

Introducing the intimate films of Ute Aurand

By

Erika Balsom

(...) Many of Ute Aurand's films take as their titles the names of people close to the filmmaker, and that's not incidental. Hers is a cinema of intimacy, populated by friends and family, daily experience forms the basis for a practice rich in lyrical beauty. I consider it amongst the most compelling work in experimental cinema today.

Unlike many contemporary artists using the moving image, Aurand works within the artisanal tradition, shooting and editing her 16mm films alone. She favours responsive handheld camerawork and a distinctive editing style that is at once energetic, rhythmic and tender. Though this process may be solitary, it is never selfinvolved; rather, Aurand's films are marked by a disarming openness. Even when working far from home – in Japan for *Young Pines* (Junge Kiefern, 2011), in the United States for *To Be Here* (2013) – Aurand is a traveller not a tourist. She may not know personally the students of Mount Holyoke College who appear in *To Be Here*, but her empathy with them is palpable and moving.

Aurand's interest in the small moments that give meaning to human relationships is perhaps best exemplified by her innovative approach to portraiture. Most often, portraiture tends to produce a likeness of the sitter at one particular time. Moving image portraiture, however, promises the ability to disrupt this particular moment and depict duration and change in a way that's unavailable to other media – and this is a promise Aurand fulfills in spades. In works such as *Hanging Upside Down in the Branches* (Kopfüber im Geäst, 2009) and *Susan* (2012), she films her subjects over long periods of time, even years, creating a specifically cinematic form of portraiture.

The expanses of time Aurand spends with her subjects are telescoped throughmontage so as to bring together disparate glimpses of changing lives. Even when the passing of time emerges as a central concern – as in *Hanging Upside Down in the Branches*, in which the filmmaker reflects on her own childhood and the death of her parents – Aurand's films do not dwell in melancholy, but rather delicately register how our relationships to those around us develop and change over time. She shares with us the feeling that though time's arrow may bring loss, it is also time that brings tenderness, care, and complexity to our lives.

Erika Balsom is the author of 'Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art' (Amsterdam University Press, 2013) and a lecturer in Film Studies and Liberal Arts at King's College London

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