

ARTslant

new york

the #1 contemporary art network

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.