

Tim Davies: *Drift*

9 March – 26 May 2013

National Museum Cardiff

You don't have to have visited Venice to construct an image of the city. Its architecture, canals and history have been well documented by artists and tourists alike, giving its unique topography a presumed familiarity and romantic quality that reaches far beyond the city limits. With this in mind, it seems fair to ask, is there anything new or unseen for an artist to bring to a city that has inspired countless reproductions and an impressive canon of works?

It is, perhaps, in response to the ubiquity of these mediated images that Tim Davies produced the three films in this exhibition; *Drift*, *Frari* and *Capricci*. Two of the pieces, *Drift* and *Frari*, were developed in Venice over a six-month period for the 54th Biennale in 2011, with the third being filmed for this exhibition in 2012. Rather than trying to further 'represent' the city, Davies carefully abstracts moments and spaces to create an intimate portrait of his experience of place. Identifiable landmarks are replaced by atmospheric and closely focused images that could relate to any city, yet are unmistakably routed in *this* city.

Drift shows a gentle and slow journey along the Venetian canals. As the artist's hand gently skims the water, buildings are subtly reflected in its rippling surface. *Capricci* creates movement by blending a series of still images to add an enduring quality to the lapping of waves against a man-made shore, accompanied by the distant mechanical sounds of a working city. Whilst creating quite different impressions and experiences, both films produce a sense of time passing beyond the immediate moment, of the artist as an ultimate flaneur, literally drifting across the city and temporarily intersecting with parts of its narrative.

Frari, is shown in opposition to these works and creates a darker, claustrophobic and frantic vision of the city. Using images taken whilst running up the steps of a gothic church (the Basilica di Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari), the work lurches from light to dark as the sounds of the city, tourists and church bells becomes almost unbearable until we are finally forced out into a blinding white light. Here the immediacy of experience and narrative is more distinct, yet something about the flashes of light and the snatched glimpses of the building's interior convey something of Venice's history.

Indeed, the three pieces in this exhibition seem to quietly reference the long history of artists who have taken Venice as their inspiration. The flashes of light in *Frari* in part mirror the golden light in Monet's [San Giorgio Maggiore by Twilight](#), the abstracted buildings in the rippled water are reminiscent of other works in the National Museum's collection like Sickert's [The Rialto Bridge, Venice](#). This gives a sense of consistency to Davies' work, linking it to Venice's rich history of artistic practices, but delivering a particular kind of immediacy that can only be delivered through video works.

Through these subtle references to Venice's artistic traditions, Davies' work is firmly routed in the city, but its closely focused attention provokes a sense that he is skimming the surface of Venice and presenting a distinctive, personal experience unencumbered by the dominance of past images. Rather than documenting the city, Davies uses his position as an artist to gently disrupt assumed ideas and reflect on our relationship to place; our unique but impermanent experience of a city against the relative permanence of its light, its architecture, and the waters flowing through its canals.

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