



KIGURUMI, DOLLERS AND HOW WE SEE

LAURIE SIMMONS

Salon 94 Bowery

243 Bowery , near Stanton St., 10002 New York, NY , US

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WELCOME TO THE DOLLERHOUSE: LAURIE SIMMONS' KIGURUMI PORTRAITS

BY D. DOMINICK LOMBARDI

It would be ridiculous to discuss gender issues, stereotyping, objectification, fetish, or fantasy in contemporary art without Laurie Simmons. For nearly four decades, using a variety of subjects and settings that include toys, costumes, collage, puppets, and people, Simmons' photographs have created an indelible interpretation of how perception is formed.

The current exhibition at Salon 94, *Kigurumi, Dollers and How We See**, features Simmons' latest series of pigment prints. The bulk of the work here investigates Kigurumi, one form of "Cosplay" (costume play) that has found its way into certain sectors of Japanese youth culture. Dressed up in female masks and body suits that reference anime or manga aesthetics, these costumed, doll-like male and female role players act out characters and situations that suggest the passions of youth, over-the-top cuteness, and the power of vulnerability, which in this case manifests itself as potent, albeit fetishistic sexual allure.

Simmons' work here is reminiscent of Morton Bartlett's photographs. Bartlett created over a dozen half life-sized dolls of young boys and girls for use as photographic models. Role playing is the ultimate link between the two projects, which share suggested actions and moods, and a focused, obsessive, creepiness. Their images encourage viewers to look and look and hold that gaze despite feelings of impropriety or voyeurism.



Laurie Simmons, *How We See/Look I/Daria*, 2014, pigment print, 70 x 48 in.; Courtesy of the Artist and Salon 94, New York

Simmons' latest work engages us ever further, in something that has a life beyond itself. *Yellow Hair/Brunette/Mermaids* (2014) more than sets the stage for the recording of peripheral entertainment. In it, two subjects donning head-to-fin costumes pose mid-dive across a blue set. It would seem that generally, this need for dolling is about escapism, but it also correlates to the line between reality and perception, fact and fantasy that is so incredibly and unmistakably blurred in the media that represents contemporary society.

In a strange way, this acting out is forming a new sort of community where participants can relate through common interests, even if they have no apparent purpose other than self-satisfaction. What Simmons captures is a cross presence, a time when fantasy forms in real time for a select few to experience first hand, and for the world to see through the art produced.

In addition to the eleven dollers depicted here, there are two striking portraits of western fashion models with their closed eyelids painted to look open. This relatively slight adjustment of eyelid painting adds extra depth to these women's stares while their stereotypically girly outfits—meant to refer to the women who strive to become living Barbie dolls through plastic surgery—end up looking more creepy than idealistically misguided. To me, the simple act of adding these two very different, but equally compelling and hypnotic images creates a juxtaposition that adds to the grand eccentricity of the phenomena and actions depicted through the exhibition.



Laurie Simmons, *Yellow Hair/Brunette/Mermaids*, 2014, pigment print, 70 x 48 in.; Courtesy of the Artist and Salon 94, New York

—D. Dominick Lombardi