

Manikin  
by  
Mickey Bolmer

Had to do something. Getting nowhere, taking classes, doing auditions, waiting table. Answered ad: "Acting Challenge! Be a Window Manikin Earn Good Money Practice Your Craft." Why not? Hell, had to be better than waiting table.

Turning self to plastic, details key.

Surprising how much people notice but don't know.

Like nails. They say that nails on corpses continue to grow. Cuticles cut away, nails end even with flesh, blend of Maybelline Wild White with Lauder Naturally, three coats.

Head easier. Hair naturally shiny black thick. Thanksgivings with family Uncle Josh would say, "You wearing a wig, Rob?" Ugly man, Uncle Josh.

Nose even.

Bright blue contacts glaze eye. But lids, softness there, revealing vulnerability. Sleeping children, lovers, kohi-eyed Egyptian women. No wonder modern women wear eye shadow. For lid, Clinique foundation instead of shadow, then Chanel black mascara, bit of black eyebrow pencil, Maybelline again.

Face, neck, chest if showing, hands, wrists, razored, safety then electric. Johnson's cornstarch baby powder lightly on all visible surfaces.

Perfect plastic.

Most weekends making pretty good money.

"How do they do that?" They push questions at plate glass, never come in, ask. Work often with Miranda, Peri. Now at Peri people really do stare. Not one movement until they're all saying, "No, she's real." Then motion, one tiny perfect robotic gesture. Crowds blink, pause, giggle, frown, quick side look at lover, sister, friend, stranger eyes questioning, then back. "How do they do that?"

Got this gallery job through Tina. "An artist I know needs a manikin for his opening. He does political pop. I told him you'd be perfect. He's paying \$500."

"Why so much?"

"Don't know. Art, I guess."

"Sure why not?"

"I'll tell him and give him your picture. First Tuesday next month."

A typical opening, tiny Soho Gallery. Greene Street window painted black except for large white box and black oak leaf on window.

Inside, gallery filled with bright political pop objects, some giant dioramas.

First, log cabin with red, white, blue bunting. Gold gilt door framing manikin blend (Johnson, Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush) sitting at cheap desk beneath flag made of miniature import products dyed red, white, blue. Flesh quite good, just how Reagan must look after shower. "Ron, honey, don't come out till you get on some make-up."

Half way down gallery, giant white shoe box draped with black lace underwear. Look through frame of rhinestones to find Star blend (Bergman cheeks, Carpenter arm, Davis chin, Funicello chest, Garbo hair, Hepburn neck, Monroe eyes, Temple nose) waving from back end of plastic "blow-up" Cadillac. Nothing below waist.

At gallery's back, stainless steel box framed by decouped \$2.00 bills. Inside

naked hairy mayor blend (Wagner, Lindsay, Beame, Koch) waving one hand while batting flies with other from atop plastic Empire State Building light.

Greet Tina who introduces Evan, the artist, who says, "You're right Tina, perfect. Come with me."

Evan walks to gallery director's office, enters without knocking, says, "Here, sign this and put this on," hands over contract and grey pinstriped Brooks Brothers suit, white shirt, red tie, black calf-length socks, black Florsheim wingtips, Brooks Brothers white boxers. Tina introduces owner who says, "You can change right here."

"Thank you."

They all leave.

Postmodern cubicle. Read and sign contract. Tie tie. Lay out clothing on director's desk. Go to bathroom. Return. Lock door.

Begin work.

Spin round desk chair.

Undress dropping clothing into corner.

Stand relaxed in front of desk chair.

"Ok, what's on your mind right now?" Accept whatever comes.

"God, Peter really is looking better." Place thought/feeling/whatever in chair.

"Ok, Peter, you sit there." Look at it from all sides. "Don't be fooled, there's no getting better. Don't know. He really does look better. Maybe this protocol's working. Keep hope alive. How?"

Then, "Fine, seen you, can't do anything about/with you right now, go stand in that corner on that clothing there."

Steadily send each thought/feeling/whatever one after another to stand on clothing until no more.

Then new clothing covering emptiness.

Pass shirt around back, both hands into sleeves, pull up, lift at shoulders, drop into place. Do buttons, smooth sides, tail.

Sit. Lift legs. Pull on boxers. Stand. Settle. Sit; feet into pants, up as far as chair. Good wool slides smoothly. Socks, shoes.

Stand. Pants up, hook, fly, belt. Tie over head, under collar, tightened, smoothed.

Reach coat round back, hands into sleeves, pull up, drop in place.

Walk round manikin, smoothing/patting/pulling here/there.

Ready. Rest easy.

Walk into gallery. They stop talking. Eyes open. Evan smiles, nods.

"Yes, perfect. Now listen. You're a political statement. I'll arrange you, then don't move. Hold that position. We'll have everyone out by 10:30. Now come on."

He goes up short step ladder at very front, opens back of window box. Inside, pair of boxes, small black on top of large white, narrow slot connecting.

"When you're in, you'll be headless. Remember. Don't move. Alright."

He steps down.

Up. In. He following.

Slot just large enough without pinching.

He pushes manikin to middle of box, turns torso right 25°, puts legs into slight stride, right foot forward, places hands by sides, curves fingers slightly, thumbs along

thighs. Adjusts hang of coat, pulls out shirt cuffs, straightens tie. Slides white cloth into slot, snapping it in and zipping it up, like kayak shirt, steadily chuckling.

"Don't get it yet. You will. One more adjustment. Now, don't move."

Reaching around. Fly pulled down. Belt undone. Pants unhooked, angled open. Reaches in boxer slot, behind balls, pulls out, balls penis adjusted, boxer slot behind.

"Perfect," he says still chuckling, backing out, "now don't move."

Hadn't moved. Got it. Mapplethorpe's "The Man in the Polyester Suit" only ordinary circumcised white manikin dressed in Brooks Brothers uniform.

Black oak leaf painted on glass foot away.

"You're good."

Door closes.

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"It must be very long," my friends say. "No, manikin time's quite different. More like sleep. Hours slip away. They say we all dream, but don't remember most. The same. Must be thinking but can't say about what. Remember little."

"It must be very hard," my friends say. "No, not so. Body's quite content to be. Day to day mind's jumpy, trying to resolve all. Manikin space quite peaceful, in fact. Problems behind. Money ahead."

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Tina reported, "Evan removed the stepladder, draped the box with black crepe and put on a sign, 'You too Jesse?' Everyone got it right away and laughed when they read the back of the box. We went around front. The box and lighting were perfect. So were you. I knew your head was in there and still I couldn't see it. I watched and watched but couldn't see the chest move. How do you do it? No one arriving for the opening knew it was a you.

'I wish my Ken had come that way,' a sweet thing from Long Island said.

'I didn't think they made manikins that way.'

'I thought it was just bumps.'

'or for underwear a sock'

'Evan's amazing!'

"And then, just as the crowd was largest, about 9:30,

'It's started!' someone shouted from the front door.

"The gallery emptied and we stood transfixed before the window. It was like those old Disney movies where plants grow, bud, and flower in minutes right before your eyes. Nothing moved but the penis, swelling slowly, reaching, stretching, rising until there it stood fully beautifully formed. Men and women all around were breathing hard, yet still I couldn't see you breath."

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Can't stop moving except by moving. Don't break contract.

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'Just like real.'

'Better than real. That's art.'

'How does Evan do it?'

'What an opening!'

'Water?'  
'Electronics?'  
'Robotics?'  
"The crowd watched for awhile.  
'Look at that!'  
'Amazing! Evan's amazing'  
'How does he do it?'  
"A drop came come out, sparkling; then spreading making the head of the penis  
shine.  
'Lovely!'  
'Talk about art!'  
'That's Art with a capital A'  
"After awhile, nothing more happening except an occasional pulse, they  
finished their white wine and moved on.  
'Best opening all season.'"

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10:30 PM, Evan opens door.  
"Ok, clown, what sort of fuckin stunt was that?"  
Evan fumbling with neck cloth.  
"If I'd fuckin wanted that I'd a hired a man with something to see. Now get out."  
"Evan," Tina says, "weren't you listening? They thought it was great!"  
"What do they know? If I'd wanted Mapplethorpe, I'd a brought leather and  
chains. Now get out a there."  
Back, turn, come on release, done.  
Evan, at bottom of step ladder, face closer than oak leaf, scowling, mouth open.  
Release  
Right at him  
Jump down, smiling, almost laughing  
Tucking in.  
"So sorry. Didn't mean...."  
"HIV positive! You HIV positive?!"  
"Don't know, never tested."  
"Get out. Get a fucking test."  
Change, leave.

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After waiting a week for my money, I write. Letter is returned with a copy of the  
contract, "Once, positioned will not move from 7:30 until 10:30" underlined in red and a  
red note, "Contract Broken." A lawyer friend warns me that going to court could mean  
public indecency charges.

I've stopped taking manikin jobs and am back to waiting.

Manikin by Mickey Bolmer©July 1990