

Chicago

Tom Denlinger

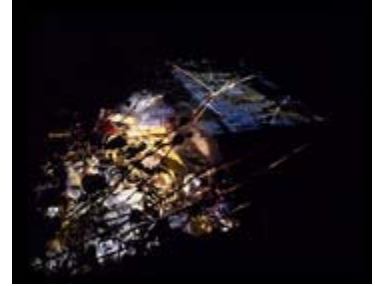
ROWLANDCONTEMPORARY

1118 West Fulton Market

May 16–June 28

Tom Denlinger's thoughtful exhibition—of photographs and a video—challenges notions of the local landscape as bland or static. Denlinger brings to the subject a keen sense of three-dimensional space, the museum context, and representations of landscape in art history. To make *Around the Art Institute of Chicago: Seurat*, 2006, Denlinger re-created in diorama form a heap of garbage entwined in leaves and branches found near the museum, covered it in plastic, projected a slide of Seurat's iconic *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of the Grand Jatte* onto and through it, and photographed the conglomeration. Doing so illuminates the debris and layers a canonized vista on top of a humble patch of land. In the video *Apparition: Salavon*, 2008, Denlinger marks a visual concordance between Chicago-based artist Jason Salavon's video *The Top 25 Grossing Films of All Time*, 2001, recently on view at the Museum of Contemporary Art, with that building's gridded facade. He sets the morphing images to the third movement of Bartók's "Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta," which was also used in the film *The Shining* (1980), and adds an eerily moody undertone. Denlinger confronts complacent viewers with a new, fractured view of the contemporary landscape that not only updates art-historical precedents both canonical and recent but also reanimates our ossified relationship to museums themselves.

— Alicia Eler



Around the Art Institute of Chicago: Seurat, 2006, color photograph, 41 x 49".

Portrait of the Artist

Tom Denlinger

We live in a broken world in which even the most planned environments—museums—do not give us respite from cultural fragmentation and disconnection. At least that is what Tom Denlinger shows us in his garishly illuminated color photographs of detritus outside the hallowed halls that he has paired with artifacts within them, showing us that nothing can ever be pristine.

Defiantly challenging New Age dogmas of fundamental unity, Denlinger has the philosophical intention of reminding us that our experience proceeds from "multiple sources" that are never fully reconciled. His art is viscerally postmodern, rather than, as is often the case, rhetorical; he is convinced that we have bought into "narratives" imposed by specialized elites that take us away from our multifarious everyday experience and try to prod us to cover over a fundamentally disordered life.

Denlinger is a warm, tolerant and generous person who does not blame the museums for attempting to make life more comfortable for us than it actually is, yet he is ready to do his bit to subvert complacency. At 52 years old and ensconced at Lake Forest College, Denlinger could retreat to safety, but he is a member in good standing of the minority of conceptual photographers who have absorbed the postmodern dictum that we can never find a simple origin for our lives, but must accept, indeed affirm, if we can, that we are thrown into a vortex of unintelligible forces. Denlinger goes so far as to say that we are all "multiple personalities," if we would only admit it, and that, if we would give ourselves the chance, we would understand that each one of us gives whatever unity to the whirl of things that we are capable of conferring.

Denlinger's images, constructed in the studio, are relentlessly aggressive, joining photographs of gleaming waste and vegetation with illegible shots of art works against deep-black backgrounds, obliterating the boundaries that we draw between life and art. In his past series, Denlinger had preserved reference to objects that we could recognize, but now he has kicked over the traces and gives us studies of wild encroaching forces on denuded cultural pretensions. It looks like Denlinger has reached the terminus of his longstanding project and he agrees that it feels that way to him; yet he adds that he believes that every series is the last one along his line, until his will to subvert penetrates even more deeply.

Tom Denlinger, "Much, Much More than Previously Imagined," shows at Rowland Contemporary, 1118 West Fulton Market, (312)421-6275, through June 28.

Michael Weinstein

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