

JAMES COHAN GALLERY

Knight, Christopher, "Erick Swenson at UCLA Hammer Museum," *Los Angeles Times*, January 2003

Los Angeles Times



Erick Swenson, *Untitled*, 2002, polyurethane resin, oil and acrylic paint, 132 x 84 x 26 inches

In a gallery handout, Dallas-based critic Charles Dee Mitchell describes Erick Swenson's sculptural style as "creepy realism", and based on the few examples I've seen by the 30-year-old Texan, that's exactly right. It certainly pertains to the extraordinary single work in the UCLA Hammer Museum's Project Gallery. This untitled sculpture is riveting. Made in 2001 from polyurethane resin and acrylic paint, it shows a pristine white deer standing on a large Persian rug. The young buck's legs splayed, rear end up, head down and antlers on the elegant carpet – is rubbing the soft velvet covering off his new antlers. Nature's season for shedding velvet would be fall, and the rug's intricate floral pattern,

rendered in deep green and golden brown hues, exudes an appropriately autumnal feel.

The deer is frozen in preparation for mature rituals of combat, mating and survival – but something strange has happened. At the places where his antlers have rubbed the rug, the elaborate pattern has blurred. In the exchange between nature and culture, the design goes out of focus.

Something at once dire and liberating characterizes the give and take – and something poignant too. Swenson shows a moment of extreme animal vulnerability, but the exquisite refinement of its rendering is consoling.

The sculpture is a marvel of fabricated artifice. The cast-resin deer is acutely observed, yet its slender fragility and blank whiteness transform it into an icy doppelganger.

Ditto the rug. The 7-by-11 foot carpet was made by casting an actual rug in resin; the floral pattern in the original was photographed, scanned into a computer and inkjet printed onto the cast. The result is a magic carpet embalmed.

Culture, in Swenson's capable hands, is an age-old field in which animal instincts are courted, copied, held at bay and struggling to be set free. His sculpture crystallizes the melee.