

ARTSY

When Dolls Come to Life: Matthew Rolston Upholds a Mastery of Contemporary Portraiture

Artsy Editorial

The first commission that Beverly Hills-based photographer Matthew Rolston ever received, in his now decades-long career, was for Andy Warhol's Interview magazine—back when he was still a student at Art Center College of Design in Pasadena during the 1970s. Rolston went on to shoot top models, actors, and entertainers for Rolling Stone, Vanity Fair, Esquire, and other culturally prominent magazines during the 1980s, establishing himself alongside formidable colleagues like Herb Ritts, Bruce Weber, and Annie Leibovitz.



Matthew Rolston, *Anonyma Boy*, from the series "Talking Heads."

Rolston's current exhibition at Diane Rosenstein Fine Art in Los Angeles takes a more deconstructed approach to portraiture in its playful substitution of the photographer's typically illustrious subject matter. In "Talking Heads," the visages that Rolston expertly lights and exquisitely captures are, in fact, functionally mute. This latest series of close-up,

large format headshots features some 200 ventriloquial figures—also known as “dummies”—from Fort Mitchell, Kentucky’s Vent Haven Museum.



Matthew Rolston, *Uncle Eddie*, from the series “Talking Heads.”

The eerily fixed expressions, hard and high-polished angles, and stone-cold gazes of *Anonyma Boy*, *Uncle Eddie*, *Ditty Talk Hawkins*, and *Goldston Head I* (all 2010) are presented in rich color and brilliantly fine detail.



Matthew Rolston, *Ditty Talk Hawkins*, from the series “Talking Heads.”

Rolston thus reveals the careful compositional techniques that characterize the best of contemporary portrait photography, by here animating the gloriously inanimate. And the realism of these striking pigment prints seems to perform the opposite aesthetic action of celebrity (which transforms living persons into static objects of admiration, scorn, or affection), inspiring varying responses to the likenesses of both orders of dolls, from delight to revulsion—at least among human observers.



Matthew Rolston, *Goldston Head I*, from the series "Talking Heads."