

# ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

## Photographer Matthew Rolston Turns His Lens to Ventriloquist Dummies

by Mayer Rus

Anyone who suffers from automatonophobia should approach Matthew Rolston's new exhibition, "Talking Heads," with caution. The photographer's striking, monumentally scaled portraits of ventriloquist dummies do little to dispel the notion that these creepy-cool conduits possess some sort of human animus. In fact, Rolston's loving images make a strong case that his subjects do indeed retain a measure of spirit and energy from the entertainers who once brought them to life.



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

The show, Rolston's first solo exhibition at Diane Rosenstein Fine Art, features 30 portraits, each 60 inches square, of ventriloquist dolls from the Vent Haven Museum in Fort Mitchell, Kentucky. (A series of smaller images at 36 inches square will also be available.) The photographer first learned about Vent Haven's eccentric collection in a New York Times story. "When my antennae are up, I receive inspiration very quickly," Rolston says. "I immediately connected with the dolls on a visceral level. They are mesmerizing."



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

In 2010, Rolston set up a full-fledged portrait studio at the museum and captured each of his subjects from the same vantage point: square format, low angle, monochromatic backdrop, and a single light source. Fixated on faces, the photographs offer a window into what Rolston clearly believes is the soul of these transfixing figures.



Matthew Rolston, *Noisy Crachini*, from the series "Talking Heads."

"There's a hypnotic quality to peering into those incredible eyes," Rolston explains, drawing a parallel with Andy Warhol's unapologetically flattering portraits of the beau monde. "The difference between these pictures and editorial photographs is that pictures in magazines

get glanced at for a few seconds at most. These images are meant to be contemplated over time, for months and even years.”



Matthew Rolston, *Pancho*, from the series "Talking Heads."

Long associated with glamorous celebrity imagery, music videos and television commercials, Rolston has of late been flexing his formidable imagination in a variety of arenas. In addition to highly personal projects such as "Talking Heads"—the gallery show is accompanied by a lush volume from Pointed Leaf Press as well as a short movie—Rolston has been working as a creative director in the hospitality and fashion worlds, applying his distinctive sensibility to the creation of high-drama spaces that reinforce the message of a particular brand.

"The thread that runs through all my work is the exploration of our shared humanity," he says. "Whatever I'm doing, it's all about what it means to be human."