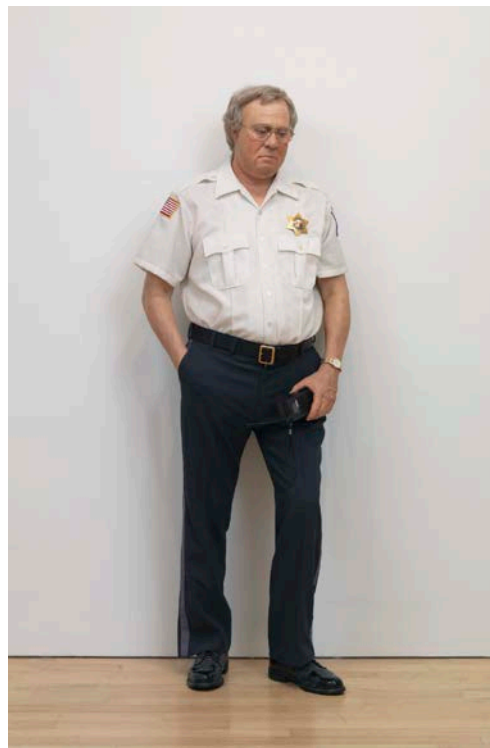


GAGOSIAN GALLERY

the PARIS REVIEW

Security Guard

Dan Piepenbring



Duane Hanson, Security Guard, 1990, autobody filler, polychromed in oil, mixed media, with accessories, 71" x 26" x 13". © The Estate of Duane Hanson. Photography by Robert McKeever. Courtesy Gagolian Gallery.

Duane Hanson's *Security Guard* is on display at Gagolian Gallery's Park and Seventy-fifth Street location through December 3. Hanson, who died in 1996, is known for his doggedly realistic sculptures of Joe and Jane Sixpack: the paunchy, unremarkable janitors, shoppers, joggers, tourists, and deliverymen of the world. Hanson's working-class men and women are always in some form of repose, wearing expressions that range from the melancholic to the merely phlegmatic. These are people with whom the world has had its way—people used to being seen through. They have body hair. They have hangnails and bruises, varicose veins.

Hanson's sculptures, given the commonness of their subjects, are almost suspiciously accessible, and so the temptation is to dismiss them as condescending or facile—or just tacky, a bid for the same kind of gee-whiz mimesis on display at Madame Tussaud's. They are, after all, uncanny likenesses, and it's easy to get tripped up on that, or to marvel at the painstaking craftsmanship. Hanson made casts from real people, and for maintenance he'd send envelopes of human hair to

museums with instructions on how to attach it properly; he went to great lengths to produce convincing skin tones. All that's very impressive, but it'd have you think the sculptures are just workmanlike forays into photorealism.

And in the wrong setting, they may well be. I could imagine how a roomful of Hanson's work might register as taunting rather than haunting—in aggregate, the statues could lose their subtlety, all but daring you to appreciate their lifelikeness. But Gagolian Gallery has done a shrewd thing with *Security Guard*: they've put him on his own. He's leaning against the wall of an otherwise empty space, patrolling nothing, alone. You can see him in there from the street.

"My art is not about fooling people," Hanson once said. "It's the human attitudes I'm after—fatigue, a bit of frustration, rejection. To me, there is a kind of beauty in all this."

By himself, hand in pocket, walkie-talkie at the ready, surrounded by white walls and looking at none of them, *Security Guard* evokes the whole spectrum of Weltschmerz. Stare at him for sixty seconds and you see a bored, stoical man, an intimate of blankness, maybe solving a Rubik's Cube in his head or thinking about supper. Stare at him for three minutes and you think, Maybe a widower. Stare at him for five minutes and you want to jot down the number of a suicide hotline, press it into his breast pocket. Take lunch, you want to say with a clap on his shoulder, Go out and get some air.

But he won't move. As the critic Sebastian Smee wrote of another Hanson piece, "He is not waiting for death, exactly. But death sure is what his life has in mind for him. And for us."