



# BARTLEBY REVIEW

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Quail Eggs & Ferrero Rocher on Repeat •• Steffanie Ling

**Tris Vonna-Michell**

*Presentation House Gallery  
333 Chesterfield Avenue  
Through May 31*

When a slide projector whirs, its images are always accompanied by a voice, whether it is a recently returned vacationer, the art history professor's routine, or at the very least, the mechanistic sighs of slides changing. In the convention of oral accompaniment for this modest form of image sharing, the voice in Tris Vonna-Michell's installations is his own. His reading, wearing a Beat rhythm, is repetitive with hard-hitting syllables, seemingly delivered in a single breath (they are usually recorded in one take without much postproduction).

In *Postscript V (Berlin)*, you watch two slide projectors cycle through pairings of various benign photographs. These documents of consumption, rest, and landscapes of general transience carry the spirit of Stephen Shore. Whereas Shore's pictures give the

feeling of a slow, blanched America, TVM's documented objects and spaces are difficult to profile. In what begins to form as the fragments of an itinerant traveller, the reoccurring image and mention of quail eggs and Ferrero Rocher chocolates are signs of some material stability. The commercials I've seen tend to project major opulence onto this fairly garden-variety chocolate, but the images of an extended handful of its brown and gold pleated wrappers and a tray of chocolates replaced with quail eggs perpetuate some splendor in the consumption of such ubiquitous things.

*Finding Chopin: Dans l'Essex*, a film projected into the corner, is partially distorted on the right where the wall turns. The camera often pans slowly to the left giving the film's landscape shots a quality of disintegrating into oblivion, and it is nearly impossible not to think about *Angelus Novus*. TVM's voice-over is frantic, but focused on remembering. As with quail eggs and Ferrero Rocher, his memory treats the miniscule as monumental, and the monumental as suspect.

*Capital Complex* is an assemblage of photographs and audio abutted with a script set in the Modernist outpost of Chandigarh, again creating a nebula of references within the installation. It prompts the question, why is failed Modernist architecture such a common stoic stomping ground? Such smooth mono-

lithic surfaces were not meant to harbor flourish nor dust, never mind histories or memories. Do such works now compensate for this period of style so hapless in its disregard for sentiment?

TVM's work is often described as "layered" and the press release warns that "[the] exhibition calls for our active engagement"; but it doesn't mean participatory, just that the work is not for the faint of attention span. Certainly, maximal information demands our attention, and a decent effort to consider a heaping pile of disassembled narrative is not so gratuitous to ask, but achieving that concession as the main purpose or desired affect of TVM's work here seems highly unlikely.

When an artist lays their subjectivity out bare, they are relying on a combination of mediation and the viewer's own determination to parse the material. While it is dense, it does not demand or stress its own importance and retains its modesty as a personally driven project. You may be endeared, or compelled by this exhibition the way travel literature can inspire wanderlust, but no romantic escapism is to be found here, only an existential digression which will either momentarily distract with your own crisis or exacerbate it.

**Steffanie Ling**