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## Laurie Simmons and Tim Kent: Interiors of Outsize Power

At 56 Henry, the photographer turns to dioramas to explore the domestic; at Hollis Taggart, the painter's surreal rooms stand outside of time.

*By Brian P. Kelly*

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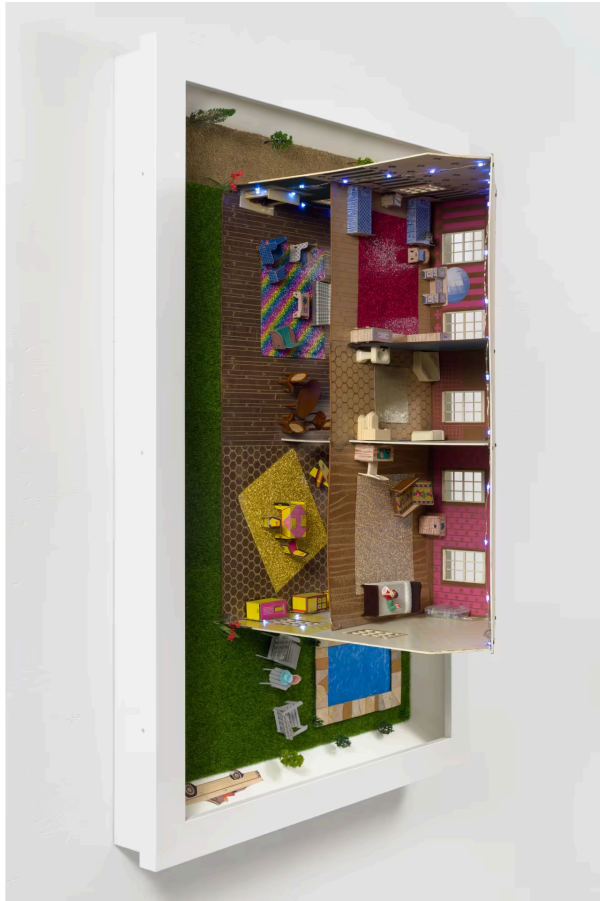


Detail of Laurie Simmons's 'Deep Photos (White House Green Lawn/Swimming Pool)' (2024). PHOTO: PIERRE LE HORS

*New York*

Laurie Simmons has long been a master of illusion. Since the mid-1970s, the photographer has made a career out of transforming humble props into

blistering feminist narratives. Her best-known images use dollhouses, miniatures and dolls themselves to stage intimate scenes that critique domesticity, traditional gender roles, fetishized consumerism and the way women feel pressured to perform certain ideas of femininity. More recently, she's turned to life-size sex dolls and *kigurumi* costumes to explore similar ideas in often-unsettling pictures.



Laurie Simmons's 'Deep Photos (Sparkle House)' (2022). PHOTO: PIERRE LE HORS

Now, at 56 Henry, Ms. Simmons takes her creative talents beyond the two-dimensional in “Deep Photos / In the Beginning” (through Oct. 27), in which she recycles the materials from her five-decade-long practice into captivating dioramic wall sculptures.

The dollhouse she captured on camera in 1997's “White House/Green Lawn” now appears in person in “Deep Photos (White House Green Lawn/Swimming Pool)” (2024), a tranquil midcentury scene of the abode, backed by a repeated scene of suburbia that suggests a cookie-cutter existence. Two women lounge in the aqua water beside a driveway—complete with a 1960s

Mercury Commuter peeking out from the garage—in a tableau that nods at both the postwar plenty Americans enjoyed as well as the ennui that many homemakers endured despite their material comfort.



Laurie Simmons's 'Deep Photos (Cowboy Town)' (2021). PHOTO: PIERRE LE HORS

A cross-section of another home in “Deep Photos (Sparkle House)” (2022) embraces kitsch. Illuminated by a strand of LED lights, its glittery rugs, folded-cardboard furniture and gaudy wallpaper celebrate bygone fads while shrugging off snobbish dismissals of any design not considered “timeless.” “Deep Photos (Cowboy Town)” (2021) taps into a similar nostalgia, with its aerial view of what could easily be a set in a John Ford film. Indeed, cutouts from black-and-white westerns populate the scene, from its clapboard homes to its humble jail to its general store. The objects here range in style and scale—tiny lifelike cows dwarfed by monochromatic plastic people; a small church that’s as long as a cartoonish toy figure is tall—echoing the broad array of films in the genre, from the serious and artistic to the laughably buffoonish.

Where earlier Ms. Simmons had pushed artifice to its furthest edge, so that her highly polished images, though clearly pictures of toys, began to seem

documentary, almost alive, here she lays bare the hand of the creator. Previously, tightly cropped photos left much to the imagination, encouraging viewers to fill in the narrative outside the frame, but these works present her domestic settings in full—a shift from stage-managed snapshot to *Gesamthauswerk*, to coin a phrase. They are a brilliant creative turn by an artist who has never had trouble crafting her own affecting worlds.



Tim Kent's 'Take Five' (2024). PHOTO: HOLLIS TAGGART

**Tim Kent** is another artist who has never had problems creating magical interiors, though while Ms. Simmons deploys a quiet, up-close sleight of hand in her photos, Mr. Kent's paintings have always exuded a sort of Mephistophelean sorcery. His latest body of work, on view in "Edges off a Model" at Hollis Taggart (through Oct. 12), continues this haunted yet stunning approach to image making, ramping up the details while adding a heavy dose of art-historical references.

Mr. Kent brings a Francis-Bacon-meets-Vilhelm-Hammershøi aesthetic to his scenes: People are smudged or obscured, seem not quite human, somewhat ghostly; the rooms he paints are beautiful, but uncannily surreal, like locales only half-remembered from a dream.

His “Rose Room” (2024) could be read as a riff on Degas’s disturbing and perplexing “Interior” (with its nocturnal confrontation between a man and a woman charged with a disturbing intimacy); here the red elements of that earlier piece envelop the entire canvas in a crimson glow, with a female figure lying in the foreground with an inscrutable look on her face as another figure is partially obscured behind a screen at the rear of the space.



Tim Kent’s ‘The Handler’ (2024). PHOTO: HOLLIS TAGGART

“The Handler” (2024) calls to mind Caillebotte’s “The Floor Scrapers”: Men on all fours work to cover a canvas instead of scraping off old varnish, but the manipulation of light and the glorious interior are as impeccably rendered as in the Frenchman’s opus. Other artworks in the background add a self-referential note to the painting, their surrealist, geometric images reminiscent of Mr. Kent’s previous pieces and wholly out of place amid the classical furnishings of the space and the fin-de-siècle dress of the men.

These discordant elements are thrown together time and again in works that make Mr. Kent’s technical abilities eminently evident (his training as an architectural painter is on full view). A headless painter stands by his easel atop a plush Persian rug in “Venice” (2024); a sculpture that could be a cavalryman seems to dissolve into thin air in the wrecked, skylighted studio of “Vault” (2024); an artist melts into the background while working on a towering equestrian monument in “Rendition” (2024). Mr. Kent’s ability to blend

elements of the past and present with those that seem to stand outside of time is eerily impressive—much like his art itself.

**Laurie Simmons: Deep Photos / In the Beginning**

*56 Henry, 105 Henry St., New York, through Oct. 27*

**Tim Kent: Edges off a Model**

*Hollis Taggart, 521 West 26th St., New York, through Oct. 12*

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