

Bellmer: Complexities of the Doll

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ABSTRACT

Hans Bellmer (1902-1975), a German draftsman working in his own advertising company in the 1920s, strongly opposed Nazi fascism. In response to the Nazi Party he stated he would no longer make work to support the new German state. In his revolt to German idealism, Bellmer constructed life-sized female dolls of which he photographed in provocative poses. The Nazi Party declared Bellmer's work "degenerate", so he fled Germany and moved to Paris where he was welcomed by the Surrealists. Bellmer's photographic production was not very large, with only around 150 images. Most of Bellmer's photographs are small in size and often delicately hand-colored. Bellmer produced fewer than thirty large prints, many of which were mounted to board and nailed to paintings stretchers. These "stretched" large prints were often hand-colored and exhibited in a style similar to paintings. In 2014 the Art Institute of Chicago acquired one of Bellmer's large doll photographs. The photograph is mounted to board, airbrushed overall, and overpainted with white gouache. It is missing its original stretcher although it still bears the holes from once having one. The piece has several areas with missing airbrush giving the print areas of differential gloss. It has some large areas of loss and abrasions, which go through the print, making the brown mounting board visible. This paper will discuss the considerations, limitations, and outcomes involved when treating this rare, susceptible, one-of-a-kind photograph.