



Photo by Laurie Simmons

GREAT ESCAPES 03.10.14



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A Doll's Life: Laurie Simmons Explores Kigurumi

Artist Laurie Simmons explores the freedom that comes with dressing up like someone entirely different—a doll—in a new exhibit based on the Japanese practice of Kigurumi.

It was the discovery of Hatsune Miku, a fictional Japanese pop star whose voice stems from a Vocaloid, a singing voice synthesizer, during a trip to Japan last year that was the starting point for the latest body of work by artist Laurie Simmons. Over the course of researching the phenomenon, Simmons stumbled upon the bizarre world of Japanese cosplay. “We just went down this rabbit hole of people who dress up and fetishes, and the girls that surgically enhance themselves to look like dolls,” says Simmons.

Simmons, whose daughter is actress Lena Dunham, finally found a cosplayer from Russia who makes giant masks of cute, anime-eyed women for Kigurumi, a subset of cosplay that involves costumed performers who dress as dolls or animals. “We don’t know who he is or what he is, but we ordered the masks, we customized them, and we just crossed our fingers and hoped they would arrive in the mail,” says Simmons, whose large scale photographs of costumed models wearing the masks are the focus of her latest exhibition, *Kigurumi, Dollers and How We See*, which runs through April 28 at Salon 94 Bowery in New York.

And what was it like actually being inside one of the masks? “You can’t see,” explains Danielle Bartholomew, Simmons’s studio manager, who posed for the artist in the Nora mask. “You can talk but nobody can understand you, so you’re walking around half blind, half deaf. They kept your head pretty warm. The poses I would get into later on. You learn how to see in this new way.”

Kigurumi, Dolls and How We See is on display at Salon 94 Bowery through April 28.