



# Guy Louis - XVI Master of Ultra Realism

By David E. Parvin A.L.I.

I well remember being new to sculpting and often wondering, "How was that done?" With experience, the mysteries of sculpting, modeling, and casting became more understood. While I am always delighted to come across excellence, it had been some time since I had wondered about the process, that is, until I met Guy Louis-XVI.

His figures are so ultra realistic that I was forced to admit that I had only a very vague and partial understanding of how he does it.

I first met Guy at a convention for motion picture make-up and special effects artists in Pasadena, CA last year. He was demonstrating some of his techniques in one of the supplier's booths. He had on display a copy of the head of a Johnny Carson mannequin that he had made for a museum in Carson's hometown of Norfolk, NE. I was so impressed and intrigued that I asked if I could visit him at work in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. I suspect that Guy probably gets that request often but almost never has the person show up on his door step. As it turned out, I had a reason to be in Ottawa a few months later and gave him a ring. He renewed his invitation.

Before going any further, let me mention a couple things about his name and his background. Guy is pronounced "Gee." Louis -XVI really is his last name. He uses the Roman numerals rather than spelling out "the Sixteenth." Guy was born in 1954 and grew up in the small town of Rockland, Ontario. Talented from the get-go, he began at 13 a career in sign writing. Over the years, he learned fiber glass lamination, mold making, casting, and welding. Fascinated by special effects, in 1988 he began experimenting in his basement with special effects techniques and dreaming of career in the motion picture industry. In 1993, he quit a job as a welder and enrolled in a professional makeup course. He became a special effects makeup artist and an expert in life casting to produce latex, silicone and gelatin prosthetics. He went to work in films and commercials. "I was the guy (or the "Gee") they'd call when they

needed a throat slashed or a kidney surgery," he says. He also did make-up work over some 3000 customers for a photography studio. "That was the best thing I ever did," says Guy. "I got to look at and analyze people. I was able to look at facial features up close - the skin and the way it folds, the color of the eyes." In the mid 1990's Guy was asked by a friend to make a mannequin for a show sponsored by a company that manufactures exhibits for museums. This led to commissions from the Canadian Wax Museum and, "I was off to the races." Entering Guy's suburban house is a delight. Not only is he very friendly, but he is eager to show off examples of his work from complete figures to a gutted salmon, a severed hand, a human heart, etc. Faces are the most critical part of his work. Sometimes he begins with a life casting and other times he sculpts from scratch.

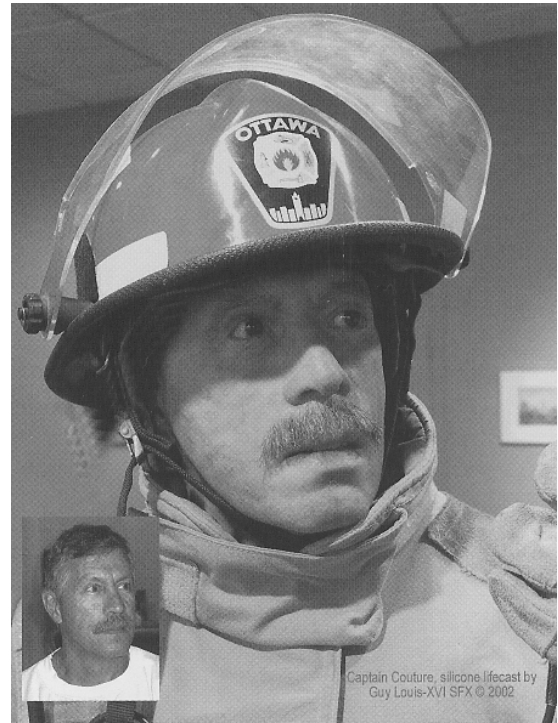
It doesn't make any difference, both look equally realistic. In my opinion, there are three things that make him one of the very best in his field. The first is that his pieces really look like the persons that they represent. The second is his attention to detail e.g. hairs are applied individually, skin texture is perfect with no visible seams. The third and most amazing to me is the translucent quality of the skin.

I know from my own experience that even a reasonably accurately sculpted face can be painted to look life-like especially if seen from a distance or in photographs. But in real life, it lacks the translucency of actual skin. Figures in wax museums are better than painted bronze or resins but still have some features painted on the outside. Guy admits that something made for a motion picture does not have to be as perfect as something to be seen close up real life. Recently Guy had several mannequins in an art show. While the press covered the event, no mention was made of his work. At first this perplexed him and then he found out that the press had him and then he found out that the press had thought his pieces were mimes!

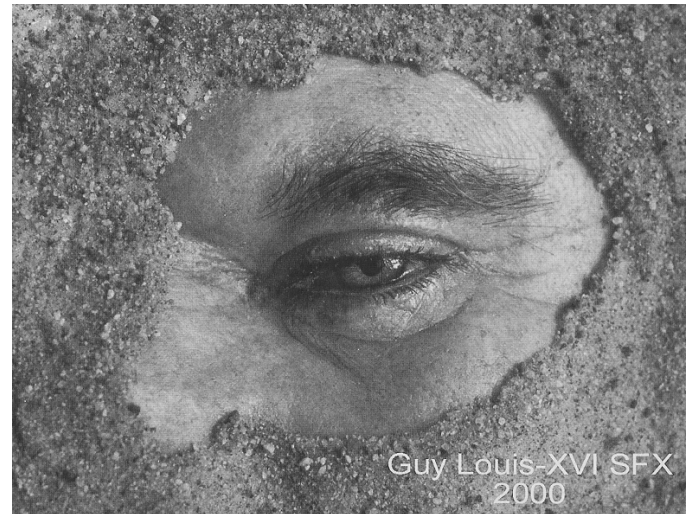
What Guy does is paint up to seven very thin layers of pigmented silicone rubber on the inside of a mold. "You lay your colors inside the mold and build up the skin, layer by layer," explains Guy. "It gives a depth of color like human skin. A vein is painted inside the skin where it is supposed to be, not painted on the outside." Eyes are so important to Guy that he makes his own which he sells to other artists who looking for perfection.

Most of Guy's commissions are for museums. However, some of his clients want mannequins of loved ones, personal heroes, or themselves. He has produced a youthful and glamorous Hedy Lamar for a collector in Illinois and a 13 year old version of a 61 year old client in Massachusetts. While Guy can, of course, create an entire lifelike body, most collectors and museums want only the exposed parts, i.e. head and hands, to be lifelike. The body is made of a lightweight steel frame covered with foam and fabric and then clothes. A finished mannequin weighs about 29 pounds. The cost can vary from as little as \$4000 and up to \$35,000 depending on the complexity and detail.

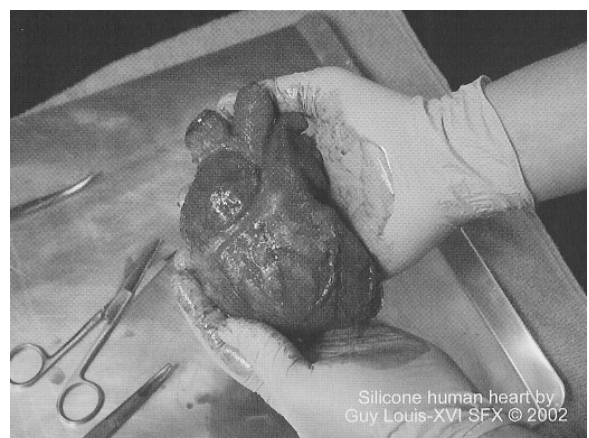
I have known artists that are very stingy with sharing their "secrets" for fear that someone else will become their competition. I suspect Guy is open and



**Captain Couture, Close up. Hi-tech silicone skin, life cast, private collection.**



**Split Char, museum prop, Cambridge Bay**

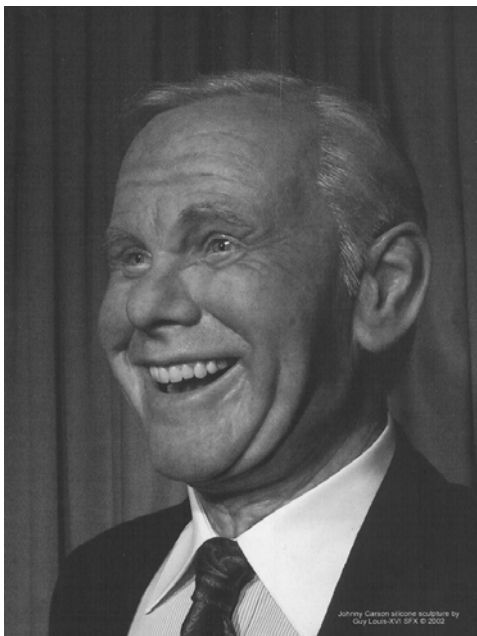


**Hi-Tech silicone, human heart for a movie prop**

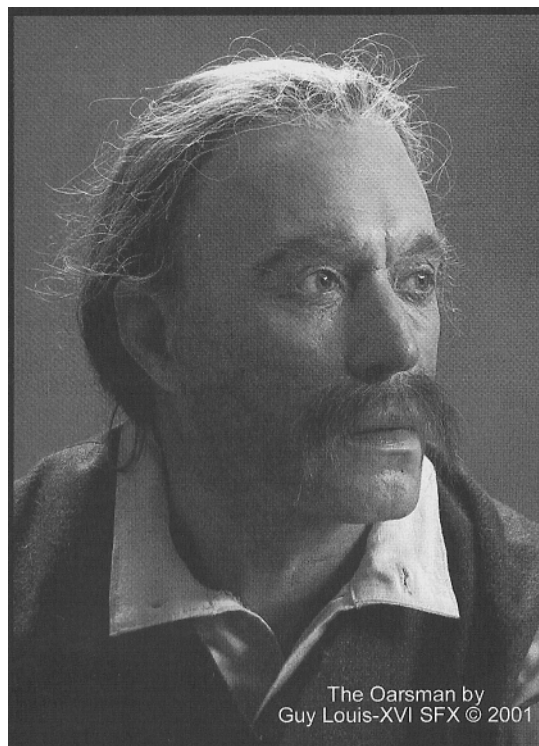
forthcoming with the details of his methods because he well understands that knowing how something is done and doing it are entirely different. After all, Ansel Adams could have truthfully said that all he needed was an 8 x 10 camera and some very big rocks!



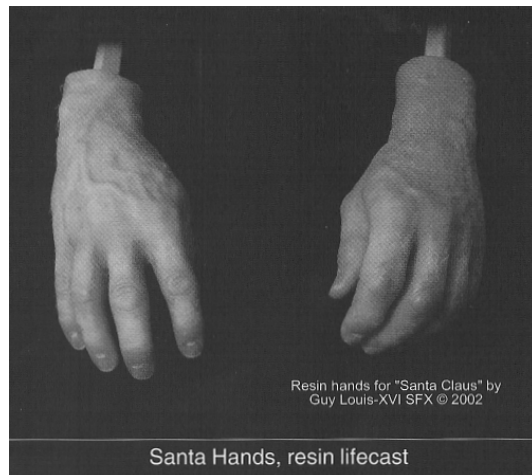
**Curiosus, is a self-portrait (life cast) of myself, finished in silicone and other medium. City of Ottawa Gallery**



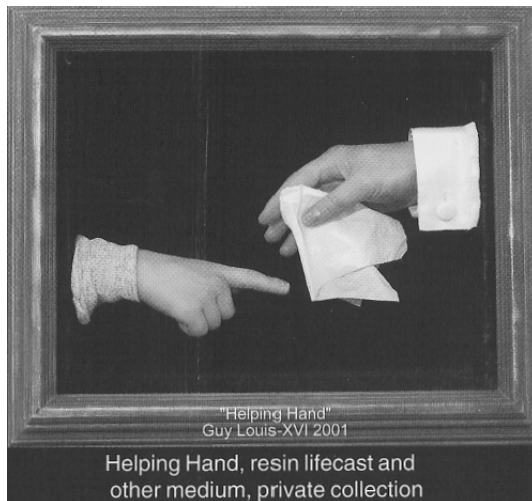
**Johnny Carson, Hi-Tech silicone mannequin, sculpted from photographs, permanent exhibit, Elkhorn Museum, Norfolk, Nebraska.**



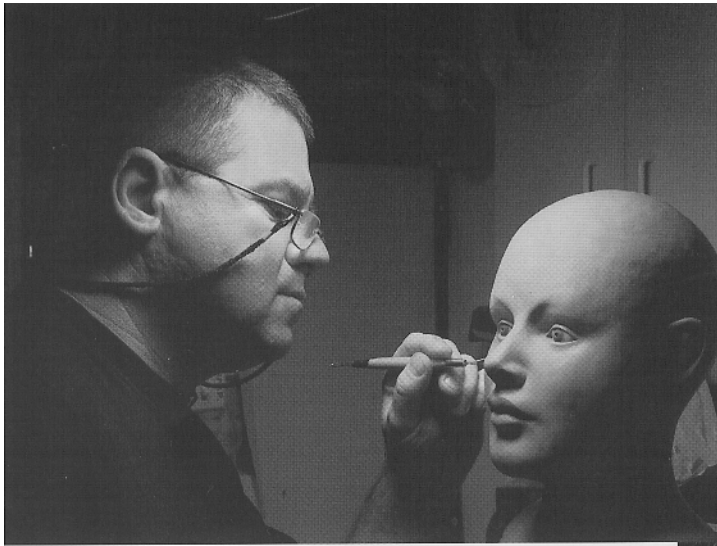
**The Oarsman, Hi-Realism, Plaster/Resin composite mannequin. Life cast from live model. Founders Hall, Charlottetown, P.E.I.**



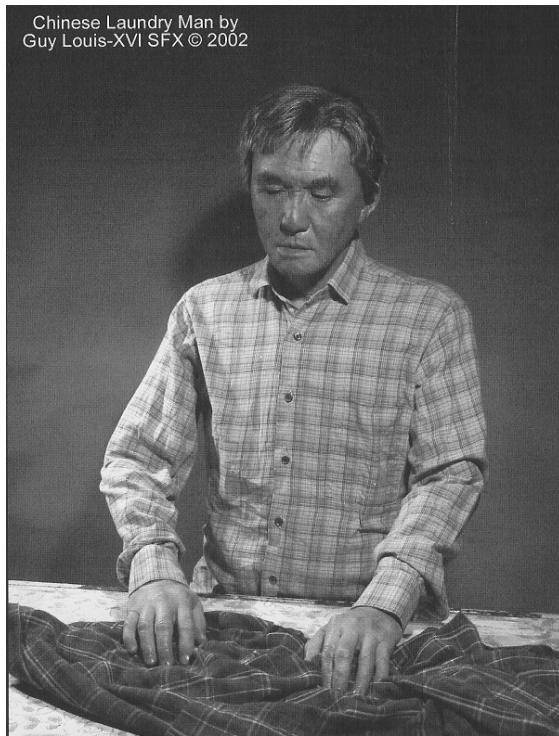
**Santa Hands, resin lifecast**



**Helping Hand, resin lifecast and other medium, private collection**



Guy sculpting Heady Lamarr and at right is the Hi-Tech silicone bust of Lamarr, sculpted from photographs.



Chinese Laundry Man by  
Guy Louis-XVI SFX © 2002

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For more information about Guy LouisXVI  
and his work, he may be found at  
[www.louissvimannequins.com](http://www.louissvimannequins.com)

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Chinese Laundry man, Hi-realism, Plaster/Resin composite mannequin depicting Chinese laundry in the early 1900's. This was done for the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Gatineau, Quebec, Canada.

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