

Movie review: Montreal art documentary L'oeuvre des jours (The Work of Days)



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Printer Paule Mainguy and artist Louis-Pierre Bougie in a scene from Bruno Baillargeon's documentary L'oeuvre des jours. *EXCENTRIS*

L'oeuvre des jours (The Work of Days) Documentary (In French with English subtitles)

☆☆☆

Director: Bruno Baillargeon

Running time: 105 minutes

Watching Bruno Baillargeon's L'oeuvre des jours (The Work of Days) is like watching paint dry. That's not necessarily a bad thing for an understated documentary about the creative process.

Baillargeon profiles three aging Montreal artists — Louis-Pierre Bougie, François-Pierre Marange and Denis Saint-Pierre. There are no dramatic flourishes in this low-key movie, no fancy camera angles, montages or stylized evocations of the sublime.

Rather, simply, as the title implies, there is the day-to-day reality of life in the loft studio the three men share.

We watch them paint, talk and putter.

Marange is undergoing chemotherapy treatments. The most philosophical of the bunch, he loves to talk about the mysterious power of art, how it snuck up on him when he was simply a print shop technician, and how, despite a severe learning disability, he found his passion through the benevolence and patience of fellow artists working in the studio when he started out.

l'oeuvre des jours / The Works of Days



Marange speaks of the borderless appeal of art, and yearns to create work that is removed from its creator, like the ownerless beauty of nature.

Bougie spends much of his time chipping and etching away at plaques, to make prints. Though he has trouble putting his work into words, he is thankful for friends and critics who have supported him over the years, offering encouragement and often understanding his pieces better than he does.

Saint-Pierre, too, has trouble defining what he does. Asked to comment on a series of faces he has painted, he cobbles together a half-baked, self-effacing statement about creating unrelated images that someone may perhaps find interesting.

As you see, not exactly the stuff of cinematic gold here. And yet, as Baillargeon's patient film rolls slowly forward and we settle into its plodding pace, a certain poetry surfaces. The artwork of these men comes to life, magically transcending the mundane nature of their humble existence.

As they make their way up to the print shop, time is devoted to the minutiae of this often overlooked link in the chain.

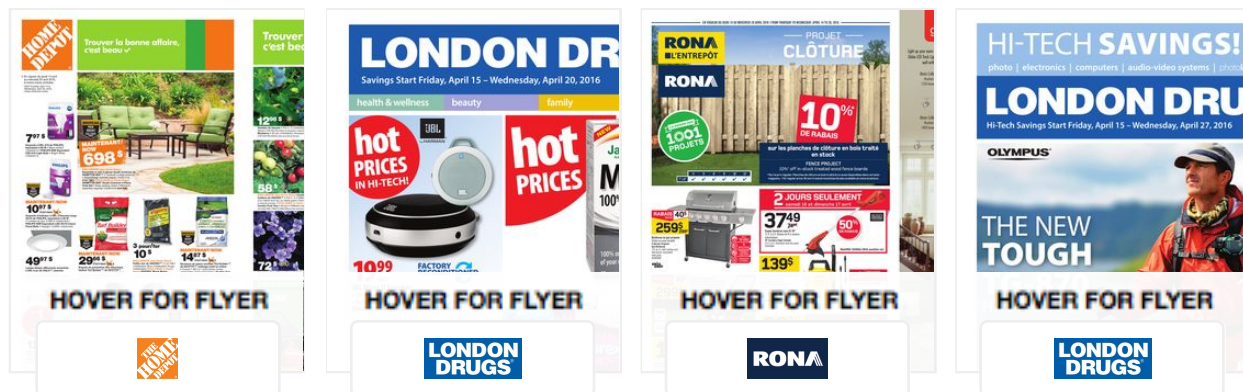
Then, just when you thought you knew where this movie was headed (if anywhere) — tragedy strikes. Death brings a new lens with which to view life. And the subsequent absence of one of the film's central subjects leaves a hole in its heart — not only due to his physical presence, which is no longer, but to his art, which (and here, Baillargeon deserves credit for not milking the moment) lingers in his wake.

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