

## CRITICS' PICKS

## New York

## Laurie Simmons

## THE JEWISH MUSEUM

1109 Fifth Avenue

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There is the problem of eyelashes. The six unnerving photographs that Laurie Simmons displays here feature interchangeable models against perky colored backgrounds: vapid, prosaic images from a fashion world where *Vogue* is no longer distinct from twelve-year-olds' makeup lessons on YouTube. But the eyelashes: Overpainted on the upper lid, much too thick on the lower one. It takes a few seconds to notice—compliments to the dexterity of this maker's hand—that the models' eyes are actually clamped shut, and irises and pupils have been painted over their lids. What gives the game away are the lashes—the lower lashes are in fact upper lashes: monstrous, spidery antennae, markers of an enduring but diseased humanity on bodies that makeup and Photoshop have otherwise scrubbed of biology.

In *The Land of Green Plums*, 1994, the Nobel Prize winner Herta Müller writes of the body as a pell-mell cluster of organs, any one of which could betray the others. "If you control your face, it slips into your voice," she writes. "If you manage to keep a grip on your face and your voice, as if they were dead wood, it will slip out through your fingers." Like Müller, Simmons employs the techniques of Surrealism not as a dated language for internal fantasy, but to express the very real effects of external pressures on the body, the psyche, that thing we used to call the soul. There's no point going inward, these images say; even your imagination has been spoiled, and the dream you dream with your eyes closed tight belongs, if we're honest, to the international conglomerate that sold you the mascara. Put on a brave face for the camera, but the body cannot withstand the onslaught; keep the pain behind your eyelids, and it will slip out through your lashes.



Laurie Simmons, *How We See/Ajak (Violet)*, 2015, pigment print, 70 x 48".

— Jason Farago