

# MODERNISM

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Gallery Exhibition Schedule

## ELENA DORFMAN: *The Origin of the New World*

April 6–May 20, 2017

*The Origin of the New World* is a sequel to Elena Dorfman's 2004 seminal series of photographs, *Still Lovers*, which examined the domestic relationships between people and their sex dolls. This current series of photographic light boxes was inspired by Gustave Courbet's famous painting, *Origin of the World* (*L'Origine du monde*), his shocking and erotic portrait of female genitalia created in 1866. Dorfman's interpretation, *Origin of the New World*, replaces Courbet's flesh-and-blood model with a silicone sex doll. Visible only when the light box is switched on, the doll's prone figure is illuminated through a one-way mirror. The darkened mirror—normally used for surveillance and interrogation—is

employed here as a device to prompt viewers to consider their own relationship to the subject, as well as the broader issues this post-human figure evokes. The illuminated box not only references the realism of Courbet's painting but also the uncanny valley of Duchamp's *Etant donne*s (1946-66), a nude-figured tableau visible only through a peep hole. The psychological tension in this work is a common thread in all of Dorfman's previous series.



Marcel Duchamp, *Etant donne*, 1946-66



Gustave Courbet, *Origin of the World*, 1866

Courbet's painting tested the limits of moral standards by offering the viewer a realistic vantage point from which to gaze at the labia and abdomen of his model. His depiction of the nude body—once considered pornographic—has evolved, in this age of

advanced technologies, into a manufactured, full-sized silicone love doll that can be purchased in a variety of flesh tones and pubic hairstyles. Placed on the floor of the doll factory, draped



*The Origin of the New World* by Elena Dorfman is a series of fourteen light boxes, 18 x 22 inches, available in an edition of 3 + 1 AP

in a cream-colored sheet, the figure's seams and staples are visible, prominently displaying signs of the process used in her fabrication. Her sticky silicone skin is covered in powder to better re-create the feel of a real woman. Even her labia is interchangeable based on her buyer's proclivities.

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Whereas the female sexual organs were once considered a source of sacred knowledge and transformation, they are now silicone duplicates, sculpted from the bodies of real women. In this age of pussy grabbing, super-abundance of internet pornography, and the fembots of *Westworld* and *Ex Machina*, it is not surprising that the manufacturer of *Real Doll* states that by 2018 his creations will be able to breathe and simulate emotion. Already, men in Geneva and London can begin their mornings at cafes where sex with dolls, along with coffee and pastries, is on the menu. What was once considered shocking is quickly becoming the new normal. Meanwhile, the increasing customization and expendability of sex is apparent in the billions of swipes per day on Tinder and Grindr (to name only two hook-up sites). It is not only cyborgs whose pussies are bespoke, but their human counterparts who flock to vaginal rejuvenation clinics in order to look like cyborgs. As we find ourselves on the eve of artificial intelligence and virtual reality, this is the perfect moment to present *Origin of the New World*. The critical dimension and new interpretation of Elena Dorfman's work invites a new experience at a time of heated social and political debates about race and gender.

Elena Dorfman's previous series include: *Sublime: the L.A. River* (2016), *Empire Falling* (Damiani, 2013), *The Pleasure Park* (2009), *Fandomania: Characters & Cosplay* (Aperture, 2007), *Still Lovers* (Channel, 2005). Her work is the collection of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, The Denver Art Museum, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Denver, The Cincinnati Art Museum, The George Eastman Museum, The Palm Springs Art Museum, and the Newcomb Art Museum at Tulane University.

Modernism is pleased to invite the public to attend an opening reception on **Thursday, April 6th**, from 5:30-8PM.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CALL: 415/541-0461 / FAX: 415/541-0425 / INFO@MODERNISMINC.COM

HI-RES IMAGES AVAILABLE ON REQUEST.

A HARDCOVER CATALOGUE WITH ESSAY BY GRACE BANKS HAS BEEN PUBLISHED FOR THIS EXHIBITION.