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## Michael Roque Collins: "The Venetian Series" at LewAllen Galleries

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That Michael Roque Collins' most recent collection of paintings is titled *The Venetian Series* should come as no surprise to fans of this prolific Texas artist. Collins has long been painting lushly textured, semi-abstracted scenes redolent with the kind of dream-like, mysterious imagery that occurs as inherently romantic and indelibly European: think crumbling arches and ships caught in tempestuous seas, all rendered in richly impastoed, organic hues. LewAllen Galleries' chic, starkly modern interior provides a pleasingly pared-down backdrop for paintings full of cacophonous texture, shrouded narratives, and strange, sometimes wordlessly eerie drama. At the center of *Adrift in the Dogana* (2014) is a gondola, manned by a narrow figure cast in shadow. Surrounding the little seaman is a brilliant canopy of gold and yellow—the arched and conjoined branches of a blaze-leaved forest or the exit of a dragon's lair. Here, as in many cases, the artist captures the feeling

of being roused suddenly from a deep sleep, the mind for several seconds straddling alert and subconscious states. Other times, Collins's narrative is fragmented and obscured—like segments of stories or lived experiences from childhood, remembered decades later with only a fleeting, slippery grasp.

Collins uses densely built-up layers of paint to add weightiness to his organic

palette, a technique manifested in works like *Falling from the Ruins* (2015), a six-by-six foot view of a greenish hill, whose overgrown, loosely lined surface looks like furrowed farmland. To the right of the composition is a pair of shadowed figures, darkly cloaked and moving toward the viewer and away from a cluster of domed and columnar buildings in the distance. Perhaps the most recognizably Venetian work is *Moorings* (2013-15), a five-by-ten-foot oil-on-linen that features a row of gondolas. Their dark, slim forms provide a marvelous contrast to the fuzzily abstracted, pale golden harbor beyond; the scene is immediately evocative of the glimmering shores of Venice's Piazza San Marco.

In *Death in Venice*, writer Thomas Mann describes his main character as being drawn to the so-called Bride of the Sea in part because of "a proclivity for the unorganized, the immeasurable, the eternal: for nothingness." In Michael Roque Collins' prodigious examination of Venice, the painter captures this romantic and remote city's storied singularity, and ultimately relays his own steadfast propensity for that which is "immeasurable and eternal."

*Venetian Series - Adrift in the Dogana*, 2014,  
**Michael Roque Collins**, Oil on linen, 54¼" x 32¼"  
Photo: courtesy LewAllen Galleries

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