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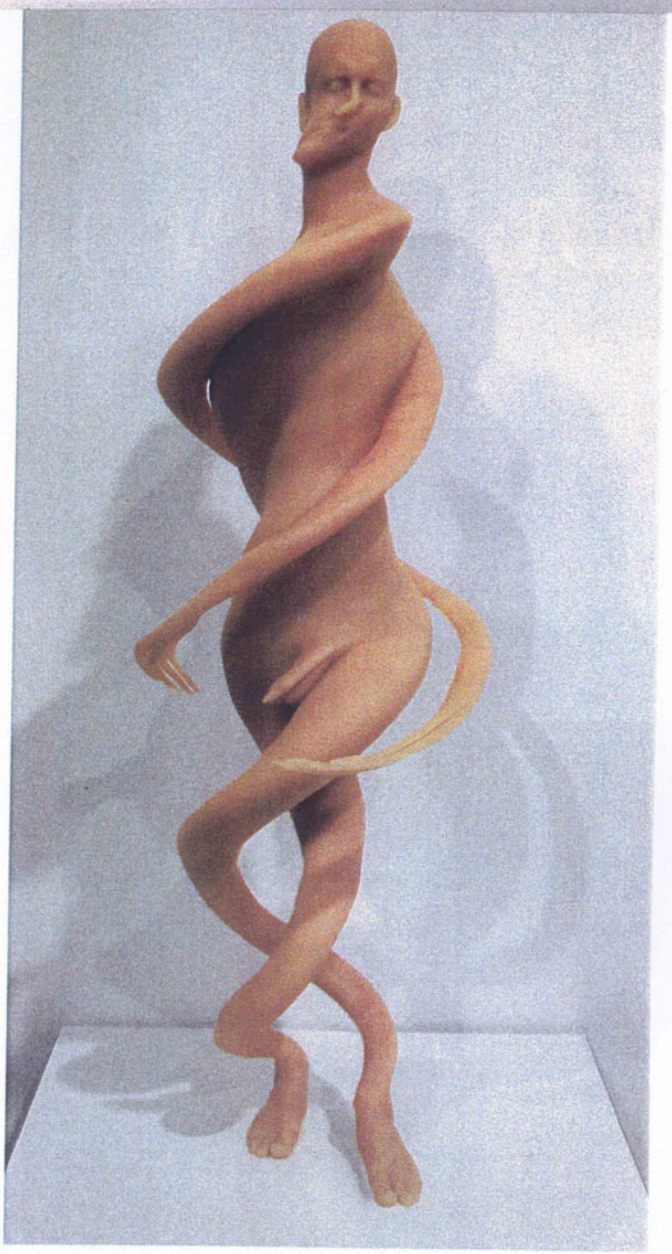
On the Cover: Folkert de Jong, *The Tower "Violin Player,"* 2007. Styrofoam, polyurethane foam, and pigment, 150 x 150 x 500 cm. Photograph: © Folkert de Jong, courtesy the artist and James Cohan Gallery, New York.

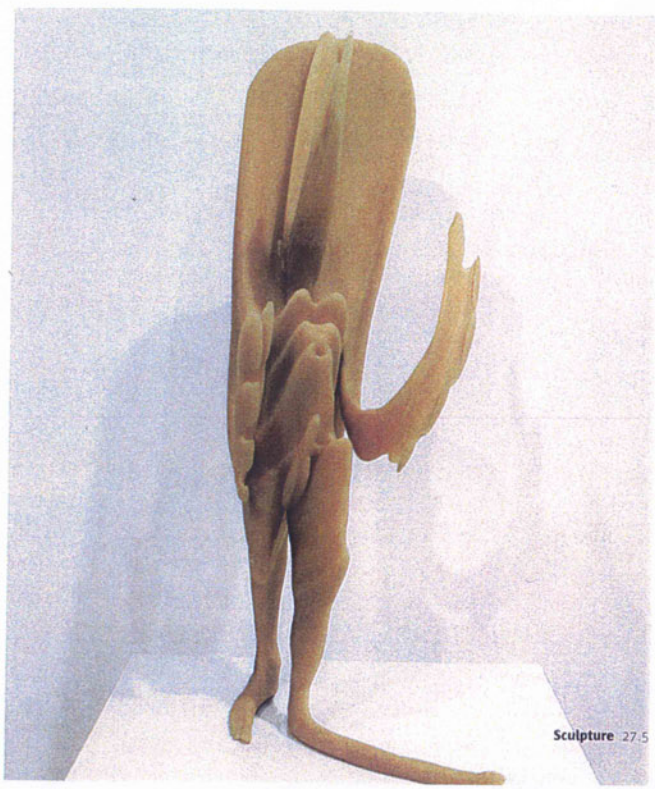
BY CHRISTOPHER HART CHAMBERS

Richard Dupont's sculptures are essentially warped-out, three-dimensional photocopies of himself. These eerie, distorted, hi-tech self-portraits seem stretched by the time/space continuum to varying degrees, from barely recognizable blurs to attenuated or distended humanoid oddities. As viewers, we physically enter that same disconcertingly surreal realm, like a cinematic fantasy of traveling through a worm hole. The artist's cold, unknowable, corporeal presence stares out at us from deep within his cast plastic doppelgangers. These entrancing and unsettling objects are equally striking for their overt technical mastery, which only enhances their spell.

Although Dupont was born (in 1968) and raised in Manhattan and educated in New England, he had his first exhibitions in Switzerland. After years of struggling and experimenting in relative obscurity in his native city, his work has finally started to receive major attention in the last few years. His most ambitious project to date is *Terminal Stage*, an installation at Lever House (spring 2008) that features several larger-than-life, anonymous, distorted nude male figures (of the artist). *Terminal Stage* was almost complete at the time of this interview, which took place in Dupont's SoHo studio, a workspace filled with a Doctor Frankenstein-like array of compartmentalized contrivances.

Christopher Hart Chambers: *Is your personal history more rooted in technology or in traditional sculpture?*
Richard Dupont: For me, the polarity of digital or traditional is misleading because I think any sculpture, particularly objects that require a certain amount of fabrication, requires a tremendous amount of manual labor. Somebody is doing the work. It's either a team of assistants or a production facility or the artist himself. In my case, most of the work happens here, in the studio. I'm interested in creating situations that can relate to viewers, that can transport them and have a strong visceral impact. To make something at the scale of what we're doing for Lever House, I've been working for a year now, along with some projects that





Top: *Untitled (Double Helix)*, 2007. Cast pigmented polyurethane, 26.5 x 8.5 x 8.5 in. Bottom: *Untitled (Bifurcated)*, 2007. Cast pigmented polyurethane, 22 x 9 x 9 in.

Terminal Stage, 2007–08. Digital rendering of installation at Lever House, New York.

we'll be doing right after this. It's extremely difficult to realize something like this technically. It's not just a matter of plugging into the computer—the machines have not taken over—and there's a tremendous amount of hand-work and hand-finishing. But, having said that, I use stereo lithography and CNC milling (computer and numerically controlled milling), and I use software to do some of the distortions and manipulations to the figures. These things, however, are just precursors—the work on the computer screen has a lot to do with drawing, manipulating form and idea. If it takes place on the screen, it then finds its way onto a piece of paper. There are all kinds of levels of mediation. How is it finding its way onto a piece of paper? What machine are you using to print it? Are you using an old machine or a new machine? A lot of my machines are plotters from the '70s that I've been able to reconfigure to work with the new operating systems. So, it's about sampling and mixing and interfacing a lot of media together, and ultimately what you get at the end is about drawing. It's not about software. I'm not interested in digital art. There are very few digital artists that I like. I think that some video art is interesting, but no one has been able to take animation and push it to a visceral level if it's not hand-drawn animation or a kind of clunky and awkward animation.

CHC: *You must outsource some components of these projects.*

RD: Originally I would make a body cast of my own body, a plaster cast. Then I would go to a video game company in Long Island, where they had a head scanner for video games, and scan my head. And then I wanted to go beyond that to scanning the whole body. There are only a few places where you can scan your whole body. One of them is on the Wright Patterson Air Force base—General Dynamics has a facility where you pay a nominal fee. This costs quite a bit less than you would pay if you did the alternative, which is basically flying to Los Angeles and going to a studio—most body scanning is used in the movie industry. But I also went to the military base out of curiosity, because a lot of what I do concerns anthropometry, body measurement, and biometrics. In order to use this full body scanner, you have to agree to take part in an anthropometry study, a military study. I think they were scanning 10,000 people, mostly military personnel. They take all of the data from the scans, create highly specific averages of body measurements, and then use that information in the design of anything that interfaces with the body, like a flack jacket, or a helmet, or an ejection seat. They also sell the data to clothing manufacturers.

As far as the milling and the stereo lithography are concerned, these are very widespread techniques today. I've worked a lot with Johnson Atelier in New Jersey. Charles Ray made his tractor out there, and Kiki Smith is there all the time. Any number of artists use these techniques to enlarge their maquettes into bronze sculptures or works in other materials.

CHC: *You shaved for this work, the sculptures are hairless.*

RD: I shaved my head, I shaved my hair. I also had to maintain the exact same body weight for a month.

CHC: *So you use these pieces created with*

stereo lithography or other computerized methods in the creation of the models, the originals, and then make molds. You don't actually use those techniques in the production of the editions?

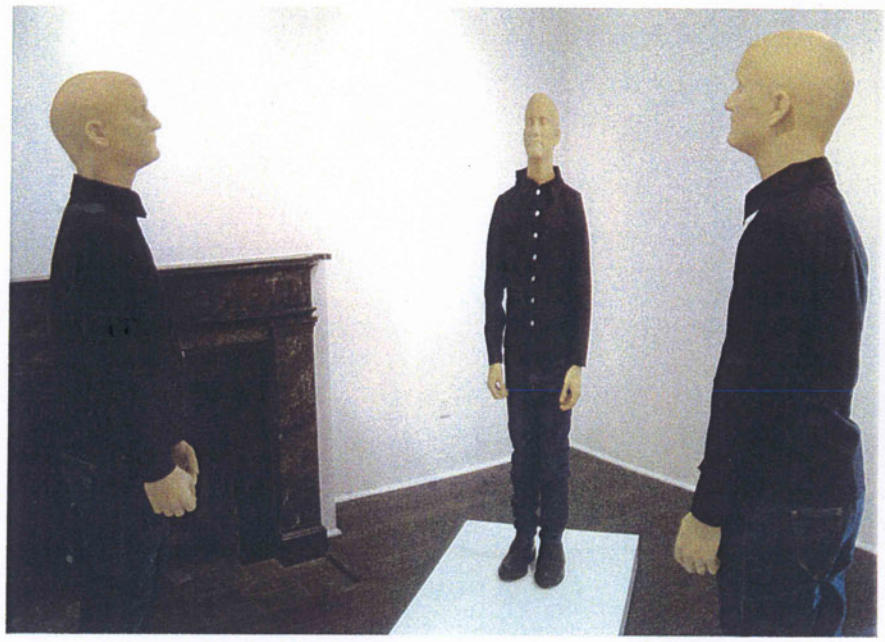
RD: Exactly. That's a way of writing. If I start off with a scan, it's almost like a three-dimensional photograph of the body. If you stay true to that in the writing of the form in three dimensions, you're still capturing some of that original photographic translation. It's just like if somebody were to take a photograph into Photoshop and mess around with it; this is like using CNC milling to tinker and mess around. That's a big part of what I do. My use of the technology is intrinsic to my concept.

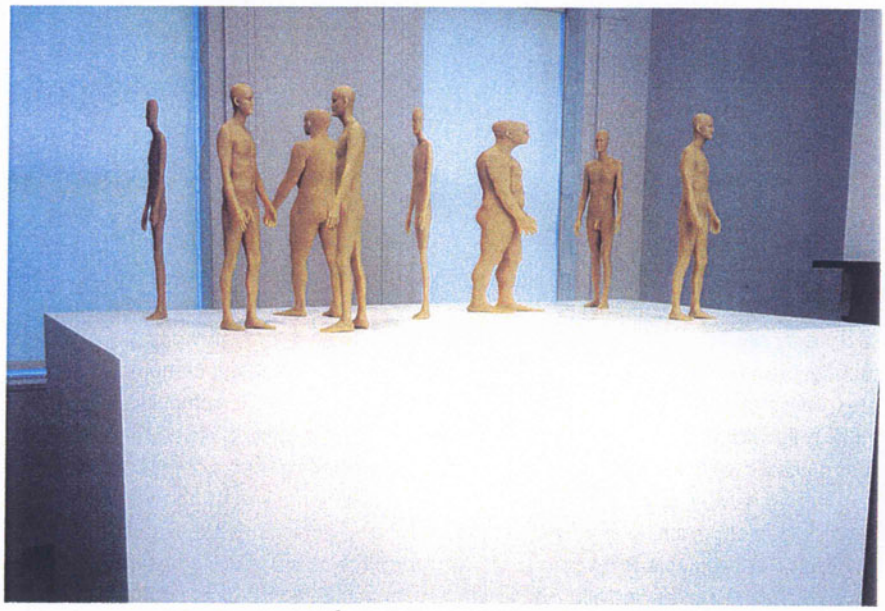
CHC: *Are your groupings of figures inspired by the manufacturing process and the mass-produced aspect of the plastics industry, as opposed to artists' multiples and editions per se, or is multiplicity an artistic statement in itself?*

RD: I think that artists' editions in general relate to the idea of reproduction and commodification and serialization in the marketplace. When you reduce the human form to just so much information—which is essentially what this model of me does—it becomes a stripping away of identity, and as such it's basically just a thing, a malleable thing that could be anything, anywhere. That's very intimidating, the possibility of going in any direction. With the groupings, particularly the ones on a large scale, I'm addressing the space of the context. At Lever House, for example, the work is designed as a site-specific piece, which is one of the reasons why I think it's going to work well and one of the reasons that it's happening at all. It's related to the idea of people's movement through the area and to the idea of that space as strangely private and also public. There's a lot going on in this piece that has to do with voyeurism and surveillance, and with the idea of mapping the body—mapping traffic and movement of the body.

CHC: *The pile of bodies, downstairs at your exhibition at Tracy Williams, Ltd., is creepy. Are they supposed to be victims?*

RD: It's an abstraction of death. It's 180 lifeless replicas.





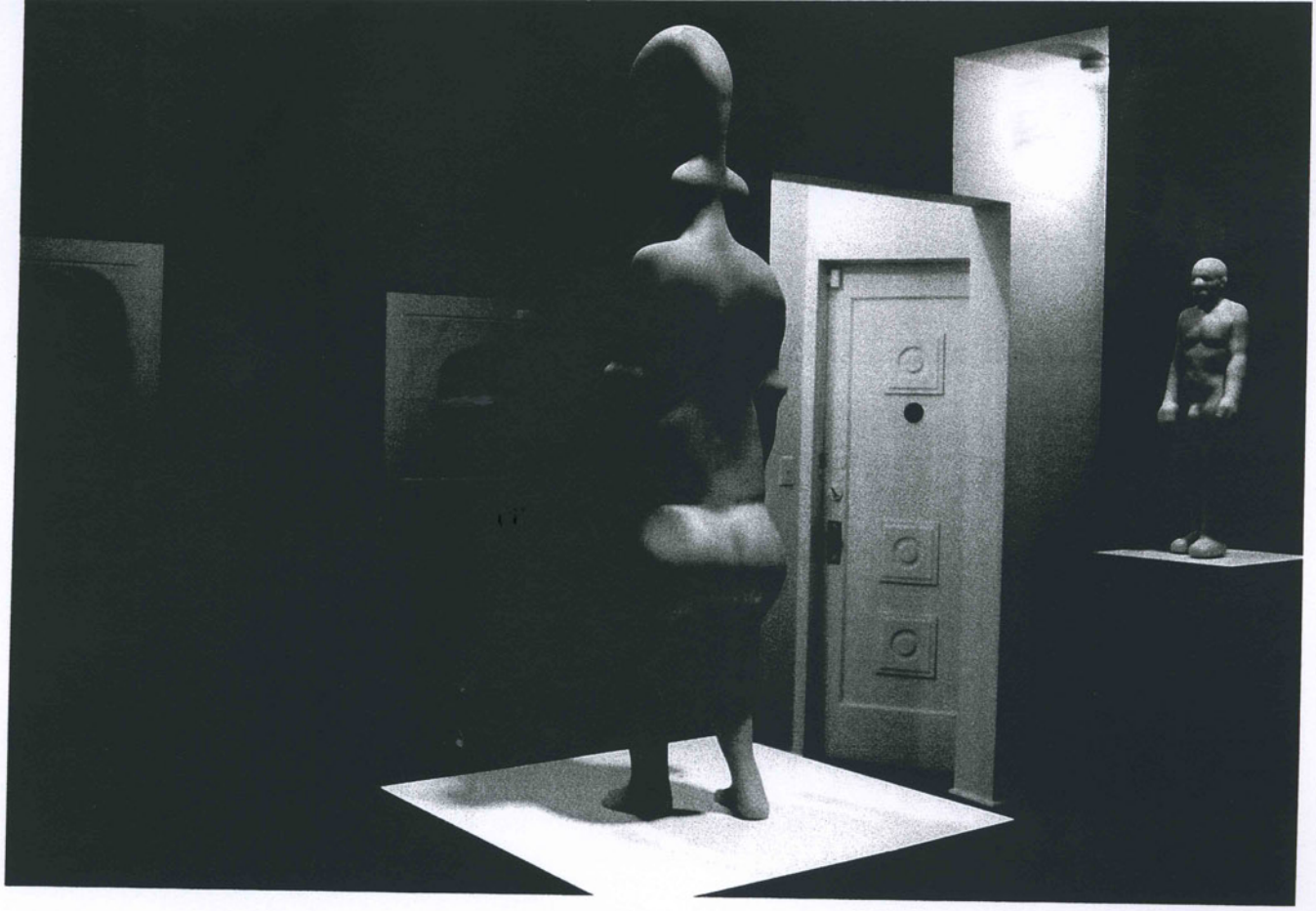
Top: *Three in One (Self Annointed)*, 2002–04. Resin, pigment, and handmade clothes, 76 x 90 x 90 in.
Above: *Them*, 2005. Pigmented resin, 69 x 45 x 84 in.

CHC: *Do you start with a firm vision, or is it more improvisational?*

RD: There's a lot of intuitive improvisation that goes on, but I find that it's a balance because sculpture takes so long to make. Because it can take a few years to realize a project, there's a risk that it can become over-determined. You have to be able to stay true to the initial idea that happened instantaneously.

CHC: *That exhibition also included some sketches executed with a plotter. What makes these interesting for you?*

RD: They relate to groupings of figures. Before today's inkjet and digital printers, engineers and architects used plotters for their drawings. Getting one of these machines to work with a new operating system took me almost a month of non-stop research and



Installation view with (foreground) *Untitled (Dogon)*, 2007, cast pigmented polyurethane resin, 26 x 8 x 7 in.

work. The machines understand vector data, but all digital data, including jpegs, are raster data, so everything has to be translated into vector form before it can get plotted.

CHC: *I find the groupings of the standing figures reminiscent of Giacometti—lonely, solitary figures staring blankly into their own voids, seemingly unaware of the others.*

RD: The dread that we live with today is probably more acute than Giacometti's, although I don't think much has changed. Different era, different war.

CHC: *At what point is the scale of a piece figured in, and would you consider changing the size and reissuing the resulting work as something new?*

RD: All work for me comes out of other work: I have to make one thing to understand the next. A lot of art-making is experimentation to a certain degree—trying things out—so if you do something and it seems to work, you learn something from that, and you can then see how it could work in a larger scale. But I never proceed traditionally with maquettes or preparatory sketches. Relationships between different things are more liquid.

CHC: *A few of the new, distorted pieces resemble icons of African sculpture, totemic and powerful fertility works. They also bear down on Brancusi and Futurism. Is there a full circle: modern technology now makes something appear primitive?*

RD: When the human form is brought back down to a kind of ground zero as a collection of data, an accumulation of data that the model of my body represents, it's as if you're back at square one and it can be taken anywhere. But it can also get pretty hokey. I've always been interested in ideas of origination, creation that are inherent in the idea of sculpture, of bringing something into physical, three-dimensional, material form. Venturing into certain places seemed irresistible to me. That aspect of the new work relates to someone like Sherrie Levine, who is trying to open a new space within a pre-existing form. We respond to things that we know. There's something about the reproduction of pre-existing form that goes to the heart of our experience today, related to Duchamp and the conversation that was opened up a hundred years ago, but also to Baudrillard's idea of simulation—but I think it goes deeper than that into verisimilitude in general. If you have a faithful copy in art—the magic of imparting the real world into a static object—it's about immortality and magic. The problem today is that magic is all around us, little visual miracles all the time—so much so that we've become desensitized to them. The miracle has been subsumed by advertising, the fetish of marketing, and the commodity. There is a reason that we respond to things that we know, and I think it goes deeper than just being able to say, "It's about the readymade." It's what's always been there in art, which is the magic of somehow imparting that real thing into this static thing, but it also has to do with the fact that today it's everywhere—with digital technology and advertising and a hundred years of conditioning people's desires, image-makers in the culture industry understand, how to push people's buttons. I think this idea of wanting to impart something that already exists into the object is complex. It's not a simple Duchampian problem.

Christopher Hart Chambers is an artist and writer living and working in New York.