

**Laurie Simmons**

***DEEP PHOTOS/IN THE  
BEGINNING***

**September 4, 2024 – October 27, 2024**

**105 Henry Street**

56 HENRY is pleased to present *Deep Photos/In the Beginning*, an exhibition of new work by Laurie Simmons on view from September 4 through October 27, 2024, and Simmons' second with 56 HENRY.

This show's double title, compound and sliced by a dash, gestures to the fundamental logic of *Deep Photos*. It is, at once, an autonomous series inaugurating its own formal parameters and a recursive return to origins as Simmons recycles the materials of her photographic oeuvre spanning the past five decades: props, including doll houses, their accoutrements, wallpaper, and functional objects that construct intimate interiors that sometimes, but not always, are populated by dolls. The artist has kept the stuff of these surrogate worlds, color coordinated and stowed in containers that line her studio walls. They surfaced again when she poured the contents of several bins into a 15-foot plastic vitrine at her 2018 retrospective at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth. An act of willful exposure, the colorful entrails offered atypical access to the underpinnings of her work, which utilizes techniques and procedures intent upon obfuscation and illusionism: making miniatures appear plausibly "real," exacerbating plastic's sheen to seem untouchably clean and hermetic or fleshy and animate, stretching dolls' inscrutable

expressions to host profuse emotional cues, unsettling the narratological expectations of the domestic melodrama.

Near compulsively, Simmons began reasserting her rules of engagement by arranging the archived props within pictorial space. The same carpenter who built her studio shelves fabricated receding white frames into which the artist assembles suburban scenes approached from multiple angles. Here, the titular invocation of the opening salvo of the Book of Genesis ("In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth") denominates Simmons as the Creator, choreographing familiar materials anew. In *Deep Photos (White House Green Lawn/Swimming Pool)*, the doll house from *White House/Green Lawn* (1997) is perched on the frame's bottom ledge, replete with fake grass, a picket fence, and an aerial shot of a picturesque town. A cutout of a 1960s Mercury Commuter is jammed in the garage; two swimmers—one flat, one dimensional—are immersed in a pool. *Deep Photos (Deluxe Redding House/Dream Kitchen)* takes a drastic bird's eye view (what Leo Steinberg called the "flatbed picture plane") of a tripartite assemblage. In the middle, a reflective cutout

provides a shorthand for a kidney bean shaped pool. Trading and inverting anticipated depth, perspective, and scale, Simmons exits the realm of the photograph and crosses the medium specific divide into painting and sculpture (notably, she has also expanded into film and experiments with artificial intelligence). Perhaps more accurately, the series emphatically performs the artist's longstanding subversion of categorical barriers as if to say her entire body of work strums the indeterminate cavities between surface and depth, image and object, material fact and mental construct.

The directorial impulse has underwritten Simmons' practice from the start, who inherited an ethos from her mother that "everything must be coordinated" —a woman's means of assimilation, control, and empowerment. Yet, the conceptual guardrails instantiated by aesthetic conventions and social taboos are continually transgressed as with her since marauded restriction against putting actual dolls in her sets. To this point, *Deep Photos (Sparkle House)* features four sparkly rugs and electric blue lights, embracing whimsical touches traditionally perceived as unserious. Structured within this meticulous assembly and turned on its side, these interventions propose an imaginative syntax that

surreptitiously unseats authority. And, moreover, suggest that play might be one of the most rigorous enterprises in which we routinely engage.

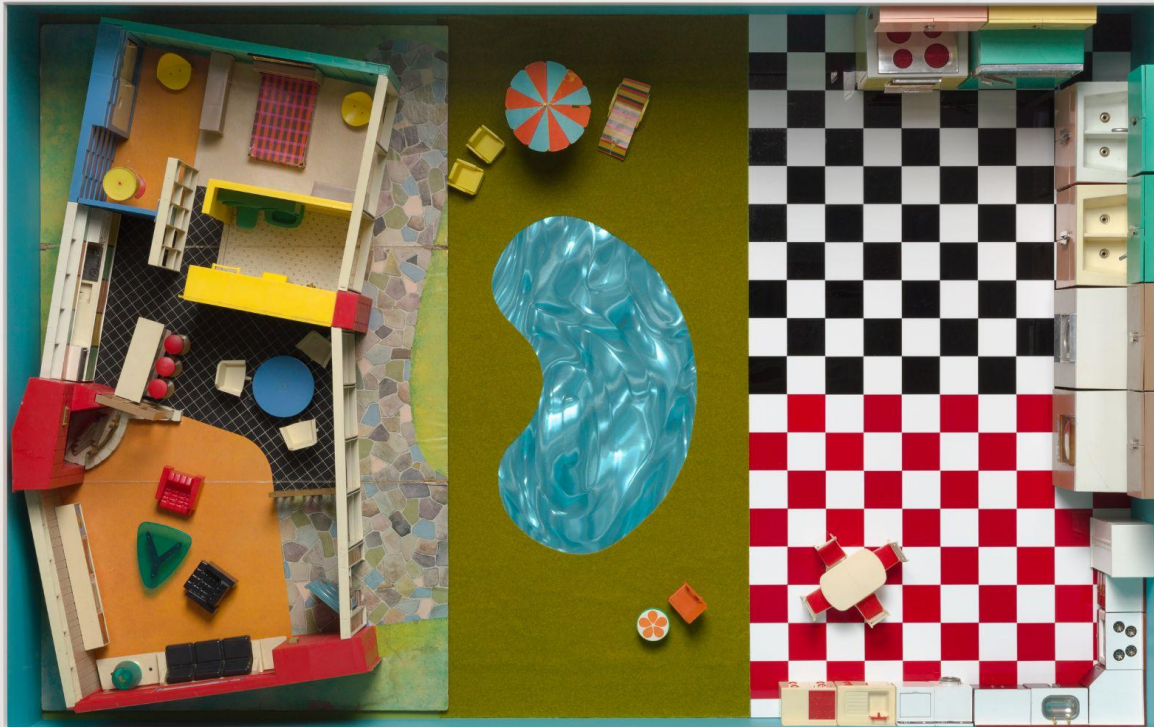
Elsewhere, in *Cowboy Town* and *Mekong Delta*, acts of placing, arranging, and staging move from the domestic sphere into martial battlefields—revealing their intrinsic parallels. Both were made during the COVID-19 lockdown with toys Simmons acquired spontaneously from a street vendor in the East Village but couldn't wrap her head around. They were handmade and hand painted (as opposed to her preferred plastic, her "marble") with masculine themes: war and cowboys. Amid the pandemic's reckoning, these scenes suddenly affirmed her newfound interest in craft (Simmons' touch pervades *Deep Photos* from constructing and collaging to drawing, cutting, and taping) and her realization that the Vietnam War and cowboy television shows were formative coordinates within her personal imaginary—the politicized and combative terrain that prompted her activism and defined her grown-up convictions.

In the end, the five works on view spark nostalgic remembrance and archival renewal as Simmons ruminates on and brushes against the grain of her own history. Revisiting structural systems, disarming subjects, subterranean currents and psychological drivers, opaque techniques—all those radical ramifications neatly arranged in *Deep Photos*.

— Megan Kincaid







Laurie Simmons  
*Deep Photos (Deluxe  
Redding House/Dream  
Kitchen)*, 2023  
Plastic, paper, acrylic paint,  
super glue, hot glue, epoxy,  
metal, plexiglass  
40 x 60 x 15 in  
(101.6 x 152.4 x 38.1 cm)

Detail of *Deep  
Photos (Deluxe  
Redding  
House/Dream  
Kitchen)*, 2023





*Detail of Deep  
Photos (Deluxe  
Redding  
House/Dream  
Kitchen), 2023*



Detail of *Deep  
Photos (Deluxe  
Redding  
House/Dream  
Kitchen)*, 2023



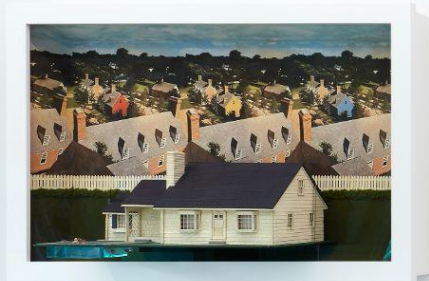




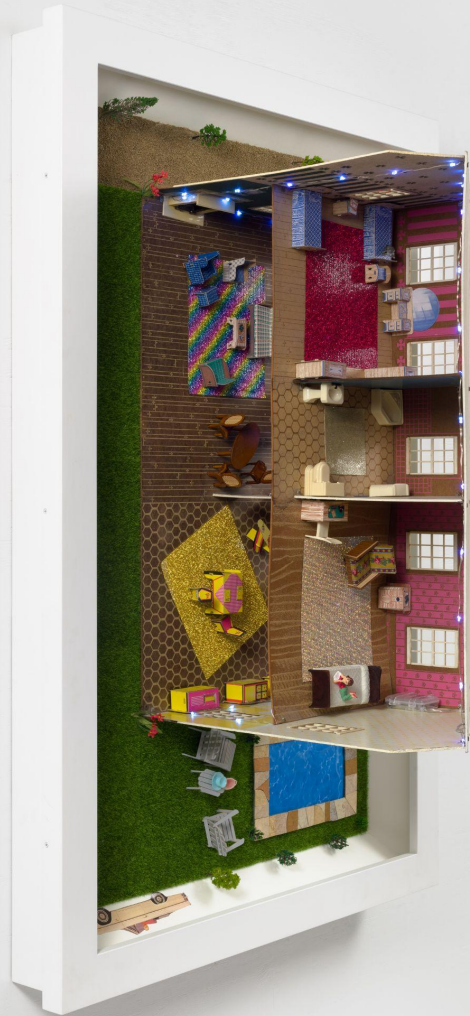
Laurie Simmons  
*Deep Photos (White House  
Green Lawn/Swimming  
Pool)*, 2024  
Metal, wood, inkjet print,  
resin, plastic, paper, acrylic  
paint, paper, plexiglass  
40 x 60 x 20 1/4 in  
(101.6 x 152.4 x 51.4 cm)



Detail of *Deep Photos (White House Green Lawn/Swimming Pool)*, 2024



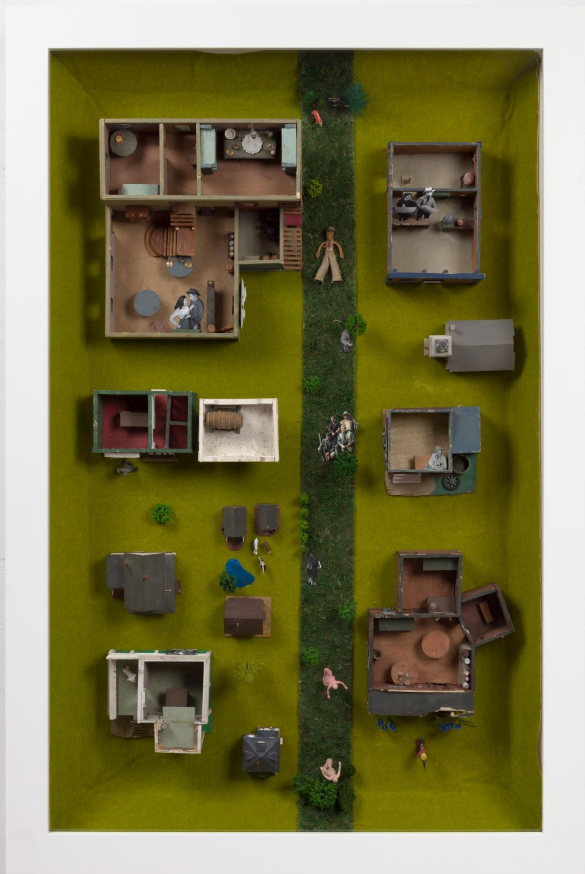




Laurie Simmons  
*Deep Photos (Sparkle  
House)*, 2022

MDF, paper, metal, plastic,  
cardboard, wood, fabric,  
battery, led lights,  
marmoleum, hot glue,  
acrylic, sand, stone,  
plexiglass  
60 x 40 x 24 in  
(152.4 x 101.6 x 61 cm)



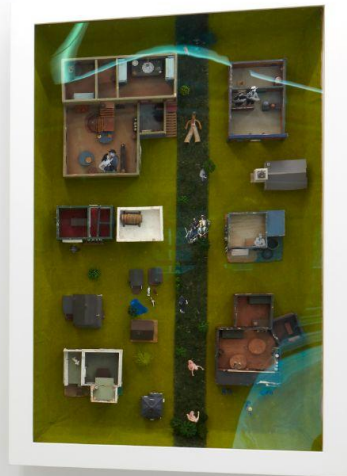


Laurie Simmons  
*Deep Photos (Cowboy Town)*, 2021

Plywood, teak, pine, plastic,  
paper, synthetic grass,  
metal, hot glue, acrylic  
paint, fabric, stone, glass  
60 x 40 x 8.75 in  
(152.4 x 101.6 x 22.2 cm)









Laurie Simmons  
*Deep Photos (Mekong  
Delta)*, 2021  
Plywood, teak, pine, epoxy  
resin, sand, stones, paper,  
hot glue, metal,  
plastic, acrylic paints,  
string, fabric  
60 x 40 x 8.5 in  
(152.4 x 101.6 x 21.6 cm)

Detail of *Deep  
Photos (Mekong  
Delta)*, 2021





Detail of *Deep Photos (Mekong Delta)*, 2021





Laurie Simmons  
*Deep Photos (Instant  
Decorator/Red and White  
Kitchen)*, 2021  
Acrylic, plastic, polyester,  
felt, velcro, epoxy resin,  
plastic, paper, metal,  
permanent marker, tape,  
plexiglass  
40 x 60 x 5 3/8 in  
(101.6 x 152.4 x 13.7 cm)

Detail of *Deep Photos* (Instant Decorator/Red and White Kitchen), 2021







# Information

## Laurie Simmons

(b. 1949, Long Island, NY)

Laurie Simmons is an internationally recognized artist. Since the mid-70s, Simmons has staged scenes for her camera to create images with intensely psychological subtexts and nonlinear narratives. By the early 1980s Simmons was at the forefront of a new generation of artists, predominantly women, whose use of photography began a new dialogue in contemporary art. Her work is part of the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, The Whitney Museum of American Art and The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City; the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles; the Philadelphia Museum of Art; the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, DC; the Hara Museum in Tokyo; and the Stedelijk Museum of Modern Art in Amsterdam, among others. In 2018-2019 Simmons's retrospective *Big Camera/Little Camera* was presented at The Modern Art Museum in Fort Worth, Texas and The Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago. In 2006 she produced and directed her first film, *The Music of Regret*, starring Meryl Streep, Adam Guettel and the Alvin Ailey 2 Dancers. The film premiered at The Museum of Modern Art. Her feature film *MY ART* premiered at the 73rd Venice Film Festival and Tribeca Film festival in 2017. Simmons lives and works in New York and Connecticut.