



Artist Jakub Dolejs set up a model dressed as a maid, above, to stand in front of the period painting, right, of Casa Loma in 1917

The maid and the castle

Art By Numbers

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Casa Loma - Toronto's Castle, 1917 (2002), by Jakub Dolejs

In what could be a scene out of *Masquerade Theatre*, a young maid in a crisp black and white uniform looks longingly at an elegant sitting room in a baronial mansion in Jakub Dolejs' *Casa Loma - Toronto's Castle, 1917*. Without even being able to see her face you know she knows this luxury will never be hers, not the Persian carpet on the floor, the expensive vase, or the superb view out of the window radiant with daylight.

A closer look at the large-scale chronogenic photograph now at Gallery 44 reveals that the sitting room is architecturally lined up at a rather odd angle from where the maid stands. In fact, she appears to be staring at a stage set, one that's been painted rather crudely. But there's even more going on.

Dolejs, a Czech-born Toronto-based artist, has not only faked the setting, he's faked time, at least our sense of it. With *Casa Loma - Toronto's Castle, 1917*, you can't be sure if the photograph has done what photographs are supposed to do, freeze the time they're

"I'm interested in the deceptive aspect of photography," says Dolejs. "In '98, when I first did this process, I was taking pictures in my studio and I noticed something strange happening when you had someone stand in front of a painting. I use the people in the photographs as links between two worlds, between what we imagine in the painting and our 'real' world."

1 The set-like setting: "I have a vision of the final photograph that I want. I paint the backdrop and I figure out the perspective as I go. The painting is very rough. I use big brush strokes. I know how to position someone so that it all looks like the real thing."

2 Casa Loma: "I started looking at some old photographs of Toronto. It struck me how polluted the city was at the time Casa Loma was built (between 1910-1914). Everyone imagines it was an ideal period then, with steam trains, horse-drawn carriages and stuff. But it wasn't. So it was absurd for someone (Sir Henry Pellatt) to build a castle in this polluted world. You can see the smoke from the factories in the window I've drawn. Casa Loma was irrelevant. It was a publicity stunt. People still are building Casa Lomas in the suburbs. It's a much broader phenomena.

non now. And the game is a lot more visible."

3 The photograph's implied story: "She's cleaning up, moving around surroundings she could never afford. In this piece I'm not trying to criticize anyone. It's a very intimate story, about the maid who is being persecuted by someone in a way. I realize narrative is almost a no-no in art these days. It's not very popular at all. But I wanted to explore whether narrative has a place in art. Can I create something that people can relate to, something that's not just decorative? I borrowed the means to do this from the cinema where the narrative is still valid and still works."

4 The period: "I choose periods of time when things that happen are clear to us today - like the publicity stunt of building a castle. The maid is someone who would not have been photographed at the time."

Casa Loma - Toronto's Castle, 1917 is part of the Proof10 show at Gallery 44 Centre for Contemporary Photography, 401 Richmond St. W., Suite 120. It's on to Aug. 9 alongside work from Colwyn Griffith, Ritian Lee, Nicholas Pye, Kim Waldron and Balint Zsako. neerlart@thestar.ca