

OIL PAINTING AND WATERCOLOURS

Sometimes I don't like the word "DOCUMENTARY".

"-ARY" is fine because you can put whatever you like in it, but "DOCUMENT" sounds like papers, identity papers (i documenti in Italian). Even in French, we have the impression that great nobility is reaching the level of papers, of "documents", when we hear, for example, "This documentary is extraordinary! It's a real DOCUMENT!"

But what I love about documentary filmmaking is the absence of paper. Not being obliged to write the film before making it – or very little – three or four pages maximum (and the ideal, for me, is to write them while filming is in progress or even after it has finished). I like to film directly, without any orders other than my own, so I have the impression of having a chance to see what I want to show, without too many 'systems', without too many brilliant ideas that I cling to when I don't dare let myself be overwhelmed by what I'm filming. The ideas and the direction come from the act of filming, not the other way round. In fact, quite simply, what I love about documentaries is improvisation. The more absolute it is, the more extraordinary I find it. You must practise a lot, like acrobats. You need to start your movements over again every day, work on them to find the balance and the imbalance, and you must feel the thread on which you are walking without stopping, so that you can contemplate and describe the emptiness below. This thread is an idea (just one), in other words a place, a feeling, something abstract and permanent.

To shoot like that, with film, you need to either be very well known or very patient. Desperately so. Because you spend your life writing ideas for projects, notes of intent, drafts, then reworked drafts, then scripted drafts, and this consumes more and more paper and time...Only to end up in an office facing someone who gives you tricks you into believing a false good idea.

Then there's the second choice, watercolours: VIDEO. It's cheaper and much despised, but for acrobatics, there's nothing like it.

Of course, once the video film is finished, they call it a "show", which is broadcast once (if all goes well) on TV (incredibly early or very late).and then it's over. The cultural networks, the art cinemas, the cultural centres, etc. still believe that video is only for sex shops, and as they are very upstanding people, they don't want to hear about it. For them, video isn't even watercolour, it's simply cheaper **THUS** less beautiful.

But there's a definite advantage to using a despised tool: they leave you alone. You can shoot for longer, in days and minutes. No one comes to the shoot, no one looks at the rushes, everything is immediate, so you don't have to pay attention. You can erase and start again.

You're smaller than what you're filming, which is very important: you don't impose your social status on the cinema. **THEREFORE** it's perfect, all you have to do is... But many people stop there, afraid. Just because we don't impose (on others) doesn't mean we shouldn't impose on ourselves? Why not? On the contrary. Filming on your own requires great persistence, slow and relentless, a persistence to transform time. VIDEO: I see. Present tense. This present tense of the video is not

always transformed into PRESENCE. Presence of the person or thing being filmed. We often see the video machine producing automatic present tense in pure loss. "I'm filming, therefore it's true". What? Nothing. The camera, perhaps? A machine. The image is then too bright, it creates a hole in the present: it's useless. You're filming live...boredom, and we want to escape.

We need something to help us cope with the present, something which is in the process of happening, of arriving, of forming. Something that will take us into the future, where we can look back on what we filmed as a past, a compound past. This past is a strange, emblematic past in which the event that took place has a theatricality that resembles destiny. So this event can no longer be undone, and it is cemented in the past that makes history and stories. And it's fascinating to now see in a film a story that took place then.

This presence, which is so difficult to capture in order to carry it into the future, is, in my view, what painters are looking for. Modestly. To paint the ordinary of each day, every day, you need to be a bit like the painter who, before clearing the breakfast table, suddenly looks at it as something ELSE, as a narrative of life, as something that radiates from the present and exceeds it. So before doing the dishes, he starts painting, trying to capture this excess that he saw for a moment. Which he loses, which he finds again, which he succeeds or fails in catching so that it once again radiates a tiny bit. What, exactly? things, people in their absolute otherness, opaque as the matter on which we crash one day and die.

Claire Simon on 5 May 1993