

ARTFORUM

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CRITICS' PICKS: MUNGO THOMPSON

by Martha Schwendener

Mungo Thomson
John Connelly Presents
526 West 26th Street, Suite 1003
April 01-May 07

The primary work in this show is *New York, New York, New York, New York*, 2004, a video installation, projected on four walls, of mundane city street scenes. However, a more compelling work is down the hall in Connelly's tiny former gallery (now an annex). *The Swordsman*, 2004, is a simple, one channel video of Bob Anderson, retired Hollywood "sword master," throwing a sword to a person off screen. Anderson, who threw sharp objects to actors in such movies as *Lord of the Rings*, *Star Wars*, and *Pirates of the Caribbean*, becomes the star, for once (in the movies, he was always off-screen). But his Florida trailer park surroundings suggest the waning demand for his brand of swashbuckling talent. And yet, he's a model of precision, skill, and craft--a doppelgänger, perhaps for the contemporary artist who worries about his own obsolescence. The simple, looped repetition of *The Swordsman* recalls classic art video like Dara Birnbaum's *Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman*, 1976, but Thompson's version is silent, anti-heroic, meditating on human rather than superhuman strengths.