

THE ARCHITECTS NEWSPAPER BLOG

Buffalo Unbuilt as Entropic Urban Art Project

[East](#) | 10.18.10 | [Jeff Byles](#)



Dennis Maher's installation "Animate Lost/Found Matter (001-)," at the Burchfield Penney Art Center in Buffalo. (Courtesy Burchfield Penney)

With some 10,000 buildings languishing on the official demolition list, Buffalo is a landscape in the losing—a city coming to grips, like others in the Rust Belt, with the postindustrial present and its architectural aftermath. As part of that collective quest, the city's detritus is now improbably on view in a pair of exhibitions that consider the fate of shrinking cities, thanks to artist and architect Dennis Maher and his ongoing project *Undone-Redone City*, an extended meditation on urban fabric in an entropic state of flux.

Maher's interest in the demolition and reassemblage of urban places became an occupational hazard of sorts after he landed in Buffalo in 2002 and found himself working on wrecking crews to pay the bills. The experience gave him a keen appreciation for what he calls "ecologies of decay"—the strange processes of dereliction and succession that have [long been familiar](#) to residents of Detroit. Working out of makeshift studios in vacant buildings around the city, Maher began assembling its remnants into installations that spoke to the power of urban fragments, yet also to their potential—reconstituted scraps and shards of a place that's disappearing by the Dumpster-ful.



"Fargo House/Kitchen Wall East" (2010), recently seen in Maher's show "Neglect of Finish." (Courtesy Black & White Gallery)

The result is currently on view at Buffalo's [Burchfield Penney Art Center](#) as part of the sprawling [Beyond/In Western New York](#) biennial. Here, Maher's *Animate Lost/Found Matter (001-)* is a suspended mash-up of architectural innards—boards and battens, crunched metal, TV aerials, filigrees of marquetry and siding. Drawn from demolition sites and salvage yards, what the artist calls “aggregate environments of urban waste” are part sculpture, part urban archaeology, part archive, and part protest. Indeed Maher, who studied at Cornell and teaches architecture at SUNY's University at Buffalo, sees [his artistic enterprise](#) as a combination of architecture and activism that can help heal cities reeling from the atomizing impact of demolition.



"End Wall" at Black & White Gallery / Project Space in Brooklyn. (Courtesy BWG/PS)

You can find his latest project at Brooklyn's Black & White Gallery/Project Space, where Maher was an artist-in-residence last summer. His show of photographic works, *Neglect of Finish*, recently closed, but the site-specific installation *End Wall* [is on exhibit](#) through November 21 (the artist's reception is this Friday at 6 p.m.). A fugue-like construction of demolition debris, found objects, and house paint, the work captures the ungainly, even ungodly nature of a city left for dead.

In these works Maher has mounded up the tailings of an urban extraction process of unprecedented proportion. This is what's left after the old industrial city has been chewed up and spat out by an inhuman economic imperative. With these modest materials and means, Maher summons a collective spirit from a senseless city of bits.

Tags: [Beyond/In Western New York](#), [Black & White Gallery](#), [Buffalo](#), [Burchfield Penney Art Center](#), [demolition](#), [Dennis Maher](#)



2 Responses to "Buffalo Unbuilt as Entropic Urban Art Project"

1. *TV Wall Installation* says:
[October 19, 2010 at 4:39 pm](#)

I love this so organic and natural

2. *Bill* says:
[October 20, 2010 at 3:10 am](#)

Yes its a great project!

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