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Eric Baudelaire: Unfinished Business French artist takes inspiration from the other Michelangelo

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BY DAVID BALZER May 26, 2010 21:05

EDITORIAL RATING:

To June 5. Tue-Sat noon-5pm.
Gallery TPW, 56 Ossington.
416-645-1066.
www.gallerytpw.ca.

There's no mistaking French artist Eric Baudelaire, currently showing at Gallery TPW, for anything other than a post-structuralist. On the broadest level, his work – frequently photo-based video pieces and multimedia installations – hovers above existing social and cultural texts, exploring the seemingly endless ways in which meanings shift and can be altered. As is to be expected, it's playful, coy, circuitous, intellectual stuff – and thus not for everyone. But the show is packed with ideas and, atypically for an artist of Baudelaire's sensibilities, often brilliantly romantic.

The title is "Unfinished Business," which, one assumes, stems from Italian modernist filmmaker Michelangelo Antonioni, the direct influence behind many works in the show, and whose uncompleted screenplays are collected in a volume bearing that name. The preliminary, eponymous piece is a stack of books, including that one, with the same title – everything from fantasy lit to self-help – and a piped-in soundtrack in which a woman reads the last line of each. It's a perfect, Beckettian introduction to Baudelaire's interest in futility and the slipperiness of narrative. For Baudelaire, endings in art can only be like an ouroboros – a serpent eating its own tale.

The most engaging illustration of this in the show is *The Makes*, which comprises collages and a video – 26 minutes long but, unfortunately, looped with *Sugar Water* (pictured), 72 minutes of a posterer in a ghost Parisian metro station filling an ad frame with a series of connected images. (Pray you get to the gallery at the right time, or [watch *The Makes* online on UbuWeb.](#)) For this critic, it is Antonioni who makes *The Makes*. In the collages, Baudelaire tears out passages about prospective films, never completed, from another of the director's books, *That Bowling Alley on the Tiber: Tales of a Director*, and pastes them alongside old Japanese film stills that loosely mirror the events of those passages. Antonioni's descriptions are exquisitely written, and there are lights above the collages, which, hauntingly, turn off intermittently in alternation with those above adjacent graffitied photographs.

In the film component, a nod to another director, Jean Eustache, and his short *Les Photos d'Alix*, real-life critic Philippe Azoury plays a non-existent critic discussing these non-existent films from Antonioni's non-existent "Japanese period." It's funny and occasionally touching: there are some beautiful inventions, particularly a tale about a late-life, paralyzed Antonioni's erotic peccadilloes. Of course, it's nowhere near as good as a real Antonioni film. And that's as it should be: Baudelaire's work is equal tribute and dissection, an ode to the self-perpetuating, "unfinished business" of one of the last century's most massive creative minds.

» EMAIL DBALZER@EYEWEEEKLY.COM; TWITTER [@DAVIDBALZER](https://twitter.com/DAVIDBALZER)

Email us at: LETTERS@EYEWEEEKLY.COM or send your questions to EYEWEEEKLY.COM
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