

Leah Ollman, "At the Galleries," Los Angeles Times, 21 October 1992, San Diego County edition, Entertainment section

Like the Boehm gallery works, Tannen's installation, "Shadow Town," in an old church building downtown, also establishes its emotional tenor through environmental means. In the most effective part of this work, Tannen has furnished a small room in the manner of a slightly seedy hotel room [fig. 1], complete with the soundtrack of telephones ringing endlessly, feet thumping up the stairs, as well as an occasional scream and siren. Tannen has effectively set his environment in the fertile zone between reality and fiction by cleverly fusing real space and represented objects. The phone, light fixture and other furnishings, for instance, are sculpted and painted, rather than actual and functional. The window shade is pulled most of the way down, but a small slice of a view is provided by a photograph of a street scene propped between the window and the sill [fig. 2].

Tannen, a local artist, quotes the writer Raymond Chandler in his wall statement for the show [fig. 3], and the influence of old detective novels and films can be felt throughout. In the re-created hotel room, a picture hanging askew affords a look through a peephole in the wall [figs. 4–4.2], where Tannen projects slides of an empty street at night, an abandoned lobby [figs. 5–6], a table full of letters and photographs. These stills, as well as the row of related black and white prints hanging in a separate room [fig. 7], are thick with melodrama and intrigue.

The photographs, hotel room and a third area made to look like a police desk [figs. 8–9–9.2] are of a piece,

thematically, but they are not well integrated spatially. Plastic sheeting defines their boundaries and patches of open space without any character stand between the vignettes. Despite this structural flaw, Tannen's installation has a wonderfully moody feel, somewhere between the paintings of Edward Hopper in the environments of Edward Kienholz.

Robert Pincus, "Critic's Choice," San Diego Union-Tribune, 22 October 1992, Night & Day

"Shadow Town," the title of Jason Tannen's show in a temporary gallery space at 930 E St. (688–9531), is intelligently chosen, too. His photographs are shadowy and full of implied violence. The work draws on highly related sources: Raymond Chandler mysteries and film noir.

The scenes in Tannen's images and the walk-in installation, on view through Saturday, clearly draw on fiction and film: a woman on a bridge tightly clutching an envelope [fig. 10]; a deserted train station late at night [fig. 11]. Tannen's installation, less like a real detective's office than a stage set, his phones off the hook, mock paintings on the wall [fig. 10], a sinister slideshow and the artist's video playing on the television [fig. 12].

The videotaped city on the tube looks evil, too, because Tannen has put us in a frame of mind to see it that way. Oscar Wilde was right: life does often come to resemble art. Our town becomes Tannen's shadow town.

— Robert L. Pincus