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Lorna Simpson
Everrrything: Evoking the Pandemic and What We Have Missed
Hauser & wirth
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by Jody Zellen



In Lorna Simpson's compelling multi-media exhibition *Everrrything* at Hauser & Wirth, the works fill both the courtyard and interior gallery spaces. Outside are *Stacked Stones/Vibrating Cycles* (2021), an array of fifteen sculptures consisting of stacked slabs of bluestone intermingled with pieces of blue-painted wood used as shims and topped with obsidian singing bowls (a type of inverted bell associated with Buddhism) that can be played by visitors with provided mallets. These pieces evoke a sense of calm: They are meditative constructions.

Upon entering the interior galleries, one is drawn to a small enclosed space where the 14-second video *Walk with me* (2020) is projected. Here, Simpson brings to life a photographic image depicting three Black women whose necks are draped with pearls. As their eyes blink and their expressions change, it becomes evident that they are composites that bring together fragmented faces culled from vintage issues of *Jet* and *Ebony* Magazines. Simpson presents an uncanny Cubist-inspired portrait of 1950s Black domesticity.

Historically, photography and collage have been at the root of Simpson's practice. While she moves away from traditional photography, in *Everrrything*, many of the works still draw from photographic or media sources. Across the walls of the entry room are numerous modest-sized collages from four different series (including *The meaning of power and physical worlds*, *Stars from Dusk to Dawn*, *Observing the Universe* and *Everrrything* (all 2021)).

These pieces combine images of women from *Jet* and *Ebony* with fragments from celestial charts where faces and body parts have been replaced by maps of the night sky. In one image from *Observing the Universe*, Simpson layers a sheet of blue handmade paper with a stylized photograph of a woman on the ground sitting beside her record player, much of her body now filled with the black and white imagery from a star map which is visible between the magazine page and the handmade paper. These small collages serve in part as an introduction to works in the rest of the show where Simpson enlarges similar appropriated fragments, as well as snippets of text. She screen-prints these elements to gessoed fiberglass and colorizes them with blue and gray ink creating large-scale commanding works.

In these monumental 'paintings,' Simpson combines the body and the landscape. The predominant gray and blue tonalities infuse them with a sense of dread and doom. They speak to the environment, to climate change and to the vulnerability of the earth. *Reoccurring* (2021) is

an arresting work picturing a shoreline with imposing, rocky cliffs seen from a choppy sea. A disembodied face seen in silhouette is collaged onto the end of the cliffs gazing out toward an empty sky. An unpainted grayish brown square of fabric and three thin, vertical light-blue colored fragments of text bisect the composition and causes a disruption in the depiction of the landscape.

In *Observer* (2021), Simpson supports the large vertical work on two piles of bluestone rock that elevate the 'painting' off the floor referencing the pieces in the courtyard, as well as Chris Ofili's use of elephant dung. In this ambiguous portrait, a female figure emerges from a background filled with celestial imagery, as well as translucent, maroon-toned patches of drippy wash. Simpson contrasts these grand depictions of stately women with wistfulness and vulnerability. They seem simultaneously present and disappearing. She matter of factly transforms her found imagery into regal portraits that are as much about process and form as they are about visibility.

The exhibition concludes, and in many ways, comes full circle with *Above Head* (2021), an installation of 218 small, framed photographs, clippings of vintage wood block prints, pastel and hand-made paper. Many are photo-booth images, some are fragments from star maps, while others are a dark monochrome. Collectively, these tiny pictures of men, women and children become a close-knit family and as such, they assert a resonant presence that evokes both the isolation of the pandemic and what we have missed. Looking both inward and outward, Simpson has created a sensational body of work that moves her practice into new territories: painting, symbolism and metaphor.

<https://artnowla.com/2021/11/01/lorna-simpson-everything/>