

Article from Winnipeg Free Press:

Two cameras, one view

A pair of former Winnipeggers living in Vancouver taking nearly identical fine-art photographs

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TWO former Winnipeggers are making waves in Vancouver as fine-art photographers who are shooting in a nearly identical style. David Burdeny and Michael Levin both graduated from Kelvin High School before initially moving on to very different careers.

But both now travel around the world taking photographs they sell for thousands of dollars per print. Both are represented by art galleries in several countries. And both have been recognized with awards and media attention.

As can be seen from the images on this page, both specialize in black-and-white landscapes and seascapes notable for their Zen-like minimalism and landscapes that are remarkably similar in style and content.

Both, in fact, have made images from the identical subject matter in different countries. The Free Press prominently featured Levin's work last month in the wake of his winning an award as fine art photographer of the year at a competition in Paris.

A few weeks before that, the magazine Canadian House & Home published a spread on Burdeny's work, drawing from the images in his 2007 book, Shorelines.

Burdeny was the first of the two to make a splash in the world of art photography.

He was already making photographs in the '90s while he took degrees in interior design and architecture at the University of Manitoba.

He moved to Vancouver in the fall of 2001 to work for an architecture firm. He devoted his spare time to shooting images of the B.C. shoreline. His black-and-white images, influenced primarily by those of American photographer Michael Kenna, make use of long exposures in conditions of poor light to "capture that which our eyes cannot."

There are a number of other photographers who also shoot long-exposure landscapes, among them David Fokos, Marc Koegel and Jason Mullins.

Burdeny had his first Vancouver exhibition at the Jennifer Kostuik Gallery in the fall of 2003.

One person who saw the show was Levin, an amateur photographer newly arrived in Vancouver from Winnipeg, where he had been in the restaurant business.

Levin contacted Burdeny, and the two ex-Winnipeggers (both of whom attended Kelvin High School a couple years apart) spent time discussing photography and even going on shooting trips together.

Levin downplays how much he learned from his more experienced friend, and Burdeny takes the high road when the similarities between Levin's photos and his own are pointed out.

"(Levin's) gallery representation and financial success have been due to his hard work and business acumen," Burdeny said in an e-mail. "I wish him luck, as it can be a challenging path, and I will continue to produce new work that, in my opinion, will always be one step ahead of his."

Levin says his photography awards demonstrate how far he has come in a short while.

"The judges of these events are well aware of the photo world," he says. "You can't pull the wool over their eyes."

The similarities in the works of the two men do not surprise the curator of contemporary art and photography at the Winnipeg Art Gallery.

"Students have always emulated their professors," Mary Reid says. "With photography, how do you copyright a landscape?"

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DAVID BURDENY

Age: 38

Education:

Master's of architecture, University of Manitoba, 1999; Bachelor's of interior design, U of M, 1993.

Photography

background: Self-taught from age 12.

First exhibition: December 2003, Jennifer Kostuik Gallery, Vancouver.

Most recent exhibition: Fall 2007, Collins Lefebvre Stoneberger, Montreal.

Publications: Shorelines, 2007.

Stated influences: Michael Kenna, Hiroshi Sugimoto, Fay Goodwin.

Quote: "I'm fascinated with the quality of light and the spatial immensity the ocean possesses."

MICHAEL LEVIN

Age: 40

Education:

Kelvin High School

Photography background: Self-taught from age 35.

First exhibition: Fall 2004, No. 4 Gallery, San Diego, Calif.

Most recent exhibition: October 2007, SNAP Contemporary Art, Vancouver.

Publications: Reveal, planned for 2008.

Stated influences: Michael Kenna, Hiroshi Sugimoto, Uta Barth.

Quote: "While many of my photographs feature water and clouds, the smooth skin of light, it is the architectural intrusions into these clean spaces that now most engages me."