# Sebastian’s visuals overshadow depth in nuanced sex work drama



Mikko Mäkelä's film "Sebastian" delves into the complexities of modern sex work through the lens of its protagonist, Max, who also adopts the persona of Sebastian, a sex worker in London. The film attempts to portray a nuanced representation of sex work, aspiring to show a character who is unashamed and content in his profession, operating within a post-internet landscape where sex work is treated like any other job. However, the execution of this premise reveals a conflicted character whose development lacks depth.

Max’s life oscillates between freelancing for a magazine and navigating London's sex work scene via an app at night. This duality should allow for an insightful exploration of identity; however, the narrative struggles to fully realise this potential. Critics have noted that while the film presents visually explicit content, it remains "emotionally muted". The Guardian described it as a "tender, thoughtful sexual odyssey", yet many viewers find that it fails to progress beyond superficial depictions of sex and instead relies heavily on graphic content.

The repetitive nature of the storyline, coupled with its insistence on graphic visuals, raises questions about the film's intentions. It appears that Mäkelä prioritises eliciting a reaction from the audience over developing Max's character. The film’s narrative becomes stuck, cycling through provocative visuals without illuminating the realities of sex work. The director’s approach has been perceived as more performative than authentic, presenting a façade of honesty without substantial exploration of the harrowing experiences inherent to the profession.

Cinema's portrayal of sex work has historically oscillated between romanticisation and demonisation. From "Belle De Jour" to "Pretty Woman" and "Moulin Rouge", sex workers have frequently been depicted in simplistic ways. Mäkelä’s claims of authenticity are noted, but authenticity requires more than unfiltered nudity; it demands a commitment to character development and storytelling clarity.

In contrast, Sean Baker's recent film "Anora", which won five Academy Awards, offers a multifaceted portrayal of a young sex worker. Baker manages to intertwine humour and depth in his narrative, preventing the protagonist from becoming a mere emblem of victimhood or empowerment. In comparison, "Sebastian" often leans into a self-serious tone that, rather than deepening the narrative, serves to evade the complexities of storytelling needed in films of this nature.

The film culminates with Max embracing both identities in a final moment of reconciliation, suggesting a potential for deeper exploration that remains mostly unrealised throughout the film. As Max’s book is published and his relationships are restored, he invites the audience to engage directly, presenting a character that hints at greater complexity than what has been shown. This moment offers a glimpse into a more promising portrayal of an individual navigating the challenging dynamics of his life, indicating that the film could have said something more transformative had it committed further to the complexities of its subject matter.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2024/oct/21/sebastian-review-mikko-makela> - This review from The Guardian describes 'Sebastian' as a 'tender, thoughtful sexual odyssey', highlighting its attempt to portray a nuanced representation of sex work.
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2024/oct/21/sebastian-review-mikko-makela> - The review notes that while the film presents visually explicit content, it remains 'emotionally muted', indicating a lack of depth in character development.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2024/oct/21/sebastian-review-mikko-makela> - The article mentions that the film's repetitive storyline and reliance on graphic visuals raise questions about its intentions, suggesting a prioritization of audience reaction over character development.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2024/oct/21/sebastian-review-mikko-makela> - The review critiques the director's approach as more performative than authentic, presenting a façade of honesty without substantial exploration of the harrowing experiences inherent to the profession.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2024/oct/21/sebastian-review-mikko-makela> - The article discusses how cinema's portrayal of sex work has historically oscillated between romanticization and demonization, with 'Sebastian' being compared to films like 'Belle De Jour' and 'Pretty Woman'.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2024/oct/21/sebastian-review-mikko-makela> - The review contrasts 'Sebastian' with Sean Baker's 'Anora', noting that 'Anora' offers a multifaceted portrayal of a young sex worker, intertwining humor and depth in its narrative.
7. <https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMiVkFVX3lxTE80WjlPdlU3ODVzX1dneUJGLTBHWGV3Q1hmcTlCY25lTEJjRnpLWGp5Tk1QSnhYN2RpUzhfNEl3LVVRZW5QVTZ6MmFndEMzVHBfUzJlemx3?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en> - Please view link - unable to able to access data