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Jay Heikes: 'Inanimate Life'

By **ROBERTA SMITH**

Marianne Boesky Gallery
509 West 24th Street
Chelsea
Through Saturday

The second New York gallery solo of Jay Heikes presents an oddly Romantic artist in love with nature and its processes and interested in works that seem almost mutually exclusive in style and material, yet collude beautifully.

In the first space, two works meditate on the delicacies of rust. "Heartless Ascension" is a gangly sculpture in rusted iron and bronze whose linear extensions and denser junctions alternate between synthetic and organic, graceful and awkward. Is it a fragment of a weeping willow, a tangle of partly downed electrical wiring or maybe a trap — in which case has it caught something? "Conversation With a Bitter Pill" is a sort of painting: a slab of steel leaning against the wall, with hints of light, leaf and pattern that seem rusted into its surface.

In the second space, "Molting," a series of paper-thin sheets of a silvery material, lies uneasily on the floor, ragged of edge and susceptible to every breeze. It is made of gelatin, and the breezes are enhanced by "Outside World," a small opening, covered by an elegant white grill, that Mr. Heikes has made in the gallery's exterior wall. Disturbed-looking humans are intimated in two large, murky photographs, and two tall sculptures made from hand-colored porcupine quills stuck in wood introduce more animalistic corporeal presences.

"Inanimate Life," the show's title, is a good term for art. Its various parts and the back and forth among them will mesmerize, if you let them.

ROBERTA SMITH