



CATSKILL, NEW YORK, AND NORTH ADAMS, MASSACHUSETTS

Marc Swanson

Thomas Cole National Historic Site and MASS MoCA

MARC SWANSON

THIS PAGE:
Installation view of "A
Memorial to Ice at
the Dead Deer Disco,"
Thomas Cole National
Historic Site, 2022.

OPPOSITE:
Installation views of "A
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MASS MoCA, 2022.

Marc Swanson's "A Memorial to Ice at the Dead Deer Disco" offers a queer elegy for our collective climate futures. The two-venue exhibition tackles a huge set of parameters, including climate change, the AIDS crisis and the friends he's lost to it, the Industrial Revolution, the Hudson River School, sublime forests, and backyard gardens. By personalizing the ecologi-

cal gaze, Swanson builds a proscenium and an altar where we can lament and, crucially, celebrate.

At MASS MoCA, within a warehouse-style gallery complete with soaring ceilings and exposed girders, Swanson has situated dozens of figural sculptures made from taxidermy mounts, plaster-dipped and expertly draped gauze, photography, video, and light.

Deer forms collide, melt, and disappear under their draperies, some losing their heads or limbs. The arrangement of these hard foam bodies evokes the small-town cemeteries that dot the landscape of New England, the ruins of which are often discovered deep in the forest. Like visiting a cemetery—or perhaps a mausoleum in this instance—the experience is intimate yet very any-

mous. Moving through the space, the light fades to a deepening dark. Mirrored frames reflect the light of slowly spinning, rhinestone-covered antlers; the feeling is that of a nightclub, albeit a nightclub inside a forest that thinks it's a graveyard.

Swanson, who is known for his use of embellished taxidermy forms, especially deer, began this project after moving to Catskill,

New York, from Brooklyn. Looking at Thomas Cole's paintings of Catskill Creek, Swanson and his partner realized that their property was once a favorite painting site for the 19th-century founder of the Hudson River School. Swanson began researching Cole and discovered that he had more in common with his predecessor than just a shared love for a particular parcel of land. Cole immigrated to the U.S. in 1818 when he was 17 years old to escape the increasingly toxic industrialization of England. He was a climate migrant. By the time he moved to Catskill in 1825, the same industrial schemes that had prompted his flight were ramping up in the U.S.

Through a study of Cole's essays and lectures, Swanson learned that Cole's work as a painter was partially an effort to warn about where this development would lead and to galvanize people into rejecting perceived human progress at the cost of nature. Cole's much-feared, worst-case scenario for his beloved Catskill Creek never came to specific fruition. Instead, his prediction is playing out on a global scale. That may not be a good sign for the many contemporary artists hoping to turn the tide somehow with their work, but it remains important to bear witness—and to celebrate that which is still here. This background provides the stage setting for Swanson's project in its entirety, and it makes his second installation at the Thomas Cole National Historic Site one of

nuance and depth.

In contract to the cavernous former industrial site of MASS MoCA, Cole's butter-yellow house offers the intimacy of a familiar, domestic setting. Swanson's works hang next to a four-poster bed, stand atop a dresser, and flank a sitting-room fireplace. The interior is compact yet stately, with brightly colored and patterned walls, some hand-painted by Cole himself (and later restored). Swanson's figures—draped, sparkling, surrounded by flowers—add a present-day opulence and splendor, enhancing and enlivening the site. Somehow, these glittering things belong here. They add the

next act to the narrative arc. The adjacency of Swanson's contemporary Romantic sculptures and Cole's 19th-century Romantic landscape paintings highlights the messy entanglements that we continue to struggle with today: Which nature/which culture? Whose history/whose progress? Which bodies—human, animal, vegetal, geographical—have been marked and how will they survive?

—LAUREN LEVATO
COYNE

"A Memorial to Ice at the Dead Deer Disco" is on view at the Thomas Cole National Historic Site through November 27, 2022. At MASS MoCA, it continues through January 2023.



contributors



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Leah Triplett Harrington is a curator, writer, and editor based in Boston, where she is curator for Now + There and editor-at-large of *Boston Art Review*. This issue, she speaks with Dawn DeDeaux.



JILLIAN KNIPE

Jillian Knipe, artist, critic, and creator of the *Art Fictions* podcast, interviews Rachael Louise Bailey.



JAN GARDEN CASTRO

New York-based contributing editor Jan Garden Castro (www.jancastro.com) has an essay in a new limited edition of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. Here, she speaks with Cristina Iglesias about the artist's latest projects.



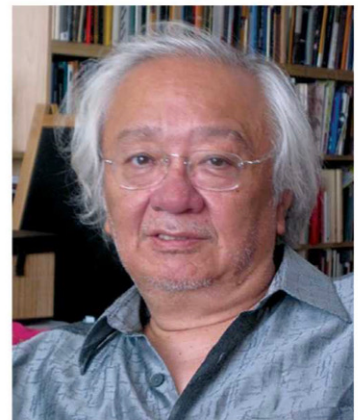
LAUREN LEVATO COYNE

Lauren Levato Coyne, a queer artist and writer, is currently the gallery director at Ferrin Contemporary in North Adams, MA. Here, she reviews Marc Swanson's dual exhibition at MASS MoCA and the Thomas Cole National Historic Site.



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JOHN YAU

John Yau is a poet, critic, and curator whose latest monograph is *Joe Brainard: The Art of the Personal* (Rizzoli Electa, 2022). Here, he reflects on the life and work of Deborah Butterfield, recipient of the ISC's 2022 Lifetime Achievement Award.

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Photo: John Polak.

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