



THOMAS FAULKNER, "Auction Farm," temporary installation, mixed media, 1987.

## ILLINOIS

### Thomas Faulkner

St. Bede Abbey  
Peru, 815/213-3140

Art is ubiquitous—we all know that. Wherever there is man there is art, and even without man there may very well be certain ingenuous birds and busy beavers going beyond the call of pure necessity. Now, as we look to the close of our century, we might be able to say that *modern art* is all-pervasive. Loop Chicagoans learn to dodge Picasso, Calder, and Miro as they scurry to and fro. Peorians come within an inch of having Serra's urban blight intrude on their Johnson-Burgee culture center. Until now the cornfields and fruit orchards have been neglected, you believe? Not so; read on.

The rose brick mass of the Benedictine Abbey of St. Bede rises above the cornfields and the orchards that the monks cultivate. Three miles off is Interstate 80 and not far away are the banks of the Illinois River and Starved Rock State Park. This summer the monks and interested Peruvians were treated to the presence of Thomas Faulkner's *Auction Farm* installed in the vestibule of the abbey church.

Faulkner, who honed his skills at Pratt and Dartmouth and resides in New York, is a foundation artist. In his subsidized role of carpetbag culture carrier, he has become acutely aware of the plight of the family farm and thus has produced this provocative piece. Stylistically Faulkner mostly resembles Marisol, and thus fits into that school of modern sculptural endeavor that draws inspiration from store-window display.

At first blush, the 12-foot-high assemblage resembles nothing so much as a rustic wooden *pissoir* with its four-sided 4' x 8' panels raised to show the lower legs and feet of four people facing inward. Even viewers who haven't been to Paris may have been to midwestern country fairs, felt nature's call, and thus may make the same association. This image is so persuasive it is hard to shake, particularly when nothing else—except the elegant liturgical setting—leads one elsewhere. True, an unlikely corrugated tin tower tops it all, and old photo portraits shinny up the core toward it along with some didactic lettering—so one has that to ponder. Otherwise the work's secret and sense (if any) are well kept. No matter; one can only hope that whatever forces that brought this visitation to our rural wasteland will continue their missionary work in years to come.

Karl Moehl