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Lorna Simpson's Memories Gather Golden Momentum

by [Deirdre Hering](#)

In *Gathered*, Lorna Simpson's ongoing show at the [Brooklyn Museum](#), the artist takes on the colossal task of challenging her viewers' collective memory—her photographs and films shine a spotlight on the marginalized past lives of African Americans in the 20th century. Simpson's much smaller exhibition at Salon 94 Bowery also focuses on memories, but the recollections that literally take the stage in *Momentum* (through June 18) are Simpson's own.

When she was eleven years old, Simpson performed in a ballet at Lincoln Center, one of the most revered stages in the world. Her memory of the performance is fleeting, but she's done her best to recreate it with a taped performance exhibited on the sidewalk—passers-by can watch her troupe of professional and student dancers decked out in afros and head-to-toe gold paint on a giant screen on the gallery's exterior wall. They spin and pirouette in a seemingly endless cycle, before taking their places back along the walls of the stark white room where they perform.

But the performance isn't a recreation of Simpson's actual experience—it's the recollection itself. Thus, it's a bit disjointed—the quick, jarring cuts in the film echo the lapses of our own memories. And the dancers' routines are punctuated by minutes of rest, replications of the long lulls during rehearsals. These moments are some of the most arresting in the film—Simpson's dancers stretch and spin and even fidget beautifully, their stone-carved bodies gleaming under the white-hot stage lights. In these moments, Simpson's dancers are completely unselfconscious in a way that no Lincoln Center audience will ever see.

Huge felt photographs of the Avery Fisher Center hang on the walls of the gallery's bottom floor. Enlarged versions of vintage postcards, the slightly kitschy images are reminiscent of Zoe Leonard's installation [You See I Am Here After All](#). Printed in gold ink and slightly blurred, Simpson's images perfectly encapsulate the inevitable condition of a memory—gilded with idealism, and faded with time.

(Images courtesy the artist, Salon 94)

Related Events

[Lorna Simpson: Momentum](#) @ Salon 94 Bowery
Tuesdays–Saturdays. Continues through June 18

[Lorna Simpson: Gathered](#) @ Brooklyn Museum of Art
Wednesdays–Sundays. Continues through Aug. 21

Related Locations