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MARC SWANSON

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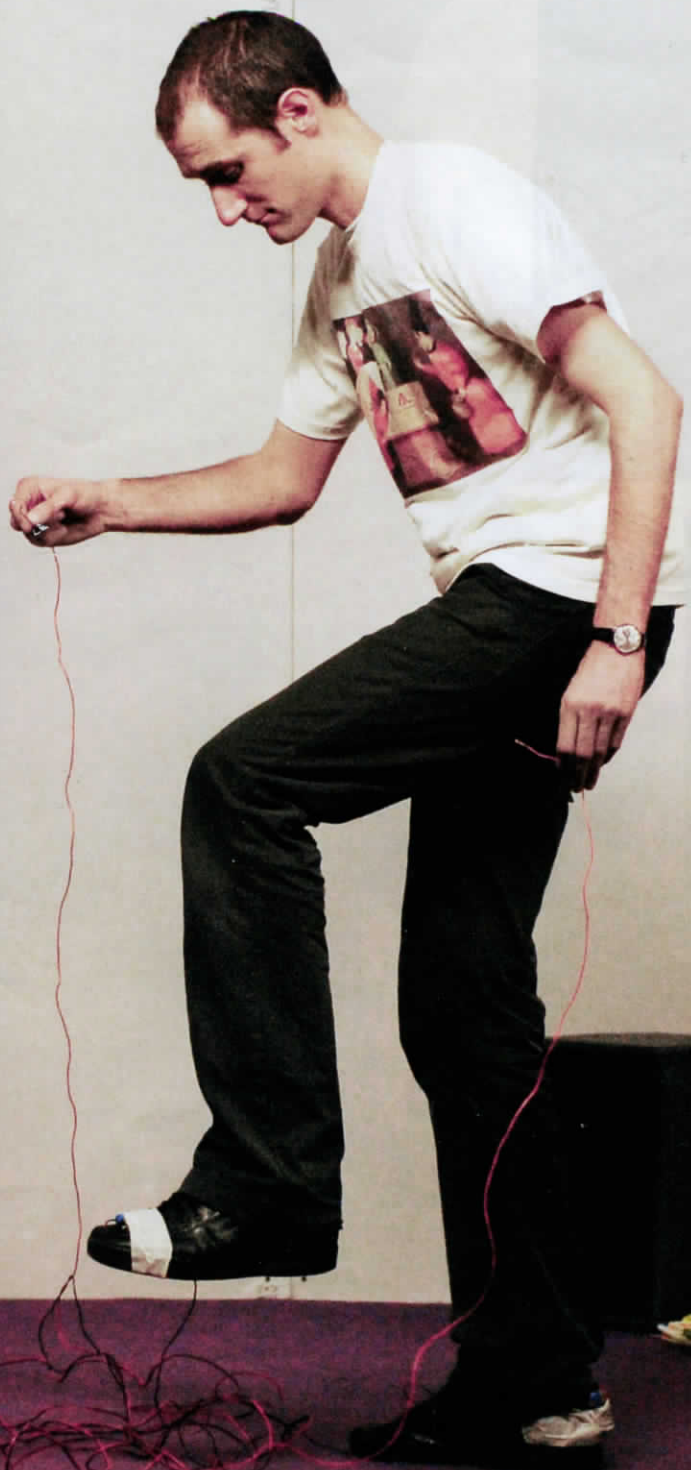
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January/February 2011

WALKER



THE SPECTACULAR OF VERNACULAR

REVEL IN THE



EVERYDAY

Embracing the rustic and the humbly homemade as well as the clash of street spectacle and commercial culture, a new Walker exhibition explores the role of vernacular forms in works by more than two dozen artists. *The Spectacular of Vernacular* focuses on pieces made since the 1970s that incorporate—and at times revel in—craft, folklore, and roadside kitsch, exploring some of the the impulses and strategies behind artists’ ongoing fascination with the often-overlooked relics of daily life.

A singular brand of material culture, the vernacular has stood out since the 1960s as an abundant source for artists’ critical interrogations. Never before has there been such a profusion of purchased, found, and otherwise inherited surplus, or such an array of categories by which artists might process and understand this wealth of commodities and castoffs. As European and American artists veered away from the imposing physicality of painting over the past half-century, they have connected with commonplace activities and made use of the residual elements of lay culture as platforms for art.

Too rustic to be called “Pop” and disconnected from the ongoing evolution of Duchamp’s famous readymade, the vernacular represented—and still does represent—something more humble and, significantly, homespun: enduring artifacts such as handmade welcome plaques, amateur snapshots, knitted afghans, and other folksy items that, for better or worse, often carry sentimental associations. Such objects also suggest a world of cozy comforts and heartwarming family moments—associations artists often feel compelled to revise, critique, and upend in ways both humorous and unsettling.

Originally a linguistics expression, the vernacular eventually came to be broadly applied to regionally or culturally specific qualities of architecture, cuisine, or folk

tradition. It is in this larger sense that many of its features reflect discourses on contemporary art, such as the casual, informal modes of expression that counter aesthetic hierarchies and traditions; or the idea that, even at a time of sweeping global exchange, material culture derives much of its meaning from its geographic point of origin.

The Spectacular of Vernacular brings together 27 artists whose work fosters a dialogue between contemporary art and the creative manifestations of lay culture. Many draw upon the distinguishing qualities of a place, for example—cultural markers visible in the churches, houses, and roadside attractions—or call attention to rituals and traditions in unusual or provocative ways. Among them, Minnesota-based artists in the exhibition look to rural architecture and culture. Though Siah Armajani’s identification with buildings “of a certain place” is just one aspect of his work, it is fundamental. For him, the kind of vernacular found in the barns, bridges, and houses of Pennsylvania and New England is the visual vocabulary of a 19th-century ethos characterized by frugality, simplicity, and community—a vocabulary that the artist reshapes into freestanding wood sculptures and enclosures at once deeply evocative and resolutely modern.

Aaron Spangler’s autonomous, intricately carved, black-painted sculptural objects tap a dense field of aesthetic references even as they lay claim to a knowledge that comes from his direct experience of living in rural northern Minnesota and making art about and within that condition. By incorporating overt references to a vernacular steeped in the Midwestern landscape—guns and machine parts, haystacks, wildlife—Spangler confronts and repurposes the inherited symbols of a particular terrain.

Just as some artists build on a sustained connection with architecture and other physical features of a specific place,

others explore the vernacular through objects and everyday traditions that vary from culture to culture and region to region. For instance, Marina Abramovic’s 2005 video *Balkan Erotic Epic: Women Massaging Breasts* interprets pagan fertility rites as a performance of sorts, in a manner at once tongue-in-cheek and undeniably serious.

Additionally, it’s difficult to sidestep the observation that artists often seem drawn to the absurdist properties of ritual and the normalized values they appear to reinforce. Marc Swanson deals with the gendered nature of boyhood customs such as camping and hunting from the standpoint of an out adult. In his 2010 sculpture *Antler Pile* (pictured on the back cover), a formation of rhinestone-encrusted antlers evokes disco balls and nightclub décor—a far cry from the taxidermic trophy icons of his New England youth.

Another arena for vernacular objects, such as ceremonial flags and family snapshots, is situated in the industry and practices surrounding death in modern society. Dario Robleto’s art is in visible dialogue with these traditions, stepping out of time to tap 19th-century mourning rituals that today feel both quaint and distant. Positing that “an artist has to remember while others forget,” Robleto positions his art on a long continuum that includes unnamed and unknown makers whose work is typically forgotten: the seamstresses and mothers who prepared memorial wreaths, sewed mourning attire, and braided hair flowers upon the deaths of loved ones, for example. Featuring an assortment of materials ranging from bullets found on the battlefield to vinyl records, the products of Robleto’s craft-based process, which incorporates skills once transmitted from parent to child, would once have been called “labors of love”; today they must be regarded as a tribute to a form of vernacular that has virtually disappeared.



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In contrast to older models of vernacular meant for things that wore the patina of age and tradition, another definition was developed in the 1970s that responded to such dramatic shifts in the American landscape as a rise in residential developments, billboard advertising, and strip malls. Decidedly loud, visually pervasive, and dominantly commercial, this newer subgenre is exuberantly embodied by Lari Pittman's massive painting, *A Decorated Chronology of Insistence and Resignation #30* (1994). Beckoning with its ballast of colors and slogans, it offers a spectrum of services to be bought and bartered: sex, love, and fast cars, brought to you by two ubiquitous credit card companies whose logos appear on the edges of the canvas like discreetly placed cash-register decals. In this sales world, however, nothing is discreet—least of all the art. Pittman's works are testaments to the power of the ornamental, or what he would term “junky secularism.”

In some ways, to understand the vernacular is to accept that objects can contain values reflecting prevailing beliefs, class and social standing, and personal background. In this sense, the vernacu-

lar is strikingly effective in perpetuating established modes of conduct; hence its frequent association with tradition, simplicity, and craftsmanship—or, in Pittman's case, consumerism. Yet artists are typically resistant to such assimilation, producing their work to expose the perversity of what is taken for granted in culture. If vernacular itself affirms a cozy comfort in the familiar, the art it inspires is often conceived to do just the opposite. *The Spectacular of Vernacular* exposes this dynamic between comfort and its subversion with artworks that may appear playful, rambunctious, or cheerfully familiar on their surfaces, but often reveal darker complexities upon closer investigation. ■

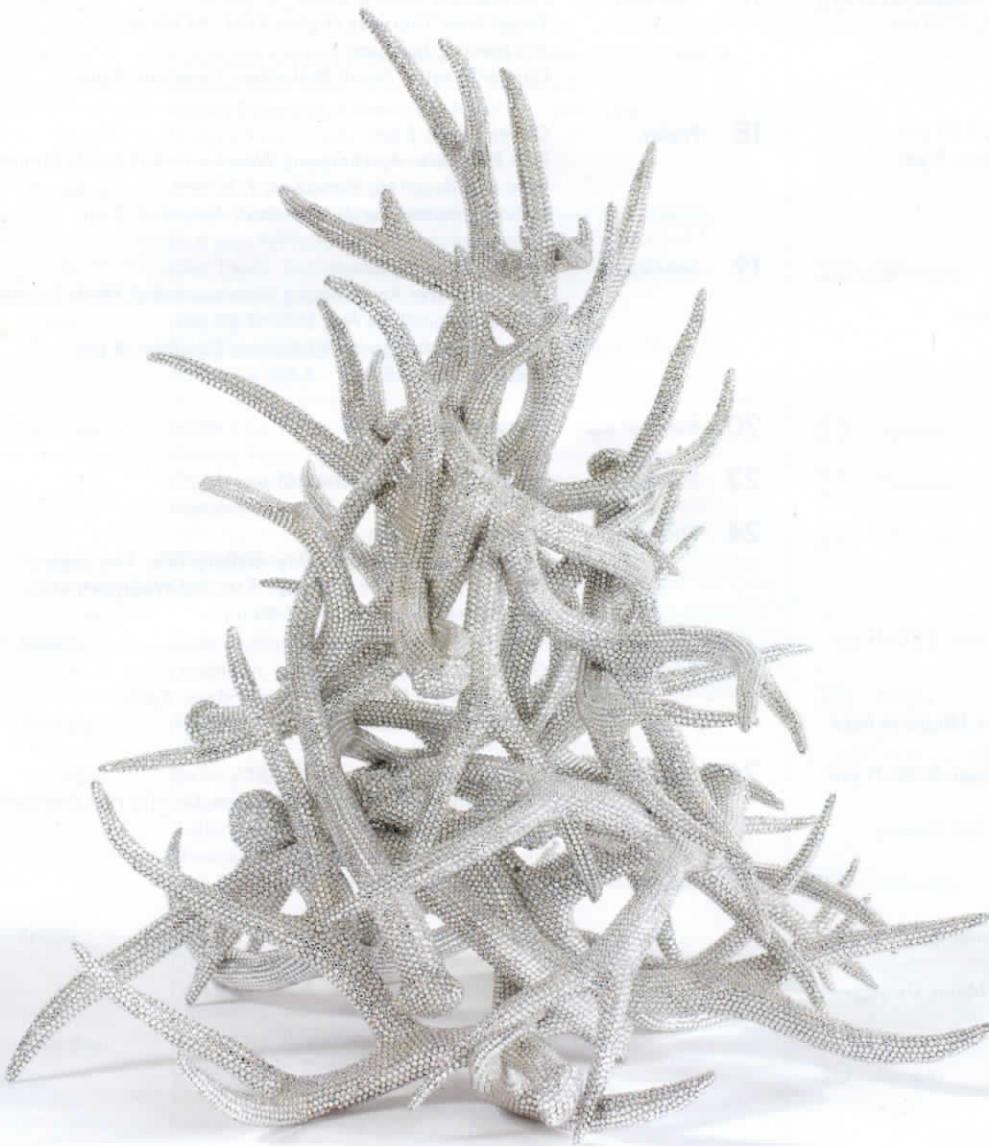
—Adapted by Julie Caniglia and Camille Washington from Darsie Alexander's essay in the exhibition catalogue *The Spectacular of Vernacular*

- 1 Marc Swanson *Untitled* 2004
Courtesy the artist and Richard Gray, Chicago
- 2 Lari Pittman *A Decorated Chronology of Insistence and Resignation #30* 1994
Courtesy Regan Projects, Los Angeles ©Lari Pittman
- 3 Aaron Spangler *To the Valley Below* 2009–2010
Courtesy the artist and Horton Gallery, New York
Photo: Mark Woods

WALKER AFTER HOURS: ON ICE

Shake off your cabin fever, slip on your flannel, and celebrate the opening of *The Spectacular of Vernacular* at this indoor/outdoor party featuring hot dishes, chill tunes, and a one-of-a-kind ice bar on the plaza. Join our Flickr photo album of "sweaters that tell a story." The most "Minnesotan" wins a prize! See pages 18–21.

Friday, January 28, 9 pm–12 midnight \$30 (\$20 Walker members)
New members receive a free party ticket (or other premiums) for joining.
walkerart.org/tickets 612.375.7600



Marc Swanson, *Antler Pile*, 2010. Courtesy the artist and Richard Gray, Chicago

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Bugs, Bones, and Feathers

[Fall 2010 - REVIEWED](#)

Edward Rubin

In less sure hands, New York City's Museum of Arts and Design's *Dead or Alive*, an exhibition of 37 international artists, whose work is composed of feathers, bones, egg shells, insects, fur, antlers, dried and rotting plants, with a few stuffed birds and animals thrown in, would be a creepy, crawly experience, one that could conceivably have people running toward the exits. Not so with this exhibition. *Dead or Alive*, conceived by chief curator David Revere McFadden, joined by senior curator Lowery Stokes Sims and assistant curator Elizabeth Edwards Kirrane, is an exhibition of extreme beauty, living proof, so to speak, that a sow's ear can be turned into a silk purse. It is also, despite outwardly appearances, an intellectual adventure, one that encourages serious thought on such topics as ecology, beauty, violence to humans and animals, and most noticeably our own mortality.

In its use of idiosyncratic materials, the attention paid to the oddities of natural history, *Dead or Alive*, reminds one of a 16th-century Cabinet of Wonders, for each highly distinctive work of art appears to be a microcosm of the world. From videos, to sculptures, to highly crafted installations, there is a virtual sideshow of organic matter being transformed into art, both functional and not. Sometimes obsessions with numbers seem to be the artist's *métier*. In *Eight Thousand Miles of Home* (2010) Thailand-based Angus Hutcheson, Ango Design's founder and chief designer, turns some 12,000 silkworm cocoons into a beautiful, overhead cloud-like light fixture. *Moon* (2006), Tracey Heneberger's sculptural wall hanging, is composed of over a thousand shellacked sardines intricately arranged in a circle. **Marc Swanson's sculpture *Untitled (Antler Pile)* (2010) is a glittering pyramid of deer antlers covered with thousands of hand-glued crystals, while *Flock* (2010), Susie MacMurray's ominous site-specific wall, hiding in a corner of the museum, features tens of thousands of dyed black rooster feathers.**

In London-based artist, Tessa Farmer's theatrical diorama *Little Savages* (2007), a taxidermied fox—a stand-in for humans—appears to be under attack by insects, both crawling and flying. Dried slugs, silk moth cocoons, and plant roots are attached to its fur, a wasp's nest hangs from its tail, and a bird with an insect in its mouth is perched on its back. Here we are faced, "fast forwarding," as curator Sims notes in the exhibition's catalog, with "the cycle of nature in terms of death, disposal, and decay." In *On Top of the World* (2009) Claire Morgan, also London-based, using transparent nylon threaded through hundreds of dead Bluebottle flies, fashions an eerie army of flying creatures into a suspended geometrically layered cube. On top of the cube, invisible to all but the top layer of flies, the artist has added a red spider, introducing the moment when disaster threatens orderly perfection.

Dutch artist Levi van Veluw is a kind of a performance artist as well as a sculptor and photographer. Veluw, at age 25, the youngest artist in the exhibition, uses his body, specifically his head and shoulders, as a canvas on which to build natural landscapes in *Landscape I* (2008). Using seaweed, and other organic materials to fashion flora and fauna, as well as stones, tiny plastic animals, trucks, lampposts, and telephone poles—all affixed to his painted face—he recreates the world while simultaneously being part of it. Before "removing his new face," the artist, represented here by three photographs and an amazing video featuring a moving toy train that circles around his landscaped head, documents each creation. Also utilizing synthetic materials to recreate nature is Cuban-born, Mallorca-based artist, Jorge Mayet. In *Cayendo Suave (Falling Softly)* (2009), the artist, using simple electrical wires,



Marc Swanson, *Untitled (Antler Pile)*, 2007, antlers, crystals, adhesive, 24 x 24 x 24". © Marc Swanson, courtesy Richard Gray Gallery

papier mâché, and feathers, gives us a super-realistic tree. Like an angel suspended in midair, the tree with a surreal clutch of feathers attached to the end of its roots, is astonishingly beautiful.

Keith W. Bentley's *Cauda Equina (Horse Tail)* (1995-2007), a labor of love, as well as a paean and a eulogy, to the thousands of horses slaughtered annually in this country for their meat, took 12 years to complete. Using the hairs from 250 horses, Bentley stitched and knotted nearly a million and a half individual hairs onto a fabric which in turn was attached to a full-sized taxidermy form of a horse, creating a kind of mourning veil, not unlike those worn by widows during the Victorian era. On the lighter side—just perhaps—is Billie Grace Lynn's *Mad Cow Motorcycle* (2008), in which she has mounted the skeleton of an entire cow over a working motorcycle. At the foot of this "kinetic sculpture" is a video which shows the artist careening through the streets of Miami while passersby, those not aghast, look on in amusement. Speaking of cows slaughtered to meet human needs, curator McFadden wryly notes in his catalog essay, "even in death this cow is not allowed to rest in peace."

Definitely on a lighter side, despite the gravity of its various subjects, is *Apothecarium Moderne*, a collaborative work of artists Tim Tate, co-founder and director of the Washington Glass School and Studio outside of Washington, D.C., and Connecticut-based artist Marc Petrovic. Lined up against the wall are nine hand-blown glass apothecary jars, each one filled to the brim with talismans that offer a cure for various maladies such as loss of faith, overpopulation, ennui, identity theft, and intelligent design. Etched on the outside of each jar is a cure-related story. *Apothecary #1 Cure for Erectile Dysfunction*, one of the more humorous works, features a photo of Betty Page, the iconic pinup model from the 50s, surrounded by oyster shells, and Enzyte, a natural male enhancement pill. The tale engraved on this jar tells the story of little David, who arrives in Manhattan by bus and meets a freakishly tall woman with an Adam's apple, who takes him to her flat in Spanish Harlem, gets him addicted to Absinthe, and makes him a man.

One of the more unusual works on view is Alastair Mackie's *Untitled (+/-)*, (2009). Here we are faced with a two-part installation, each work dramatically placed for effect on its own concrete plinth. Resting on the first plinth is a pile of thousands of mouse skeletons—all eaten, digested, and regurgitated by barn owls—which the artist collected over the course of a year. Occupying plinth

two is a loom with a piece of fabric woven from mouse fur which the artist separated from these bones. Like much of the work in this exhibition, Mackie's mouse-centric installation speaks to the relationship of things and events in the endless cycle of life and death. A strong point of this exhibition is the simply written labels that tell us about the artist as well as each work on view. Once we digest the ideas behind each work, and the process each artist uses to create their work, everything falls into place, naturally so it seems.



L. Brandon Krall, *Courtesy of the artist.*

As curator Lowery Stokes Sims notes in the museum's beautifully appointed catalog, "the work in *Dead or Alive* might challenge usual and habitual notions of beauty, but artists can extrude beauty from the most base and defiled materials. This maneuvering of a transcendent experience from trash was given a specifically psychological and emotional role in art making by the Surrealists,

who linked it with concepts such as 'the marvelous' or 'convulsive beauty'—both of which were based on the experience of the 'uncanny.' Of particular interest is what Hal Foster called understanding the 'marvelous' as 'signal(ing) a rupture in the natural order...challeng(ing)...rational causality...(and) its fascination with magic and alchemy.'"

The Dada force and spirit has been moved forward since 2006 at the Emily Harvey Foundation, where the first, second, and fourth Blago Bung evenings took place. The third was held in Zurich at the original Cabaret Voltaire in September 2009. Participants have included Michel Auder, John Armleder, Michel Collet, Gerard Colin Thiebaut, Adam Kahan, Patrice Lerochereuil, Nicola L, Larry Litt, Moira Tierney, Valentine Verhaeghe, Beatriz Albuquerque, Michel Bulteau, Jacques Halbert, Per Huttner, Jeffrey Perkins, Nicole Peyrafitte, Ivan Alechine, Taketo Shimada, Joao Simoes, Nicola Sornaga, John Giorno, Roland Wagner, Paul Dorn, Soren Berner, Nicolas Kerksieck, Bob Lens, Paul Wiegierinck, Svetlana Heger, M.K., Charlie Doria, George Quasha, Neboja Seric Shoba, and Glory Hazel.

Blago Bang is a "Meta-écriture," and every artist presents actions, dance or no-dance, art and no-art, performances, poetry, video, sound works. The pieces roll up quickly, come together randomly, and collectively that gives a character, tonicity, and joy. Free association is open, as in a dream weave or in the society imagined by Charles Fourier. The dynamic is present, irrepressible, linked to theoretical research, play, philosophy, politics, aesthetics, poetry, and movement.... —Michel Collet

The collaboration started in 2006 after a snowball effect of performances and interventions in France and America between Michel Collet, Valentine Verhaeghe, and Patrice Lerochereuil, with associated writers, artists, non-artists, and others. A naming occurred from which emerged the collective, activist-oriented node that we can call, Blago Bung. The name comes from two lines of the proto-poetic-performance *Karawane* by Hugo Ball at the opening of the Cabaret Voltaire in 1916.

Michel Collet, a key initiator who operates the Cold Mountain and Mobile projects wrote, "Montagne Froide is a creative device in the related areas of choreography, text, voice, images, sound, and the machine. ... While using well-known types of devices such as performance, exposition, as well as publications, our creations try to travel unexplored areas, far from the center, or even halfway through a performance. Each creation makes it possible to assemble unlike elements that cohere as a whole, tending to put form and questions about form, multiple appearances, and aesthetic games, as well as depth of meaning into play. Every action in Montagne Froide is managed by a team that is re-defined according to the project. Each action is co-created. The logical base of our productions relies on the concepts of the complexity and a non-specialized conception of art close to intermedia as defined by Dick Higgins."

About choreographer-performer Valentine Verhaeghe's adaptation of *Mind Opener*, a work by Robert Filliou, Astrid Gagnard wrote in *Mouvement*, Mai 2007, "What's at stake? Showing that today it is possible to work together and that the reasoning of the network developed by the concept generator, Robert Filliou, is still applicable. This heritage has grown and is developed by each of the personalities working with choreographer Valentine Verhaeghe in the creation. Nine interpreters (dancers, poets, performers) are on stage, the tenth being video and sound. It is, in fact, an interactive system that is proposed by the artists brought together in *Mind Opener*. Therefore, the broadcasting of the videos, which is generated by the presence and the relations between the dancers and the performers, is random or predetermined. This version of the play using the technological means available in 2007 is faithful to the spirit of Filliou, who wanted to create poetry with a computer. Far from the standardization of some shows, *Mind Opener* accepts the challenge of going beyond the definitions of dance and proposing the interpretation of this partition with the creators of different generations The emotion comes from proximity with the spirit of Filliou in an artistic performance where dance establishes a dynamic exchange with other parts. Between the lines can be read the story of a friendship: of Robert Filliou, of Daniel Spoerri, and Emmett Williams; Spoerri who launched Filliou on the artistic chessboard, and Williams who imagined that the soul of his friend Robert, was reincarnated in an insect, as Julien Blaine says in his text narrating the last moments of the artist."

Patrice, Lerochereuil says, "If I were to describe my work. I will call it, 'a field of approximative discoveries.' I try to approach and clarify what seems to me necessary and fundamental, but pretty much useless in our society's value system today. I realized early on that the idea of capturing a meaning or the effect of a thought is impossible. This makes the origin of each piece very subjective. I always relied on my own sensibility and what I consider important. I have always prioritized thoughts, feelings, serendipity, over words' formulations and, as an artist concerned with process, origination over the final product. This dialectic simply implies the conflicts inherent in our efforts to communicate what is essential to us. For me it's a matter of balance, as well as sways, back and forth, and adjustment.

"I do not choose a medium over another. I simply live with the fear of missing some possibilities by not experimenting with other media, (performances, paintings, video, music, drawings ...). For example, my piece, *partir c'est crever un pneu*, (a French pun meaning 'leaving is a little bit like dying' refers to a quote of Alphonse Allais, and 'leaving is having a flat tire,' where I stand before an audience and blow into a tube (A replica of Marcel Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel* [1913, ready-made]), would not have had the impact I was looking for, had I not chosen to realize it as a performance. This hedonistic state beloved by Marcel Duchamp, a state where I find myself engaged in an action which implies exhibitionism and public voyeurism, and of course my attachment to Duchamp's work, were the genesis of the piece. (Not to say that I was born in the same part of France as Marcel Duchamp, Normandy.)"



Nick Cave, Soundsuit, 2010, mixed media, 96 x 3 x 22". Courtesy of artist; Jack Shainman Gallery, New York



Marc Swanson, Untitled (Antler Pile), 2007, antlers, crystals, adhesive, 24 x 24 x 24". © Marc Swanson, courtesy Richard Gray Gallery



*Billie Grace Lynn, Mad Cow Motorcycle, 2008, cow bones, bicycle frame, electric motor 96. x 24 x 36". Courtesy of the artist
Photo: Billie Grace Lynn lbillie@mail.as.miami.edu*



Levi van Veluw, Landscape I, from the Landscape series, 2008, Lambdaprint on dibound, antireflex Perspex, 47 1/4 x 39 3/8". Courtesy Gallery Ronmandos, Amsterdam/Rotterdam. info@ronmandos.nl

Creepy, Crawly, and Absolutely Beautiful

Dead or Alive at the Museum of Arts and Design, New York

by Edward Rubin

In less sure hands, New York City's Museum of Arts and Design's *Dead or Alive*, an exhibition of 37 international artists, whose work is composed of feathers, bones, egg shells, insects, fur,

antlers, dried and rotting plants, with a few stuffed birds and animals thrown in, would be a creepy, crawly experience, one that could conceivably have people running towards the exits. Not

so with this exhibition. *Dead and Alive*, conceived by chief curator David Revere McFadden, joined by senior curator Lowery Stokes Sims, and assisted by assistant curator Elizabeth Edwards Kirrane, is an exhibition of extreme beauty, living proof, so to speak, that a sow's ear can be turned into a silk purse. It is also, despite outwardly appearances, an intellectual adventure, one that encourages serious thought on such topics as ecology, beauty, violence to humans and animals, and most noticeably our own mortality.

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In London based artist, Tessa Farmer's diorama *Little Savages* (2007), a taxidermied fox – a stand-in for us humans – appears to be under attack by insects, both crawling and flying. Dried slugs, silk moth cocoons, and plant roots are attached to its fur, a wasp's nest hangs from its tail, and a bird with an insect in its mouth is perched on its back. Here we are faced, "fast forwarding," as curator Sims

notes in the exhibition's catalog, with "the cycle of nature in terms of death, disposal, and decay." In *On Top of the World* (2009), Claire Morgan, also London based, using transparent nylon threaded through hundreds of dead Bluebottle flies, arranges an army of flying creatures into a geometrically layered cube. An ominous red spider, invisible to all but the top layer of flies, threatens the cube's orderly perfection.

Dutch artist Levi van Veluw, at age 25, the youngest artist in the exhibition, uses his body, specifically his head and shoulders, as a canvas on which to build natural landscapes. Using seaweed, and other organic materials to fashion flora and fauna, as well as stones, tiny plastic animals, trucks, lampposts, and telephone poles – all affixed to his painted head – he recreates the world while simultaneously being part of it. Before "removing his new face," the artist, represented here by 3 photographs and a video featuring a moving toy train that circles around his landscaped head, documents each creation. Cuban born, Mallorca based, Jorge Mayet, also using synthetic material in *Obatala* (2010), creates an astonishingly realistic miniature tree with electrical wires and papier mâché. Suspending it in mid air, with a clutch of feathers attached to its roots, adds a touch of the surreal.

Keith W. Bentley's *Cauda Equina* (Horse Tail), (1995-2007) is composed of hair from 250 horses collected over a period of twelve years. Stitching and knotting nearly a million and a half individual hairs onto a fabric which in turn is attached to the to a full-sized form of a horse, Bentley creates a mourning veil, not unlike those worn by widows during the Victorian era. It is his eulogy to the thousands of horses slaughtered annually in this country for their meat. On the lighter side is Billie Grace Lynn's *Mad Cow Motorcycle* (2008), a skeleton of a cow mounted on a working motorcycle. At the foot of this "kinetic sculpture" a video shows the artist playfully careening through the streets of Miami while passersby,



Claire Morgan, *On Top of the World* (detail), 2009, bluebottle flies, spider, nylon, lead, acrylic 70-718 x 19-11116 x 19-11116". Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Karsten Greve, Paris



Tess Farmer, *Little Savages*, 2007, Taxidermied fox, wasp nest, animals, insects, plant roots, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist; Spencer Brownstone Gallery, New York
Photo: Tessa Farmer

those not aghast, look on in amusement. Speaking of cows slaughtered to meet human needs, curator McFadden wryly notes in his catalog essay, “even in death this cow is not allowed to rest in peace.”

Apothecarium Moderne, the work of Tim Tate, co-founder and director of the Washington Glass School and Studio outside of Washington, DC, and Connecticut based artist Marc Petrovic, uses humor to approach the serious. Lined up against the wall are nine hand-blown glass apothecary jars each one filled to the brim with talismans that offer a cure for various maladies such as loss of faith, over population, ennui, identity theft, and intelligent design. Etched on the outside of each jar, is a cure related story. *Apothecary #1 Cure for Erectile Dysfunction*, one of the more humorous works, features a photo of Betty Page, the iconic pinup model from the 50s, surrounded by oyster shells, and Enzyte, a natural male enhancement pill. The tale engraved on this jar tells the story of little David, who arrives in Manhattan by bus and meets a freakishly tall woman with an Adam’s apple, who takes him to her flat in Spanish Harlem, gets him addicted to Absinthe, and makes him a man.

One of the more unusual works – a two-part installation, each one set on a concrete plinth – is Alastair Mackie’s *Untitled (+/-)*, (2009). Plinth one features a mound of mouse skeletons collected by the artist over the course of a year. All were eaten, digested, and regurgitated by barn owls. Occupying plinth two is a loom with a piece of fabric woven from mouse fur which the artist separated from these bones. Like much of the work on view, Mackie’s mouse-centric installation speaks to the relationship of things and events in the endless cycle of life and death. A strong point of this exhibition is the simply written labels that tell us about artist. Once we digest the ideas and creative process behind each work – the latter often taken to the nth degree – everything falls into place. Naturally, so it seems.



Keith W. Bentley, *Cauda Equina (Horse Tail)*, 1995-2007, approximately 1.4 million hand knotted horse hairs, fabric, taxidermy mannequin, resin. Horse 63 x 24 x 76". Base 12 x 48 x 90". Courtesy of the artist



Tim Tate, Marc Petrovic, *Cure For Erectile Dysfunction* from *Apothecarium Modern*, 2010, blown glass, oyster shells, enzyte, found photo 18 x 6 x 6". Photo courtesy of the artists

'Reflection'

Nathan A. Bernstein & Co.

This intriguing show offered a wide range of takes on how reflective surfaces can draw us in. Metallic paint, silver leaf, mirrors, and crystals threw light back at viewers—sometimes with near-blinding intensity, other times with a muted glow.

The range of artists was impressive. In one room, a 1977 Andy Warhol screen-print portrait of Georgia O'Keeffe cast its jaded gaze from beneath a sprinkling of diamond dust. Warhol himself was appropriated in Douglas Gordon's *1 piece multi Marilyn* (2008), which burns away part of Warhol's image of Monroe and places the portrait over a mirror, so viewers can see their own faces completing Marilyn's.

Marc Swanson won for sheer dazzle with his *Untitled (Sitting Buck)*, 2009, a polyurethane-foam sculpture of a deer wearing a glamorous, scintillating coat of armor. For a companion piece, *Untitled (Crystal Antler Pair)*, 2009, he covered a rendering of intertwining antlers with crystals to evoke an outsize Surrealist brooch.

Many other works, by contrast, focused on the warmth of tone that metallic paints and surfaces impart. For her 2010 series of untitled pieces, Nancy Lorenz poured melted gold over blocks of poplar wood. Thanks to the medium's

subtle radiance, the feeling of the heat required to melt the gold was palpable here. There was also interesting work from Shinique Smith, whose *Little Glutton* (2007) coats a bale of clothing in metallic paint, and Anne Peabody, whose glass-and-silver-leaf *New York City Landscape* (2003), *Courtney's Room*, and *Mimi* (both 2005) call to mind dapper stereotypes. Perhaps most mysterious was Lynda Benglis's wall hanging *Tempest (Juliet)*, 1990, made of stainless-steel mesh and aluminum. Its series of coils seems to be curling away from us, while its shining surface pulls us in—all in the spirit of this well-thought-out exhibition.

—Steve Barnes



Marc Swanson, *Untitled (Sitting Buck)*, 2009, polyurethane foam, crystals, and adhesive, 34" x 40" x 50". Nathan A. Bernstein & Co.



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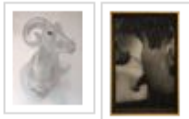
Art Marc Swanson: *The Tenth of Always*

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Marc Swanson, *Place in the Sun*,
Courtesy Richard Gray Gallery



In his more extravagant moments, [Marc Swanson](#) hones a style that one might call "glam hunting lodge": think of the artist covering a [ram's head](#) with rhinestones or treating white t-shirts to look like [tanned animal hide](#). Personal symbolism — linked to facets of his present life or the conservative milieu of his upbringing — plays a prominent role in his work, although this current exhibition brings out a more meditative (even mystical) side, along with touches of geometric abstraction. In the polished gallery space, the cultivated kitsch factor and emotional reverberations of Swanson's sculptures fall away somewhat, while his talent for transforming materials comes to the fore.

— *Karsten Lund*

EVENT DETAILS

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Price

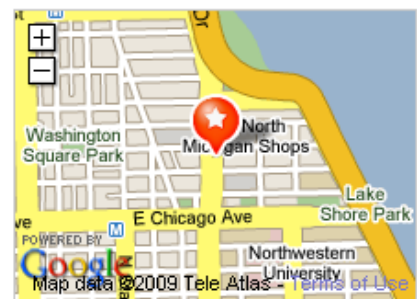
★ FREE

When

Apr 3 – May 22
Mondays–Fridays (10am–5:30pm)

Where

Richard Gray Gallery (875 N Michigan Ave, Suite 2503)
312.642.8877



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Marc Swanson

★★★★★

"The Tenth of Always," Richard Gray Gallery, through May 23 (see Galleries, Michigan Ave).



Swanson,
Untitled
(*Vertical T-shirt*
and Chains),
2008–09.

Marc Swanson's handmade wooden boxes recall religious icons—though we've never seen devotional objects that contain both antlers and glitter. Most of the Brooklyn-based artist's recent sculptures hinge on such unusual combinations of materials. In *Untitled (Black Elk Pair)* (2009), he coats two intertwined elk antlers with sparkling black crystals and balances them upright on the floor. Doubly removing these natural objects from their usual state, Swanson renders them unrecognizable, beautiful and disconcerting. *Untitled (Antler Box)* (2006) suspends several deer antlers from taut metal chains with S&M connotations.

In other works, Swanson's chains veil the contents of his boxes. The physical distance the chains create between his art and the viewer, and the golden gleam they add to his work, strengthen the impression that Swanson's sculptures are shrines. Dozens of metal strands dangle from *Untitled (Vertical T-shirt and Chains)* (2008–09, pictured), glinting off the cotton shirts the artist has treated with latex, which gives them the stiff, brown look of animal skins preserved for a ritual. The slender pieces of wood that make up *Untitled (Light Bars)* (2008–09) also suggest a spiritual purpose, forming an enigmatic symbol on the wall as their low-watt bulbs cast a warm glow. Yet Swanson leaves irreverent touches everywhere: While it hurts to look at his spangled Styrofoam *Untitled (Crystal Ram)* (2009), you wouldn't mistake this fabulous faux taxidermy for a burning bush.—*LW*

ARTslant

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Northern Exposure

by Robyn Farrell Roulo

The Tenth of Always

Richard Gray Gallery

875 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60611

April 3, 2009 - May 23, 2009



“Marc Swanson: The Tenth of Always” opened last Friday at Richard Gray Gallery, located in the John Hancock Building. On view until May 23, 2009, this is the first solo Chicago exhibition for the Brooklyn based artist. As with his public installation in 2005 *Killing Moon II: Self-Portrait as a Yeti*, Swanson transformed the 25th floor gallery into an environment that is both natural and glamorous. Antlers, gold chains, broken mirrors, and rhinestone crystals drape, hang and encrust found and created objects. Swanson has produced an environment that reveals a poignant narrative of personal history with symbols of masculinity and self-exploration.



Although influenced by Robert Rauschenberg and Joseph Cornell, Swanson’s approach is all his own. He wittingly reveals aspects of his psyche with each piece, stating that his work is conceptually, materially and formally driven. The subjects and materials used in the show run the gamut, but all are connected by theme. Reflections of his conservative upbringing in New England and current lifestyle are central to his inspiration. Swanson is a hunter and gatherer of media and identity.

A Place in the Sun (2008-2009, seen at top) is the image shown on the gallery's website and exhibition announcement for "The Tenth of Always". Swanson incorporates wood, chain, paper, paint, and polyurethane for this self-contained installation. The image is a still of the pivotal moment in George Stevens's 1951 film where the two characters give into their desire and share a forbidden kiss. The work brings themes of sensuality and mortality to the forefront of the exhibition. The chains that hang in front glimmer and shine, reflecting the intensity of this scene. *Untitled (Crystal Ram)* (2009, seen at left) is an iconic sculpture, encrusted in rhinestones and hung in a prominent manner representing a motif that is central to the show. Better known for his crystallized deer heads, the ram is introduced at Gray as a stoic figurehead of strength and quiet beauty. The work speaks to the artist's process of melding contemporary work with traditional practice. As one would assume, the animal's head is not true taxidermy, but formed from the mold of a previously deceased animal.



A second sculpture occupies the back hallway of the gallery, also an example of Swanson's dedication to practice and form. *Untitled (White Paper Wasp's Nest)* (2007, seen above) is hand blown glass in the shape of a "wrapped" beehive or wasp's nest. The work demonstrates the artist's ability to illicit desire within danger. The nest appears to be safe and frozen in time. The sheen of the glass and the angelic tone of white is calming and elicits a zen-like mood instead of fear. In the adjacent gallery, *Untitled (Light Bars)* (2008-2009) provides a dark space. The installation of wood, fixtures, and light bulbs nod to the practice of Dan Flavin or the *Truisms* of Jenny Holzer and demonstrates the range of the artist.

For Swanson's exhibition, Richard Gray took over additional space down the hall. Photographs, works on paper, and sculpture are featured in this gallery as well as the artist's newest foray into "animal pelt" work. *Untitled T-Shirt Panel #2* (2007, seen below) keeps with Swanson's concept of raw emotion and dedication to material. Within a self-constructed box, he has sewn and coated in latex cotton t-shirts to



imitate the look of an animal hide. Left for open interpretation this work is both alluring and elusive; feelings that contextualize throughout the exhibition.

--Robyn Farrell Roulo

Images:

A Place in the Sun, 2008-2009. Wood, chain, paper, paint, polyurethane. 36 x 24 x 8 inches.

Untitled (Crystal Ram), 2009. Polyurethane foam, crystals, adhesive. 27 x 18 x 22 inches.

Untitled (White Paper Wasp's Nest), 2007. Hand-blown glass. 7 3/4 x 16 x 10 inches.

Untitled (T-Shirt Panel #2), 2007. Wood, cotton t-shirts, latex, thread. 65 x 57 x 3 inches.

Images all courtesy Richard Gray Gallery.

THE HUFFINGTON POST



Paul Klein

Posted April 3, 2009 | 07:42 PM (EST)

With ArtChicago a few Weeks Away, Art in the Galleries is Improving

There is quite a bit more good art to see as we approach [ArtChicago](#) than there was last week. There are numerous strong exhibitions opening this weekend.

Let's start at the top and not just because it's on the 25th floor. Richard Gray is presenting the work of [Marc Swanson](#) in Chicago for the first time. I like this expansion of aesthetics for the gallery. The art is slow, meditative, genuine, well-executed and thoughtful, dealing with issues of identity and internal conflict. Here it is about gay culture and identity from an accomplished artist who was raised in a family of hunters in northern New England before relocating to San Francisco. But that isn't quite the point. As humans, we all have internal conflicts. Seeing someone else conscientiously explore their dichotomies sheds light on all of our own issues. Besides beautiful, I found the show cathartic. That makes for a memorable exhibit.





ARTFORUM

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Marc Swanson

BELLWETHER GALLERY

Marc Swanson is not a colorist. Like his contemporary Terence Koh, Swanson prefers the absoluteness of white and black when crafting his sylvan-themed sculptures and strange mixed-media panels. When he does dabble with nonabsolutes, he does so with reticence, employing natural, lower-luminance hues: gold, the sepia of faded celluloid, or the amber blond of shellac. When he wants impact, he uses texture, making his work shimmer, sparkle, or reflect. Like other young artists (David Altmejd, Cristina Lei Rodriguez, and Kristian Kozul, to name a few), Swanson borrows from the tool kit of kitsch, arriving at something a bit outside that term's stubborn connotations.

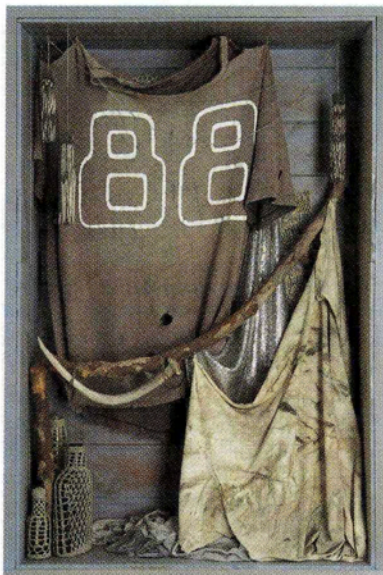
So the muted, pale blue-gray in 88, 2006–2008—a dolorous, Joseph Cornell-inspired box assemblage in the front room of “The Saint at Large,” Swanson’s fourth solo exhibition at Bellwether—marked something of a shift, however humble. At the heart of the work hung a threadbare Stephen Sprouse T-shirt (screen-printed, in Atari-style lettering, with the eponymous 88) that the artist purchased in 1988. A token with aura to spare, the shirt had been for a time in the possession of Swanson’s friend the singer-songwriter Elliott Smith, returning to Swanson following Smith’s suicide in 2003.

A tentative memorial, 88 was also the exhibition’s *mise en abyme*. Inside, a tiny antler evoked the sequined *Untitled (Black Antler Pile)*, 2007–2008, set precariously on the floor of the front room; motes of glitter recalled the sparkling black wall installed in the room beyond; a canted stick of wood suggested a prototype for two white latex-covered branches strung from the ceiling; bottle covers crocheted by the artist’s grandmother seemed like templates for the stark geometric patterns delineated throughout the exhibition; and so on.

The work also memorializes the exhibition’s title. It was in 1988, after all, that The Saint—a storied East Village palace of gay hedonism—closed and morphed into The Saint at Large, a company responsible for producing the annual Black Party and White Party, two of New York’s largest gay bashes. The connection between this allusion and Swanson’s choice of palette is plain (and indeed, a 1999 exhibition of his work at San Francisco’s ESP Gallery was titled “The Black Party”), though more noteworthy is the sentimental trajectory of this lineage. This is Swanson’s milieu: nostalgia for nostalgia, the Sisyphean task of mourning faded glory. Another box work in the main gallery, featuring a muzzy reprint of a still from the beginning of *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), cinched the exhibition’s analeptic modality.

The exhibition also featured a short video titled *Love Is All Around*, 2007, made by Swanson and Neil Gust, a friend and former

Marc Swanson,
*Untitled (T-shirt and
Chains)*, 2007–2008,
mixed media,
81 ½ x 81 ½ x 9”.



bandmate of Smith's. In contrast to its saccharine title, the video is a homoerotic, epileptic collage of butch men, red lightbulbs, foil curtains, and projections of geometric patterns. It seems to pay as much tribute to Fabien Baron's video for Madonna's single "Erotica" (1992) as it does to the queer film pantheon of Kenneth Anger, Andy Warhol, and James Bidgood. The video played in a room lined with black Plexiglas that reflected the images on all sides, producing an unsettling mirage that simultaneously evoked the lubricious backroom exploits of another erstwhile East Village gay bar.

Swanson plumbs his life for material with which to organize an otherwise loose network of people, places, and sensibilities, from the kitschy pastoralism of his antlers to former gay meccas, his grandmother's knitted keepsakes, and the tragic saga of an indie-music star. Swanson is an automythologist, one who excels in crafting sparkling, enigmatic totems from the messiness of his own history; there kitsch and confession dovetail to reveal, not obscure, visceral thirsts.

—David Velasco

Flash Art

February 29, 2008

STUDIO VISIT - MARC SWANSON

Marc Swanson's Studio is located in a golden-yellow brick building between Williamsborough and Bushwick in Brooklyn. The yellow bricks could be considered a hint towards a better understanding of the artist practice...

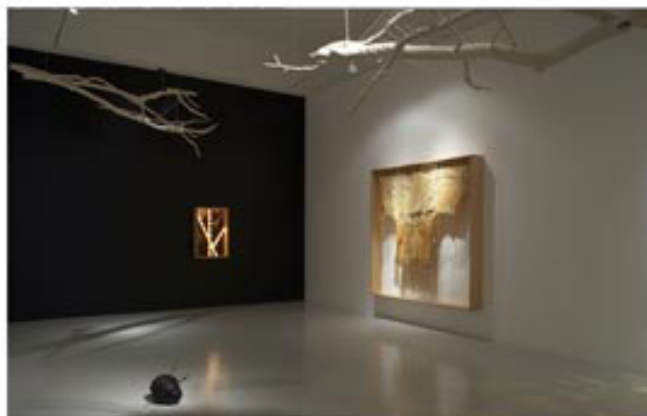
The first thing you realize inside the artist's 'burrow' is his attention to materials. Like an animal, the artist collects pieces of wood, deer horns (one of them donated by a Native American), tree branches and fake snakes, all ready to be turned into one of his installations.



Marc Swanson, *The Saint at Large*, 2008. Installation view at Bellwether gallery, New York
Marc Swanson, *The Saint at Large*, 2008. Installation view at Bellwether gallery, New York

Marc Swanson speaks about his childhood spent in New England, where as the son of a hunter he became confident with nature, and learnt how to deal with its 'unanimated' elements. In a Warholian *déjà vu*, he subsequently trained as a window decorator, developing a strong taste and an ability to create amazing immersive environments.

Another inseparable element of his current practice is his fascination for dioramas, a passion carried by the artist since his first projects, like *Killing Moon #3* (2005), presented at PS1 on the occasion of the "Greater New York." After this breakthrough the main character of this little world, a whitish, shy version of a bigfoot based on the artist's features [see *Killing Moon #4 (Self Portrait as a Yeti-)*, 2005], became the artist's trademark.



Marc Swanson, *The Saint at Large*, 2008. Installation view at Bellwether gallery, New York
Marc Swanson, *The Saint at Large*, 2008. Installation view at Bellwether gallery, New York

The other leitmotiv of Swanson's modus operandi is the deer head, a classic representation of masculinity in American culture, which the artist covers entirely with black or white crystals. Each object has its own inherent meaning and Marc Swanson knows how to contextualize this issue, wrapping up everything in an elaborate paradox.

The studio, which welcomes you with a bunch of old dirty bird cages hung on the ceiling as a ready-to-be installation (as was the case with *Always and Nothing*, 2005), is full of works that will be displayed in his upcoming show at Bellwether gallery. There's *Psychic Studies III* (2008), where the artist plays with nature's capacity to be decorative – from snowflakes and hand creases to horoscopy and stars maps – and *Untitled (88 T-shirt box)*, 2008, a sort of tribute to a series of coincidences summarized by the number 88, printed on an old and worn-out t-shirt owned by the artist. In 1988 (if I remember well) Swanson gifted the T-shirt to a friend, who consequently gave it to another friend before his death and who then after this tragic event gave it back to Swanson.



Marc Swanson, *Untitled (Black Paper Wasp Nest)*, 2007. Blown Glass, 40 x 50 x 25 cm. Courtesy of Bellwether, New York
Marc Swanson, *Untitled (88 T-shirt box)*, 2008-08. Wood, antler, glass, string, fabric, metallic lace, 91 x 81 x 19 cm.
Courtesy of Bellwether, New York

"I used to be recognized as an installation-maker," says the artist, "while the last show I did at the Milan-based gallery Marella was pretty much focused on different objects. This new show will be in between."

This desire is visible in a little maquette of Bellwether's spaces, where the artist has positioned all his variegated but still connected objects, such as one of his blown glass nests and a huge piece consisting of a wooden box filled with several golden ropes and a grubby group of t-shirts – some belonging to the artist, some to his assistant – made up with yellow/brown enamel (reminding me Robert Rauschenberg *Minutiae* of 1954). In this era dominated by eclecticism, I cannot help but recall the suspicious but courageous sexuality addressed by Rauschenberg's oeuvre, as written about by Yve-Alan Bois for the March 2006 issue of *Artforum*. This article, published on the occasion of the Rauschenberg survey organized by Paul Schimmel and hosted at the MOCA and then the Met, could also be considered an introduction to Marc Swanson's raw and glam atmospheres.



Marco Swanson in the studio
Marc Swanson, *Untitled (Sunset Boulevard Box)*, 2007-08. Wood, paper, lights, 91 x 61 x 20 cm.
Courtesy of Bellwether, New York

This solo show at Bellwether unveils all the artist passions, from Eva Hesse to Rauschenberg, from Native American Art to Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard*, from which he took a frame to use as the background of *Untitled (Sunset Boulevard Box)*, 2008). The next big show for Marc will be a solo exhibition at the Cornell University Museum this summer and "Abstract America," the forthcoming American survey at the Saatchi gallery featuring fellow artists like Kristin Baker, Mark Bradford, Francesca DiMattio, Barnaby Furnas, Ryan McGinness, Elizabeth Neel and Ruth Root.

Nicola Trezzi

www.bellwethergallery.com

March 5, 2005

Unknown Artists Find a Public Stage

By [GLENN COLLINS](#)

Orange? Yes.

Gates? Certainly.

Public art? Absolutely.

"The Gates"? Nope.

Yesterday, on the plaza just where the Christmas tree customarily looms over the skating rink at Rockefeller Center, the works of 10 contemporary artists began taking shape in a temporary gallery formed from a sugar-cubelike array of giant, unheated, orange modular boxes and cargo containers.

At midday, many of the artists began mounting the exhibition; some will not cease their aesthetic toil until Sunday night. The free show - titled "Art Rock" - will be formally open to the public for seven days, starting on Monday at noon.

Previous public art on the plaza has celebrated high-profile names like Jeff Koons with "Puppy," in 2000, an outsize terrier fashioned from 70,000 flowering plants; Louise Bourgeois with "Maman," a 34-foot-tall bronze spider, and two of its gargantuan offspring, in 2001; and Jonathan Borofsky who created "Walking to the Sky," seven life-size human figures on a 100-foot-tall slanted pole last year.

But "Art Rock" is the first plaza show featuring indoor and outdoor solo projects by relatively unknown artists; many of the installations are being created on site.

"There is a wealth of unknown artists, and many don't get the chance to show their work publicly," said Rob Speyer, senior managing director of Tishman Speyer Properties, manager and co-owner of Rockefeller Center.

"We wanted to give them the same access to the public usually reserved for high-profile names in the art world."

The target audience is the 250,000 passers-by on an average Midtown day. "We hope to expose the artists to people who might never have been to a gallery show, and we hope that they might be changed by what they see," said Abby Messitte, co-owner of Clementine Gallery in Manhattan, which produced the show and chose the artists.

"To most people, contemporary art is what Jay Leno makes fun of on the 'Tonight Show,' " said Taylor McKimens, 29, one of the artists. Yesterday he was hefting the faux facade of a white-shingled house, and installing cartoony windows that highlighted his three-dimensional drawings.

"I hope all of this might be a revelation to people who will see these works in a place where they aren't expecting to see contemporary art," Mr. McKimens added.

The two entrance gates to the plaza on 49th Street and 50th Streets are termed gateway lobbies in exhibition-speak, and their color is "like a hyper Rustoleum orange," said Todd Oldham, a designer who has created fashion, a furniture line for La-Z-Boy and a hotel in Miami. Mr. Oldham, a Clementine Gallery client, designed lounge areas at the gates in the interior space of four 11,000-pound shipping containers.

The 8-foot-by-20-foot lounges "have saltine-box scale," Mr. Oldham said, and are being furnished with varicolored "weird hairy carpet material," along with vinyl ottomans, floral displays and funky end-tables made from coiled cardboard spools, he said, "to carry the sponsors' propaganda."

This was a reference to Lucky, Cargo and Domino, the Condé Nast shopping magazines, which are sponsoring the show along with Tishman Speyer Properties.

"The lounges are a place to hang if you have a few minutes in your day," Mr. Oldham said. Since the lounges are unheated, however, hanging may be ephemeral, "though we are hoping for nice, sunny, ambient-heat days," he said.

Can those who may be pining for "The Gates" now find solace in shipping-container orange?

"I guess our presentation is coming on the heels of a great public art experience, and people may make that connection," Ms. Messitte said.

"But the coincidence of the timing, and the orange, it never occurred to us," she said. "Anyway, nothing is saffron."

The modules were trucked in, swung into the plaza with a 120-foot crane, and connected to form two 40-foot-long hallways in which most of the art is being installed; two installations will be outdoors.

Tishman Speyer declined to reveal how much the sponsors are spending, but those with knowledge of the exhibition estimated its cost to be in excess of \$250,000.

Last fall, Ms. Messitte and Elizabeth Burke, the other co-owner of Clementine, learned they had been rejected by the 2005 Armory Show, the Manhattan art fair at Piers 90 and 92 that opens on Friday. So the two women approached Mr. Speyer and his father Jerry - who had previously bought work from their gallery - requesting the donation of exhibition space to mount a show of new contemporary works. Ms. Burke said they just wanted "a parking lot or a warehouse or something."

Mr. Speyer came back to them with an upgrade: Rockefeller Plaza. "It's the best thing that ever happened to us," Ms. Messitte said, referring to the Armory rejection.

And so, yesterday, there was Rob Fischer, a 36-year-old artist who works in Brooklyn, hoisting the components of a narrow, 16-foot-long mirrored house, a 1,000-pound steel structure that will reflect "not only visitors to the show," he said, "but also all the office towers around it."

Ivan Navarro, 32, another Brooklyn artist, was positioning three aluminum-framed glass doors he had fitted with red, blue and yellow neon sculptures. Backed by mirrors and viewed through one-way glass, the images seemed to tunnel to infinity. The work, called "Short Cut," was created specifically for the Midtown location and is, he explained, an homage to Mondrian.

Marc Swanson, a 35-year-old artist, was assembling an installation called "Killing Moon II: Self-Portrait as a Yeti," an eight-foot-wide glassed-in diorama of - well, a city basement. It is inhabited by a sculpture of the abominable Mr. Swanson covered in white Mongolian lamb's wool.

"People will be creeped out by how much it looks like a basement," he said. "I hope I have time to linger in the corner and hear people's reactions."

The artists also include Matt Johnson, who converted a commercial steel Dumpster into a folded Dumpster-size airplane. Other exhibitors are Matthias Muller, Richard Aldrich, Ivan Witenstein, Sarah Oppenheimer and Trevor Appleson.

"Since we want folks who may not ordinarily have art in their lives to see this work and in some way be inspired by it" there was one important shared goal with "The Gates," Rob Speyer said.

"Perhaps," he added, "they might even develop an interest in art."

ARTFORUM

APRIL 2005



Kehinde Wiley

New York-based artist Kehinde Wiley is currently preparing for solo shows this year at Connor Contemporary Art in Washington, DC, and Deitch Projects in New York. His exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum, "Passing/Posing: The Paintings of Kehinde Wiley," closed February 5.

6 MARC SWANSON After following this guy's work for a few years, I realize its rhetorical strength comes from its ability to code-switch. Swanson's sculptures (featured in the 2004 Whitney Biennial) look like taxidermic deer-hunter trophies, but his antlered bucks are fabricated from foam and encrusted with dazzling crystals. He calls the deer his "surrogates."



V FALL 2005

WORK IN PROGRESS



NEW YORK'S P.S.1 HAS ALWAYS BEEN A SPACE FOR CREATIVE DISOBEDIENCE. THIS SUMMER THE **GREATER NEW YORK 2005** SHOW, WHICH FEATURED 167 ARTISTS DOING SOME ASTONISHING THINGS WITH PRETTY MUCH EVERY MATERIAL IN THE KNOWN UNIVERSE, GAVE A REAL SENSE THAT THE MISFITS HAD TAKEN OVER THE SCHOOLYARD. V TAKES A PEEK AT 10 YOUNG ARTISTS INSTALLING THEIR WORK IN THE NAME OF NEW YORK NOW

Photography Jason Schmidt

MARC SWANSON

This installation, called *Killing Moon #3—self-portrait of a yeti in his lair*, was proposed and made specifically for the boiler room at P.S.1 and for the Greater New York show. In November 2004 I was able to tour P.S.1 and figure out what space I would propose to do an installation in. I had wanted to do a series of myself as a yeti, and as soon as I saw the boiler room, I knew this would have to be where he would live. The boiler room is such a special space, and you just can't beat the natural light coming in from the sidewalk skylights.

The photo shows me unwrapping my yeti sculpture about midway through the weeklong installation. It was all very dark and cold at first but now I have come to feel very at home in the P.S.1 boiler room. Most items in the installation aside from the yeti are made from trash and debris found between my apartment in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, and P.S.1 in Long Island City (about a half an hour's walk). I spent close to every night for weeks combing the streets in the mind-set of the yeti to find the materials needed for the installation. The yeti figure has casts of my hands, feet, and face, and the body is sculpted from measurements of my body in the pose you see.

I had to think as the yeti to make his lair—what he would make, and what would make him tick. I wanted to make objects from materials found on the street, ritual objects that the yeti would use to make sense of the world.

It was hard to work out, because if the yeti creates the objects, they are ritual; if I make them, they are fine art. After a while the lines began to blur, and I realized that I was the yeti and the yeti was me, so the object became both an object of ritual as well as art. And in turn the whole installation became a self-portrait—not just the figure of the yeti. This was a real breakthrough for me.

Marc Swanson

ARTINFO

NEWS & FEATURES



Always and Nothing (detail view) Marc Swanson

Emerging Artists: Marc Swanson

by João Ribas

NEW YORK, Nov. 15, 2005 - Probing your subconscious for gems of self-wisdom comes with a caveat: You never know—and frankly might not like—what's lurking there. In Marc Swanson's case, the Brooklyn-based artist's journey into self-awareness takes place through the artistic process—and it uncovers some dazzling disquietude. Turns out, Swanson's a Yeti.

Killing Moon #3, Swanson's self-portrait as a Yeti in his lair in the boiler room of P.S. 1—a stand-out contribution to the Greater New York 2005 show held at the MoMA-affiliated museum in Queens, N.Y. this summer—was made from materials that Swanson's abominable alter-ego collected while foraging around his house and the museum.

"The idea was that I would be the Yeti and basically collect garbage for four-to-six weeks every night to make the installation," says the Connecticut-born artist. "I had to reconcile the fact that I'm an educated artist who knows about formal issues and academia, and figure out what the Yeti would make instead—these more ritualistic objects. But the Yeti also collects things in the world and then puts them together to sort of make sense of the world around him. It dawned on me that I pretty much do the same thing: so I'm the yeti and the yeti is me."

With such feral self-portraits and enigmatic dioramas—recreating creepy but meaning-laden forest environments in urban settings—Swanson's work blends personal revelation with a poignant sense of melancholy. "I'm jealous that Lucas Samaras calls everything a self-portrait," jokes the Connecticut-born artist, who, in all his art, turns personal narratives into a witty play between what can be understood by others and what remains mysterious but alluring.

From Swanson's restive imagination—filled with pop culture references and a Romantic

longing for glitter-covered symbolism—emerge some rhetorical bait-and-switch moves: hunting trophies delicately covered in rhinestones; scratched mirrors toying with the very meaning of self-reflection.

Swanson's conceptual lillies often get gilded in such uncanny ways, and his third solo show, on view at the Bellwether gallery in Manhattan's Chelsea neighborhood through Dec. 3, continues to explore beauty and desire from all refracted sides. "I can't help but make pretty things. Even if they're made from trash, they're always sort of glinty. I like to challenge this postmodern idea that great art can't be beautiful," Swanson says.

Swanson's new work has him working intuitively, "building things up like a drawing or a painting and using a more formal language."

Dualities pervade in his work. Take his rhinestone covered deer head, what amounts to a Liberace deer: "There were all these dualities in my life that were really strong influences. I grew up in the most republican state in the nation, but my mom was a libertarian, and I was brought up a Unitarian. I think with the deer heads I was trying to make an object that expressed that, this pretty simple synthesis."

Some of the more perverse gestures in the show—like adding streaks of acrylic painting to a stuffed peacock—are just as seductive, if less literal.

The diaphanous glass arrows that puncture the gallery wall are impossibly beautiful for their intended purpose, a kind of reconciliation of beauty and power. "I went bow hunting with my dad as a kid, but it just didn't work—I didn't become a bow-hunting marine like my dad, but I wanted too," Swanson says. "The arrows are like a myth," Swanson explains, "that there's only one person who can shoot them into the wall without breaking."

Always and Nothing, the exhibition's large diorama made with trees from the New England landscape of Swanson's youth, evokes a sense of mystery and melancholy, a Yeti's lonely refuge of beer-bottle-filled cages, flags and wasp nests suspended from wiry tree branches.

Several etched mirrors in the show, with images of a target, a peacock or a Madonna partially scratched off, use their visual trick to, well, mirror, the issues they evoke. "When you try to focus on yourself, something always steps in the way. Your brain is finishing the image on the mirror while at the same it's bouncing to look at you; I think it brings up all these issues of insecurity and narcissism in between the two."

The combination of self-revelation and ironic gesture might make Swanson's work elusive, but it also makes it evocative. "I try to see all these things and what they mean to me. I think that these layers end up with a poetic sense that people can take something away from, even if it can't be totally nailed down."

Swanson proves this is often the case with what we find alluring, and the same might be said of the remnants of the not-so-rose-colored past that is slowly revealed in Swanson's work.



Always and Nothing



Boy in Tree



Madonna



Prelude to Sorrow

Art in America

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REPORT FROM NEW YORK I

Return to the Real?

A youth-oriented survey at P.S.1 presents work, much of it politically aware, by 160 New York City artists who have emerged since the millennium

BY ELEANOR HEARTNEY

Greater New York 2005 took up residence at P.S.1 just in time for the opening of a flurry of spring art fairs in New York City. The sprawling exhibition was preceded by a buildup of expectations based in part on the freshness of the first edition of this show in 2000. Once again, Greater New York was posed as a full-scale collaborative effort between the curators of P.S.1 and the Museum of Modern Art. It includes more than 160 artists selected from a pool of over 2,000 submissions generated by both professional recommendations and an open call for proposals. The curatorial team that selected the final show was composed of P.S.1 director Alanna Heiss, MOMA director Glenn Lowry, P.S.1 curatorial advisor Robert Nickas, P.S.1 curator Amy Smith-Stewart and MOMA curator Ann Temkin, and headed by Klaus Biesenbach, who is a curator at both museums.

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In an equally absurdist vein is Marc Swanson's *Kill Moon 3 (self portrait as Yeti in his lair)*, 2005. Tucked away in the gloomy bowels of P.S.1's basement, a furry albino creature sits under the only illumination, a small window. He is surrounded by real-looking dead bunnies, hanging rats and sequined antlers, apparent evidence of the satisfaction of his primeval appetites.

The humor of these last two works extends to a number of other nonapocalyptic works in the show, suggesting that comedy, fortunately, has not been completely vanquished by the pervasive gloom.

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What may we conclude about the state of art in New York, at least as represented by this show? Overall, the work reveals an attraction to the theatrical, a weariness with conceptual rigor and a drive toward narrative. Ideas are broad, but not necessarily deep, and they tend to be presented in an easily digested form, a tendency compatible with a wider culture dominated by soundbites, Fox "News" and Hollywood blockbusters driven by amazing special effects. The show suggests that artists are connected to events in the outside world but have little sense of what to do about them, other than to create artworks that incorporate their frustration, rage, apprehension or sense of the absurdity of contemporary life. □

"Greater New York" is on view at P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center in Long Island City, Queens, Mar. 13-Sept. 26.



Marc Swanson: *Kill Moon 3 (self portrait as Yeti in his lair)*, 2005, mixed-medium installation.

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Marc Swanson at Bellwether - New York

Dominique Nahas

Marc Swanson's second solo exhibition at Bellwether, "Live Free or Die," was an anthem to crushed dreams and hopes for the future. Conceived as a four-part installation comprising individual artworks fitted into a loosely autobiographical scenario, the show roughly conveyed the artist's coming to terms with his homosexuality and his politically conservative, rural New Hampshire roots. It also suggested a lapsed search for the possibility of renewal in a psychically devastated landscape.

The gallery was transformed into a walk-in tableau meant to recall a grungy meeting place or entertainment center filled with movie posters as well as absurd roadside souvenirs. The four narratives were "The Beginning of the End of the Beginning (Black Glitter Forest)," an allusion to eco-devastation; "Target the Rainbow," about finding one's way through the many conflicted paths of gayness; "Death Is Not the Worst of All Evils," the artist's self-deprecating examination of his values and life choices in contrast to his childhood's nativist values; and "Bucks," consisting of two fake mounted buck heads, entirely sequined, antlers in mid-clash, placed against a bright red-orange wall.

Swanson's honky-tonk environment initially seemed to be at odds with his purportedly self-revelatory intent. Each tired symbol pumped up the volume of exhausted artifice. Yet on some level, the contrivance of this deliberately awful down-and-out setting, with its dime-store mannequins and cheaply realized decor--made with, among other things, glitter, sgraffitoed Plexiglas, hockey tape, hanging T-shirts, rope nets, dirt and deerskin--seemed to offer an authentic glimpse into the artist's sense of abject futility, Goth morbidity and misplaced projection of gay fabulousness.

Injecting a tone of mock despair into essentially serious concerns can be a genuine enough way of bracing oneself with bittersweet humor in order to endure the unendurable. But the exhibition never seemed to take off beyond this coping tactic. A thin, tinny tone permeated the show, which was hobbled by overarching generalizations about the Self, Death, Rebirth, Gayness, Nature, Man, the State, etc. Some of the objects in the installation recalled private incidents in the artist's life and were not reducible to easy interpretation. But they were few and far between. Absent more of those unexpected elements, the rebel yell of "Live Free or Die" seemed more like a perfunctory murmur.