

## Eric Baudelaire

ELIZABETH DEE GALLERY

Any number of artists have fetishized the tropes of cinematic fiction. Consider the prestidigitations of, for instance, Gregory Crewdson, Charlie White, or Francesco Vezzoli. The young Eric Baudelaire could be considered another, though his sober political aims place him on a different trajectory. (In this regard, Jeff Wall's work is perhaps more resonant.) Baudelaire often takes pleasure in Hollywood verity, but he uses the artificial setting of his photographs and videos as a means to explore the production and reception of images in the wake of war and catastrophe. Simulation, both as topic and technique, is a fixation for the artist.

Baudelaire first appeared at Elizabeth Dee Gallery in a small group show last November, in which he presented *The Dreadful Details*, 2006, a large, lush photographic diptych portraying the gruesome aftermath of a battle. The scene was a memorable tableau vivant, a condemnation of clichés of war imagery and theatrical modes of media representation. In "Circumambulation," the artist's New York solo debut, he included a pile of posters quoting Leonardo da Vinci's instructions on the proper method for painting a battle. An evocative set of stage directions, Leonardo's exhortations ("And if you make any one fallen, you must show the place where he has slipped and been dragged along the dust into blood stained mire . . .") here seemed an obvious allusion to *The Dreadful Details*, establishing a noble historical lineage for that work.

The center of "Circumambulation" was another staged reflection on the mediation of violent imagery: a seventy-two-minute high-definition video projection titled *Sugar Water*, 2006—its title a reference to Henri Bergson's example of sugar dissolving, which the philosopher used to illustrate his categorical division between space and duration. The work opens on an empty, nondescript Parisian Métro station. On the wall hangs a large advertisement frame containing a solid chroma-key blue poster. The frame is sandwiched between two sets of tiles spelling out the station's name: "Pte. d'Erewhon"—an anagram for "nowhere" and a reference to Samuel Butler's dystopian novel. A man in blue work clothes descends the stairs carrying a ladder and supplies and crudely wheat-pastes sections of an image across the blue surface. Subway passengers arrive—everymen in every sense of the word. Although the camera's perspective omits the train, sounds and the movement of passengers signal its coming and going.

Nothing else *happens*, per se, though it soon becomes apparent that the question of what constitutes "happening"—and how an event is narrated and disseminated—is the video's subject. The first image applied to the advertisement space shows a car parked on an anonymous Parisian street. The worker then obscures the original image by applying another of the same car exploding. Several other pictures follow—of the car on fire, then charred. (The images were created digitally, and there is no apparent damage to the area surrounding the car.) The train passengers—actors who reappear throughout the video—are largely oblivious to the dramatic narrative unfolding behind them.

The "event"—such as it is—is held in abeyance, unfolding in fits and starts according to the hand of the anonymous laborer. In *Sugar Water*, the artist functions as a cog in the system of mechanical reproduction, while the staccato, subliminal interruption of advertising—capitalism's art par excellence—operates as a metaphor for our fragmented and ineffectual attempts to narrate terror. Warhol's "Death and Disaster" series may have laid the track, but in stressing the durational aspect of the image, Baudelaire's polysemic parable is a welcome addition to the dialogue.

—David Velasco

Eric Baudelaire, *Sugar Water*, 2006, still from a color video, 72 minutes.

