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Lorna Simpson, by Joan Simon et al., Prestel: Munich, 2013 (Book Review)

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drawing, as they demand “a kaleidoscopic eye with which we are always seeking the right word, which, just as it comes into view, slips away from us so that we have to run breathlessly after it,” writes De Diego (26). Finally, in “The Thickness of Surface: Projections on a Screen-Wall,” Giuliana Bruno argues that Iglesias intentionally invokes the double meaning of the word *celosias*, as both lattice and jalousie/jealousy, to denote a thing, a screen, and at the same time, to connote “an affect” (70–71). For Bruno, Iglesias’s *celosias* are lattice windows or portals that conduct emotional projections “that enable imaginary access into the architecture of interiority” (71).

Iglesias’s extraordinary outdoor projects, sometimes located in far-flung places that are nearly impossible to visit, usually incorporate water. *Underwater Dwellings* (2010) is a series of *celosias* forming rooms built fifty feet below the

surface of the water at the bottom of the Sea of Cortés in Baja California Sur, Mexico, where only fish and an occasional diver can see it. Carefully designed to serve as an artificial reef able to withstand the environment without harming the UNESCO World Heritage Site, *Underwater Dwellings* incorporates a section of *The Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, written by the Jesuit priest Jose de Acosta during the sixteenth century about his time spent in New Spain (186).

Wells and fountains are forms or structures favored by Iglesias. Since about 2009 she has installed several versions of *Towards the Ground*, a well with cast interior lining encrusted with leaf or root patterns that mysteriously appears to send a flow of water down deep into the earth. Gertrud Sandqvist’s essay explores the “bilabial economy” of feminine fluidity and maternal earthiness in

Iglesias’s work, which is most monumentally embodied in *Deep Fountain* (1997–2006), a 46’ x 108’ rectangular fountain commissioned for the entrance of the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp (43). Here Iglesias reverses the spouting logic of the familiar garden feature by directing water downward between two lips of a narrow slit at the center of the fountain, where it flows into the labyrinthine “maternal darkness” of the womblike earth (43).

Before picking up *Cristina Iglesias: Metonymy*, I did not know this artist, but going forward I will surely include Iglesias in my next lecture on contemporary art or feminist aesthetics and encourage others to do likewise. •

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Lorna Simpson

by Joan Simon et al
Prestel, 2013

Reviewed by Vittorio Colaizzi

The images and essays in this catalogue, which documents Lorna Simpson’s (b. 1960) first museum exhibition in Europe,¹ trace an increasing emphasis on the enigmatically personal at the expense of the linguistic, although her work remains concerned with the discursive behavior of images as they reveal assumptions about race and gender. Simpson, as the author and contributors show, activates looking by short-circuiting the possessive aspects of the gaze.

Curator Joan Simon provides a brisk but insightful survey of Simpson’s works to date, which vary remarkably from the 1980s text-and-image juxtapositions to the more recent and relatively lush video works that inhabit the spaces between personal and historical memory. Four concise essays follow that examine phases or specific works, and after a section of plates, the book is rounded off by an interview in which Simpson discusses

her education, her processes (both mechanical and conceptual), and ruminates on the emotional weight of her subjects.

Recurring themes are the inadequacy of photographs to truly convey experience and the related problem of African-American subjectivity. Essayists Elvan Zabunyan and Thomas J. Lax critique the tendency to read any black image or voice as a stand-in for all. At the same time, the assertion of black agency is by nature a defiant political act. Zabunyan shows how Simpson’s early images assert this agency by refusing to subject themselves to the gaze, initiating a long concern with elliptical communication and meaningful non-communication. Marta Gili, in her essay, describes this happening in the video *Corridor* (2003), in which concurrent sequences of a well-dressed African American woman attending to daily tasks in historically preserved homes are separated by two hundred

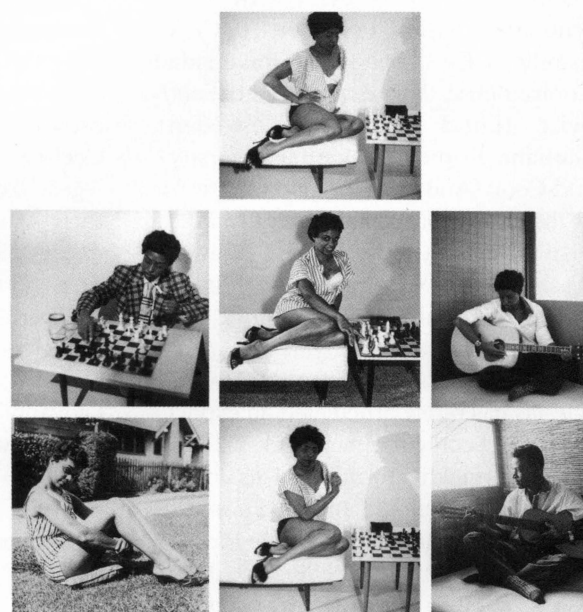


Fig. 1. Lorna Simpson, 1957–2009 (2009) (detail), gelatin silver prints, 299 prints, each 5" x 5". Rennie Collection, Vancouver.

years but united in their unreality, as the protagonist would have been excluded from such sites of privilege.

Recently Simpson has incorporated found sources, most notably a stack of glamour-tinged photos shot by an unknown black couple in Hollywood in 1957 (Fig. 1). Moved by the poignant desire for unachieved (and largely

socially prohibited) celebrity that infuses these images, Simpson chose to display them alongside her own inexact re-enactments of both male and female roles. Such re-enactment, as Lax points out with regard to the video *Momentum* (2010)—this one growing from a childhood dance recital—cannot be a duplication but a layering of additional context and meaning onto a referent from the past. Further, according to Lax, this constitutes a liberating deconstruction of rigid concepts of cause and effect.

Lax also places Simpson's work in a rich historical context that includes minimalist and post-minimalist objects and performance, Yvonne Rainer's de-hierarchical choreography, the deliberately

indistinct self-portraiture of Adrian Piper, and Jacques Derrida's notion of inscription as absence. These connections, along with Naomi Beckwith's invocation of surrealism and dreams, re-energize a body of work that has arguably been canonized for viewers educated after 2000.

Beckwith's essay offers an excellent summary of Simpson's place in photography's late 20th century ascendance as a tool for skepticism as to the transparent truth of images. She also cautions that an overly semiotic reading undercuts the importance of the viewer's body and subjectivity. As Beckwith argues, Simpson's career began with a conflation of words and

images that showed how images can be read like texts. By dispensing with actual words, Simpson shows, as Roland Barthes pointed out, that like texts, images can also be "played."

Vittorio Colaizzi is a critic, curator, and Assistant Professor of Art History at Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA, where he is working on a study of abstract painting since 1970. •

Notes

1. Minneapolis: Foundation for the Exhibition of Photography; Paris: Jeu de Paume, in association with Haus Der Kunst, Munich, 2013.

The Dinner Party, Judy Chicago and the Power of Popular Feminism 1970–2007

by Jane F. Gerhard
University of Georgia Press, 2013

Reviewed by Joanna Gardner-Huggett

This captivating read aims to restore "the role of audience interest and popular taste in the success of *The Dinner Party*," which the art establishment held in low regard or used as evidence of its flaws (284). Feminist scholars will find the first two chapters of *The Dinner Party, Judy Chicago and the Power of Popular Feminism 1970-2007* dedicated to the history of the Feminist Art Program and *Womanhouse* familiar territory; likewise the published critiques of *The Dinner Party*'s essentialism, lack of diversity and its place in the culture wars of the 1990s addressed in chapters six and seven.¹ However, author Jane Gerhard, a feminist historian, offers a new dimension to *The Dinner Party*'s history by drawing from financial records that remain in Chicago's possession, as well as numerous interviews with Chicago and her collaborators, and *The Dinner Party* archives held at Harvard.

While audience reception is Gerhard's focus, she also captures the reality of Chicago's studio when the romance of feminist rhetoric fades, by



Fig. 1. Photo. The loft was crowded with large embroidery frames where workers could see and evaluate the runner as a whole. The frames and stands, made at the studio specifically for the runners, disallowed a common practice of rolling up large work on a small frame and stitching small sections at a time. Note the hanging runners in the background. Each runner was covered and stored at night by Susan Hill. From left, Pat Akers, Susan Brenner, Terry Blecher (1977). Courtesy of Through the Flower.

highlighting the voices of the paid staff and volunteers (122). Gerhard vividly describes graffiti in the studio bathroom that derides seventeenth century embroidery techniques utilized for banners, and addresses the conflict between volunteers taking pride in their art, yet being required to relinquish authorship (125) (Fig. 1). The author quotes Terry Blecher, who worked on the runners, as saying, "I felt a conflict of ownership for the first time ... I was

angry at Judy for having the final say at *The Dinner Party* when I had made all the decisions on the piece ... not feeling the confidence to just do it" (126). Further, Gerhard illuminates the many personal and financial sacrifices unpaid volunteers made to participate in the creation of *The Dinner Party* by quoting the studio's *Survival Guide*, including how to apply for welfare and other subsidized city and state services (90). Fourteen black and white photographs