Why are we attracted to dolls?
**doll**
**noun**
1. a small figure representing a baby or other human being, especially for use as a child’s toy.

2. *Slang.*
   a. a pretty but expressionless or unintelligent woman.
   b. a girl or woman, especially one who is considered attractive.
   c. a boy or man who is considered attractive.
   d. (sometimes initial capital letter) an affectionate or familiar term of address (sometimes offensive when used to strangers, casual acquaintances, subordinates, etc., especially by a male to a female).

3. *Informal.* a generous or helpful person: You’re a doll for lending me your car.

**Verb phrases**
4. **doll up,** *Informal.* to dress in an elegant or ostentatiously stylish manner: She got all dolled up for a trip to the opera.

**Origin:**
1550–60; generic use of Doll

1 dictionary.reference.com
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Biebie, my sleepingdoll since childhood
Proem

Dolls have always been attractive to me, as a little child I loved playing with them and I loved creating them even more. I noticed in the past few years during the development of my artworks that I always recreate those certain doll-like features that I enjoy. I want to research in this thesis why that is and how I can enhance and use this and what can be the content of this use of doll-like features in my artwork in such a way that it will help me convey my message.

Dolls for me are more then just toys. I think simulacra is the better word to use. Simulacrum comes from Latin and it means likeness or similarity, it is most often used to indicate a representation of a human in the form of a statue or painting, and in my case it represents a doll or doll-like statue or painting.

So why are we attracted to dolls? I am going to divide this question into different aspects of dolls and why we like them. In the first chapter I will summarize the history of dolls which will give context to our current position towards them. Then, in the second chapter I research our biological imprints towards beauty. In the third chapter I try to get a grasp on why we are attracted to the lifeless and the eerie sensation it arouses in us. The fourth chapter I explore why we like to indulge ourselves in the fantasy, then in the fifth and final chapter I discuss aesthetics and dolls used in art.
Venus of Willendorf, 24,000 - 22,000 B.C.
1. History of dolls and their use

For as long as humans have been shaping the world around them, dolls have existed. Or dolls have existed for as long as humans have been creating objects. There even is a known case of a caveman/woman that collected a stone that resembled a human face. Somehow the idea of a still humanlike object has always interested and attracted us. Anthony Fergusson, a graduate of the creative arts faculties of Curtin University and the University of WA says about this:

“Dolls have been part of human culture since before recorded history. Before they were children’s toys, they had other specific functions. They were used as fashion models, offerings to the gods for newlywed brides, and for other iconic purposes. The earliest dolls were religious symbols for use in ceremonies. Somewhere along the line their religious significance decreased and dolls were given to the children.”

Even though their significance has decreased, dolls have never, have never lost their connection to the spiritual world for us. Everyone who looks at a doll sees something more than just the material; some people find it creepy, others are attracted by it.

Victoria Nelsson, an independent scholar, writes about this. She groups dolls, together with robots, puppets and similar under the word idols. She states:

“In our officially postreligious intellectual culture, we miss the idols, too, and we have similarly aestheticized them. The repressed religious is also visible in representations of puppets, robots, cyborgs, and other artificial humans in literature and film. It endures as a fascination with the spiritualizing of matter and the demiurgic infusion of soul into human simulacra- a fascination that manifested itself, in the twentieth century, both in avant-garde theatre and in popular entertainments. These simulacra came to carry the burden of our outlawed

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2 The sex doll, 71
but tenacious belief in the holiness of graven images, and behind that in the immortality of the human soul, for complex reasons.”

She explains in her book that she thinks humans need a certain amount of spiritual fantasy in their lives. As religion is no longer providing us with that, we now find it in art and popular culture. So the need of dolls as religious artefacts has faded but we still use them to project our spiritual feelings on.

For a long time I had a feeling of resentment against my own fantasy drawings and sculptures. I did not like the idea that I was making things that were cut off from this world and were only there to escape from it, now I know better and I understand why I and others need this fantasy in their lives. I learned to create art that combines the real world with the fantastic and feel now that I found the right balance in them.

Besides the dolls that are objects, there are also the dolls that were made from people. The act of dollification was practiced for decades to. This term, dollification, encompasses the process of evolving a human, mentally and physically, into a “living doll.” This is often done in a sexual context.

In China there were woman who had their feet bound since a young age, creating Lotus feet. Many of them were unable to walk and move normally, creating the dependence on others for being able to move, just like dolls are dependent on us for movement. Their waddled way of walking was also considered sexually attractive. In Japan the Geisha’s were dressed in a way we associate with dolls, the way they had their hair and make-up done originated as a way to be visible in barely lit places but it also strongly resembles a porcelain doll to us.

There are also the Egyptian mummies, not made for visual or sexual pleasures but made for spiritual purposes. The mummification process seems a lot alike with the dollification process. By preserving the deceased they would be able to

3 The secret life of puppets, 20
Roman jointed doll, second half of the 2nd century CE.
preserve their spirit, although on another level of consciousness he would be able to continue living. They are spiritualizing the material by embalming human bodies. They provide them with masks to represent their faces and allow the spirit to continue living with a beautiful face. They desire to preserve them in a perfect way so they can return to their beauty forever in the peaceful afterlife.

Still in these modern days there are a lot of people who practice dollification, most often the subject is turned into a blow-up sexdoll by dressing them completely in latex. There are a lot of different ways to do this and there are a number of specialised company’s who offer clothing and second skins for sale.

Today dolls are mainly seen as a plaything for children, although a lot of adults play with them too, they are often designed in a different way. There are the BJD’s, Ball Jointed Dolls that originated in Japan. Dolls that were made for customizing and for projecting our own imagination on. There are also the sexdolls, the simple blow-up doll or the high end silicon ones that are meant as a sexual plaything or release. Besides that there is the more extreme dollification which is mainly seen within the fetish world. Next to the physical dolls we also see a lot of digital dolls these days, online communities like Gaia-Online, which is a virtual world where you can make and dress your own pixelated doll. Or avatars in games which are getting more and more customizable, the most recent version of Guildwars has so many options you can make a character to look like anything you can imagine. Naturally these are to represent yourself with, within a fantasy world, probably also to express yourself through their appearance just like we express ourselves with fashion. I’m leaving the digital dolls out of my study as I prefer to talk about dolls you can physically touch and play with. A lot of people from my own generation that I know play with some kind of dolls, of course that can also be more prone in my environment because that is the kind of people I am attracted to and like to exchange ideas with.
“docrobbyscherry” 63 year old fetishist dresses up as a 16 year old girl
Both forms, projecting on a doll and making a person (dead or alive) into a doll, could both be considered a religious act. It seems like we all like imposing our will on an object, or the ritualization of creating our will.

People make inanimate doll-like objects of others and also of themselves. In philosophy, the embodied mind thesis holds that the nature of the human mind is largely determined by the form of the human body. Philosophers, psychologists, cognitive scientists, and artificial intelligence researchers who study embodied cognition and the embodied mind argue that all aspects of cognition are shaped by aspects of the body. The aspects of the body include the motor system, the perceptual system, the body’s interactions with the environment (situatedness) and the ontological assumptions about the world that are built into the body and the brain. So it could be said, that as soon as someone dresses like a doll, they become the doll, not only in their appearance but also in their mind. The practise of dollification is generally unknown by most people, who still perceive dolls as toys for children, even though there are many adults who collect and create dolls. Thanks to the internet, the members of this community can share information, ideas, and connect with others who share the same passion.
Esmée Berkers, 1 year old
2. What do we find attractive about dolls? Why do we find the simplified aesthetic and/or childlike form beautiful?

Researcher Anderson states that from the beginning the human species is designed to reproduce, to create offspring. Thus we are built with certain preferences branded in our brains, so we can choose our mate based on the best breeding capacities. What those preferences are may change over time, it also partly depends on how successful society is. In times of wealth we tend to be more attracted to slim figures because that shows we are healthy and have enough resources and are not in need of storing fat. In hard times we are more attracted to more full figures as it shows that you have enough means to care for your offspring.  

What we are attracted to also differs per gender and even if you are heterosexual or gay. But some physical attractive aspects are universal.

Both genders prefer a symmetrical body because it indicates general better genes. It seems that in the course of evolution, the features of babies’ faces have developed to evoke emotional responses from us that protects the child. It makes sense that this should be so, of course, for small babies are so vulnerable that the species would not have survived were we not programmed to look after them. The hallmarks of a baby’s attractiveness are chubby cheeks, a high, prominent forehead, relatively large eyes, smooth skin, a small mouth with full lips and a large head in proportion to the body. All these hallmarks are also seen as attractive in adults. Some features were more in fashion in previous decades, like the high forehead, which was found so attractive in woman in the renaissance that woman plucked their hair so the hairline would start higher. Now this isn’t so extreme anymore but we still prefer a face which has a higher forehead over one that does not. We also prefer red lips

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4 A Cross-Cultural Review of the Socioecology of Ideals of Female Body Shape, pg. 197
5 Introducing evolutionary psychology, pg. 109-111
6 The human face, pg. 141
over pale ones as it indicates that you are healthy, it’s also implanted in us as a baby’s lips grow fuller and more red as they suckle.

There are more beauty ideals that are not necessarily linked to our baby-linking instincts. For example blue eyes are widely admired, and this may be because their light colour make the size of the pupil very clear. If the pupil enlarges in response to desire or fear, it is more obvious in light eyed people. Also wide eyes that are high placed in the head and set far apart and have high eyebrows are attractive, as it makes our faces more ‘open’ and easy to read. For the same reason we like people with more expressional faces. We prefer in adults wide cheekbones but narrow cheeks, this are signals of sexual maturity, like full breasts.

Next comes fertility. Fertility is the main biological reason we find someone attractive. A good indication for fertility by woman is the hourglass shape. A low waist-hip ratio is associated by man and by woman with attractiveness and health. A waist-hip ratio of 0.7 is seen as the most attractive. It does not matter if the woman is slim or a full figure, as long as the 0.7 ratio is there they are more attractive. This can be explained as woman with more hip-fat give birth to children that are more healthy and with better developed brains as woman with a lot of waist fat. Because certain long-chain unsaturated fat from the hips, which are passed to the baby in the womb or through breast feeding, have a good impact on the development of the infant brain, while the saturated belly fat is actually damaging to the brains of the baby. In woman, smaller chins and full lips are desired, as these traits reflect both high estrogen levels and low androgen levels. This combinations signals high fertility.

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7 The human face, pg. 30
8 The face, a natural history, pg. 338
9 Introducing evolutionary psychology, pg. 112
10 Human evolutionary psychology, pg. 108
11 Blind men prefer a low waist-to-hip ratio. pg. 182-186.
12 The face, a natural history, pg. 340
Waist-hip ratio of 0.7
The ‘market value’ of men hits it’s high in their late thirties, for woman that is their late twenties.\textsuperscript{13} Woman have to accentuate their youthful features as they are the most attractive when they are fertile, for men that’s less important as they stay fertile a lot longer then woman. What woman find attractive in a man differs a lot from what men find attractive in a woman. Men are more attracted to the looks as where woman are also heavily influenced by how well a men can provide for his family. So his means are more important then his looks.

Then there is another factor that is of big importance, which makes this all even more complex. In our unconscious we set an image that is an average of all the different faces and body’s we meet in our culture. This is probably because there is a smaller chance to be exiled from your community when you are average looking. So through this process we come to an opinion to whether we find someone beautiful or not.\textsuperscript{14} Conformism makes good evolutionary sense, if you are a female, and all other females favour an average face in a mate, then you should too, since your children are more likely to have average faces. They’ll be more in demand, and you’ll have more grandchildren. It almost doesn’t matter what the factor is. The reasoning is the same.\textsuperscript{15} Beauty is not a single quality, it involves a mix of signals of sexual maturity, youth, health and of averageness.

So if dolls on one level represent an arrested, perfected state of human beauty, frozen in time, we need to ask where this desire for perfection arose. On a simple physical level we can see that dolls are free of the ravages of time, which take their roll on living flesh. Being intimate, the doll is incapable of growth and decay.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{13} Human evolutionary psychology, pg. 120
\textsuperscript{14} The Evolution of Desire: Strategies of Human Mating pg
\textsuperscript{15} The face, a natural history, pg. 341
\textsuperscript{16} The sexdoll, pg. 77
3. Why are we attracted to the lifeless?
I think that we are attracted to the lifeless because of two main points. Because it is without life, we can enforce our will upon them; I will get to that in the next chapter. The second point is that a lifeless object that resembles a human can evoke an eerie sensation in us that we simultaneously find repulsive and attractive.

What is that eerie sensation? It is called the uncanny valley. Masahiro Mori wrote about it in his essay about robotics. He comes to a conclusion that it must have something to do with our survival instinct. He says this about it:

“Why were we equipped with this eerie sensation? Is it essential for human beings? I have not yet considered these questions deeply, but I have no doubt it is an integral part of our instinct for self-preservation.”

Our instinct for self-preservation makes us afraid of all that could harm us, anything or anyone that looks or acts differently. For example a corpse or somebody that has a visual abnormality could carry a disease that could harm us. Freud also talks about this, although he did not talk in depth about it, he links it back to the uncanny:

“(…) the “uncanny” is that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar. How this is possible, in what circumstances the familiar can become uncanny and frightening (…)”

He continues this thought later on in his essay by explaining it further. It would seem as though each one of us has been through a phase of our individual development corresponding to that animistic stage in primitive men, that none of us has traversed it without preserving certain traces of it which can be re-activated, and that everything which now strikes us as “uncanny” fulfils the condition of stirring those vestiges of animistic mental activity within us and bringing them to expression.

17 The uncanny Valley
18 The Uncanny, pg. 2-3
Freud writes:

“It would appear that we invest with a feeling of uncanniness those impressions which lend support to a belief in the omnipotence of thoughts, and to the animistic attitude of mind, at a time when our judgment has already rejected these same beliefs.”

What he says speaks partly about our age-old instincts, but he also touches the subject of childhood memories. What he says can also be interpreted as something that we recognize from childhood but have forgotten. In the book *The Sexdoll* Anthony Fergusson tells us that we are actually drawn to them:

“Human beings are drawn to uncanny objects like dolls and robots because they are both familiar and strange. They look more and more like us, but they are not human. Thus we simultaneously desire them and are repulsed by them.”

Not only are we drawn to them, we desire them. What is it about uncanny objects that we find them so interesting? I might have found the answer in what has been written by Victoria Nelson in her book. She first explains that a metamorphosis happened to puppets and idols.

“This, then, will be a discourse of puppets and idols that explores the metamorphosis, over a span of two millennia, of two profoundly religious activities of the early history of western culture: spiritualizing the material by embalming human bodies, and materializing the spiritual by making human simulacra as physical embodiments of the divine. As these two practices of “ensouling” matter move from religion (the realm of belief) to art the realm of make-believe or imagination.”

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19 The uncanny, pg. 13
20 The sexdoll, pg. 77
21 The secret life of puppets, pg. 30
So instead of being an image of worship and holders of a religious power, being either an embalmed body or an idol these objects turned still. They lost their meaning and “soul”. Now they are merely a work of art or an object that can take us away in a make-believe world. Victoria Nelson continues:

“These invented creatures of our imagination still carry for us, below the level of consciousness, that uncanny aura the unacknowledged “holy” characteristically assumes in a secular context.”

So maybe, even now, when we do not believe in statues becoming “ensouled” they still make us feel something that we cannot define, it is not clear what that is that we feel but I think that part of the uncanny feeling is the result of not knowing and not being able to define it.

Ernst Jentsch believes that a particularly good situation for arousing the uncanny feeling is created when there is intellectual uncertainty whether an object is alive or not, and when an inanimate object becomes too much like an animate one. And so we are back to Masahiro Mori’s essay about robotics and his graphic which show’s the dip we experience when and inanimate object looks like a human but is not a perfect copy, which he named ‘the uncanny valley’. Jentsch states in his essay;

“No attempt will here be made to define the essence of the uncanny. Such a conceptual explanation would have very little value. The main reason for this is that the same impression does not necessarily exert an uncanny effect on everybody. Moreover the same perception on the part of the same individual does not necessarily develop into the “uncanny” every time, or at least not every time in the same way.”

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22 The secret life of puppets, pg. 31
23 On the psychology of the uncanny, pg.8
I have to agree with him, even if we now know that the uncanny feeling is situated in our ancient self-preference systems and it may or may not have roots in our childhood, the uncanny still remains to be something very personal that changes from person to person. Just as no two people are exactly alike, each person experiences the uncanny in a unique way. For every person the dip which creates the valley is placed somewhere else. This is why some people are scared of dolls while some others are actually drawn to the uncanny feeling they arouse. The latter we will continue to talk about.
4. Why do we indulge ourselves in the fantasy?

As children we are, while playing, busy with defining what oneself is. Where does the world stop and I begin? By projecting part of oneself onto a doll, we can help to re-enforce a “fragile sense of self” as has Psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut described it. Woodrow Phoenix describes in his book that this process is not only happening in children:

“Toys are symbols that have a figurative power to embody thoughts and emotions that may have their origins in childhood, but are not childish. We recognise parts of ourselves- our secret, wishing selves- in toys. The part of us a toy touches is our unexpressed, dream(ing) self.”

Freud talks about this too, but he writes about how children innocence removes borders in our minds:

“Now, dolls happen to be rather closely connected with infantile life. We remember that in their early games children do not distinguish at all sharply between living and lifeless objects, and that they are especially fond of treating their dolls like live people. (...) the child had no fear of its doll coming to life, it may even have desired it. The source of the feeling of an uncanny thing would not, therefore, be an infantile fear in this case, but rather an infantile wish or even only an infantile belief.”

Perhaps growing up we change our viewpoint of the uncanny, as children we view it with innocent eyes and do not experience it as something that could be possible harmful, as we grow older we learn on the dangers in this world and we build proverbial/metaphorical/figurative walls around us to protect us. Somehow that sense of fear we come to understand as we grow up makes us experience the uncanny when we look at dolls now. Maybe a lot of adults return to the play, often in a different context as children, to try to return to this innocent state.

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24 Plastic Culture: How Japanese Toys Conquered the World, pg.9
25 The uncanny, pg. 8-9
Phoenix writes:

“When a toy is played with, it becomes more “charged”, more filled with the personality of the owner. As a toy absorbs and re-enacts plans, secrets, ambitions, and desires, it becomes an essential part of the owner, both carrier of and link back to intense personal experience.”  

Psychologist Theodor Lipps writes about something along those lines. He proposes the theory that the appreciation of an artwork depended on the capacity of the viewer to project his own personality onto the object of contemplation. He claimed that ‘one had to feel oneself into it’.

He called this process Einfühlung which translates as empathy. So it could be said, that any object which one forms and emphatic bond with becomes an extension of oneself in some way. Jonathan Chapman takes this idea further he says about it:

“We transfer resources into products that- in a sense- provide us with existential mirrors, allowing us to view and experience our dreams and desires in real time. These reflections help us to construct an identity that we feel is individual, while also being indicative of our individual aspirations and dreams. In this respect, objects are meaningful that they illustrate- both to society and the self- our personal life journeys.”

This would mean that as someone projects oneself onto an object, in this instance of course a simulacra, one would want to own it. In this way, the projection is something we want to own. As we perceive ourselves in a way we did not before we view that part of ourselves as perfect. As soon as you own a doll, you want to play with it. This word had several meanings in this situation. Play could mean dressing up, customizing, staging and recording it or just plain admiring it’s beauty.

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26 Plastic Culture: How Japanese Toys Conquered the World, pg. 9
27 Emotionally Durable Design: “Objects, Experiences and Empathy”, pg. 53
So play is an important part of owning. And an important part of play is projecting yourself onto the object that is played with. This also happens in art, minus the physical playing part, the playing happens in our minds, by looking at it, experiencing the artwork our minds are challenged, and in our head we discover different ways of viewing it.

Philosopher Immanuel Kant of the Enlightenment states that beauty is not a property of an artwork or natural phenomenon, but is instead a consciousness of the pleasure that attends the ‘free play’ of the imagination and the understanding. Even though it appears that we are using reason to decide what beautiful, the judgment is not a cognitive judgment, “and is consequently not logical, but aesthetical”.28

Beneath the notion of projection lies an even older identification. The archaic identity of subject and object that still lives at the bottom of the psyche that is the participation mystique identified by Luvien Lévy-Bruhl. In which from our perspective, people from the pretechnological era experienced part of their psyche as externalized forces in the environment. As Jeremy Naydler had pointed out, however our contemporary “self-possessed consciousness” is a consciousness whose emotions, impulses, thoughts and moods are attributed to oneself instead of deriving from gods or being possessed.

28 Wikipedia
My personal Asian ball jointed dolls
What happens when a vision that begins in the realm of *imagine* ends up in *believe* and an author’s own stories and characters become the raw material for rites, ritual and worship? (...) This strange crossover markets a profound reversal from earlier times in our culture, when religion fed art instead of the other way around, and in an odd way it puts us further back yet to the earliest of human times, when all stories were about the gods.29

As someone that plays with dolls, you can remake our own reality as a sort of mirror you can view trough. With your own imagination you can make this world your own, change it, polish it to be perfect in a heavenly or hellish way. You can make the fantastic ordinary and the ordinary fantastic. While playing you are the creator, you are in the position of god. The human can reconnect with the divine within him/her this way. You can comprehend your own self by obtaining an objective standpoint trough play.

I, as an artist, play the part of god all the time. When I play with my dolls in my spare time and when I create my artwork, there is always a sense of power and control over the matter. When I play it is relaxation, I let my mind free, while when I create art I am a lot more aware. Then there is a field of tension between me and the matter, the matter are my paper and pencil, or my moulding wax but also my model. There is a really small line between play and art for me, play is personal and art is something that I try to extend beyond my personal world, it is not just about me anymore but it is also about some general value’s I think everyone carries within them and I hope I can converse about with others trough my artworks as there are no words to describe those feelings.

29 The secret life of puppets, pg. 177-178
5. Aesthetics

I am not the only artist who struggles with these aesthetical value’s and feelings and how to converse about them. There are a few artist throughout history that I feel especially connected to. These artists all have certain aspects in their work that seem similar to aspects in my own. In this chapter I want to talk about their work and how it is connected to my research and to my own art. These artists are Ray Ceasar, Hans Bellmer and Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres.
Ray Caesar (October 26, 1958)

Caesar used to like playing with dolls, something that infuriated his father, and though he was left alone to draw, he repressed that side of himself that wished to be more vocal. Later in life, he would work for seventeen years in a children’s hospital, and the physical wounds he would witness that were inflicted on the children and their powerlessness to protect themselves, would have a profound effect on his own expression.

Hans Bellmer (March 13, 1902 – Februari 23, 1975)

Hans Bellmer takes credit for provoking a physical crisis in his father and brings his own artistic creativity into association with childhood insubordination and resentment toward a severe and humorless paternal authority. Perhaps this is one reason for the nearly universal, unquestioning acceptance in the literature of Bellmer’s promotion of his art as a struggle against his father, the police, and ultimately, fascism and the state. Events of his personal life also include meeting a beautiful teenage cousin Ursula in 1932 who he could not be with because of the age difference and the family bond. He began to actually construct his first dolls. In his works, Bellmer explicitly sexualized the doll as a young girl.

Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres  (August 29, 1780 -Januari 14, 1867)

Ingres was undoubtedly among the most experimental artists of the 20th century. His constant search for the idealized human form, particularly in the female body, was the cause for his highly controversial anatomical distortions. He is known for his obsessive quest for ideal beauty which resulted in his famous (or infamous) anatomical distortions. He was a respected portraitist and was commissioned to do work for the royal family.  

30 www.artble.com
Ray Ceasar, Private Affair, 2012
These three artist all idealise the appearance of their subjects, they morph, beautify or actually make them appear grotesque. All three do this for different reasons, although somehow there is something universal in the way they idealise.

Ray Caesar’s virtual dioramas are populated by a coterie of doll-like creatures. Caesar tells in an interview that he has maybe ten or twelve character studies with twenty variations of faces that he reuses, sometimes altering their facial expression by changing the shapes of their noses, morphing smiles with frowns. He says that somehow, they always return to a look of serenity. In another interview he explains that his models are actually a combination of this close loved ones. The interviewer asks if he thinks of a certain person while he works on the faces. He answers:

“My self and my wife Jane.... I actually try to model a face that is a combination of our faces and our skin textures. I see much of my work as a self portrait of both of us as children.... we have been together for over 30 years ... I met her when I was 15. The images are also reflections of my mother and sister who appeared as children to me after they died.” His wife Jane is of Japanese descend.

I can relate this to the research in chapter 2 about what we find attractive in a face which discovered that we set in our unconscious an image of the average of different faces and body’s we see in our culture. That he made a combination of his own and family’s Aryan face and his wife’s Asian face to use as a template to create his characters off. Of course this is not an completely average face as it is only a combination of two faces but for him, this surely could come very close to what he perceives as an average attractive face as he will see his own image and that of his wife more often than those of others.

31 Interview Huffington Post
32 Interview thorynisaround.blogspot.nl
For Bellmer the dolls he made were also instigated by the looks of a loved one, the unobtainable cousin that he longed for. He sculpted his first doll in her image. He says about this in “Memories of the Doll Theme”:

“It was worth all my obsessive efforts, when, amid the smell of glue and wet plaster, the essence of all that is impressive would take shape and become a real object to be possessed.”

He turns this obsession he has for his cousin into a doll he can own and has the ultimate control over. It was like he made a simulacra of Ursula to not only catch her physically but also spiritually. The photo’s he made of the dismembered doll, that he arranged and rearranged look like the girls fate is completely in his hands. He made an object of desire to replace the original, unobtainable object of desire. He made this reflection of Ursula so he could experience his dreams and desires in real time. He is projecting these things on the doll, and therefore he wants to own the doll. The most direct way to experience this ownership over this object and what it stands for was for him to dismember it, to rearrange parts of it to demonstrate his power over it. This way he could stage his power over his own fate and feelings regarding her. We view our identities by what we own, we express our identities by what we own as discussed in chapter 4.

So whereas Ray Ceasar’s form of the uncanny lies closer to the use of attractive features the word of Bellmer is more related to the uncanny as Freud explained it. The omnipotence of thought.

So both Ceasar and Bellmer are inspired by people they are close to, Ingres also experienced this. He drew a lot of portraits of people he had no relation to. His first few years in Rome where he was forced to sustain a living by drawing portraits made him realize that he did not wanted that anymore, he only wanted to draw persons which who he felt an ‘relation’ to. He was attracted to Mme Moitessier, who had a very goddess-like appearance, by what he called her ‘terrible beauty’. 33

33 Algemene kunstgeschiedenis, pg.654
Hans Bellmer, Die Puppe, 1933
We can also see that Ingres work has something in common with Bellmers, which would be distorting the figure. We can speculate that maybe Ingres needed a kind of control over his subject to, so that both his and Bellmers visual reaction was to distort to show that they are in control. Ingres was among the most experimental artists of the 20th century. His constant search for the idealized human form, particularly in the female body, was the cause for his highly controversial anatomical distortions. He made a habit of elongating backs, his nudes sometimes described by critics as “creatures not found in nature.”

Obviously Bellmers work is very grotesque where Ingres work is very angelic. Ingres perfect figures with attractive characteristics like symmetry, hourglass shape, perfect skin, etc. are something that suggest they aren’t human anymore. Perhaps he wanted to own these beautiful creatures through making art of them, art so he could use this to project himself on. Einfühlung as Theodor Lipps said and perhaps he needed to own these perfect people just like Bellmer wanted to own his cousin. I can relate this again to what Jonathan Chapman theorizes and which I have written about in chapter 4, where we want to own something because we project ourselves onto it, when it then becomes a part of us.

So all three of these artists experienced that they needed to be inspired by people they have an connection to. I myself experience this to, I can draw a well resembling portrait of a stranger, but I never really feel that these portraits are good. It is when I draw someone I feel a ‘click’ with, who I trust, I can open my mind and make a truly good portrait. I feel that, when I trust someone I can open an imaginary passageway in my mind and heart and ‘converse’ with someone’s personality while I make a portrait. This conversing enables me to put something more into the portrait then just the physically likeness of a person.

34 www.artble.com
Immanuel Kant points out in his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* that we all shape our experiences through the filter of our mind. The mind shapes the experience, we never have a direct experience of things and what we do experience is the world as it is conveyed by our senses. I think this may explain why I am told so often that I idealise my models, because I experience them in a certain way, and as I only portray persons I care for this could explain the idealising.

Besides this there is also the search for beauty, I pick these models because I feel I can show not only their outer beauty but also their inner beauty. Umberto Eco wrote about the fifteenth century contemporaries in his book *The history of beauty*:

“(…) Those contemporaries saw Beauty both as an imitation of nature in accordance with scientifically established rules and as the contemplation of a supernatural degree of perfection that could not be perceived by the eye because it was not fully realised in the sublunary world. Knowledge of the visible world became the path toward knowledge of a suprasensible reality governed by logically coherent rules. The artist was therefore at once- and without this seeming contradictory- a creator of new things and an imitator of nature.”35

Kant philosophises that a pure judgement of taste is in fact subjective in so far as it refers to the emotional response of the subject and is based upon nothing but esteem for an object itself: it is a *disinterested* pleasure, and we feel that pure judgements of taste, i.e. judgements of beauty, lay claim to universal validity. It is important to note that this universal validity is not derived from a determinate concept of beauty but from an ontological source. Kant also believed that a judgement of taste shares characteristics engaged in a moral judgement: both are disinterested, and we hold them to be universal. In the chapter “Analytic of the Sublime” he identifies the sublime as an aesthetic quality that, like beauty, is subjective, but unlike beauty refers to an indeterminate relationship between the faculties of the imagination and of reason, and shares the character of moral judgments in the use of reason.

35 *The history of beauty*, pg. 176 - 178
Jean Dominique Ingres, Madame Ingres
The feeling of the sublime, describes two subjective moments, both of which concern the relationship of the faculty of the imagination to reason.36

So both Kant and Umberto Eco write that there is an emotional charge in artwork. Umberto Eco writes this is embedded in the artwork itself whereas Kant philosophizes that it holds ground in a universal pure judgment of taste that is rooted within each of us. I think Kant is partially right, that some value’s are imbedded in us being human, but I feel more attracted to Umberto’s fifteenth century statement that we don’t make a mere image of something visible but that we make an image of something supernatural. In an interview, Ray Ceasar explains why he as an affinity for seeing beauty within when viewing something grotesque and unpleasant, as he uses that in his work. He says:

“I have always thought of my work as a form of self portrait or at least the portrait of what it’s like to look inside my head. I think it’s natural to look in a mirror and see something beautiful and grotesque and many of us swing back and forth in our own estimation of that reflected image of who we are – more or less so if we are naked in front of that mirror! I think for an artist, dealing with putting their emotions, passions, love, and pain onto a wall we have to be honest with what we find in the reflections of our inner mind and subconscious. Sometimes that process can be hard and if I am going to bring the world into the living room of my subconscious, I am damn well going to tidy up and make the place as pretty and presentable before everyone arrives. (...) In a nutshell, I think life can be hard sometimes so the best thing we can do is put up a good front and do the best we can and if you can’t find the prettiness in the putridity, then you’re basically just left with the putridity.”37

36 Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen
37 arrestedmotion.com
Here is a big difference between Ceasars work and my work illustrated. Where Ceasar want to show his inner world, I want to show the outside world how I perceive it. I feel that escapism is not the answer for me, I do like to escape, and art is a form of escaping, but I still want to create something that can show the beauty of this world how I perceive it to others to. I made peace with the fantasy part in my art, which bugged me for a long time because I could not explain to myself why I use it. But now, after researching for this thesis, I found the answers while reading for chapter 4. Everyone needs a bit of fantasy in their lives, the opportunity to belief, without that belief there is no hope and there are no dreams. My work is a promise, it promises beauty and happiness. This promise is a fantasy, as I cannot make sure it is a promise kept.

In Hans Bellmers work the grotesque is more an result of his unobtainable desires. When he cannot obtain what he wants, the desire turns into this obsession with a dark side. In “Memories of the Doll Theme”, Bellmer displays an understanding of the impossible, and therefore all the more intense, nature of his desires, and their nostalgic, retrospective origin. He dreams of a “miraculous garden whose distant odour had so promptly devalued [his] magic act, that this fabulous distance, just as with the dolls, could be a necessary component of any super-sweet thing, and deteriorates when it is no longer unattainable.”

Maybe I portray my models as unobtainables too, but I do not do this on purpose. For me they are perfect the way they are and I want to show that. Thus they get this eerie god-like appearance which positions them out of reach for the viewer. I think the only way of connecting to them is to be able to develop such a relationship yourself with another person. I want to illustrate that this kind of love and trust still exists in this world. You have to open your mind and heart for it and be very quiet to hear my art whisper about it. But I think when you realise that this thin line between fantasy and reality is just a mere mirage you can obtain such value’s yourself to.

38 Hans Bellmer: The anatomy of Anxiety, pg. 56-57
Freud says that an uncanny effect is often and easily produced by effacing the distinction between imagination and reality, such as when something that we have regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality, or when a symbol takes over the full functions and significance of the thing it symbolizes. It is this element which contributes not a little to the uncanny effect attaching to magical practices. Nellson says about this:

“The image, by invoking the essence of the substance imaged, was itself magically transformed from being mere image to being an image infused with the spiritual substance it portrayed. At the same time, it became absorbed into this spiritual substance on a spiritual level, and thereby gave access to it.”

In my own work, I try to capture the essence of someone’s beauty, not only their outer but also inner beauty. Because of the way I portray my models and how I present those portraits it carries the connotation that suggest a religious context. I think this happens because in a way I become god in this little world I create and whereas I am god, I simultaneously idolize the people I represent in my work. This might be because these people represent trust and happiness for me, and these are the value’s I long for the most in my life.

The sensuous doll like appearance I give my models is for me a way to reach for the divine, to try to make my friends into impalpable angels. Where as Bellmer and Ceasar use the uncanny in a grotesque way to reach for the spiritual to gain access to it or to get control over it. I feel more connected to Ingres as he reaches for the spiritual through an uncanny kind of beauty. I see a similar way in how we seek an uncanny beauty, so perfectly beautiful and god-like it evokes an eerie feeling. Ingres uses distortion of the body to evoke that feeling whereas I try to find it in simplification of the information the model gives me. By only using lines and discarding the figure of color and shading I try to show the true beauty of her/him.

39 The uncanny, pg.15
40 The secret life of puppets, pg. 38
I seek the spiritual in an unattainable beauty, not only physically but also emotionally.

“Sensual desire gives way to a state of mind, not an object of oppression and an to infinity unsatisfied desire, but to a path of salvation, a means of ascending to God. A path to higher spirituality.”

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41 The History of beauty pg. 171
For me the writing of this thesis was a whole new adventure. Not just reading all the sources turned out to be addictive also connecting the different researches to each other deemed to be challenging but interesting. Writing about all of this has given me an understanding about my own work and approach that has surprised me. Through this I discovered a lot about my own work and way of thinking. It has made a lot of aspects about my work more transparent and comprehensible.

Why I am attracted to the uncanny and the research about it, and what it means to me and how I relate it to the beautiful. And why I find certain aspects of people’s appearances attractive and why some of those aspects are universal and some are subjective.

I do not use the uncanny the way Jentsch and Freud explained it, I want to discover an different kind of uncanny, grasp it, hold it and use it in my artwork to be able to transfer my message better, clearer. I want to make an image that is easy to read. I think the uncanny taps into a primal instinct opening up barriers in your mind, resulting in an mindset that allows you to experience art to its fullest. Not only having a visual experience but one that goes deeper than only beauty and evokes and emotional response. I want to use the supernatural not in a grotesque manner but in a way to show beauty. Beauty alone is a mere biological thing, when you connect it to the uncanny you can show that it can reach a divine state. I can recognize attractive features in someone’s face, especially when I love my models or have a relation based on mutual trust with them. I think I subconsciously enhance these features, I do not try to make my models into these divine creatures, it happens because I actually experience them that way. I am aware of their physical attractiveness and their social attractiveness but I want to render their emotional beauty, this is probably why my models take on such god-like appearances when rendered by me.
I want to reconnect the human with the divine, make the inner visible in the outer. It also explained to me why I find it important to use certain people as models and that this is something other artists experienced to.

I want to construct high-art on a low-art foundation. Cliché is likewise deliberate, non-ironic and serves a higher purpose as allegory, the aesthetic device of personification, to make my message clearer to convey.

To make the fantastic ordinary and the ordinary fantastic and reach for that ineffable level of spirit beyond the material world. Use the imagery of today’s media in my favour to be able to converse my message to as many people as possible. Using beauty, I want to include people without an art-education in my audience, I want people to have an open-minded view on my art so they are willing to let the emotional experience happen.

Finally I want to thank some people, without them this would not have the shape it has right now.

I especially want to thank Bert, he has been teaching me English for years now and he put up with me having him check sentences and trying out if I still was writing comprehensible. Thank you for being so patient and for proofreading my complete thesis!

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