

1988



Hanson, Duane, American, b.1925
8. SELF PORTRAIT WITH MODEL, 1979.
Polyvinyl, polychromed in oil and mixed media.
Life-size.
Courtesy of the artist.

REAL PEOPLE

LIFE-LIKE SCULPTURES
BY DUANE HANSON

An **N4 NZI Corporation**/Auckland City Art Gallery Exhibition

Organised by the Edwin A Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas
and toured in New Zealand by the Auckland City Art Gallery

DUANE HANSON

Duane Hanson is an American sculptor who attained prominence in the late sixties during the height of the pop art era. A social realist in three-dimensional forms, Hanson is almost exclusively a sculptor of the human figure, drawing his types from a wide cross-section of American society.

Cast in fibreglass and resin, or more latterly in bronze, from fragmentary mouldings taken from different sections of a sitter's anatomy, the sculptures are then assembled, painted and decked out in real clothes, wigs and accessories to present an astonishing recreation of an actual person.

What sets these intriguing sculptures apart from wax effigies at Madame Tussaud's, is their frequent allusions to a troubled society and the fact that the people they represent are from all walks of life and not the ranks of the rich, famous and infamous. Many of Hanson's earlier sculptures, for example *Woman derelict* 1973, *Bowery derelicts* 1969 and *Drug addict* 1974 deal with extreme cases of social alienation and despair. While compellingly illusionistic, such works are also disturbing because they confront us with the full force of a reality we normally perceive indirectly through television and newspapers.

In *Riot* 1967 and *Accident* 1967, Hanson has captured the horror of violence, both deliberate and accidental, in all its grisly detail. The helmeted cop kicking a black youth he has clubbed to the ground, and the young motorcyclist pinned beneath the mangled wreckage of his machine, are experiences (and not just images) that imprint themselves indelibly on the imagination.

But there is also humour in Hanson's work and in recent years he has moved away from the unfortunates of society who comprise many of his earlier subjects. *Photographer* 1978 looks perfectly credible in an art gallery context and it is not unusual for the public to politely avoid obscuring his view. Crouched on the floor, amid empty packets of film, his camera cocked, he appears a legitimate participant in a social gathering. The absence of such formal devices as plinths enhances the illusion of reality. Similarly *Woman with child in a stroller* 1985 can easily be mistaken for part of a crowd, not just because she looks real, but also so commonplace as to hardly warrant a second glance — until we realise the hoax. It is this ironic matter-of-factness combined with Hanson's almost obsessive pursuit of verisimilitude that makes his sculptures both prosaic and riveting, and explains why Hanson exhibitions are so appealing to audiences worldwide.

At the Whitney Museum of America Art in New York 300,000 people viewed a previous exhibition of Hanson's sculpture and over a seven venue tour of America the same exhibition was viewed by a total of 950,000 people. Perhaps it is the fact that he blurs the traditional distinctions between art and life by holding up a mirror to society that gives Hanson's sculptures a special attraction for modern audiences. They appeal to people of all ages because of their extraordinary craftsmanship and illusionism, yet they also challenge ideas of what sculpture is and what its role should be.

Realism has long been a challenge to sculptors through the ages. The ancient Greeks, whose statues we know today in white marble and bronze, often polychromed their creations to enhance naturalism, a technique Hanson also employs, though with a spraygun and not a brush. While many classical sculptors sought an ideal human form for their gods, rulers and heroes, there is also a long tradition of realism in sculpture of the human figure which goes back to the Hellenistic age (3rd-2nd century B.C.). The bronzes *The dying Gaul*, *Boy jockey* and *Old fisherman* from this period can be seen as antecedents of Hanson's social realism.

Even Hanson's unconventional practice of dressing his sculptures in real clothing and wigs has a direct historical precedent in Degas' sculpture *Young dancer of fourteen years* 1881. To the young figure modelled in wax, Degas added real hair, a muslin tutu, a linen bodice, ballet shoes and a satin ribbon in her hair. It is inviting to draw comparisons between Degas' sculpture and Hanson's portrait of a contemporary girl, *Child with puzzle* 1978.

There is something of all of us in Hanson's sculptures, cast from life, and in looking at them, in a sense, we look at ourselves. "People love to people-watch", Hanson says, "but they feel guilty about doing it. With my figures they can go up to them, stare at the wrinkles, the hair, the skin tone, something they wouldn't dare do normally."



Edgar Degas 1834-1917
Young dancer of fourteen years 1881
wax, human hair, dressed.

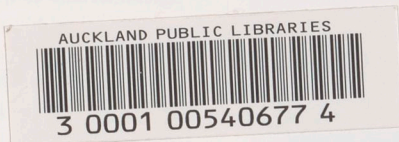


Hellenistic school
Boy jockey c. 230-200 BC
 bronze
 lifesize

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

- 1 **SEATED ARTIST** 1971
 Polyester resin and fibreglass, polychromed in oil and mixed media.
 Life-size.
 Courtesy of Byron and Eileen Cohen, Shawnee Mission, Kansas.
- 2 **DRUG ADDICT** 1974
 Polyester resin and fibreglass, polychromed in oil and mixed media.
 Life-size.
 Courtesy of Mr. Richard Brown Baker, New York, New York.
- 3 **MAN WITH HANDCART** 1975
 Polyester resin and fibreglass, polychromed in oil and mixed media.
 Life-size.
 Courtesy of Frances and Sydney Lewis, Richmond, Virginia.
- 4 **SHOPPERS** 1976
 Polyvinyl, polychromed in oil and mixed media.
 Life-size.
 Courtesy of Mr. Jerome S. Nerman, Leawood, Kansas.
- 5 **MAN ON A BENCH** 1977
 Polyvinyl, polychromed in oil and mixed media.
 Life-size.
 Courtesy of Gloria and Richard Anderson, Mission Hills, Kansas, and Jackie and Larry Gutsch, Chicago, Illinois.
- 6 **PHOTOGRAPHER** 1978
 Polyvinyl, polychromed in oil and mixed media.
 Life-size.
 Courtesy of Marilyn and Ivan Karp, New York, New York.
- 7 **CHILD WITH PUZZLE** 1978
 Polyvinyl, polychromed in oil and mixed media.
 Life-size.
 Courtesy of the artist.
- 8 **SELF PORTRAIT WITH MODEL** 1979
 Polyvinyl, polychromed in oil and mixed media.
 Life-size.
 Courtesy of the artist.
- 9 **WOMAN WITH A CHILD IN A STROLLER** 1985
 Polyvinyl, polychromed in oil and mixed media.
 Life-size.
 Courtesy of the artist.
- 10 **TRAVELLER** 1987
 Polyvinyl, polychromed in oil and mixed media.
 Life-size.
 Courtesy of the artist.
- 11 **BEAGLE IN BASKET** 1988
 Polyvinyl, polychromed in oil and mixed media.
 Life-size.
 Courtesy of the artist.
- 12 **CHEERLEADER.** 1988
 Polyvinyl, polychromed in oil and mixed media.
 Life-size.
 Courtesy of the artist.
- 13 **TOURISTS II** 1988
 Polyvinyl, polychromed in oil and mixed media.
 Life-size.
 Courtesy of the artist.

DEANE HAYSON



Auckland City Art Gallery 23 August – 9 October 1988

Wellington City Art Gallery 11 November 1988–8 January 1989

Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch 3 February – 19 March 1989

Dunedin Public Art Gallery 5 April – 21 May 1989

Waikato Museum of Art and History, Hamilton 5 June – 19 July 1989