

GRANDLIFE

ARTIST PROFILE: MARC SWANSON

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By Yasha Wallin

Marc Swanson's dreamlike sculptures, installations, and paintings incorporate a variety of materials such as glass, mirrors, crystals, and animal skin, and resemble something between a dark fairytale and a peaceful nightmare. His beautiful works consider themes of renewal, self-awareness, mortality, and desire. I caught up with Marc shortly before the opening of his fourth solo exhibition *The Saint at Large*, on display at Bellwether Gallery, New York.

GrandLife: Tell me a bit about your background. Where are you from? What type of household did you grow up in?



Untitled (T-Shirt Quilt #1), 2007
T-shirts, latex, wood, thread
67 x 57 x 2 1/2 inches

MS: I was born in Connecticut and brought up in New Hampshire. New Hampshire was a strange place to grow up—very libertarian. Where I grew up was a small town when we moved there in 1976, but by the time I graduated from high school in 1987, it was pretty suburban. The town next to my town had been voted the most desirable town in the country to live in by Fortune Magazine a couple of years before and had a real boom. This is still a mystery to me. My father was an ex-marine and a hunter and a salesman. We heated our house with wood. My mom is Unitarian and a high school math teacher. She wasn't a teacher while we were growing up. I was terrible at math. She brought us up Unitarian after my father and her divorced.

GrandLife: Your fourth solo show at Bellwether Gallery opens February 28th. What can we look forward to in this upcoming exhibition?

MS: I think it should be a little bit of a surprise, but I can say it will be 13 new works in an array of materials. The back wall of the gallery will be covered in black glitter. It's more formally and material driven than some of my earlier work, but I believe has the same feel.

GrandLife: One of the pieces that will be on view is Untitled (88 T-shirt box), a beautiful boxed diorama. Tell me more about these self-contained installations that we are seeing more of, and this piece in particular.

MS: I wanted to take my installation work and see if I could make it work in a discrete object. The 88 box is a great example. (Thanks for saying it's beautiful.) This piece is a memorial and very sentimental piece. I got that shirt in 1988—it's a Stephen Sprouse shirt. It has had a very exciting life and has very deep felt feelings in it for me because of people in my life who have worn it for periods of time. The bottles in the box have crochet on them that my great grandmother did. The materials are very loaded for me, but the assemblage is formally driven and is very inspired by Cornell and Duchamp. I wanted to see what I could do with the trope of a diorama box, seeing how the personal can be narrative for me, but make it a formal project and see if these things can synthesize.

GrandLife: How long have you been making work for The Saint at Large?

MS: About two years.



88 Box, 2006-8
Wood, t-shirts, bottles, branch, antler, metal chain, fabric, wood, glitter
36 x 24 x 7 1/2 inches

GrandLife: *How prolific are you? Do you focus on one piece at a time, or will you work on several simultaneously?*

MS: I work on many at the same time...it wasn't always like this. When I had less time I would work on one or two at a time, but now that I am very fortunate and have more time and more space, I work on them as long as I can. All of the pieces for this show are getting their finishing touches now. And some have been worked on for the last two years, some not as long, but it has been very fruitful to let them sit. I may not touch one for a month, but they get further along somehow. Many of the pieces in this show have had many incarnations and many failures. But they are all coming together now.

GrandLife: *You seem to be able to find beauty in difficult themes and subjects. Do you consider yourself an optimistic person?*

MS: Yes, I definitely am a half full kind of guy.

GrandLife: *The diversity of the materials you use is impressive, and you seem to be able to incorporate a range of these with ease. Have you always worked with many mediums?*

MS: I have always worked this way—I used to do it with jobs. I would take on a job I knew nothing about and learn it. Get good at it and then quit and start a new job I knew nothing about and so on. Sometimes I feel like I'm doing the same thing with technique and material. But I hate being bored and love a challenge. Sometimes it feels a little schizophrenic, but I love to learn new techniques and materials. I try to make everything myself and learn what I need to do to make different pieces. This year I got the chance to have some glass pieces made, and that was an incredible experience. I couldn't blow the glass myself, but I was there during the making. Between the guys who worked on them, they had combined experience of 50 years and you could tell. Glass is addictive. I would like to go to Italy in the near future to learn some very traditional techniques. I love the idea of making contemporary work with old world techniques and traditions.



Untitled (Sunset Light Box),
2007-8
Wood, paper, light bulbs and
fixtures
36 x 24 x 7 inches

GrandLife: *Do you consider your pieces narrative? Has art making helped you work through your own psychology?*

MS: It has very much helped me in the past. It was my sanity, and it is narrative to me, but I don't expect people to be able to figure out this narrative. They are also conceptually, formally, and materially driven. I hope they can be very open to interpretation of the viewer.

GrandLife: *Do you have set goals when creating new work, or does it mostly begin organically?*

MS: I used to decide before hand, and this was kind of a necessity with time and money and such, but as I have gotten older and have more time it comes pretty organically now. I try and work as intuitively as I can and as formally. But I start with personally loaded materials and then work with them formally, combining narrative with formal, sometimes figurative, sometimes abstract. This combination seems to be working for me these days.

GrandLife: *Outside of the art world, who or what are you most influenced by?*

MS: Science, music, and spirituality.

GrandLife: *What's next?*

MS: Some rest.