

Flash Art

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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...

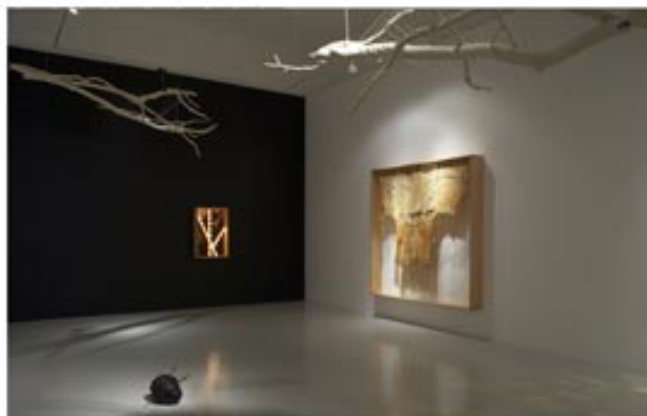
The first thing you realize inside the artist's 'burrow' is his attention to materials. Like an animal, the artist collects pieces of wood, deer horns (one of them donated by a Native American), tree branches and fake snakes, all ready to be turned into one of his installations.



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



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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.

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www.bellwethergallery.com