Artist Statement

Iris Klein, 2008

"Subjectivity is always a reaction to something."
Sylvère Lotringer

In my work I use external means to capture interior moments; moments of intimacy, of reflection, of fear and desire, emotions that could be mine, but don't belong to me. For this I use Non-Persons (a doll, myself as other). Non-Persons have no personal depth. They may wear masks, or display an absence of features, suggesting some primordial state, elusive symbols, or tutelary shadows.

Non-Persons are allowed to express anything that traverses them, but without taking any responsibility for it. They act as a platform where I can experiment with atmospheric moods, light, gestures, poses, motions. They provide a repertory of attitudes and affects that can be varied experimentally and generate other ideas.

Gilles Deleuze wrote that there's nothing personal about life, and Non-Persons are alive in that way. They are cyphers in a drama that never arrives to any conclusion because it constantly shifts and recurs in other forms. Their preferred mode is interaction, and they often double themselves up in order to create an ambiguous tension in which animate and inanimate, original and simulacrum can exchange their own properties.

About Women series

My work has always used a female figure as a central character. Sometimes it is me, but most often I use a lifeless substitute -- a doll -- as a screen for projections. I expect the viewer to be lured by the beauty of the pictures, but also

experience that there's something uncanny about it.

'Women' (1998-2005) uses a "body double," a life-size featureless cloth doll that inhabits the frame, instead of a real woman. The double here is not a real-life substitute, rather a 'peel off' from my body (I traced its outlines on a piece of fabric which served as foundation for the design). By this I mean to suggest an image being "pulled off," the fabrication of a copy, a process of transfer. I deliberately used the thinness of the puppet to bring out the 'flattening effect' of reality produced by the photographic medium. The doll is nothing but an empty shell displayed for the camera.

My photographs are somewhat reminiscent of Film Noir and a kind of 'blue collar' still-life atmosphere pervades them. Each pose conjures up a mind/body relationship.

Another de-familariazing device is the specific photographic technique I chose. I print with paper contact instead of film negative. That reverses the image and in addition I apply diffusion techniques, transforming the captured scene into a soft-lit luminous chiaroscuro world. Projecting a light through paper contact to imprint on photo paper is what metamorphoses some objects into mysterious hybrids, half-way between a photograph and a drawing. The stillness of the pose and the soft incandescent light of the image creates some kind of an aura (a person's 'soul' in animistic term) which older photographs, especially daguerreotypes, seem to have captured. In this way I recreate the kind of stillness that was required of the sitter by historical photographs in the immobility of the doll.

I deliberately printed these pictures in a small format to elicit in the viewers a sense of proximity and intimacy. And yet some of the images from the small cinematic series have been scanned and produced in large Lambda prints, accentuating their specific painterly aesthetics.

Le Désir

The series, "Le Désir," follows also a photographic style reminiscent of the past and shows existentialist traces in a different way. Here I dance with a male doll and tutelary shadows evoking strong associations with the 'death and the maiden' motif. By donning a Marilyn Monroe-style wig, a very demonstrative form of eroticism is expressed, which is a quintessential feature of the media age starting in the 20th century (fashion magazines, advertising…). At the same time, eternal themes such as beauty, desire, loneliness, and death come to the surface, thus transcending mere feminist interpretations.