



Traveler, 1987, with his still red sunburn and weary look, tells a story familiar to many without uttering a word.

Hanson's people — realism at its best

By Jill Hamilton
special writer

"Sculptures By Duane Hanson" is the perfect cure for "anthophobia," the fear of boring, pretentious or just plain confusing art exhibits. Hanson, a Cranbrook graduate, creates arrestingly life-like sculptures of ordinary people. The result is riveting, eerie, and, dare we say it, a heck of a lot of fun.

As museum worker Helga Siner puts it, "It is a fun exhibit. It's not the serious, highbrow kind of art where you look at it thinking 'what is this?' then look for the title and it is called 'Untitled.' It's very accessible — people really enjoy it."

It's true. Hanson's hyper-realistic sculptures of everyday people — construction workers, obese American tourists and other working class types — attract an enthusiastic crowd.

Gone is the hushed, reverent atmosphere of many exhibits. Instead, Hanson's satirical, sometimes playful work invites people to react. Talking, pointing and laughing are encouraged. One group of older women gathered around "Cowboy" (1989) were overheard exclaiming comments like, "He looks so real!" and "Look at those veins in his arm!"

HANSON'S WORK inspires a wonderful sort of voyeurism, one where social niceties are stripped away and the audience is welcome to stare to their hearts' content at the sculptures of the eerily ordinary people. "Self Portrait with Model," a sculpture of Hanson sitting at a kitchen table with a large woman in a frumpy, blue-checked dress is a people-watcher's delight. Viewers are allowed to break social conven-

tions by peering into the woman's handbag or looking over her shoulder to examine her reading material (ironically, an article titled "Relax and Be Fit").

Because Hanson's sculptures look so realistic, the line between the art and the people viewing the art often becomes blurred. In other words, make sure something hasn't moved before staring at it because it may very well be a real person.

This is especially true with "Commuter" (1983), a sculpture of a man dressed in a suit, reading a magazine and leaning against the wall.

Is he one of the statues in the exhibit or one of the other museum visitors? Be careful, the difference between the two isn't always obvious. "Commuter" is so life-like that it is almost uncomfortably embarrassing to look at. It seems as though he might, at any moment, lift up his head and say "Please stop staring at me."

Other highlights include: "Traveler" (1987), a sculpture of an exhausted traveler sacked out on the floor, his Hawaiian shirt unbuttoned to reveal a beer-belly reddened by the beginnings of a sunburn; "Cleaning Lady," a dignified portrayal of a maid named Queenie; and "Child with Puzzle" (1978) and "Cheerleader" (1988), companion pieces that pay a loving tribute to Hanson's daughter at two stages of her life.

The exhibit continues through April 1, 500 Lone Pine, Bloomfield Hills. Regular museum hours are 1-5 p.m. Tuesday-Sunday. Special hours for the Hanson show are 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Thursday. Movies about Hanson and his work are being shown at 1:30 p.m. Saturday and Sunday in the deSalle Auditorium. They are free with museum admission.



Cheerleader, done in 1988, is one of several the artist has done of his daughter.



book
break
Victoria
Diaz

1st novel set in rural south

"The Rattlesnake Master" by Beaufort Cranford (239 pp., Ballantine, \$8.95)

IN MY opinion, any novel that begins with somebody sitting on a tombstone while eating peanut butter-and-jelly sandwich is a promising novel.

Open the pages of Beaufort Cranford's novel and you'll find yourself way down among the kudzu vines and pickerelweed of rural Georgia, where the buckeye butterflies hold forth alongside rattlesnakes and the sweet-sad call of the mourning dove is heard in the land.

Here, in the non-such town of Alachua, and the nowhere mythical county of Talmadge, you'll meet black folks and white folks. You'll come across some good ol' boys and some very bad guys. You'll learn that there's good coffee at the Ogeechee Grille, cold beer at the Red Hot Saloon, homemade whiskey over at Harold Buckminister's place, and annual Whoppermelon contest, and some pretty good fishing down around Hard Labor Creek, if you're willing to put up with a number of determined mosquitoes and a speckled leech or two.

It seems an ordinary, rather drowsy little place, and then one day, a bag of silver dollars turns up, and a dramatic tale begins to unfold, revealing that all is not as it appears. Something impossible to understand is afoot in Talmadge County, as a matter of fact. It may be mumbo-jumbo. It may be magic. It may be something else. Whatever it is, it is personified in an exotic old gentleman known as the rattlesnake master, who can cure snakebite and perform other deeds as well.

IN THE MIDST OF this contemporary adventure are characters with wonderfully-Southern names like Leeman Truesdale (just returned home after a disastrous love affair north of the Mason-Dixon line), Buddy Crittenden (his friend, an inquisitive deputy sheriff), Royal Mango (a mulatto who comes across the silver dollars in a most unexpected way), and two cretinous redneck thieves, Jerry Spivey and Sperry Bissell.

In the "Rattlesnake Master," former Detroit News journalist Cranford has written a novel that is funny, strange, touching, suspenseful, even a little stomach-turning here and there (a scene in which one of Cranford's bad guys grapples with a particularly pesky leech may make your skin crawl right out the door), and greatly-entertaining. It bears a vague resemblance to

In fact, so strong and sure is Cranford's evocation of this piece — its language, its flora and fauna, its food, its weather, even its scent — that the setting becomes a kind of character at the very heart of this story.

Thomas Tryon's "Harvest Home," in that strange things are happening beneath a rather mundane surface in both tales. But the resemblance is only superficial, for Cranford's novel is not ultimately a tale of horror, as is Tryon's, and its setting is most definitely not New England, but the American South.

In fact, so strong and sure is Cranford's evocation of this piece — its language, its flora and fauna, its food, its weather, even its scent — that the setting becomes a kind of character at the very heart of this story. Truth to tell, its characters are never so "fleshed-out" or as vivid as is their environment.

Two bones to pick before I go: While Cranford — who grew up in the South — most definitely possesses a real ear for the language and speech of these people, sometimes his characters talk too much. One explanatory, conversational scene goes on (and on) for nearly 20 pages, with its question and answer, question and answer routine growing considerably tedious before Cranford finally decides to wrap things up. This dialogue overload (though never quite to this extent) occurs more than once in the book, confusing and slowing the pace of this story every time.

A less-than-convincing conclusion is a disappointment, especially since, up to this point, Cranford has succeeded so beautifully in making this fantasy so credible. With a fine writer's magic touch, he's been able to cause the reader to happily suspend disbelief and become totally caught up in a story about people whose lives are changed one day when a rattlesnake crosses the road, and bag of silver dollars falls out of the sky. Then . . .

Let's just put it this way: This story's beginning works much better than does its ending.

Victoria Diaz is a free lance writer who lives in Litonia and has roots in the South.

Tchaikovsky Festival celebrates birthday

In celebration of Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky's 150th birthday, the Detroit Symphony Orchestra has planned a Tchaikovsky Festival Thursday through March 3. There will be ballet, opera, and orchestral and chamber concerts.

Gunther Herbig will conduct the opening concert at 8 p.m. Thursday with violin virtuoso Pinchas Zukerman performing Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto. The program will include Marche Slave and Symphony No. 5. It will be repeated at 8 p.m. Friday and 8:30 p.m. Saturday.

All three concerts will be at Orchestra Hall. The Friday concert will be preceded by a 7 p.m. Pre-Concert Conversation with Zukerman and guest host Peter Schoenbach, chairman of the Wayne State University music department.

AS AN adjunct to the festival, the Lyric Chamber Ensemble will give a concert at 3:30 p.m. Sunday at Orchestra Hall.

The ensemble will perform Tchaikovsky's String Quartet No. 1, two songs, "At the Ball" and "As a Blade of Grass in the Meadow Green," and the Piano Trio in A minor. The ensemble is composed mainly of Detroit Symphony Orchestra musicians.

preview

An evening of dance is planned for 8 p.m. Tuesday at Ford Auditorium. The DSO, with Leslie B. Dunner, assistant conductor, will be joined by New York City Ballet dancers Merrill Ashley, Lindsay Fischer (replacing Peter Frame, who was injured) and Damin Woetzel and American Ballet Theatre dancer Cynthia Harvey.

Highlighting the program is the world premiere of La Danse Neva, a ballet by choreographer Kirk Peterson, commissioned by the DSO for this festival.

THE FINAL concerts of the festival, 10:45 a.m. Friday at Ford Auditorium and 8:30 p.m. Saturday at Orchestra Hall, will feature Janet Williams, soprano and Joseph Wolverton, tenor, in a rarely heard opera fragment, "Romeo and Juliet."

For ticket information, call 833-3760.



Paintings on exhibit

Paintings by Southfield artist George Gravelindinger, above, are on exhibit at Le Miniature Gallery, 115 Ann Arbor through March 6. He paints in acrylic on paper and canvas and his clothes are often as colorful as his paintings. At right is "The One Eyed Clown," 40 by 34 inches. His works are expressionist and the figure is always an important element. His works will be part of a show that the gallery is taking to France. Hours are noon to 5 p.m. Monday-Saturday.

