

JAMES COHAN GALLERY

Hersh, Allison, "Art and Soul: (Un)Natural history," *Savannah Morning News – Savannah Now*, August 23, 2009



Erick Swenson, Untitled (carpet piece), polyurethane resin, oil and acrylic paint, platform dimensions rug is transported on: 144" x 96" x 5", 132" x 84" x 26", 2001.

Like many students, Erick Swenson changed majors a number of times in college at the University of North Texas. He tried majoring in jewelry, drawing and painting before discovering the irresistible magic of sculpture.

"I like making stuff that's challenging," he said. "Sculpture is a very time-consuming process. There are a lot of material questions, but there's always stuff to learn. It's rewarding when it works and devastating when it doesn't."

"Caught Captive," a powerful solo exhibit on display at the Savannah College of Art and Design's Red Gallery, showcases original work by this rising star on the contemporary sculpture scene. Swenson made a tsunami-size splash at the prestigious Whitney Biennial in 2004 and has been featured in *Art in America* and *Artforum* in recent years.

"Erick's sculptures are incredible on both a formal and conceptual level," said Melissa Messina, senior curator at the Savannah College of Art and Design. "The detail is awe-inspiring, which is what initially draws you in. Then, once in front of the pieces, you begin to consider their complexity. Viewing the work, one is reminded of the delicate balance in nature and the vulnerability of life."

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Swenson's ambitious sculptures typically blend science, nature, cinema and art in dizzying compositions that push the boundaries of the medium. His intricately cast resin installations - which can be as large as a basketball court - have been universally praised for their ambitious design, provocative content and hyper-detailed execution.

In one dramatic tableau on display at Red Gallery, Swenson focuses the eye on a white fawn spinning upward, its hind leg caught in the rippling folds of a sinister cloak. Equal parts innocence and menace, this emotionally charged sacrifice seems to suggest the ultimate destruction of life, as a wide-eyed woodland creature naively succumbs to death's elegant, seductive persuasion.

Creating these intricate, baroque sculptures can take months and is a laborious process of casting and molding. Swenson particularly enjoys sculpting animals, which assume symbolic, allegorical and mythic proportions in his work.

"You can get away with a lot more with animals," he confessed. "They're more fun to use to depict emotions and scenarios. Humans are very loaded and, frankly, I don't find them very interesting in an artistic context."

Although he has dabbled with drawing and painting over the years, Swenson finds sculpture to be the most stimulating and fulfilling medium.

"I like the fact that sculpture is three-dimensional" he said. "I think sculpture is more interactive because it takes up the physical space. I find that very appealing."

Swenson's work recalls the stuffed deer, elk, whales and other creatures typically on display at a natural history museum, but the artist considers his work to be closer to the special effects set on an imaginary Hollywood movie.

"I think they're more like cinematic moments," he said. "They're more like a background in a film."