Boy I/Corner, 2013
(right)
Pigment print
89 3/4 x 59 1/2 inches
(228 x 151 cm)

Boy I/Floor, 2013
(bottom left)
Pigment print
59 1/2 x 89 3/4 inches
(151 x 228 cm)

Boy II/Silver Desk/Profile, 2013
(top left)
Pigment print
89 3/4 x 59 1/2 inches
(151 x 228 cm)

Laurie Simmons
Courtesy of the artist
and Salon 94, New York
Laurie Simmons
Tourism: Moonwalk Apollo II Mission (Top), 1984
Cibachrome
40 × 60 inches (102 × 152 cm)
Pushing Lipstick (Spotlight) (Left), 1979
Cibachrome
5.75 × 8.75 inches (15 × 22 cm)
The Love Doll - Day 14 (Candy) (Right), 2010
Fuji Matte print
70 × 47 inches (178 × 119 cm)
Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94, New York
Laurie Simmons’s Two Boys
ESSAY | WILLIAM J. SIMMONS

Over four decades, Laurie Simmons has written an innovative and visually engrossing photographic story. With her new work on view at the Arnold & Marie Schwartz Gallery Met, she adds an entirely new chapter. Two Boys, a set of four photographs displayed in tandem with the North American premiere of Nico Muhly’s opera of the same name, presents not only a vision of the internal and communal traumas of the internet age, but also Simmons’s ever-expanding relationship to photographic practice.

Long admired for her commitment to both conceptual and formal rigor, Simmons has addressed a myriad of historical, social, and aesthetic phenomena, all through adroitly maneuvered lenses. Simmons’s projects include objects on legs, ventriloquist’s dummies, impossibly manicured interior scenes, and a musical featuring a chorus of melancholic puppets, all of which reflect her desire to communicate impossibilities, despite the sincerest dreams and prayers that remain with us from childhood. These themes, rendered in films, installations, and photographs, maintain intensely personal, subjective, and universal factors. Perhaps she speaks is marked by the precariousness of her chosen craft. For most of its infancy and adolescence, the photograph was as lifeless and utilitarian as these dummies. In fact, it was not until the late 20th century that conceptual photography became the revered art historical staple it is today, a transition that Simmons, among others, spearheaded.

Two Boys could thus be said to contain this history. By elevating the medical dummies from tools to conceptual entities, while retaining their basic function as material objects through unflinching realism, Simmons reenacts the transformation of photography. She illustrates the very foundation of the photographic process, an unpredictable amalgam of technical, subjective, and universal factors. Perhaps she is equally interested in the “inner life” of the photograph as she is in that of her subjects. Simmons now presents us with the antonym of much of her previous work, and, in doing so, questions established narratives not only of her career, but also of photography as an art historical category. What results is a complex deepening of our relationship to the photograph, a love affair that Simmons perennially rekindles with formidable vigor.

2 I owe this point to Mary Simpson, who initially noted the astonishing details in these photographs.
3 Simmons, Laurie and Marvin Heiferman. “Laurie Simmons and Marvin Heiferman.” Art in America, 3 April 2009.

Laurie Simmons’s Two Boys is on view at the Metropolitan Opera’s Arnold & Marie Schwartz Gallery Met in New York City through January 15, 2014.