



SALON 94

On View

‘I Always Wanted to Literally Bring My Work to Life’: Laurie Simmons on Puppets and Her Work With Meryl Streep

As part of a collaboration with Art21, hear news-making artists describe their inspirations in their own words.

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Production still from the "Romance" episode of "Art in the Twenty-First Century," Season 4. © Art21, Inc. 2007.

What would it be like to have Meryl Streep play you in a movie? It's the kind of question most people would only dream about, but for artist [Laurie Simmons](#), it became a reality.

For her debut feature film, *The Music of Regret* (2006), Simmons expanded on the photographic tableaux she'd been making since her career began in the 1970s, animating her miniature set pieces to create a fully formed narrative.

Using hand puppets and live actors, Simmons told Art21 in [an exclusive interview](#) that "in making this movie I did something that I always wanted to do, which is to literally bring my work to life." In three distinct acts, Simmons uses the puppets to act out complex familial relationships, dance musical numbers, and sing original lyrics written by Simmons.



Production still from the "Romance" episode of "Art in the Twenty-First Century," season 4. © Art21, Inc. 2007.

Streep stood in for Simmons's female perspective, and there is a comical disconnect between seeing a real-life actor interacting with a series of ventriloquist dummies. The artist explained that although she'd always imbued her work with deeper psychological ideas and stories, she hesitated to include them in her exposition, but her role in directing the film was like "the way the ventriloquist is able to say whatever he or she wants to say through this other character."

The Music of Regret is one of two films included in a show of Simmons's work now on view at the Modern Museum of Fort Worth, "Laurie Simmons: Big Camera/Little Camera." The exhibition traces the artist's career, from her early black-and-white photography to her most recent hand-painted models as a commentary on perception versus reality.

Watch the full segment, which originally appeared as part of the "Art in the Twenty-First Century" television series on PBS, below. "Laurie Simmons: Big Camera/Little Camera" is on view at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth through January 27, 2019.