

NOWNESS

Truth, Auder?

Michel Auder was a video artist before the term even existed. Beginning in the late 60s, Auder invented an autobiographical film style for which there was no outlet and less patronage. With the advent of innovative art spaces like [The Kitchen](#) in mid-70s New York Auder's work found a home. But it is only now in these digital diary days that we can appreciate just how influential that work has been—a fact evident from Andrew Neel's film with Auder, *The Feature*, a fictionalized biography that incorporates elements from 5000 hours of Auder's films as well as new footage, an excerpt of which we show here. We caught up with the artist as he was putting the final touches on his show *Keeping Busy: An Inaccurate Survey* at the [Zach Feuer](#) Gallery.

How is the show coming along?

Almost ready. [Taking the temperature of a nearby television, and disapproving] Technology!

It's supposed to make everything easier.

Not yet.

Why a survey in 2010?

It makes sense. People think they know my work but they haven't really seen it in an overview. I have more shows in Europe.

So much of your autobiographical-ish work seems to anticipate what the kids are doing now with vlogs and video diaries.

Totally. I used video "reality" before it was coined. I did what television does,

presenting it as reality when of course it's not reality at all. It's a little bit like Jonas Mekas's work, which is a little more traditional—he tells a story about his life. I use my life as a model—both fictional and realistic.

When you look back, how do you tell what was real?

I'm not interested. I'm telling stories about how I feel about the world around me, the way I see it.

Which is like how memory works anyway.

Yeah. It is more like being a writer than a filmmaker in a way, because I use my own memories. Most writers, even if it is fiction, base it on their experiences.

How many millions of upgrades in technology have you gone through since your first Sony Portapak?

I follow technology. I started to work reel-to-reel and then went into some videocassette, then video-8, then mini-DV... As the technology changed I adapted and always got the [lowest] common denominator. They made it smaller so that people could buy them—they weren't for professionals.

So, now that everyone can make film, everyone is a filmmaker.

Exactly.

How do you feel about that?

The more, the better.

Does it raise the bar of the medium?

It changes the viewpoint, the aesthetic, the interest of people, therefore they become more interested in my films because I am making my own films without using the principle of filmmaking. I just take somebody crying, somebody saying something, mix it together and make a story. I don't like to hire actors.

Using real people, do you ever cross a personal, private line into voyeurism?

I don't think I use voyeurism. I don't put people in jeopardy to expose themselves. I put my own self into these things, knowingly. I'm not perfect, so what I am doing is exposing the imperfection of the world. I'm just using me as an example about our culture.

Before the Kitchen brought video into the art world people were telling you not to do video. Looking back on that now do you feel...

Vindicated?

Yeah.

I never had that feeling of vindication. That's what I did. In the first ten years of video—1970 to 1980—my point was to make movies and put it on film to show them. Television didn't want them because the signal was too weak (now people have their camera phone footage on TV). It never worked out. I could never find the money to do it. I'm convinced I was doing something interesting. I became an artist later, in the late 70s. My last film was *Cleopatra* and then I gave up and went into video and I closed everything to communicate with that system. And the tools came—you can make a movie every day.

Well, that's liberating. And it must be satisfying to look at so much stacked up in this show.

It's nerve-wracking. But as the title says [*Keeping Busy: An Inaccurate Survey*] it is inaccurate because I have so much more.