

Laurie Simmons on the visual riffing behind her pages

In 1963 Bill Evans recorded his provocative album *Conversations with Myself*. With the use of overdubbing, he literally played with and over himself on three different piano tracks using the technology of reel-to-reel recording. What may seem primitive and flat-footed in the digital age of music actually stirred some controversy in the early 1960s and created a complex new sound in jazz. While not everyone's cup of tea it earned Evans his first Grammy award and a five-star review in *DownBeat* magazine.

When, as a teenager, I discovered *Conversations with Myself*, it seemed I'd finally found a foreign language I could comprehend (as high school math, science, French and Spanish were Greek to me). To my ears, Evans devoured everything in his path – ripping through and chewing up tunes familiar to me from movie soundtracks and my parents' living-room stereo, with 'Hey There', 'Just You, Just Me', and 'Love Theme from Spartacus'. His music forced me to make order out of melodic chaos – the more complicated the layering, the more satisfying it was to find the strains of a song. And since everyone around me seemed to detest jazz, it was one more opportunity for me to set myself apart from the rest of my family.

I would say in hindsight that *Conversations with Myself* was my first conscious understanding that borrowing and recycling in art might be OK. It was clear that Evans wasn't doing covers of songs but blatantly stealing refrains and making them his own. (Of course, I'd been tracing pictures in fashion magazines for years and calling them 'my drawings'.)

Obviously, in current art discourse, the acts of borrowing, layering and stealing (subsumed under the term 'appropriation') are hardly new, and arguably have become academic. I've often felt that artists devour all kinds of material, including philosophy, literature, film, fashion, TV and, most often, other artists' work in a weird kind of jealous fit, wishing they could have invented it, composed it, designed it or written it themselves.

In my version of *Conversations with Myself*, I've reproduced some of my own photographs of the Love Doll I bought in Tokyo in 2009. They are paired with work I love by other artists (Sarah Charlesworth, Carroll Dunham, Jimmy DeSana and Marilyn Minter), starting with Sarah Charlesworth's mysterious

red geisha and ending with my picture of a tattoo of a geisha on a human back. I highlight the weird correspondence between the woman's hair in my husband Carroll Dunham's recent paintings and the hair of my Love Doll character swimming underwater. I borrow dresses from my favourite designers (Duro Olowu, Wes Gordon, Peter Jensen, Thakoon) and use my own Japanese Love Doll as the fashion model.

Thakoon's 'rose on legs' fabric (which we designed together in 2009) faces off against Duro's cabbage roses on a cape. I accessorise with shoes (Tabitha Simmons; Minter's painting of platform sandals in a puddle of silver paint; my own mother's shoes from the 1960s) and handbags (Jimmy's purse on his model's head and my purse on legs) and a cut-out photograph of a bracelet by Ligia Dias. Having recently commissioned a tattoo artist (Tamara Santibenez) to create a tattoo for my Love Doll's back, I juxtapose that with a portrait of my Love Doll by the Japanese manga artist Erika Kobayashi.

Several years ago, in a great moment of synchronicity, I discovered (after dressing my Love Dolls as geishas for some time) that my studio assistant Rachel Howe had an intricate multicoloured tattoo of a maiko (an apprentice geisha) on her back. Rachel makes beautiful ceramic vessels, influenced by Japanese indigo and boro textiles among other things, and I layer those along with the work of ceramic artists Takuro Kuwata and Brie Ruais. My mother Dorothy Simmons' delicate shoes from the 1960s feel as much like sculpture as fashion and the colours perfectly match the pinks and greens of last summer's limited-edition designer cookie: watermelon Oreos. Double T-strap, ankle-strap Tabitha Simmons shoes from her new collection look as exciting to me as aerodynamic table-top sculpture. And finally, the outfit the Danish designer Peter Jensen lent for this shoot was borrowed – at the last minute – by me to wear in my self-portrait. (Peter and I also collaborated in 2009 when I, or rather my work, was the inspiration for his Laurie collection, and one of our paper dolls is reproduced here.)

The graphic designer Tom Watt helped me layer the pictures using over 50 shades of miniature jelly beans as punctuation marks.

I'd like to thank everyone who allowed me to play over them. ★ Laurie Simmons, August 2013



Laurie Simmons

Tabitha Simmons Shoes, Autumn/Winter 2013 Collection, 2013

Marilyn Minter

Not In These Shoes, 2013

Enamel on metal, 108 x 162in.

Courtesy of the artist and Regen Projects, Los Angeles

