

# ARTnews

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**Reviews:** New York

## Hans Bellmer

### Ubu

This show of 70 vintage prints by the Surrealist Hans Bellmer (1902–1975) offered a rare, intimate look at the artist's photographs from the 1930s—images based on two life-size adolescent female mannequins he constructed with parts that could be manipulated and reassembled. Miniature prints made in 1934 were accompanied by the first doll for the original German edition of his book *Die Puppe* (The Doll). Also on view were contact prints made between 1935 and 1938, shown with the second doll, which was constructed



Hans Bellmer, *La poupée*, 1938, vintage gelatin silver print, 2½" x 2½".  
Ubu.

around a central ball joint, for *Les jeux de la poupée* (The Games of the Doll), a collaboration with writer Paul Éluard.

Most of the *poupée* images show the dolls enacting a disturbing, erotic game, and their ability to shock has not dimin-

ished. Some of the scenes are shot outdoors—as in a ca. 1935–38 print of a set of legs and hips mounted upside down atop another set and leaning coyly against a tree—but most were staged in domestic interiors where Bellmer experimented with lighting and props.

White stockings, Mary Jane shoes, and shoddy mattresses abound—as do breasts, buttocks, and pelvises in contorted poses. In a hand-colored print from 1936, the doll is an armless amputee leaning against a banister—her knee tied with rope, a large ribbon in her hair, and buttocks taking the place of breasts—and both the staircase and the doll are cast in purple, pink, and red hues, intensifying the image's menacing quality. A 1938 print shows a nude, headless, armless doll with round, voluminous body parts and a juvenile pudenda, her statuesque stance emphasized by the diagonal strip of light in which she stands in an otherwise shadowy room.

The small format of these works accentuated their taboo quality, adding to the thrill of voyeurism.

—Sandra Ban