

HAUSER & WIRTH

Press Release

Lorna Simpson

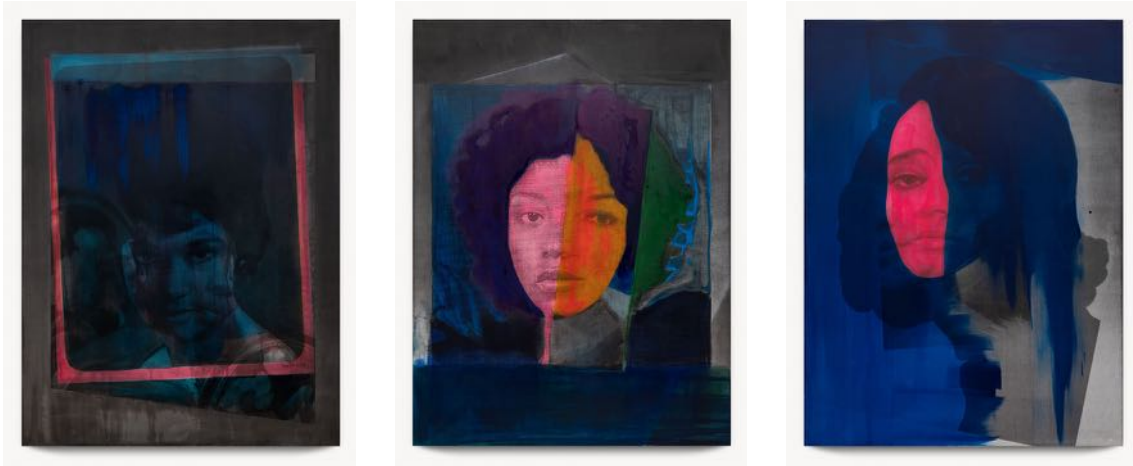
Hauser & Wirth Zurich, Limmatstrasse
30 September – 22 December 2023



This autumn, the renowned US artist Lorna Simpson debuts new work from her ongoing Special Character series at Hauser & Wirth Zurich, Limmatstrasse, marking the artist's first solo exhibition with the gallery in Switzerland. First unveiled in 2019, the Special Character series superimposes women's faces from fashion and wig ads found in the pages of Ebony magazine, revealing through repetition the reinforcement of stereotypes in the everyday imagery we consume. In these works, silkscreened images of isolated figures emerge from layered washes of paint, highlighting Simpson's continual investigation of the relationship between parts and wholes, and the nature of representation, identity, gender and race. The exhibition in Zurich will coincide with 'Lorna Simpson x Gaëlle Choisne' at Reiffers Art Initiative, Paris, part of their 2023 mentorship exhibition programme.

Captivated by imagery from different time periods, the Special Character series began after Simpson found copies of Ebony magazines from the 1950s to 1970s that belonged to her grandmother. Ebony magazine embodies African American thought and point of view, notable for documenting lifestyle, culture, and politics and issues otherwise unrepresented by mainstream media. 'As an artist gravitating towards advertising and images of women—from very small wig ads or hair product ads, to large-scale national ads—advertisements chronicle periods of time in terms of politics and expressions of self-determination,' Simpson explains. The subjects of 'NYC Story' (2023) are framed within a smaller rectangle akin to film stills or negatives, acting as a snapshot of a moment in history. By repurposing and reconfiguring found images—a signature source in her work—Simpson creates her own highly distinctive visual terrain that offers a potent response to American life.

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The striking gazes in Simpson's amalgamated portraits exude a power in looking, in representation and in visibility. Though their glances invite us to look, we are separated by the layers of pigment and by the time periods that define them. In works such as 'Third Person' and 'Z' (2023), several versions of the same face can be discerned – the considered selection and placement of the found images in these large-scale, silk-screen works are juxtaposed with the spontaneous nature of the ink that is layered on top, forming uncanny, dreamlike portraits. The layered fragments of the figures morph, fuse and shift before the viewer's eyes, settling into a composite female face accentuated with fluorescent pink or orange pigment whose direct gaze meets the viewer. In works such as 'As far as possible' (2023) and 'NYC Story' (2023), the face becomes simultaneously present and partially obscured, exploring the duality of these spliced personas and the interruption between their physical appearance and their inner psyche—refracted and amplified by the additional external layer of the viewer's own contemplation.

Through unexpected reconfigurations of visual culture, the artist continues to develop her distinctive language of the found image as a source, encouraging new narratives to emerge from unexpected origins. Over double the size of the other works, Simpson liberates the subject in 'Night Fall' (2023) from its history by placing her in a new, otherworldly context. The azure pigment, glowing with an ethereal luminescence, cascades from the figure into a bright pool, demonstrating the artist's mastery of ink and paint. Simpson's new work continues to immerse viewers in the characteristic paradoxes of her praxis, weaving dichotomies of figuration and abstraction, past and present, destruction and creation into the fabric of her oeuvre.

About the Artist

Born in Brooklyn, Lorna Simpson came to prominence in the 1980s with her pioneering approach to conceptual photography. Simpson's early work—particularly her striking juxtapositions of text and staged images—raise questions about the nature of representation, identity, gender, race and history that continue to drive the artist's expanding and multi-disciplinary practice today. She deftly explores the medium's umbilical relation to memory and history, both central themes within her work.

Simpson continues to probe these questions while expanding her practice to encompass various media including film, painting, collage and sculpture. Her recent works incorporate appropriated imagery from vintage Jet and Ebony magazines, found photo booth images, and discarded Associated Press photos of natural elements – particularly ice, a motif that appears in her sculptural work in the form of glistening blocks made of glass. Layered and multivalent, Simpson's practice deploys metaphor, metonymy, and formal prowess to offer a potent response to American life today. Works from Simpson's Special Character series are featured in numerous major international institutions, including The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York NY; TANK Shanghai, Shanghai, China; Glenstone, Potomac MD; and Kistefos Museum, Jevnaker, Norway.

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Opening hours:

Tue – Fri, 11 am – 6 pm
Sat, 11 am – 5 pm

www.hauserwirth.com

Caption and courtesy information:

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Photo: James Wang

Lorna Simpson
Night Fall
2023
Ink and acrylic on gessoed fiberglass
Unique
365.8 x 259.1 x 3.5 cm / 144 x 102 x 1 3/8 in

Lorna Simpson
As far as possible
2023
Ink and screenprint on gessoed fiberglass
Unique
170.2 x 127 x 3.5 cm / 67 x 50 x 1 3/8 in

Lorna Simpson
NYC Story
2023
Ink and screenprint on gessoed fiberglass
Unique
170.2 x 127 x 3.5 cm / 67 x 50 x 1 3/8 in

Lorna Simpson
Z
2023
Ink and screenprint on gessoed fiberglass
Unique
170.2 x 127 x 3.5 cm / 67 x 50 x 1 3/8 in

Lorna Simpson
Third Person
2023
Ink and screenprint on gessoed fiberglass
Unique
170.2 x 127 x 3.5 cm / 67 x 50 x 1 3/8 in