

Art Mûr takes us to Italy

Photos from a boat in Venice ripple with memory; and another artist toys with Old Masters in the Uffizi

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SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

Two new shows at Art Mûr transport us to Italy. Although both artists are dealing with the past, they do so in very different ways.

In the case of noted Montreal artist Ewa Zebrowski, the focus is on Venice. Venice no doubt rates, along with Paris, as one of the most painted cities in the world. Of course, Venice, for better – and for worse – has also become a museum, both with and without walls. The city is the sacred venue for countless masterpieces and for crumbling old buildings that are, in their own right, timeless aesthetic tours de force that are, ironically, quietly slip-sliding into old age, albeit one of unsurpassed grace.

What makes Zebrowski's photos, from a trip last year, so fascinatingly poignant is that they represent the city both as romantic myth and as a real place in a potentially terminal slide into oblivion. The small colour photos on view at Art Mûr, collectively titled *Vedute di venezia* (Views of Venice), tickle the eye with the hypnotic reflections of light on the canals. Artfully presented in clinical frames that recall museum display cases, they reflect a unique approach to capturing the essence of Venice.

Rather than producing the usual tourist-inventory of individual sites, the artist serves up small slices of the city. Yet it's precisely in the liberal cropping that Zebrowski conveys the notion that the real city extends far beyond any given photo – that it even reaches far beyond its own borders, in the form of memories, and memories of memories.

The water, of course, suggests how our memories end up in that mistiest of places, the swamp that is the human psyche. And a faint blur in most of the images – Zebrowski shot them from a moving boat – underlines the transience of recollections.

Of course, in real life, the more Venice fades, crumbles and sinks, the more profoundly endearing it becomes – hence its continued viability as a subject of painting. Coming across in Zebrowski's latest work is a casual intensity, a visual cocktail that mixes both anxiety and exhilaration.

Go to Venice, if you can afford it, but by all means make a trip to Zebrowski's Venice at Art Mûr.

The sense of layered memory and loss also surfaces in the seemingly old-fashioned work of Jakub Dolejs. His current show, titled *Tribune*, is based on one work by a relatively obscure 18th-century painter named Johann Zoffany.

Dolejs's work titled *The Tribune of the Uffizi* depicts a veritable convention of the greatest masterpieces, hung high and very low in an elegant museum chamber of the Uffizi, the main art museum in Florence. In the Art Mûr show, we're never

shown an exact reproduction of the Zoffany work that was the inspiration, and thus cannot know whether Dolejs's homage is accurate at all.

Dolejs, who grew up in Prague and moved to Vancouver in 1998 at the age of 23, produces work with many layers, sly visual collages of painting and photos of painting, with backgrounds and foregrounds fiercely competing for attention.

Apparently, Dolejs often works from second-hand sources like Zoffany's painting, an approach that fits in perfectly with his obvious fascination with the gaps between perception and memory, fact and fiction. Yet the works here, such as the oddly comic *Tribune Louvre Remix*, are seeded with clues as to their intentional mendacity.

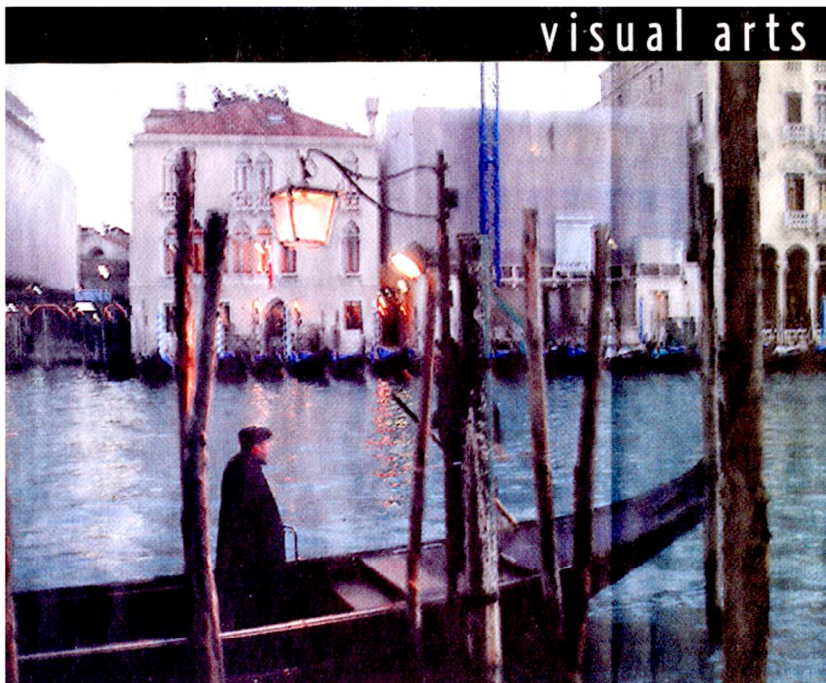
For instance, the paintings reproduced in this large work, all celebrated masterpieces, are not the

same as in another Dolejs piece allegedly focusing on the same room in the Uffizi. Another indication that Dolejs is not into straight documentation is the strange distortion of the subject matter in some of the masterpieces reproduced. For example, Titian's famous reclining Venus looks as though slightly melted down.

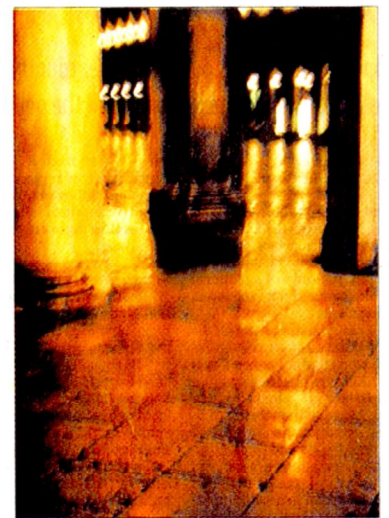
Vedute di venezia by Ewa Monika Zebrowski and *Tribune* by Jakub Dolejs remain on view at Art Mûr, 5826 St. Hubert St., until Feb. 10. Call (514) 933-0711 or consult www.artmur.com.



Jakub Dolejs's show *Tribune* features work with many layers, sly visual collages of painting and photos of painting. The lamda print pictured here is titled *Arrotino and Madonna*.



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF ART MÛR
Two photographs of Venice by Montrealer Ewa Zebrowski, part of a show called *Vedute di venezia*.



visual arts