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By Daniel Kunitz

Les beaux corps

Richard Dupont's new work
uses the artist's body to ask
questions about cloning,
sameness and the loss of
identity. **Daniel Kunitz** met
several versions of him

This page, Richard
Dupont, *Three in
One (Self Anointed)*,
2002-04, resin,
pigment, handmade
clothes, 193 x 228.7 x 228.7cm





Waist-high stacks of little wooden boxes, eerily like juvenile coffins, line the edges of sculptor Richard Dupont's Manhattan studio. The size of ossuaries, they are actually intended for transporting a congress of naked, two-foot-tall polyurethane effigies of the artist, which will be included in his first solo show with Tracy Williams, Ltd. In the centre of the studio stand eight of these Mini-Richards in various poses. Although all are bald (the artist has dark hair, closely shaved) and based directly on Dupont, they are not identical: some are more squat than others, some are stretched so thin they seem almost two-dimensional. Some are improbably blurred or fuzzy, as if seen through a soft-focus lens. In all, there are five types here. And, while stand-ins, they are not meant to make you think of Richard Dupont. As the 36-year-old asserts, 'My work doesn't have much to do with me biographically. It's sort of to do with everybody, or a collective body.' However, as a group, they represent the latest evolutionary stage in Dupont's thinking about human evolution and the very notion of what a body, or body of work, might entail: in his case, an expanded relationship between sculpture, performance and digital art.

This new work represents a notional extension of some of the sculptures Dupont has made over the past three years, especially *Punctuated Equilibrium* and *The Principle of Irreversibility*, which were shown at Caren Golden Gallery in 2003. The former is a replica of the artist, again without hair, compressed by a third. Short, he stands with hands held nonchalantly at his sides. The latter reproduces his wife's body elongated by a third and holding a similar pose. Each wears generic khaki pants and a blue button-down shirt, and each occupies a large glass vitrine, much like dioramas in the American Museum of Natural History. Once described as Gap-ish, the clothing is obviously intended to reinforce the idea of identity dispersed and dissolved in a homogenizing culture. (In the same show, he reproduced one of the Austrian psychologist Wilhelm Reich's Orgone Energy Accumulators, a box for accumulating 'orgone', the life-force. That a machine can gather something as organic or human as the life-force is the sort of bizarre idea that gets Dupont's juices flowing.) Less obvious is the relationship of his recent work to a series of flower sculptures made two summers ago. At a family outing to Ikea, he became entranced with the vibrantly coloured plastic flowers on display. Tracy Williams recounts how he 'began thinking about the flower industry, how it aims to produce perfect, cloned versions of the same thing'. In response, he hand-cast potted flowering plants, 'so fake they almost look real', in Williams's estimation.

To create his newest sculptures, Dupont underwent full-body laser scanning at a General Dynamics facility at the Wright Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio. It being a military base, however, they wouldn't allow him to undergo the scan naked. The machine at the base is the most used full-body scanner in the world. 'The catch,' says Dupont, 'was that, in order to use the scanner, I had to take part in a broad anthropometry study. Over a thousand people have taken part in this study, which is used in the production of body armor, ejection seats, helmets, and things like that. They also sell a lot of their data to clothing companies for use in sizing. And this was interesting because lot of my work plays into the idea of anthropometry or biometrics – identification based on retina or fingerprints or DNA or just body measurement.' The process is integral to the larger issues Dupont's

work addresses, what he describes as 'the human animal moving into the 21st century in a compromised state of autonomy'.

Because he had to retain his underpants during the scan, he ended up having to cast his mid-section in plaster and then laser-scan it. He then pieced the various scans together, so that the final model was 'super-detailed' – it had over two million polygons in it, which are the tiny triangular units of measure that define the 3-D computer model. At Tracy Williams, he will also show portions of these scans, in two dimensions, focusing on extreme close-ups of hands, heads, feet, and the like. Printed on Japanese paper, these austere though gorgeous works look almost like topographical maps composed of thousands of triangles. And, despite being perfect representations of Dupont's body, they are, at such a minute resolution, utterly anonymous – maps of Everyman.

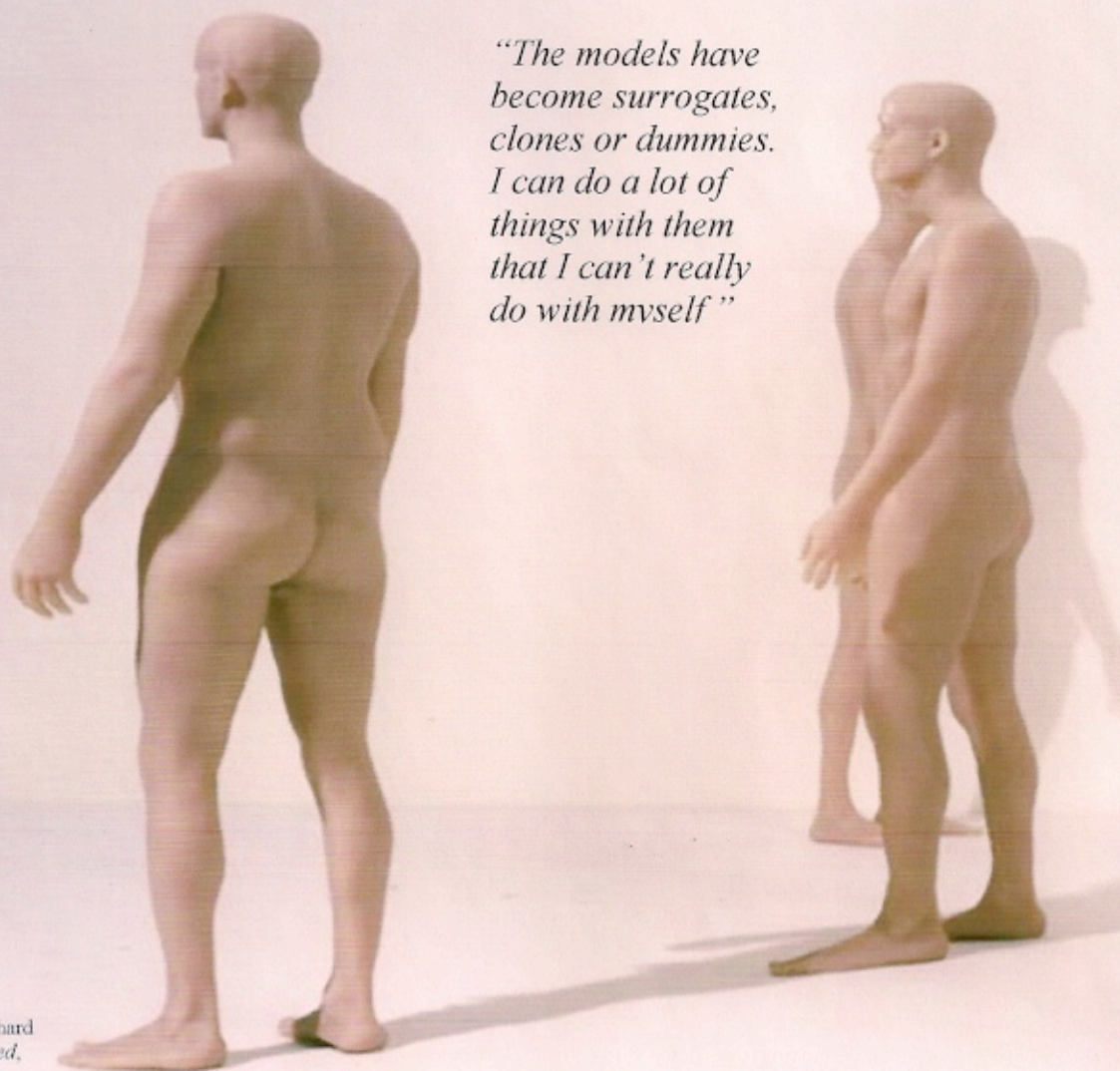
Distorted on a computer, the 3-D scans were eventually converted into casts, resembling the pods in the film *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, from which the polyurethane doppelgängers are extruded under intense pressure. Dupont, who studied ancient history as well as sculpture at Princeton University, cast the men in poses reminiscent of classical sculpture. 'That one is compressed by 150 per cent,' he says, pointing to a squat figure in the pose of a Greek kouros boy; 'this one' – taller, thinner and in a more hieratic pose – 'is pulled 200 per cent in the X axis.' Considering the poses and the hundreds of *National Geographic* magazines lining a shelf in his small office, one senses that Dupont is trying to grasp the entire history of anthropomorphic imagery and pull it into the gallery.

A devotee of Sixties and Seventies art, he explains that the completion of the work occurs in the interaction with the viewer: as you move around a particular arrangement, the men change from every angle, appearing at times flat or

full, crisp or fuzzy. 'The arrangement activates space in the manner of Serra and other Seventies artists.' Still, unlike earlier versions, these Adams have no Eve. 'This model now has become a surrogate, a clone or a dummy, and it can be abused, it can be distorted, it can be put through the motions or reconstituted or changed,' he says. 'I can do a lot of things with this model that I can't really do with myself.' When I visited him, he was at work on a larger version of the *kouros* boy, one 80 inches tall, or 15 per cent taller than Dupont himself. That said, he is adamant about how the figures 'create a distance from me. I don't think this work has to do with identity politics, only with the loss of identity. It also taps into a history of the body and the machine, tinged with a sexual element, which began perhaps with Leonardo but in the more modern sense with Picabia and Duchamp and running all the way on to J G Ballard's *Crash*.'

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This page: Richard Dupont, *Untitled*, 2005, resin, dimensions variable



Crash – the action rather than the novel – is key. Dupont's replicants were always more an exploration of the body as machine, and the loss of identity through technology, than updated versions of Duane Hanson's sculptural realism or Charles Ray's postmodern simulacra. And one of the things his surrogates could do, with the right technology, was to reenact the mechanical actions of Seventies performance art. So, for the third component of the show at Tracy Williams, he has transposed one of the 3-D figure scans into a video animation called *Clone Torture* in homage to Bruce Nauman's *Clown Torture*, which, in part, depicts clowns in traumatic situations. However, Dupont's piece draws for inspiration on any number of performative pieces, like Nauman's *Tony Sinking Into the Floor*, the self-parody of *Self-Portrait as Fountain*, and *Failing to Levitate in the Studio*. Nobody will be shouting 'No, No, No,' but his clone will be charging into a wall at full speed and then falling down – crashing, in other words – as well as performing any number of actions impossible for the artist himself to do, more than once.

At Art Basel Miami Beach, where Dupont will have a solo installation as part of the 'Art Positions' section, he hopes to unite the performative and sculptural elements. There he plans to include big, animatronic clones, larger than life, though not otherwise distorted, and wearing clothes this time. The animatronic figures will enact manic, repetitive movements, again in the manner of Naumanite performance artists. By the time they're made, perhaps Dupont's measurements from the anthropometry study will have entered the pool of physical statistics employed by clothing companies. Perhaps his animatronic clones will wear, without his knowledge, clothes based on Dupont's own physical characteristics. Perhaps. Looking at his work causes one's thoughts to whirlpool in this manner. Only in the hall of mirrors that is Dupont's mind could so much thought about sameness, loss of identity, and cloning produce work that is so insistently unique.

Richard Dupont, 10 Sept-29 Oct, Tracy Williams, Ltd, New York
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