

# UNFLINCHING LOOK AMONG THE RUINS

By LOU LUMENICK

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**Rating:** ★★☆☆  
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March 3, 2004 -- FOR better or worse, narrative filmmakers have virtually ignored 9/11 as subject matter, so we should be grateful to Etienne Sauret, a French-born New York documentarian who has turned out a couple of powerful - if at times tough to watch - pieces on the subject.

The program, running for two weeks at the Film Forum, opens with a half-hour short called "The First 24 Hours," a verité collage of indelible images Sauret collected in and around Ground Zero, beginning moments after the planes hit the World Trade Center.

Though brutal, those images pale beside the grisly reminiscences of firemen at the scene in Sauret's one-hour companion piece, "Collateral Damages."

These candidly shaken macho guys recall scenes still haunting their nightmares two years after 9/11 - a 4-foot-high pile of bodies hurled from the towers, finding faces that were ripped from heads by the violence of the collapse, and heat so intense they encountered rivers of molten steel.

One man reveals how difficult it was to deal with the constant stream of civilians showing up at the firehouse with candles and flowers at a time when some of them were so distraught they couldn't even cope with their own families.

Sauret effectively punctuates these rigorously unsentimental recollections with scenes of battered fire equipment being demolished at the Fresh Kills landfill.

The program also includes "Imagine," a 1986 music video for John Lennon's song that gains unintended poignancy because it's set against the World Trade Center towers.

## COLLATERAL DAMAGES

Poignant reminiscences. *Total running time: 94 minutes (including "The First 24 Hours" and "Imagine"). Not rated (intense images). At the Film Forum, Houston Street, west of Sixth Avenue.*

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