
March 3, 2011

LAURIE SIMMONS: 'The Love Doll: Days 1-30'

By **KEN JOHNSON**

Salon 94

243 Bowery, at Stanton Street

Lower East Side

Through March 26

Laurie Simmons has found the perfect woman for the man terrified of human relationships. She is young, beautiful and Asian. She has a perfect body, and she never talks back. She is, yes, a life-size, high-end sex doll, and she is the subject of a suite of large color photographs that are conceptually too obvious but emotionally affecting nevertheless.

Ms. Simmons smartly underplays the sexual element. Mostly her subject remains demurely clothed, posing in casual fashions and outdoor settings like a model in a J. C. Penney catalog. In more provocative pictures she kneels nude indoors over a live dog or poses in a see-through slip next to a similarly lifeless yet uncannily palpable friend who sits on a sofa in an ordinary living room.

A picture of a doll's head and shoulders emerging from a cardboard box drives home the point: female attractiveness as pure commodity.

Ms. Simmons's works are not visually exciting enough as photographs — or meta-photographs — to make up for the ideological bluntness, but there is a more subtle aspect. That there is a serious demand for this sort of thing bespeaks a dark cloud of loneliness shadowing the lives of untold numbers of modern people. This comes out most compellingly in a loop showing on the gallery's outdoor video screen. As the camera slowing scans the doll dressed in a traditional geisha costume, a woman's sweet, slightly raspy voice sings "Falling in Love Again." It is the sadness, not the feminist critique, that casts a spell.