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GAGOSIAN GALLERY

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A model show from the odd couple

Lynette Yiadom-Boakye/Duane Hanson
Serpentine Galleries, London

REVIEW BY KAREN WRIGHT

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Frighteningly real: Hanson's 'Old Couple on a Bench'

On the surface Duane Hanson and painter Lynette Yiadom-Boakye have little in common: an American super-real sculptor and a British painter. What unites these two shows spread across the two Serpentine Galleries is the virtuoso talent on display and their ability to conjure up a scenario enabling space for the viewer to have their own experience, to complete the artwork.

Duane Hanson was born in 1925 (he died in 1996) in Alexandria, a small town in Minnesota. His first experience of seeing real art was when he was already 15 or 16, a painting by the 19th-century French painter William-Adolphe Bouguereau he saw when visiting the Walker Art Museum in Milwaukee. "Later on, when I went to art school, they informed me realism was dead and that Bouguereau was a degenerate painter." Undeterred by the contemporary distancing from reality in both painting and sculpture, he doggedly continued to make his meticulously cast sculptures, frightening in their conscious realism.

Critics of Hanson's oeuvre saw the scenarios as mere cultural stereotypes of the middle and working class. But these are more then carefully observed snapshots of their time. The delight and empathy of seeing *Old Couple on a Bench* is universal.

Yiadom-Boakye is that rare breed of contemporary artist, content to be "merely" a painter with a bit of graphic work, but already validated by critics as one to watch. She is a Turner Prize nominee, winner of the Future Prize and has been included in a Venice Biennale.

She was born in 1977 in London to first-generation immigrants from Ghana. Yiadom-Boakye's sitters are not real. Indeed, she is emphatically not a portrait painter, drawing instead on her inner world for her subject matter. The canvases display her understanding and strong connection with painters such as Manet, Degas and Goya. She has said on multiple occasions, "the subject of my work is painting".

Her works also have a contemporary feel – the bodies are beautifully drawn but also have a very deliberate "wrongness" to them. We as viewers are drawn into their worlds. In *Shoot the Desperate, Hug the Needy* (2010), two women identically clad in white dancing together are seemingly having a good time but with the ambiguity of the title and their strange mirroring the door is open for other interpretations.

Yiadom-Boakye is also an accomplished writer. I beg the audience who enters the Serpentine this summer to purchase the small catalogue that contains, along with reproductions of her recent skilful exploration into printmaking, her writing: carefully observed vignettes that are both vicious and very funny.

Both Hanson and Yiadom-Boakye in some ways are concerned with "old-fashioned" object making: Hanson with his meticulously crafted sculptures and Yiadom-Boakye with her exquisitely crafted yet seemingly effortless paintings. This is a serendipitous pairing. Please go and see it!

To 13 September (020 7402 6075)