Brigid Polk

Drifting in and out of sleep watching Michel's lengthy 'Chelsea Girls with Andy

Warhol', 1971–6, Andy, Viva and Brigid become present to me in a way that makes me feel I am at home with my friends. I feel akin to this aimless sense of timelessness and love, the queer surrogate family that Michel has captured.

Last night passed out on Jay's couch, where we have shot so many scenes, talked about Warhol so many times, intermittently I awake: Jay is wrestling the dog; Lia and Jay are pretending to fuck; the BeeGees are on youtube

Michel creates films by traversing time – constantly surfing through the footage he has shot over the years, re-editing, reconstructing, reusing images within different contexts to divulge new meanings. He calls his method 'moving poetry'. My favourite film is 'Made for Denise', 1978. A voiceover (sounding like William Burroughs) narrates:

'two lovers sat on a park bench with their bodies touching each other holding hands in the moonlight there was silence between them so profound was their love for each other they needed no words to express it and so they sat in silence on a park bench with their bodies touching holding hands in the moonlight... how much do you love me John she asked he answered how much do I love you count the stars in the sky measure the waters of the ocean with a teaspoon number the grains of sand on the sea shore, impossible you said?'

I watch this again and again. I need to watch this again and again. The first images show a man's hands tenderly wrapped around a photo of a pretty woman – he is touching her, he is projecting his love towards her, she has left him. He (Michel) is making a video to leave with her concierge to say goodbye to plead with her. The next sequence shows buildings collapsing. The soundtrack is Philip Glass, mixed with video interference (like the poltergeist) forming perfected editing rhythms... a voice chants 1234 123456 2345678, the clock begins to tick, delicate flowers, a bowl of fruit, a motorcycle skids the man is falling 'he's dead he's run over!!' cries the soundtrack. I feel sick, like I've been kicked in the stomach. The titles are swiped away. Nothing.

Michel never heard from her again. I try to imagine receiving a masterpiece love letter.

'There is so much pain in my life and so much joy in it. What keeps me alive is that I think everyone is going through some struggle.... It's like usually you eat you get laid you're worried about money you have money you're happy you're sad you cry you laugh you have more sex – if you're lucky – and then you know there's nothing left in life that's what it is.' Michel Audier

Ellen Cantor is an artist