



MYRIAM THYES: DOLL DE/CONSTRUCTION

To avoid misunderstandings: despite their striking colour scheme in black, white and rose, the sixteen photographs by Myriam Thyes have nothing to do with the current 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 – but the contrasts were also harsher and the rose was considerably more garish (and was called pink). Rather than making pop-cultural allusions, the artist is here engaged in an art-historical labyrinth of allusions, some of which at least want to be touched upon.

The title of the 16-part series *De/Constructive Puppet Show* recalls a term coined by Wolf Vostell, *Dé/collage*, which originally meant only the tearing off of posters and other superimposed image layers, the withdrawal, so to speak, of the assembling gluing on and over each other of collage, but then came to mean all the destructive and dissociative tendencies in his own art and that of some of his contemporaries and fluxist companions.

Deconstructivism also exists: with this, the artist borrows a term from architecture and turns it (ex negativo) into the pictorial tradition of constructivism, which, roughly speaking, since the 1920s elevated geometrically rational and abstract painting to a programme. Thyes' photographs obviously have little to do with this. After all, she uses a square arrangement of four by four square photo panels in the format 40 x 40 centimetres, which in its severity certainly comes close to constructivist pictorial structures.

In addition, the artist uses unusual slants, tilted perspectives, strong under- and top views in some of her photos, such as those that Alexander Rodchenko, for example, played a major role in shaping as forms of expression of constructivist photography.

Nevertheless, Thyes pursues completely different, individual goals with her photos and, as the title already suggests, rather 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, whereby the theme complex of doll and automaton, i.e. the uncanny boundary between animate and inanimate beings that are human-like but not human, is the continuation of a dark romanticism à la E.T.A. Hoffmann or Mary Shelley (and ultimately leads from Pygmalion to Olympia to the cyborgs of Blade Runner or Ex Machina). But that doesn't belong here... With the Surrealists, however, a clearly erotic, almost sexualised use of doll figures predominated, with Dali and Man Ray as later with Duchamp and particularly blatantly in the fetish fantasy photos of Hans Bellmer.

Myriam Thyès reverses Bellmer's sexualised fantasies of violence several times in her series of pictures. First of all, she reverses the roles and has two women take on a male doll, which they take apart and reassemble at will, fragment and dismember, undress and put on again.

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 liveliness compared to its black and white surroundings – in other words: in some images, a human being actually seems to be used, disassembled and dismembered in the first moment. 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 very obvious, lustful unseriousness, the visible pleasure that the two protagonists display in their actions.

So that the unease about the immanent violence of the events, which can affect the viewer just as much as the viewer, is counteracted by the artfully alienating, tension-laden image compositions and the prevailing character of playfulness. And therefore ultimately: a liberating laugh.

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