

ARTFORUM

Evan Penny

SPERONE WESTWATER

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Facile spectacle. Hollywood special effects. Technique for the sake of technique. There's no denying that those all seem likely, credible reactions to the ultrarealistic silicone figures of Evan Penny. (Works by Duane Hanson and Ron Mueck seem impressionistic by comparison.) Yet even an eye immune to spectacle and craft can find these works compelling. That could be because, for all the stunning three-dimensionality that seems so central to them, the real referent of this sculpture is photography. It turns our culture's crucial pictorial experience into a material one.

Large Murray, 2008, a typical Penny, presents the nude torso of a skinny, ponytailed, fifty-something male, realistically rendered down to his every hair, mole, and trace of stubble. At eight feet tall, it deploys the characteristically photographic trope of enlargement. It also arrests time just as a photo does, letting us contemplate the detail in a world that looks like it should move. Like a photograph—and unlike works by Hanson or Mueck—the arbitrary edges of the sculpture crop a segment from reality: The gallery floor cuts through Murray's body just below his belly; his arms, hanging loose at his sides, are cut off at the wrists. Finally, for all that it is distinctly in the round, *Large Murray* presents the world to us from the singular viewpoints of photography: Murray looks perfectly real from the front, as he does from the back, but try to view him from the side and he seems flattened out.

Despite first impressions, Penny doesn't deploy his impressive technique to traditional realistic effect. By giving a material presence to photography, he draws as much attention to realism's gaps as to its plenitudes.

— Blake Gopnik



Evan Penny, *Large Murray*, 2008
Silicone, pigment, hair, fabric, aluminum
96 1/8 x 47 1/4 x 18 1/8"

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