

## arts

# Ready for his long shot

Up close, it's hard to make visual sense of Tom Deininger's new installation of found materials. So stand back 10 feet and prepare to say 'wow.'

## 'BEAUTIFUL ACCIDENTS' TOM DEININGER

Through Feb. 28  
Didi Suydam Contemporary  
25 Mill St., Newport  
(401) 848-9414  
www.didisuydam.com

BY DANIEL COMBS

"I'm cutting up a convict's ear to make highlights on my son's lip."

This statement shouldn't make sense, but after spending two hours watching Tom Deininger set up his new installation piece at Didi Suydam Contemporary Art Gallery, on Mill Street in Newport, it's easier to just nod.

The lips the 41-year-old Bristol artist is talking about lay glued to a foam board, which itself is precariously positioned on top of an old television set. Looking at the mesh, fur and shards of plastic, it's not easy to see any defined shape at all. The props seem turbulent at best. But this is controlled chaos in Deininger's world, because there, on the television set, are the dark nostrils and pouty, parted lips of Christoforo, Deininger's 5-month-old baby boy, inspiration to the installation aptly titled "Beautiful Accidents."

Perspective is the driving force behind Deininger's work. Three old cathode-ray tube TV sets are positioned on pedestals of varying height: a milk crate, a five-gallon

bucket and an old table. The set on the left shows the shadowy, deeply textured lips and nose, while each of the sets to the right displays an image of an eye. To stand 10 feet away is to see Christoforo's face gazing innocently up at you with startling intimacy.

"It's about getting these persnickety little illusions," Deininger says with a sigh and a smile. He laughs and it sounds as if he is trying to catch up with his own humor as he points to the assorted junk scattered across the floor. Only when viewed at precisely the right angle does the chaos of trash actually look like anything. When the effect is achieved, the results are stunning.

On the floor lay a toy soldier, a bent coat hanger, cut-up mug shots from the New Bedford Police Department archives, buttons, bottle caps, film canisters and fuzz ripped from the rug underfoot. This is an eye, a dark, huge, piercing eye with no lack of animate quality. The dark shadow of junk seems to be *looking* at the small camera fixed to the underside of the nearby milk crate.

The perimeter of the other eye is built out of a gold-painted Barbie doll, a scratched-off lottery ticket, cut up screens, shattered ballpoint pens and ruined family photos. As Deininger bends over his pristine pile of junk, he starts to explain that the perspective he's referring to is about much more than just camera angles. "This is like a lifelong scavenger hunt for me," he smirks. "Instead of waking up to the world



'A lifelong scavenger hunt for me.' Tom Deininger assembles his multimedia installation inspired by his son Christoforo last week at Didi Suydam's Newport gallery. PHOTOS BY DAVE HANSEN

as a picture you're going to paint, the world becomes your palette. You wake up looking for the contents to make your painting."

This is what Deininger sees as "upcycling," one of the words, along with "cyclical," "cycle" and "recycle" that come tumbling out of his lips at pretty frequent intervals as he gazes at the heretofore unmentioned fish, hanging above his head, the starting and finishing point of the ever-more-complex installation.

The fish is actually two fishes — one eating another (does "cycle of life" sound about right for a metaphor here?) The bigger one is a giant blue fish head suspended from the ceiling, sculpted from bits of buttons, old shoes and shattered plastic bottles. It is eating an ugly little brown fellow, through whose gills run a wire. In *its* mouth is a camera, the one pointed at little Christoforo's lips and nose, which lay on the TV

Only when viewed at precisely the right angle does the **chaos of trash** actually look like anything. When the effect is achieved the results are stunning.

set below. The position of the fish, the angle of the camera, the orientation of the TV sets, are all *just* so. It is a Rube Goldberg machine of visual trickery.

Inside the fish, the metaphors compound. If you peek in through the cracks in the fish's back, you'll find a small camera pointed directly at a miniature TV it's delivering a video feed to. A strip of tape from a cassette is hanging between the two, fluttering in the turbulent breeze of a small fan also placed within the

floating fish.

The camera and TV create a feedback loop, the visual equivalent to placing a microphone near the speaker it's hooked up to. Instead of a high-pitched drone, however, the monitor displays an unfolding, pulsing orb of whirling blues, greens and yellows. The fluttering of the black tape plays itself out on the screen as a beautiful, rapid dance, highlighting and fluctuating the lines of the orb itself.

This is the beating heart of the entire installation. Hidden within the fish cycle, it instantiates everything Deininger is trying to accomplish. Technology that paragon of perfection, is essentially flawed. It is a binary to human existence. "Whose life ever works out exactly as they planned?" he asks. "The inadequacies of technology, the imperfections that make us human, that's what's beautiful."

### Two fish.

A giant blue fish head suspended from the ceiling, sculpted from bits of buttons, old shoes, and shattered plastic bottles, eats another, which has a camera in its mouth.

