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## Gyan Panchal

MARCELLE ALIX



Gyan Panchal, *La face (The Face)*, 2014, polyurethane, rust, 33 × 22 3/4 × 10 3/4".

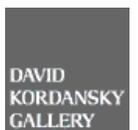
Broken beehive boxes, a discarded hunting tent, a three-foot-tall wedge of eroded polyurethane: These are among the raw materials of Gyan Panchal's latest works. Starting with man-made items scavenged from the French countryside near his home in Limousin, Panchal takes care not to efface marks made by humans, animals, chemicals or other forces of nature whose interactions with these once-functional objects predate his own. Via subtle, sometimes almost imperceptible modifications, such as the addition of a layer of dust, some gentle sanding, or a strategic fold, Panchal casts himself in the humble role of coauthor in a story of nature versus culture. Though the gallery context deprives some of the objects of their practical connotations, even abstracting them in a sense, Panchal's work raises real concerns about the relationship between man and his environment.

The first grouping encountered in Panchal's recent exhibition "*Redevenir soleil*" (To Become Sun Again) was a trio of sculptures—*L'urne* (The Urn; all works cited, 2014), *Le vol* (The Flight), and *Le pas* (The Step)—made from artificial beehives that had been burned and abandoned following a devastating mite infestation. By listing "propolis" (a sticky substance produced by bees to seal their hive and protect against intruders and pathogens) as a material in two of the three works alongside wood and paint, Panchal recognizes the bees' contribution to the final art object, appearing here, postfire, as a brownish, charred crust. Panchal's installation, however, laments this collaboration between man and nature as a morbid failure on both sides. *Le pas*, a pillar made from reconfigured planks from a hive-box cover, towered over the corresponding topless box, *Le vol*, like a mourner beside an open casket. Nearby, *L'urne*, a closed silver-painted hive box, suggested a tombstone.

Elsewhere, less poignant works appeared to shame and ridicule apparatuses that exploit nature. In an otherwise empty room, *L'aveugle* (The Blind), a tent designed for hunters and nature photographers who

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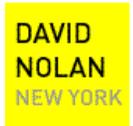
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need cover in the woods, cowered in the corner. Transposed into a stark white, brightly lit space, the protective gear—an object on display—became itself a defenseless target. In an act of retributive justice, Panchal has not only ratcheted up the lighting but covered the tent in sawdust. The woody coating, with its tar-and-feathers implication, mocks the tent's camouflage pattern and thwarts the would-be occupant's ability to see without being seen. Receiving a similar reckoning, *Le tronc* (The Trunk), a hunter's outfit cut lengthwise, was mounted on a wall like a trophy head.

Like politicized non-sites, Robert Smithson's installations featuring dirt and rocks brought from specific outside locations into the exhibition space, Panchal's sculptures describe a battle between nature and culture. Some man-made objects appear marred to the point of incomprehension—for instance *La face* (The Face), a sliced cylinder of polyurethane that looks like a giant hunk of moldy Swiss cheese. Others, like the hunting accoutrements, maintain their formal integrity but have been duly humiliated. In both scenarios, it is the artist's touch, light though it may seem, that tips the balance in favor of nature.

—*Mara Hoberman*

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