



FEATURE

Introducing the intimate films of Ute Aurand

By Erika Balsom
7 February 2014

Ahead of Tate Modern's upcoming film series, *To Be Here: The Films of Ute Aurand*, Erika Balsom considers the work of a film-maker you really should know - Ute Aurand

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Ute Aurand, *Young Pines*, 2011, film still Courtesy the artist

*A key figure in the alternative film culture in Berlin from the 1980s onwards, the German experimental filmmaker Ute Aurand is an exemplary contemporary proponent of 16mm filmmaking, working in the intimate tradition of diary filmmakers such as [Jonas Mekas](#), [Marie Menken](#) and [Margaret Tait](#). Her acclaimed films have shown at festivals and museums around the world. An upcoming Tate season celebrates her films including her latest work, *To Be Here* (2013), that premièred at the New York Film Festival last year*

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 in which 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

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[To Be Here: The Films of Ute Aurand](#)

Friday 21 February 2014 – Saturday 22 February 2014

The playful and poignant films of German filmmaker Ute Aurand, a key figure in Berlin's experimental film scene since the 1980s, emerge from her intimate relationship with people and places

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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 self-involved; 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 through montage 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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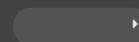
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To Be Here: The Films of Ute Aurand

Tate Modern

Friday 21 February – Saturday 22 February 2014

£5, concessions available



Ute Aurand
to be here 2013, film still
Courtesy the artist

The playful and poignant films of German filmmaker Ute Aurand, a key figure in Berlin's experimental film scene since the 1980s, emerge from her intimate relationship with people and places. Drawing on traditions of the diary film, feminism and artisanal practices, her handcrafted 16mm films are filled with joy at the small details of life – from observations of landscapes to friends filmed over many years. Her exuberant films reflect on memory as much as they celebrate the here and now. These screenings presented by the artist will highlight the range and breadth of Aurand's filmmaking.

Curated by George Clark, Assistant Curator Film, Tate Modern

Tate Film is supported by Maja Hoffmann / LUMA Foundation

With additional support for *To Be Here: The Films of Ute Aurand* the Goethe-Institut London

Events in this series

[Ute Aurand 1: to be here](#)

Friday 21 February 2014, 18.30 – 20.30

[Ute Aurand 2: Berlin Babylon](#)

Saturday 22 February 2014, 16.00 – 18.00

[Ute Aurand 3: Young Pines](#)

Saturday 22 February 2014, 19.00 – 21.00

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FILM

Ute Aurand 1: to be here

Tate Modern, Starr Auditorium

Friday 21 February 2014, 18.30 – 20.30

£5, concessions available

Part of the series [To Be Here: The Films of Ute Aurand](#)

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Ute Aurand, *Lisbeth* 2012, film still Courtesy the artist

Ute Aurand has established herself since the 1980s as a key filmmaker in the personal or diary tradition of Margaret Tait, Jonas Mekas and Marie Menken, creating intimate and responsive films that capture fleeting moments, glimpses and snippets of life around her. This opening screening features a selection of recently acclaimed films combining poetic portraits and studies of place. As Ute Aurand has stated 'filming portraits allows me to emphasize private gestures and moments beyond narration and documentation. Sometimes I collect footage for years before deciding to edit a portrait, [like] *Susan* or *Hanging Upside Down in the Branches*, then again a portrait like *Lisbeth* was filmed only on two occasions and edited shortly afterwards.' Together with these is *Zu Hause* a self-portrait and her ambitious work *To Be Here* 2013 a free-wheeling exploration of North America, drawing on footage and experiences from New England with the all female Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts to New York and the Hopi reservation in Arizona.

Programme

Susan + Lisbeth

Ute Aurand, Germany 2012, 16mm, colour/black & white, sound, 7 min

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Hanging Upside Down in the Branches / Kopfüber im Geäst

Ute Aurand, Germany 2009, 16mm, colour/black & white, silent, 15 min

To Be Here

Ute Aurand, Germany/USA, 2013, 16mm, colour/black & white, sound, 38 min

At Home / Zu Hause

Ute Aurand, Germany 1998, 16mm, colour, 2.50 min

Followed by a conversation with the artist

Programme duration 63 min

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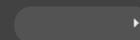
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Ute Aurand 2: Berlin Babylon

Tate Modern, Starr Auditorium

Saturday 22 February 2014, 16.00 – 18.00

£5, concessions available

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Ute Aurand & Ulrike Pfeiffer, *OH! The Four Seasons* 1988, film still
 Courtesy the artists

These films celebrate the alternative film culture in Berlin that emerged in the 1980s. Ranging from the joyous *OH! The Four Seasons* (1988) featuring a series of improvised performances with Ulrike Pfeiffer in Berlin, Paris, Moscow and London to *Bärbel and Charly* (1995) a portrait of fellow filmmakers ranging from a re-enactment of *Singing in the Rain* to the excitement of putting on screenings at Berlin's Babylon cinema in Kreuzberg. Aurand's first film *Deeply Absorbed in Silent Conversation* 1980 presents an introspective portrait of the artist in Berlin, and marks the beginning of her evolving visual style while *Detel + Jón* (1988-93) is a playful portrait showing life in the city and in Iceland filled with happiness and love. The text by Jonas Mekas that he reads at the start of *OH! The Four Seasons* (1988) sums up the exuberant and inventive nature of these films "Improvisation is, I repeat, the highest form of concentration, of awareness, of intuitive knowledge, when the imagination begins to dismiss the pre-arranged, the contrived mental structures, and goes directly to the depths of the matter."

Programme

Bärbel and Charly

Ute Aurand, Germany, 1994 16mm, colour/black & white, sound, 35 min

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With Bärbel Freund and Karl Heil

Deeply Absorbed in Silent Conversation / Schweigend ins Gespräch vertieft

Ute Aurand, Germany 1980, 16mm, colour/black & white, sound, 8 min

Detel + Jón

Ute Aurand, Germany 1988/93, 16mm, colour/black & white, sound, 23 min
With Detel Aurand and Jón Sigurgeirsson

OH! The Four Seasons / OH! die vier Jahreszeiten

Ute Aurand and Ulrike Pfeiffer, Germany 1988, 16mm, colour, sound, 20 min

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Ute Aurand 3: Young Pines

Tate Modern, Starr Auditorium

Saturday 22 February 2014, 19.00 – 21.00

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Ute Aurand, *Young Pines*, 2011, film still Courtesy the artist

Ute Aurand's filmmaking is often inspired by a deep relationship to place. *Young Pines* 2011 was filmed on various trips to Japan where Aurand captures distinct areas of the country from Yokohama, Kyoto to Tokyo prior to the nuclear meltdown of Fukushima, which occurred while Aurand was in the midst of editing her film. The film explores the relationship between culture and nature, a concern present throughout Aurand's work from the *At the Sea* 1998 made on the car-free German island of Hiddensee, with a soundtrack by Japanese filmmaker Utako Koguchi to *Half Moon For Margaret* 2004 that combines a dizzying array of footage from a lunar eclipse to family celebrations inspired by the work of Scottish filmmaker Margaret Tait (1918-1999). The screening will open with Tait's 1955 film *The Leaden Echo And The Golden Echo* an inspired response to Gerard Manley Hopkins poem of the same name, a film about youth and beauty as well as the impermanence of all things.

Programme

The Leaden Echo And The Golden Echo

Margaret Tait, UK 1955, 16mm, colour, sound, 7 min

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At The Sea / Am Meer

Ute Aurand, Germany, 1998, 16mm, colour, sound, 3 min

Half Moon For Margaret / Halbmond für Margaret

Ute Aurand, Germany 2004, 16mm, colour, silent, 15 min

Junge Kiefern/Young Pines

Ute Aurand, Germany/Japan 2011, 16mm, colour/black & white, sound, 43 min

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