

Press contact: Eddie Silva
314.387.0405
esilva@camstl.org



Contemporary Art
Museum St. Louis

3750 Washington Blvd
St. Louis, MO 63108
314.535.4660 camstl.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Recent video work by acclaimed artist Lorna Simpson shimmers on CAM's facade for Street Views



Lorna Simpson, *Redhead*, 2018. Single-channel digital animation video, 8 seconds on loop. © Lorna Simpson. Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth.

August 18, 2021 (St. Louis, MO) - The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis (CAM) presents *Lorna Simpson: Heads*, an exhibition of two recent digital animation videos by the acclaimed artist. In the two works, *Blue Love* (2020) and *Redhead* (2018), from her *Ebony* collage series, Simpson melds black-and-white photographs of women and men from vintage *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines, embellished with shimmering, flame-like watercolor hairdos. *Lorna Simpson: Heads* will be on view on CAM's facade as part of Street Views, from dusk to midnight, September 3, 2021 through February 13, 2022.

Simpson came to prominence in the 1980s as part of a generation of artists who utilized conceptual approaches in photography to challenge the credibility and assumed neutrality of images and language. Her most iconic works from this period depict people staged in a neutral studio, photographed from behind or in fragments— isolated from time or specificity of place. Simpson accompanies these images with her own texts. These powerful yet ambiguous works raise questions about the nature of representation, identity, gender, race, memory, and history. Since the late 1990s, Simpson has extended these concerns into a series of film and video installations.

In her *Ebony* collage series, Simpson manipulates the photographs through extreme cropping and close-ups to emphasize parts of the bodies—in the case of *Blue Love* and *Redhead*, the subjects' faces and hair. "The notion of fragmentation, especially of the body, is prevalent in our culture, and it's reflected in my works," Simpson explains. "We're fragmented not only in terms of how society regulates our bodies but

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in the way we think about ourselves.” In these collages, Simpson focuses on hair and its profound intersection with identity. Though these faces were once posed and designed to sell products to other women and men, in Simpson’s hands, none of them are indebted to any particular identity or occupation. The translucent watercolor beehives, like eternal fountains, wash away any meaning to be drawn from the individual.

Simpson sources images from *Jet* and *Ebony* magazine from the 1950s through the ‘70s, and then reanimates them, as a means toward threading the past and present. Both publications were well known for focusing on contemporary lifestyles, culture, and politics from African American perspectives. The magazines chronicled Black lives and issues underrepresented in mainstream media and are recognized as important markers of a turbulent era of American history. By re-imagining the figures from these vintage magazines through video, transforming them into surreal animations, Simpson deftly navigates the territory between figuration and abstraction, past and present, and in so doing reopens the history of representation in images.

The exhibition is generously supported by Emily Rauh Pulitzer and the Ferring Family Foundation. Street Views is generously supported by the Whitaker Foundation.

Lorna Simpson: Heads is organized for the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis by Wassan Al-Khudhairi, Chief Curator.

Lorna Simpson (b. Brooklyn) received her BFA in photography from the School of Visual Arts in New York and her MFA from the University of California, San Diego. Her work has been widely collected and exhibited by such institutions as the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Studio Museum in Harlem; Aspen Art Museum, Colorado; and Haus der Kunst, Munich, among many others. Her work is in the permanent collections of many prominent museums including the Art Institute of Chicago; Brooklyn Museum of Art; Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; High Museum of Art, Atlanta; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Related Events

Friday, September 3

Patron Preview 10:00–11:30 am

Member Preview 5:00–6:00 pm

Public Opening 6:00–9:00 pm

For press access on Opening Day

RSVP to Eddie Silva at 314.387.0405

or esilva@camstl.org

Saturday, February 12, noon

RE: Ebony and Jet

About the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis

The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis works to enrich lives and inspire curiosity, creativity, and learning through experiences with contemporary art. Focused on a dynamic array of changing exhibitions, the Museum reflects and contributes to the global cultural landscape while engaging thousands of visitors through a wide array of public programs. CAM nurtures the creative minds of our city’s youth through free, in-depth art education, making a long-lasting impact on the community. We are a site for discovery, a welcoming space, free and open to all.

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