

A strong initial workshop idea, several types of camera and a long-term commitment: these are the preconditions established by Franco-American artist and filmmaker Éric Baudelaire, the recipient last year of the prestigious Prix Marcel Duchamp, for the making of his new feature. He shaped the project with Dora Maar school in the Parisian suburb of Saint-Denis, and with a group of 21 middle schoolers, who showed both spectacular commitment and a truly free spirit during the four years of filming.

Although the overarching rules governing the film's structure are deliberately made evident, Baudelaire has created a work from which emerge varied and surprising frames of reflection that intertwine throughout. The film offers rich perspectives on the complex relationship between students and current events (individually and collectively, how did they experience the terrorist attacks that took place in Paris in 2015?) and questions their relation to the image (including their own), which fascinates as much as it makes us wonder what will remain of the traditional cinemagoing experience for younger generations.

Through each participant's life outside the school walls, Baudelaire also suggests a rich spatial and social cartography, a patchwork of the many situations to which we are invited: the families and neighbours we meet and the homes and intimacies we discover, which reveal both the diversity of representative family structures, pastimes and professional activities, and, more globally, the diversity within the French public school system. Baudelaire, who trained as a historian and political scientist, has crafted an experiment in film literacy, an alluring work of non-fiction filmmaking and a snapshot of today's France that is reminiscent of some of his most recent and equally absorbing projects: such as *Après* (2017), an exhibition at the Centre Pompidou exploring the aftermath of the attacks in France, and *Where are you going?* (2018), an art project considering the consequences of the Brexit referendum.

As the title of *Un Film Dramatique* suggests, however, the central thread of thoughts is a reflection on the film form. Baudelaire invites the ensemble to examine what constitutes a film and prompts them to start filming their everyday lives, urging them to break down the barriers between *watching* and *making*. The participants, who are also active spectators of their own lives, interrogate their perceptions of their own routines, and of what is recognised as having a narrative interest in the making of a cooperative film. We see the schoolchildren getting progressively more personal in the material they produce – proving the efficacy of Baudelaire's initiative, as he himself becomes witness to each participant's fragments of their life. For the students, the emancipative process of making the film establishes the keystone of a positive, reflective and (re)active relationship with the over-present image, both filmed and experienced. This bond solidifies throughout the film, as the participants gain confidence in the medium and in their capacity to navigate it an increasingly unrestricted way.

Conceptually, as a pedagogical exercise, the film seems sufficient to itself as a wholesome experiment. An external, foreign audience feels secondary, inasmuch as the intent behind the experience has been flawlessly fulfilled. However, Baudelaire and the 21 co-directors' final work is so revealing in grasping the relationship between today's youth and the moving image, between current events and the questions they raise, that it proves a revelatory and fabulously inspiring watching experience.