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Leigh Ledare at the Box, Michel Auder at Kayne Griffin Corcoran

By **Andrew Berardini**

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PHOTO BY FREDRIK NILSEN



Pornography and other items collected by Leigh Ledare comprise his *Double Bind* at the Box.

PHOTO BY KAYNE GRIFFIN CORCORAN



Michel Auder documents his life in *48 Hours in 8 Minutes*.

Neither Leigh Ledare nor Michel Auder makes art for the complacent. With current exhibitions on opposite sides of the city, the two artists use reality — often their own lives — to subtly creep through desire and fantasies, the instability of meaning and the permeability between the fictional and the real. This is compelling, uncomfortable material. I have seen both men naked and in compromising positions, and in one case, his mother, too.

At Kayne Griffin Corcoran, Auder exhibits 40 years of documenting and shuffling an unlikely life. It would be easy to reduce Auder to his biography if only because he has such a lively one. From being drafted into the French military in Algeria, through an early marriage to Warhol superstar Viva and time around the Factory, his longtime drug addiction, a later marriage to artist Cindy Sherman — all the time Auder kept his camera rolling.

After purchasing the first commercially available, easily portable camera in 1969, Auder began documenting his life. It is this decision, and what he did with the footage, that makes Auder extraordinary.

The footage can be raw, incredibly intimate, metaphysical, often uncomfortably and voyeuristically so. The camera doesn't look away or judge. It merely records. Thus his video work always has simultaneously a closeness and a distance, as if he, like the viewer, regards his life with deadpan clarity, unsentimental humor and play.

The word *document*, however, implies some relationship with fact that I'm never sure Auder really cares for. (His feature-length 2008 film, *The Feature*, made with Andrew Neel,

begins, "This narrative is not a true account.") What Auder documents could be in reality television, elegantly recut to dramatic and strange effect. It can be his lovers and his family; it can be, as in one of his more famous videos, *My Last Bag of Heroin (For Real)* (1986/1993).

In *La Plage/L'Opium* (1967/68-2009), on view in the gallery, a split screen showing a lugubrious beach trip on one side and opium-taking on the other has an ethereal quality, as if seen through a

gossamer scrim.

The most transgressive/fascinating video in the exhibition (which has a miniretrospective aspect to it) is Auder's most recent, culled from an archive always open for reassembly. *Untitled (I was looking back to see if you were looking back at me to see me looking back at you)* (2012) consists of numerous shots of Auder aiming his camera into other people's windows: sweaty couples in flagrante, many people eating dinner alone, a duet of televisions with the same picture in the same location on different floors, men and women undressing, admiring or surveying their bodies. All these lives play out desperately, separately, with the sound of the distant traffic, and the cameraman's life back at us on the window glass, his daughter playing alongside him, as music tinkles intermittently in the background. This reflection creates a complex interior cycle, resulting in an uncomfortably intimate, morally complicated masterpiece of video montage.

Both the uncomfortably intimate and the morally complicated are central to the work of Leigh Ledare also, currently on view at the Box in its new location in the Arts District downtown. Over the last four years, Ledare has been at work on three major projects, two that are central here and a preceding one that is only touched upon but deeply informs the other two.

For that earlier project, Ledare had long been documenting his unusual relationship with his mother, which has a level of sexual, physical and emotional intimacy that transgresses social norms. His mother's story, from *Seventeen* magazine model to blue-movie actress, documented in previous exhibitions, reveals a powerful, complicated woman, shown most revealingly here in *The Shoulder* (2008). In this video, a caustic interview with his mother leads to her acting grief, then to real grief, as she weeps profusely on her son's shoulder.

Though other aspects of Ledare's body of work involving his mother are on view, as well as a series of illustrated personal ads, the central work in the exhibition, titled *Double Bind* (2010), involves Ledare's ex-wife, Meghan Ledare Fedderly. The premise is as follows: Many years after Ledare's divorce, the artist invited his ex-wife on a trip to a cabin in the woods, sleeping in separate beds, to photograph her over the course of a few days. Before they were scheduled to leave, his ex-wife remarried. Ledare and his ex-wife proceeded with the trip. Two months later, his ex-wife replicated the same trip with her new husband, who also documented her and their time, delivering the undeveloped film to Ledare.

Installed in its self-contained room constructed in the center of the main gallery, the work consists of these two separate archives of more than 1,000 images (Ledare's displayed on black matte, her new husband's on white matte), and collaged by Ledare along with pornographic and popular ephemera from the artist's collection.

The whole project prompts the same initial discomfort of Ledare's work with his mother, as if some unspoken social/moral code has been violated, but what is most interesting here is the shifting meaning. In Ledare's images, his ex appears emotional, standoffish, the smattering of nudity almost rude, while with her new husband she smiles openly, her attitude and appearance completely shifted. The person, the setting, the scenario are almost identical, except for the difference of the photographer; the subject's different though equally intimate relationship with both creates a somewhat discomfiting after and before of matrimony.

Like *The Shoulder*, where playacting shifts to the real, here what is at once a simple construct becomes emotionally authentic. As with Auder's work, the camera and the collage create a necessary distance from otherwise emotionally raw situations. It goes from real to imaginary to real again,

flowing back and forth between fiction and nonfiction, from the interior to the exterior. As both Auder and Ledare meaningfully attest, it is a space that is difficult and dangerous, though necessary, to traverse.

Michel Auder's work is at Kayne Griffin Corcoran, 2902 Nebraska Ave., Santa Monica, through May 19. Leigh Ledare's work is at the Box, 805 Traction Ave., dwntwn., through April 21.