

# Tristan Tondino

Most artists are frustrated by the problem of space. We are constantly moving from one studio to another because the building has been sold, or is being torn down, or the rent went up, or there was a fire, or whatever. Many of us paint in a room in our apartments. My late father, Gentile Tondino RCA, painted for most of his life in our living room, in which there was a fold-out couch that my parents slept in. The smells of turpentine, linseed oil, pipe and cigarette smoke were something to behold. The Abstract Expressionists like Bill and Elaine de Kooning lived in unheated lofts in Soho and cold-water flats; not that I'm comparing us with them.

I have had very many studios, and some were truly fantastic. In 1998, we lost another wonderful space. In the fall of that year we travelled to Florence because my wife, portrait artist Joséane Brunelle got a small grant to study Italian for a month. I went along and every morning took a small painting kit into the streets. After her class we would meet, and I would have a small private exhibition over a glass of Prosecco. Plein Air painting has always been thrilling to me. My father taught a sketching school class for McGill Architect students and I am, in many ways, a descendent of Arthur Lismer and the Group of Seven. Like many Montrealers, I attended the Children Classes at the Museum of Fine Arts and my dad was a close friend of Lismer's and taught with him for around 13 years.



This, on the left, was the first painting I did in Florence. A lot happens when we paint in the streets. People comment on your work. It rains. There are bugs and dust. Vespas and bicycles whizz by.

On one occasion, I was painting in the *Piazza della Signoria* when a tour guide stopped with his group. He said, in English with a strong Italian accent, "This guy's bitten off more than he can chew." I laughed; he had a point, of course. That's the "Fountain of Neptune" in the foreground, Michelangelo's "David," and well, other masterpieces. It was in the streets of Florence that I began painting little paintings of sparrows with what remained on my palette at the end of a session. This was the first one.



By 2002, I was back to painting in our living room and Joséane was painting on the bathroom door in our hallway. Below right is what that looked like. That's her self-portrait; it's called "Please Hang Up and Try Your Call Again." The phone, paint, and scissors on the floor depict with humour what the problem of space is like. Using the washroom was an issue because Joséane would have to get up and move her chair whenever the need arose.



That year I decided I wanted to paint some very large paintings, so we packed up my kit and headed out to construction sites around Montreal with Beatrice our wonderful terrier.

I'd staple the canvas to the plywood wall and paint all day. I was working in oil and I would fold up the painting at the end of the day; paint on paint, which left a mirror print that I liked. I would always begin by painting the words "Artwork in Progress" and "Tableau en Cours" on each painting of that series. Some of the pieces were 20 feet long. Anyway, the point of all this is that these were outdoor paintings also.



On one occasion some guy stopped his car long enough to scream, "Get a job you loser." We laughed and Beatrice barked. Of course, we do have jobs, sort of. Most artists live like millionaires, but you know, without all that money to worry about. Our friend Mathew Cope was walking by and took this picture. That's Joséane with Beatrice looking up at her adoringly probably thinking something like, "what are we doing?" And on the right is my "Self-Portrait."



This show « Venise n'est pas en Italie » has grown out of this story of space.

Fashion designer and close friend Yves-Jean Lacasse of la maison de couture Envers moved recently to a new space at The Belgo Building on Saint Catherine Street West (372- #420). He needed a new place also. His current boutique is a lovely loft space and he suggested we do an opening.

There are two points about the show that I'd like to make. The first is philosophical. The idea of Venice being both in Italy and not in Italy relates to the creative aspect of language use. There are different conceptual frameworks involved in our understanding of both ideas. The second point is that this is a show about our story. The white and black frames are meant to be dreamlike. To imply mental imagery of my memories; the memories of my earlier work as well as my travels with Joséane.

Unfortunately, the largest works will not be exhibited because, well... there just isn't enough space.

« Venise n'est pas en Italie » opens Wednesday May 8, 2019 at 5pm at The Belgo Building, 372 Saint Catherine Street West #420 and runs until June 8, 2019.

