

Fig. 1. Tom Denlinger, 'Holobiont 10,' 2024, 76cm x 56cm, Artist's personal collection.

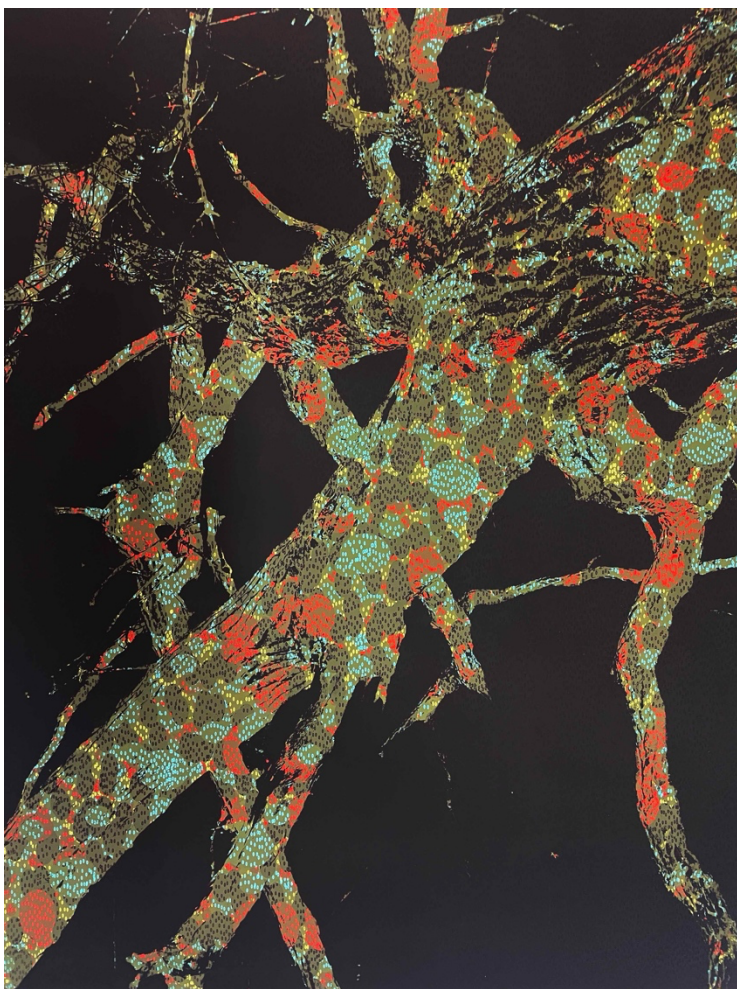


Fig. 2. Tom Denlinger, "Holobiont 9," 2024, 76cm x 56cm, Artist's personal collection.



Fig. 3. Tom Denlinger, "Holobiont 13," 2024, 76cm x 56cm, Author's personal collection.

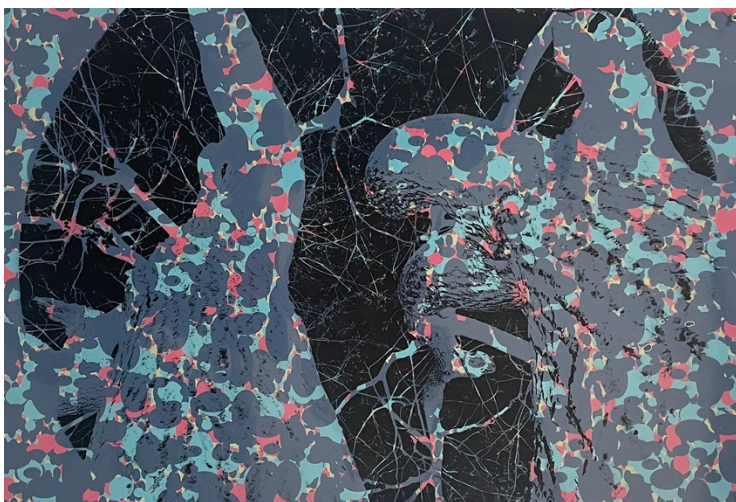


Fig. 4. Tom Denlinger, "Symbiont 12," and Fig. 5. "Holobiont 15," both 2024, 56cm x 76cm, Artist's personal collection.

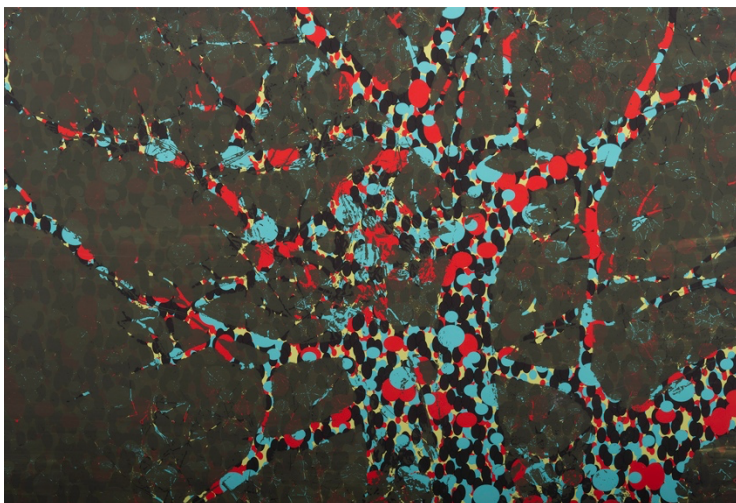




Fig. 6. Tom Denlinger, "Symbiont (Silver Maple)," 2024, 91.5cm x 61cm, Artist's collection.



Fig. 7. Tom Denlinger, "Membrane (Chitin)," 2023, 33cm x 46cm, Artist's collection.



Fig. 8. Tom Denlinger, "Holobiont (Olive)," 2024, 91.5cm x 61cm, Artist's collection.

In The Palace of Polysaccharides

Tom Denlinger

My work presents a surreal world reminiscent of two recent TV horror series: *Stranger Things*,¹ and *The Last of Us*.² The latter present realities dominated by Cordyceps mycelium or plant-like tentacular beings dwelling in parallel realities with us. In these series bio-botanical creatures break into the substrate of our familiar reality, making mayhem beneath the surface, or in our bodies, and always occupying space in our subconscious.

These horror scenarios are a cultural recoil from recent scientific revelations: the world is daily created and dominated by plants, bacteria, and fungus, which occupy every biosphere, including the human body. As described by Scott Gilbert, our relations with botanical and microbial others are tangled and complex.³

The works in this group are all from my series *In the Palace of Polysaccharides* and are meant to attack Anthropocentric thinking by presenting a plant-centered & bacteria-centered world.

¹ *Stranger Things*, written by Matt Duffer and Ross Duffer, Netflix, 2016-2025.

² *The Last of Us*, written by Craig Mazin, Neil Druckmann, and Halley Gross, HBO, 2023-2025.

³ Gilbert, Scott F. et al. "A Symbiotic View of Life: We Have Never Been Individuals." *The Quarterly Review of Biology*, vol. 87, no. 4, 2012, pp. 325-41, JSTOR, doi:10.1086/668166.

These works have been derived from photographs of trees (except Membrane, which is a silkscreen print on mycellium sheet grown in the studio). The photographs are source material for layered image/objects that are meant to reference membranes, bacteria and plant produced cellulose, the porous nature of materials, and biological residues of microbes and plants. The holes in some of the pieces are graphic representations of glucose molecules, which plants and bacteria produce through photosynthesis.

My work has always been very much influenced by Max Ernst and Eileen Agar. Ernst uses photographic elements, frottage and grattage to accumulate surfaces and contours of ordinary materials, cobbling together monstrous realities from the contours and texture of everyday objects. Agar explores similar scenarios, using collage to explore sexual relations and human relations with nature, juxtaposing disparate materials and patterns to construct those worlds.

In this series I use photography to gather images that I re-interpret as textures, environments and objects, framing a surreal scenario: that we live in a world created-dominated by plants, bacteria and fungus. Our bodies are occupied territory, and figure little into their botanical/microbial calculations except as nutrient sources and pathways for continuance. Additionally, we are completely dependent on these others to digest food, process nutrients, and clean up our bodily mess when we expire. Recent research

suggests that gut microbes profoundly influence our emotional and psychological well-being.

In sum, the symbiotic relations that we have with these beings are uneasy at best. My work explores those territories of botanical and microbial control and organization that engender our Anthropoc anxiety.

Works Cited

Gilbert, Scott F. et al. "A Symbiotic View of Life: We Have Never Been Individuals." *The Quarterly Review of Biology*, vol. 87, no. 4, 2012, pp. 325-41, JSTOR, doi:10.1086/668166.

Stranger Things, written by Matt Duffer and Ross Duffer. Netflix, 2016-2025.

The Last of Us, written by Craig Mazin, Neil Druckmann, and Halley Gross. HBO, 2023-2025.