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The Lush Solace of Gustav Klimt's Landscapes



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MUSEUM | FEBRUARY 27, 2019 | CHANDRA NOYES



Laurie Simmons' Big Career Photographing Little Things



Laurie Simmons, *Yellow Living Room*, 1982

Opening this week at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago is the first major survey of acclaimed photographer Laurie Simmons. *Laurie Simmons: Big Camera/Little Camera* encompasses four decades of her work, including film and sculpture, in addition to her photographs. Known for her close-up images of the world of dolls, Simmons has long used her lens to critique gender roles and idealized visions of American prosperity and domesticity. By making small objects the central focus of her works, Simmons manipulates our sense of scale and of what is important and worthy of artistic attention. In this way, Simmons makes the personal, the small, and the intimate, political objects, bringing a feminist message to her domestic scenes.



Laurie Simmons, *Walking House*, 1989

Simmons became interested in photography as a child, and after art school worked briefly as a photographer for a dollhouse miniature company. This experience, as well as purchasing a collection of old toys, would shape her career. By creating intimate vignettes for these objects and combining them with other props, Simmons used the toys she recognized from childhood to explore themes of gender stereotypes and how images influence our lives. Her *Walking and Lying Objects* (1987-91) series brought inanimate objects to life via a pair of slender, feminine legs, drawing a comparison to how the female body is objectified in the media.



Laurie Simmons, *Café of the Inner Mind: Gold Café*, 1994

At first, it may be hard to imagine 40 years worth of photographs of dolls as being very interesting or ground-breaking, but Simmons' images are remarkably varied, featuring a wide cast of characters, and eliciting a range of emotions, from the nostalgic to the humorous, and the sad. Simmons' props, many of which are on display in this exhibition, have grown just as she has as an artist. Ventriloquist dummies feature in her photos and the film *The Music of Regret* (2006, 45 min), which stars Meryl Streep. Recently Simmons incorporated high-end Japanese sex dolls for the series *The Love Doll* (2009-11).



Laurie Simmons, *Some New: Grace (Orange)*, 2018

Simmons has been a major voice in contemporary art photography, and continues to be influential. She continues to explore ideas surrounding gender, including her most recent work for the series *Some New* (2018). Using make-up and costumes, Simmons addresses the way image-making is not limited to photographers but is something we as individuals engage in every day as we shape our appearances.

Accompanying the exhibition is a full calendar of film viewings, tours, and artist talks, including Simmons in conversation with her daughter, writer and activist Cyrus Dunham.

Laurie Simmons: Big Camera/Little Camera is on view through May 5, 2019.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Chandra Noyes is the former Managing Editor for *Art & Object*.

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