

ARTFORUM

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I N T E R N A T I O N A L

JANIETA EYRE

CRISTINEROSE GALLERY

March 1995, the Day I Experienced Love at First Sight: There should be a whole division of Hallmark for cards about love at first sight, but when Janieta Eyre takes that line for the title of a work from 1999, the most romantic thing in the photograph is a panel of rose-patterned print, maybe a textile, probably wallpaper. Before this backdrop stands the artist. She is formally linked to parts of her surroundings, though not to the roses: The shape of the watch she wears on a chain around her neck is echoed by a large segmented white circle, like the wheel of a ship, drawn on a flat square of black above her head; the broad black-and-white checks of her skirt are picked up by a straight-edged vertical slice of black-and-white bars at the left. In a parody of a pince-nez that makes her look a little prim, Eyre holds, mounted on a rod, a card on which have been drawn two sets of eyes, plus an odd one out. These eyes hide her own—so that, in a picture about love at first sight, the subject cannot see.

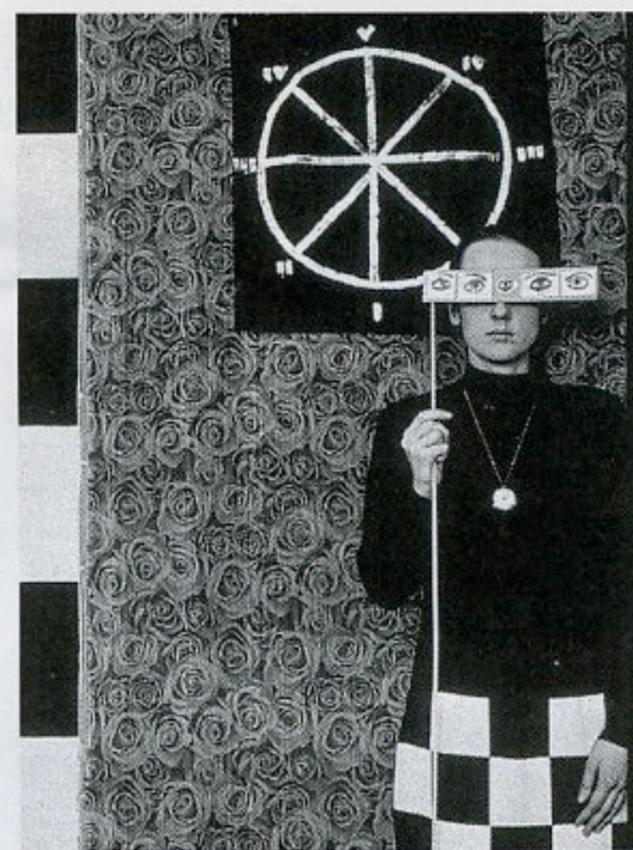
The carefully artficial self-portraits in Eyre's recent show place her among the growing number of women photographers who are following in the wake of Cindy Sherman, but she distinguishes herself from these others through her images' heightened theatricality. Not that

Sherman's photographs aren't theatrical—they are—but her earlier work addresses the modern world (even if through the scrim of the movies and the media), and her later photographs are insistently physical, steeped in the organic processes of body and psyche. Eyre, on the other hand, likes geometric abstraction. The space in her images is shallow and frontal, usually defined by a single, stage flat-like backdrop. This flat is often covered with some kind of pattern, like the bars and the grid of roses in *Love at First Sight*, or the eye-popping lattice of little red-and-white lozenges in *Two Pages from My Diary*, 1998. (Actually, the lozenges fill only the upper half of the panel; the lower half is papered in green and white pinstripes.) Sandwiched between these visually assertive surfaces and the camera is the artist, who usually stands directly facing us. Sometimes her clothes blend in with the backdrop, as if her body were shaped by its patterns. Elsewhere her fashion choices are more aggressively eccentric, but even then her fondness for loudly printed fabrics is of a piece with her taste in decor.

The repetitive structures of the patterns in these large-scale photographs—high-contrast black-and-whites, jarringly bright C-prints—are duplicated in Eyre's treatment of her own body, which she habitually doubles or triples, presumably through the use of double exposure. She shows us twins, often standing in the same poses. Part of the effect of all this—the submission of figure to ground, the stiff, hieratic frontality, the doppelgänger devices—is a sense of the erasure of individuality, which is what you might expect

from an artist who has said "Identity is something which belongs to everyone else," and "I think of each of my images as a kind of burial." But the images also pull in another direction: Eyre's gawky, stubbornly resistant stances; the intimation of carefully calculated and equally carefully unexplained narratives conveyed by her costumes, props, and titles; and a certain spiky wackiness to her imagination suggest not so much identity lost as identity hidden. "I think of my body as a disguise," Eyre has also said, and in this context we think again of her cardboard pince-nez: Does it blind her, or does it just keep us from looking in?

—David Frankel



Janieta Eyre, *March 1995, the Day I Experienced Love at First Sight*, 1999, selenium toned print, 37 x 30".