



*La Poupée*, 1935 (approximately actual size)

## *Hans Bellmer : Petites Anatomies, Petites Images*

MAY 2 – JULY 28, 2006

Ubu Gallery announces an exhibition of approximately 70 small-format, vintage photographs by Hans Bellmer (1902–1975), whose overt influence on current art trends still far outweighs the recognition of his emotionally- and intellectually-charged oeuvre. The exhibition will present the earliest examples of Bellmer's photographic output—specifically, miniatures created in 1934 in connection with the realization of the original German edition of *Die Puppe* and contact prints of images made between 1935 and 1938, which were considered for inclusion in *Les Jeux de la poupée*. Bellmer's photographic activity was sporadic and his production was limited—no more than 150 different images (and within this group many just subtly varied)—yet it possesses an extraordinary richness and individuality without peer in Surrealism.

Bellmer is best known for a series of photographs of two life-sized adolescent female dolls, which he conceived and photographed between 1934 and 1938. The first doll, which was documented in various stages of its construction, and the fully realized and articulated second doll, whose limbs, head and breasts were arranged in a variety of natural and unnatural configurations, were each recorded by Bellmer variously in the guise of an innocent, a temptress and a victim. The lighting and staging—with their nods to German expressionist cinema, Renaissance religious painting and illumination, and explicit fetishism—allowed Bellmer to establish a sexually-laden atmosphere and to realize a personal language of desire which he felt would, in his own words, “make it possible to recreate physically the dizzying heights of passion and to do so to the extent of creating new desires.” In the theoretical reflections contained in his 1957 book, *Petite anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'image*, Bellmer situates his dolls within a “dictionary of analogues–antagonisms, that is the dictionary of the image.” For Bellmer, the doll was not simply a recombinant machine, but instead was a language system replete paradoxically with metaphors and metonymies, condensations and transferences.

In 1934, Bellmer privately published *Die Puppe* (subsequently published in Paris as *La Poupée* in 1936), containing a series of tableaux-vivants of the first doll, with each photograph tipped-in by hand as if in a family album. The pocket-sized format of this book and its photographs deliberately induced a personal, private engagement and intimated at the “forbidden” aspects of the work. Bellmer constantly modulated his photographic narrative through a succession of “petite”—both in size and in quantity—editions. Each contained a series of contact prints, which were also preparatory models for the collection of photographs he eventually realized—accompanied by the simultaneously tender and cruel poems of Paul Éluard—as *Les Jeux de la poupée* in 1949 (the first conception of which appeared as *Jeux vagues de la poupée* in the periodical *Messages* in 1939). Around 100 images document the abject, yet pliant, second doll, engineered around a central ball joint, many including props and each bathed in dramatic light and often photographed from a succession of shifting angles. The small scale of these photographs is important to their aesthetic and can be considered integral to the compositions, helping to establish certain formal boundaries and psychological tensions.

Ubu's exhibition coincides with the Centre Georges Pompidou's traveling retrospective, “Hans Bellmer: Anatomy of Desire,” closing May 22, 2006 (subsequent venues are the Staatliche Graphische Sammlung, Munich and Whitechapel Art Gallery, London) and an exhibition at New York's Miguel Abreu Gallery, “Hans Bellmer: Drawings, Photographs and Prints,” on view from April 29–July 2, 2006.

Gallery hours are 11:00 am–6:00 pm, Tuesday through Saturday. Ubu Gallery is located at 416 East 59th Street between First Avenue and Sutton Place.

For further information or for visuals, please contact Susan Braeuer or Miriam Kienle at 212 753 4444 or [info@ubugallery.com](mailto:info@ubugallery.com).