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Creative Living

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People watchers — this is your show

MINDY SAUNDERS/staff photographer

The photographer (above) was mistaken for the *real* thing many times during the opening of the show. Hanson gives exact instructions about where all the accessories for each figure should be placed. "Child with Puzzle" (right) like the one above is polyvinyl, polychromed in oil and mixed media.

By Corinne Abatt
staff writer

If you want to know what sculptor Duane Hanson looks like, he's the figure seated at a table in his showstopper exhibit at Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum through March 3.

Hanson's people are so close to the real thing you may find yourself talking to them or uttering a "pardon me" as you walk in front of them.

Hanson, a pleasant, soft-spoken man who completed his graduate work in art at Cranbrook in the early 50s, said most people, himself included, love to people watch, but don't want to stare.

"Here a viewer can relax and not feel embarrassed or inhibited while people watching," Hanson said.

EVEN BEFORE he entered Cranbrook, Hanson had been doing figurative sculpture. He recalled that he made a beeswax mold of his cousin's hand, slit it just as he does now, filled the mold with concrete and was delighted to see the lines of the hand so clearly detailed.

Realism was out of favor in the early 50s when Hanson entered Cranbrook. He remembered that one Cranbrook faculty member looked at his portfolio and said, "You did that? That's terrible. I don't know how they let you in."

Saying the Cranbrook experience was valuable, he added, "I use everything I learned here — modeling, carving. . . ," noting that in spite of his admiration for the great potter/teacher, Maja Grotell, he wasn't at his best in pottery.

While sculptor Carl Milles wasn't as active as he had been earlier, his presence on the Cranbrook campus made a strong impression on Hanson.

"CRANBROOK GAVE me a vision," he said. "I always had this dream of being an artist who wouldn't have to teach."

Remembering Milles, he said. "I always kept in mind the picture of that old man coming into that room — the whole room full of his statues. . . the whole place is a work of art."

All but one of the figures in this show are of white polyvinyl acetate which was poured into a silicone rubber mold made from the subject. The painter in the white suit, is bronze, a material he is just now starting to work with.

Up until the bronze, each figure was one of a kind. The bronze allows him to do several editions of a figure, lowering the price and making his figures more accessible.

EACH FIGURE, either polyester resin and fiber glass or polyvinyl is meticulously painted and outfitted. The hair, synthetic and human, is inserted into the vinyl with a sewing needle. Hanson shops in thrift stores for the appropiate clothes and accessories.

Noticeable is the fact that none of his figures are smiling and most have their eyes down, both make the viewer more comfortable and the figures more pensive, in a world of their own.

The ones in this exhibit, with the exception of the child and the dog, are working people. The only professional of the lot is "The Commuter" and he's slightly separated from the others.

While many of these people work hard and achieve little if any recognition, simply by portraying them Hanson gives the worker not only recognition, but a kind of dignity. "The Lady with Cleaning Cart" cuts quite a fine figure.

IN THE PAST, Hanson has done works that have made social commentaries or sociological statements with subjects such as murder, a war group, Mafia victims, a riot group and a Bowrey group. Later he did a satirical series picturing the overcomsumer.

From the working people series, he will doubtless progress to other types.

"I'm amazed at the way people dress. I used to be appalled by it."

He mentioned women out shopping with their hair in rollers, the conservative couple who retire to Florida — he starts wearing red pants and shirts with palm trees on them and she, too, changes her whole look from drab to bright colors.

HE CONTINUES to be fascinated by the way people dress and look. "You wouldn't find it in Europe or Asia. The whole country is so fasci-

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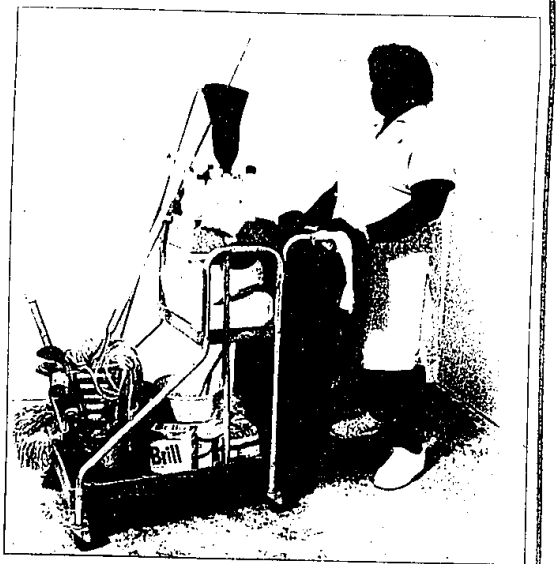
MINDY SAUNDERS/staff photographer

Many of the sculptures in the exhibit, like "The Commuter" are on loan from private collections. This tall, lean, preoccupied figure belongs to the Gilbert Silvermans of Southfield.



"Queenie: Cleaning Woman" in her light green uniform, is polyester resin and fiberglass, polychromed in oil. Hanson made her in 1980.

MINDY SAUNDERS/staff photographer

Needlepoint becomes art in their hands

By Corinne Abatt
staff writer

Those who think needlepoint is one monotonous stitch after another are in for a surprise.

"There are 400-500 (different) stitches," said Linda Fields of Troy who teaches five classes in needlepoint at "The Needleworks" in Adams Square, Birmingham.

Many of her students, whom she claims are as proficient as she is, take her classes year after year because they enjoy the challenges as well as the friendships.

Linda Fields (standing) makes a suggestion to Marge Gormley of Bloomfield Hills about her butterfly. Others are Jo Jackson of Bloomfield Hills (left) and Ann-Dee Fitzgerald of Bloomfield Hills.

An exhibition of their work will be held noon to 4 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 17.

Ruthe Young, "The Needleworks" owner said she uses artists from all around the country to do the designs on the canvases, or she commissions artists to do special designs upon request.

Claire Hall of Milford, one of the regulars in Fields' classes, found a painting pictured on a greeting card that she wanted to do on canvas and Young commissioned an artist to do it. And while the needlepointer uses the lines of the design as a guideline, stitches and colors vary widely.

FIELDS said, "Everything you look at becomes a stitch — once you start you'll never do plain needlepoint again."

She picked up a bell pull by Debby Gannes of Franklin in which a wide variety of stitches were used — one of them, blackwork, which stays on top of the canvas was frequently used on the clothes of King Henry VIII of England. Another, the Rhodes stitch, is used to create an open feeling.

"It's an art form unto itself," said DeeDee Goldenhar of Birmingham who was working on a large, square oriental style piece. The black hair of the geisha girl in the work was heavily padded and real pearls formed a semi-circle in her elaborate coiffure.

"It's like painting with threads, "Goldenhar added.

Fields, who grew up in Newfoundland, said, "I've been stitching since I was three, my mother taught me."

After settling here she said she studied with Marnie Ritter of Grosse Pointe for three years and after learning to use all different fibers and techniques, started teaching on her own.

She continues to study with Soji Tamura of Japan who comes here twice a year to give special classes.

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