

The sweetness and anguish of childhood memories suffuse the “boxed” world of Dwora Fried. The works of this sensitive and original artist are showing now at the Jewish Museum of Venice until September 12th.

By Michele De Luca (translation by Erika Marina Nadir)

Simultaneous with the Biennale where the most creative, innovative and interesting international works of art are shown in the Padiglioni dei Giardini and at the Arsenale, there are also a rising number of shows that “invade” this lagoon city that open in buildings that are usually inaccessible or out-of-the-way, and therefore out of normal tourist circles.

Among these is the interesting show of the artist Dwora Fried (born in Vienna, attended Tel Aviv University,



graduated from the Avni School of Fine Arts in Israel; lives in Los Angeles since 1978). The show is in the Jewish Museum in the heart of the New Ghetto in Cannaregio. This is an important museum with a prestigious history: the Venetian ghetto during the three centuries of its existence (1516-1797) was not only an enclosure of humiliating segregation, but also a place of intense cultural production and participation in the literary life of Italian society. The

16th and 17th centuries saw not only the beginning of printing in Hebrew, with editions that made Venice the publishing capital of Europe, but also the birth of literary works and traditional religious tomes that distinguished the lagoon city in its contemporary Jewish cultural context. This history is “preserved” in the many testimonials open to the public and to academics in this lovingly well-run museum.



Important to note that it is this museum, set apart and set up for remembrance and historical reflection, that serves as the host for Fried’s show entitled “Outsider in the Box.”

The “boxed” creations in little glass-enclosed wooden cases already evoke a dioramic characteristic that seems to blend in as a “section” of this hosting museum, and the museum offers a natural “key” to understanding the works. The public is immediately fascinated by the communicative force of the works and by their provocation limned by subtle yet bitter irony.

Fried guides us inside these little “windows,” which at first glance evoke “doll houses,” saying: “Growing up Jewish in Vienna I always felt a stranger and this perspective is reflected in my art.” She adds: “this work is definitely my

most autobiographical.” It is also intentionally the most “biographical” in the way that any artistic creation beyond the conscious and unconscious intentions of the artist has an inescapable grounding in real life - that is, biography.

These works of the Austrian-American artist, like little theatrical representations (in “Vespa” 2012, there is even a little curtain), ask uneasy questions about identity, convictions, and the inanity of history. They recreate imaginary



scenes of entrapment and isolation, and narrowly enclose the interior life of the artist, daughter of a Holocaust survivor. And this small, but simultaneously unlimited, universe is populated with little figures, objects, and words that off-handedly cram together tender and anguished memories of great historical tragedies as well as of a small and intimate family world: a long-ago fragmented childhood, maybe not even lived. Apropos of this “memorabilia” that inhabit the little spaces of her “boxes,” the artist says she loves to rummage through flea markets where people sell a lot of old stuff, and dismantle the tiny tributes that held the memories of a house and of a family. Or rather: “Most of the images that I use are old photos that I took over the years or some that I found in my mother’s credenza in Vienna.” She chooses those that she

remembers from her childhood, assembling them to construct a personal pathway through her inner being. Rendering her memories “visible” and concrete, able to be seen and reflected upon by others, the “remembered” things become (to quote our cherished poet Leonardo Sinisgalli) the “things to not remember.” Because to remember, would be to be plunged into an abyss of angst and unanswerable questions.



Fried’s works are little “theatrical pieces” where dolls from the 1940s “act.” There are photographs, cameras, frames, realistic backgrounds (like the Bridge of Sighs) or merely images, playing cards, cages, and antique telephones. They bring to mind the work of Mari Mahr (born in Santiago del Chile in 1941, then emigrated first to Budapest and then to London). She used objects to make little scenes using photographs as backgrounds and then would photograph the result. She said, “my works are a fusion of the real and fantastic, even events that never happened.” Here also, Fried’s creations seem realistic and imagined, from the memories evoked by the “actors” of her little representations, blending, mixing together, and becoming indistinguishable and undecipherable: creating and ensuring, however, moments of captivating emotion.