

Time Out

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Janieta Eyre, "3/4 Blind"
Cristinerose Gallery, through Sat 15
(see Photography).

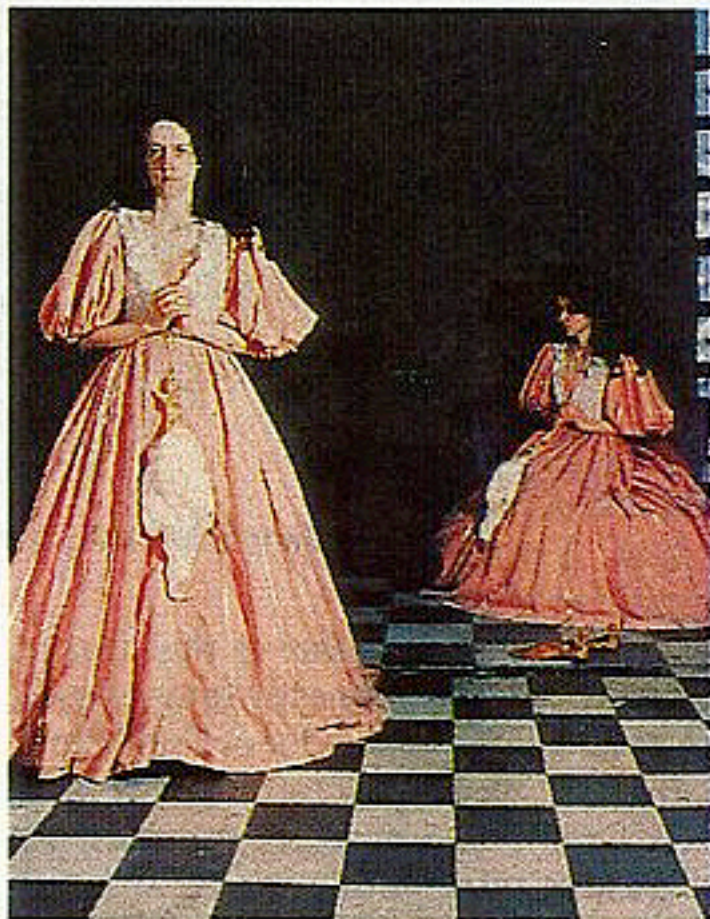
There's a strange rumor going around about the Canadian artist Janieta Eyre: that she's the surviving half of Siamese twins separated at birth. One look at her surreal photographs makes it easy to see how this all got started. In them, pairs of identical women enact creepy Freudian tableaux. But whether the women wear demure black dresses or just stockings and lace mantillas, they're all played by Eyre herself. The dead-twin theory made so much sense to me, I almost thought the gallery director was lying when he said it wasn't true.

Although Eyre's pictures seem inspired by Dada's randomness, they're actually meticulously planned. Using double exposure, she photographs herself twice. Most of her prints are in super-saturated color, though occasionally they're black-and-white. In each case, she starts with a stage set that could've been conceived by Salvador Dali: Walls are hung with fish, scissors, photographs of eyeballs and of genitalia—even tiny versions of other pictures in this show. The two Eyres sit together on sideboards, pose before painted drop cloths, or stand on a checkerboard floor, like the living chessmen of *Through the Looking Glass*.

Most fascinating of all is the way Eyre transforms herself. In *Albatross*, she becomes a miserable-looking Edwardian lady in a scraggly pink dress with a filthy bird strung around her neck. Often, the Eyre twins play alter ego to each

other: In one image, a girl in a strapless gown looks on calmly as her double shrugs her breasts out of an identical dress. Eyre demonstrates a flair for symbolism that lies somewhere between the Dutch Masters and the subtext of *The Patty Duke Show*. In *The Day I Gave Birth to My Mother*, one twin wears a saucepan on her head while the other holds a baby snapshot at her crotch.

While it might seem natural to compare Eyre's work to Cindy Sherman's, the exhibition never once made me do that. Really, Eyre's photos aren't so much about the images a woman can mold herself into. They're about the phantasmagoric possibilities of her own mind.—Carol Kino



Janieta Eyre, *Albatross (incarnation #46)*, 1996.