Photographer, 1978

MATRIX is supported in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, a Federal Agency.
Each work by Hanson is a personal lament. He is an artist who uses the medium of sculpture to articulate his deeply felt concerns about the "latent and explicit terrors in our social environment".

Visitors to this exhibition are likely to concentrate on how "life-like" these figures are. Hanson himself, however, is less interested in deceiving our eyes than in engaging our hearts and minds in the quiet despair of aimless workers, bloated consumers and neglected senior citizens.

"In 1965," says Hanson, "I made a small sculpture in plaster, wood and cloth... a figure of a dead pregnant woman sprawled on a table... the piece was entitled Abortion. Here at last was something I deeply wanted to say about life around us today... after years of uncomfortable ventures into abstract, non-objective and conventional representational work with the traditional materials of clay, plaster, stone and wood, I had embraced realism as my mode of expression."

Hanson's sculptures draw on tradition, old and new. His search for an objective realism finds ample precedent all the way back to selected Egyptian polychrome sculptures which in earnest quest for immortality did not hesitate to portray flaw and deterioration. A contemporary context for Hanson's work is located in Pop Art's embrace of the imagery of "dailiness", George Segal's plaster casts of the human figure, and Edward Kienholz's surrealistic tableaux in which protagonists are clothed in Salvation Army purchases.

Hanson's first figurative works, started when the artist was forty years old, were boldly violent and often gory: Abortion (1965), War (1967), Riot (1967), Bowery Derelicts (1969). Since that time Hanson's work has become increasingly subtle and refined. "You can't always scream and holler," says the artist, "you have to once in a while whisper, and sometimes that whisper is more powerful than all the screaming and hollering..."

Hard Hat (1970) and Sunbather (1971) are harsh satires which border on caricature. Such stereotypes permit us to remain a comfortable distance from the work. Recent pieces are more subdued and consequently more intimate. Rita, The Waitress (1975), is quietly introspective. Empathy draws us close to her. In concentrating on the individual, Hanson broadens the implications of his work. We are all candidates for Duane Hanson's attention.

It takes Hanson about six to eight weeks to make one of his sculptures. It is a long process made up of many different steps. Each sculpture is made from body molds of a real person, usually a friend or acquaintance of the artist.

The subject, wearing only underwear, is thoroughly greased with vaseline and shaving soap. Separate molds - which take about thirty to forty minutes each - are made of the legs, arms, torso and head. Quick-setting silicone rubber is applied to the appropriate area. This rubber is reinforced with a "mother mold" made of dental plaster.

These original molds are then filled with polyvinyl in recent works or polyester resin reinforced with fiberglass in the earlier works. Next comes the very difficult task of reassembling the six parts into a human figure with a natural bearing. Often the cast parts need to be radically altered: shortened, fattened, etc. For Hanson capturing the relaxed mien is far more crucial to the success of the work than the correctness of many small surface details.

First the legs are placed in the shoes to achieve proper balance. The other sections are then added and adjusted. Hanson next smooths, rebuilds and refines surface features. Once the work stands assembled, the artist meets the challenge of hand painting the entire piece. He applies oil paint over acrylic with brushes, his fingers, rags, etc. In painting the nuances
of skin tones and shadows, Hanson is very much concerned with light and how it will affect the colors he chooses.

Plastic eyes are placed within the head and using body putty hair is anchored into place. Hanson blends several hair colors together as carefully as he mixes paint. One arm always remains detachable, allowing for the removal and laundering of the clothes from time to time. A completed sculpture by Hanson weighs about fifty to sixty pounds.

Sometimes Hanson's work is misunderstood to be "style-less". Yet, we can project ahead to a time when museum visitors will not be "fooled" by these figures in their antique dress. These sculptures will then document for later generations certain aspects of life in the United States in the 1970s.

Duane Hanson was born in Alexandria, Minnesota in 1925. He graduated from Macalester College in 1946 and received an MFA from Cranbrook Academy of Art in 1951. (Area residents might be interested to know that Hanson taught art at Edgewood School in Greenwich in 1951 and was on the faculty of Wilton Junior High School in 1952). From 1953 to 1960 he lived in Europe, and then returned to Atlanta for five years. Hanson moved to Miami in 1965 and to New York City in 1969. In 1973 he returned to Davie, Florida. Hanson is represented by the O. K. Harris Gallery of New York City.

AMK

MATRIX in Tapestry Hall:


**Young Shopper**, 1973, polyester resin and fiber glass polychromed in oil, with clothes, etc., life-size. Private Collection.


**Man with Handcart**, 1975, polyester resin and fiber glass polychromed in oil, with clothes, etc., life-size. Collection of Sydney and Frances Lewis, Richmond, Virginia.

**Lady Reading Paperback**, 1977, polyvinyl polychromed in oil, with clothes, etc., life-size. Private Collection.

**Photographer**, 1978, polyvinyl, polychromed in oil, with clothes, etc., life-size. Private Collection.
Selected one-man exhibitions: Wilton Gallery, Wilton, CT '52; O. K. Harris Gallery, NYC '70,'72,'74,'76; Wurttembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart '74; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago '74; Louisiana Museum, Humlebaek, Denmark '75; Edwin A. Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita State University '76 (travelling exhibition to ten museums, ending April '78 at the Whitney Museum of American Art).

Selected statements by Hanson:
Hanson, Duane. "Presenting Duane Hanson," Art in America vol. 58 no. 5 (September '70), p. 86⁺.
Bush, Martin H. "Martin Bush Interviews Duane Hanson," Art International (special supplement, vol. 21 no. 5), September '77.

Selected bibliography about Hanson:
Masheck, Joseph. "Verist Sculpture: Hanson and De Andrea," Art in America vol. 60 no. 6 (November-December '72), p. 90⁺.
Bush, Martin H. Duane Hanson, Edwin A. Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita State University, 1976.
Kuspit, Donald B. "Duane Hanson's American Inferno," Art in America vol. 64 no. 6 (November '76), p. 86⁺.

Selected group exhibitions: Whitney Museum of American Art, NYC, Human Concern/Personal Torment: The Grotesque in American Art '69; Whitney Museum of American Art, Sculpture Annual '71; Biennial '73, '77; New York Cultural Center, NYC, Realism Now '72; Kassel, Documenta 5 '72; De Cordova Museum, Lincoln, MA, The Super-Realist Vision '73; Wadsworth Atheneum, New Photo Realism '74; Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Seven Realists '74; Centre National d'Art Contemporain, Paris, Hyppréalistes Américains-Réalistes Européens '74.