
Marc Swanson

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"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*