



## MYRIAM THYES: DOLL DE/CONSTRUCTION

By Stephan Trescher, 2023

To avoid misunderstandings and despite the striking colour scheme in black, white and pink, the sixteen photographs by Myriam Thyes have nothing to do with the pop-cultural phenomenon of the band Blackpink from South Korea, nor with a retro-chic flashback to the taste of the early 1980s, when this colour triad had a stellar career in fashion and design - albeit with harsher contrasts and a significantly more garish shade of pink (which was called 'pink'). Rather than indulging in pop-culture references, the artist is engaged here in an art-historical labyrinth of allusions, some of which, at the very least, want to be touched upon.

The title of the 16-part series *Doll De/Construction* recalls a term coined by Wolf Vostell, *Dé/collage*, which originally referred simply to the tearing away of posters and other superimposed layers of images (effectively reversing the additive process of gluing elements together or layering them in a collage), but which later came to encompass all the destructive and dissociative tendencies in his own art, as well as in that of certain contemporaries and fellow travellers of the Fluxus movement.

Deconstructivism also plays a role: here, the artist borrows a term from architecture and adapts it—\*ex negativo\*—to the visual art tradition of Constructivism, a movement that, broadly speaking, championed a geometrically rational and abstract style of painting from the 1920s onwards. Thyes's photographs clearly have little to do with this. Nevertheless, she employs a grid arrangement of four-by-four square photographic panels—each measuring 40 by 40 centimetres—whose rigorous composition certainly echoes Constructivist pictorial structures.

In addition, the artist uses unusual angles, tilted perspectives, and sharp low- and high-angle shots in some of her photographs—styles that were heavily pioneered by artists like Alexander Rodchenko as forms of expression in Constructivist photography. Nevertheless, Thyes pursues completely different goals of her own with her photos and, as the title already suggests, plays a game that also resonates with these associations but essentially has a completely different subject: Two women dismantle a man's doll.

The doll, for its part, is once again a motif that was particularly popular in Surrealism. Here, the thematic complex of the doll and the automaton—the uncanny boundary between animate and inanimate beings that are human-like but not human—continues a dark Romanticism à la E.T.A. Hoffmann or Mary Shelley (leading ultimately from Pygmalion and Olympia to the cyborgs of Blade Runner or Ex Machina. But that does not belong here...). Among the Surrealists, however, a distinctly erotic, indeed, overtly sexualised, use of doll figures predominated; this is evident in the work of Dalí and Man Ray and later Duchamp, and most blatantly in the fetish fantasy photos of Hans Bellmer.

Myriam Thyès subverts his sexualised violence fantasies multiple times over in her image series. First of all, she reverses the roles by having two women tackle a male doll, which they dismantle and reassemble, fragment and dismember, undress and dress at will.

The violence of this sequence of scenes gains weight from the fact that the mannequin is a highly realistic one and, in addition, the pink colouring of its visible skin parts gives it an unexpected lifelike quality compared to its black and white surroundings - in other words: in some images, it momentarily appears as though a real human being is being handled, dismantled, and dismembered. The mere reversal of the usual gender roles in the destructive encounter would not in itself be a great gain. What distinguishes the 16 pictures, however, is their totally obvious, 'lustful unseriousness', the visible pleasure that the two protagonists display in their actions.

As a result, the discomfort over the inherent violence of the event, which can affect male and female viewers alike, is countered by the artfully alienating, tension-filled compositions and the prevailing character of playfulness. And therefore ultimately: a liberating laugh.

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