

ART IMITATES LIFE

Capturing human forms and emotions is what hyperrealistic sculptor Marc Sijan does best, ZARA ZHUANG writes

ON THE SHORES of Lake Michigan, keeping watch at the training centre of the Milwaukee Bucks NBA team is a reticent, unmoving guard who once famously annoyed Basketball Hall of Fame inductee Michael Jordan with his lack of response, so much so that Jordan made it a point to complain to Bucks officials about him. But he couldn't help being rude — he's a sculpture by Marc Sijan, and his name tag simply reads "Art".

Life-size sculptures of security guards — and he's made a number — have become Sijan's calling card. They are among dozens of figures he has created over his four-decade career, based not on the celebrities that are cast in wax for Madame Tussauds galleries worldwide but on ordinary people he spots on the street. One of Sijan's security guard



THIS PAGE FROM LEFT:
SECURITY GUARD #1,
GOLFER; OPPOSITE PAGE:
MARC SIJAN AT WORK IN
HIS STUDIO



sculptures was modelled after his late father, Sylvester.

A top-ranked sculptor working in the realm of hyperrealism, which recreates objects and subjects with photographic accuracy, Sijan's pieces are part of an exhibition on the theme at the Opera Gallery Singapore until May 21. His works share the stage with those by Italian painter Roberto Bernardi, whose oil-on-canvas depictions of candy stuffed in glass jars and fruit wrapped in plastic film are enticingly and so deceptively realistic.

By blurring the distinction between art and reality, hyperrealism explores the detailed renderings of life and form, and the art style represents another means of expressing the human form. According to Sijan, the best hyperrealistic pieces are those that are so truthful a viewer recognises someone in them or gets fooled by them. "Hyperrealism deals with realism," he explains. "It deals with the human anatomy and reflects what one sees. But it's what the

sculpture is expressing that's important."

Sijan's dedication to representing reality, albeit in high definition, manifests in his insistence on portraying subjects exactly as they are. Spending months casting a single sculpture out of clay, completing it in polyester resin and coating it in about 15 layers of oil paint, Sijan omits nothing — not the wrinkles, the sinew, the spots or the fat rolls. "[*There is*] no special effects or make-up or a veil of make-believe," he says. Sijan's sculptures may not be glossy copies of Adonis statues, but intrigue audiences the world over. The 71-year-old has held more than 75 one-man museum exhibitions around the world, most recently in Denmark, South Korea, Spain and Mexico, with critics lauding, "All that's missing is the pulse."

Initially studying to become a teacher, Sijan took art classes in his 20s as part of his degree programme at the University of Wisconsin Whitewater but fell so in love with sculpting that he switched his major. He then worked on projects with the late hyperrealistic sculptor Duane Hanson, perfecting finishing techniques they both employed in their creations. "I have always liked the idea of working with the human figure and the challenge of breathing life into it," says Sijan.

He considers the concept of a sculpture the

most important aspect of his work, and he spends the bulk of the creative process coming up with a thought-provoking message. He selects and casts his models only after the groundwork has been laid.

"The concept is everything," Sijan says. "Without a message, a story or something for the viewer to ponder over, it's nothing — boring, irrelevant, meaningless."

He knows that viewers are often looking for signs that reveal if his sculptures are real or otherwise, but he concedes one feature in particular can make or break a hyperrealistic sculpture.

"The most important are the eyes," Sijan says. "They are always the windows to the soul." **P**

