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## GAGOSIAN GALLERY

THE   
INDEPENDENT

### GREAT WORKS

*by Michael Glover*



### MAN WITH HAND CART (1975)

By Duane Hanson, 166cm X 70cm X 88cm,  
ESTATE OF DUANE HANSON

Many works of art – from Titian's great *Assumption* on the high altar of the Frari church in Venice, to Olafur Eliasson's sun, which glowed molten for a few brief months in Tate Modern's Turbine Hall over the winter of 2003-2004 – are enhanced, brought into the fullness of their own being, by the sheer theatricality of their settings.

Art is in excited conspiracy with its own staging. Other works – such as the sad piece on this page today – seem to have been dragged into the space of a public gallery from some distant world of indifference and incomprehension. In fact, the work itself is a kind of meditation upon a blue-collar existence for which the concerns of culture are a laughable

irrelevance. This world's principal concern is getting by. And yet its presence as an art object in an art space also seems, quite cunningly, to be pointing up the opposite: that it is in fact the work of the toiling man that underpins the ease and the gloss of cultural institutions. Whose child was never in need of a public lavatory five minutes into a museum visit?

Here is a work deftly posing as anti-art. This foot-dragging street cleaner is as much at one with his miserable hand cart as Dante's blighted souls in the Inferno, who were tethered to each other throughout eternity. Hanson made this work in 1975, a good 20-odd years before Ron Mueck's *Dead Dad*. The two share a passion for shocking, three-dimensional lifelikeness, but Hanson's work is more deadpan than Mueck's, which, with its plays of scale, edges towards the sensational.

Hanson's work takes pleasure in its own humdrumness, its shruggy lacklustrelessness. His works are just as big as they need to be, which is our size. They are also seen at their best in ones and twos, at a gallery's corner, or at a slightly awkward angle to the true, just within eye shot, as if they exist to interrupt easy cultural passage. They never look positioned just so. They seem to be saying to us: you are here when we are not here. Sorry that we interrupted you.

This story-less man, with that raised right leg, has an air of weary, vacant, slow-time resignation about him. He belongs in a scene by Steinbeck or Dos Passos. He is the distillation of the common man, unnoticed, forever cleaning up after us. Leaning on his metal hand cart, posed between here and there, he embodies the grey and grainy dreariness of life lived on the margins of everything that



### ABOUT THE ARTIST

DUANE HANSON  
(1925-96)

The American super-realist sculptor Duane Hanson was born in Alexandria, Minnesota, and died in Boca Raton, Florida of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. Following a period teaching art in high school, he received a Master of Fine Arts degree from the Cranbrook Academy in 1951.

hurts by with passing self-importance. And yet for all his extraordinary ordinariness, he is also an impassioned summary of sheer humanness. That glazed, down-turned look, eyes barely seen at all through those slightly fogged lenses, seems to say it all.

This man is keeping on keeping on, as Bob Dylan once put it. We admire the brilliance of observation: just attend to that slightly out-bowed left leg, the lived-in look of those old, patched trousers, green as puke, or the mottling of the skin of the hand. We don't want to know too much about this man. There is already a suspicion – perhaps even the merest hint of a stale reek – that quite enough of him lives inside of us already.

*'Man with Hand Cart' is on display at the Serpentine Sackler Gallery, London W2 (020 7402 6075) to 13 September*