



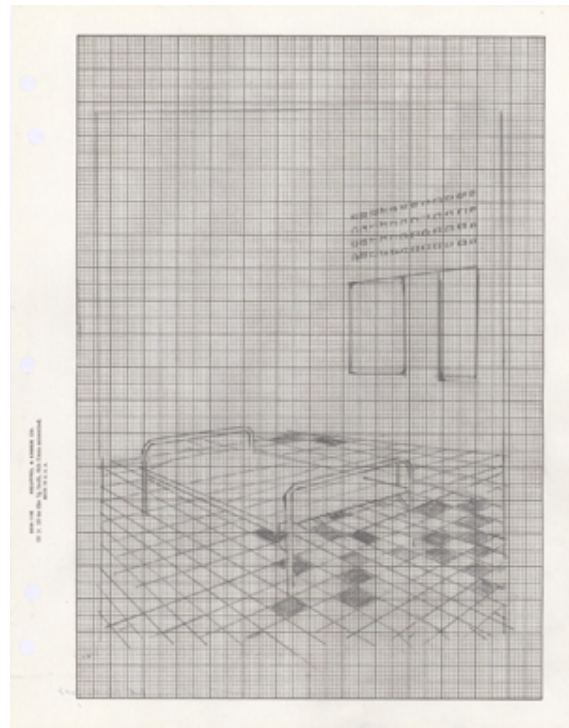
SALON 94  
FREEMAN'S

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Lorna Simpson: Ink at Salon 94 and Salon 94 Freeman's  
By Merve Unsal

October 23 to December 13  
12 East 94th Street, between Fifth and Madison avenues  
New York City, 646 672 9212

1 Freeman Alley, off Rivington Street  
Lower East Side  
New York City, 212 529 7400



Lorna Simpson Head 20. Graphite on paper, 11 x 8.5 inches, left, and Bed Black 2008.  
Graphite on paper, 11 x 8.5 inches. All images courtesy of Salon 94, New York.



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Lorna Simpson's two-part exhibition at Salon 94 and Salon 94 Freeman has a quiet tone. The content of her art is somber. She deals with such issues as gender, identity, war, and torture. All of these subjects are explored by Simpson with a formal sophistication that generates provocative yet ambiguous works.

In the uptown space, two bodies of work are exhibited, *Photo Booth* (2008) and *Heads* (2008). Simpson's drawings of the backs and sides of women's heads put a special emphasis on hairstyles. Simpson transforms hair into abstract forms. These are not simply representations of specific "heads". They are multiplicities containing poetic signifiers that go beyond the visible world. They are reminiscent of Rorschach tests and yet they never become non-descript inkblots that are open to any interpretation. The drawings are based on photographic imagery and by interpreting these found images through the drawing process, Simpson discovers new forms and ideas that are not contained in the original material

The hand of the artist plays a very different role in *Photo Booth* (2008). These images are of black males from the 1940s. The intimate images are reminiscent of Carrie Mae Weems' work, but instead of creating narratives, Simpson juxtaposes these images to form a cloud-like shape on the wall. This shape takes on a life of its own and an element of abstraction and ambiguity is introduced within a context that in and of itself only has historical value. The overall form created by the accumulation of individual photographs appears to be more important than the individual images and Simpson reiterates this notion by interweaving inkblots among the photographs. The inkblots become weird surrogates for the photographs, filling gaps to complete a "big" picture. The artist becomes a mediator of found images and the marks she makes. The viewer is responsible for interpreting this tapestry consisting of personal images of men who are self-consciously posing for snapshots.



Lorna Simpson *Long, Slow, War (Still)* 2008. 2-channel video projection, dimensions variable



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The tensions between intimate and public, between information and interpretation, found in the uptown space, take on a different meaning in what Simpson calls the “orchestrated theatrical disaster” of war. At the Freeman Alley venue, a piece called *Long, Slow, War* (2008) are juxtaposed with a set of drawings of interior spaces from the same year; these latter took their titles from the motif depicted in each drawing. The graphite drawings, on sheets of graphing paper, reminiscent of interior design sketches, are based on published images of war (either disseminated by the government or the soldiers themselves). The drawings emphasize the ubiquitous quality of war imagery in our culture, but when viewed all together, there is something uncanny about their barrenness. The mental spaces created by these drawings could be defined as a heterotopia; the viewer is not completely detached from the reality of the images from which these drawings are reproduced and yet the drawings do not make the reality of the events taking place pertinent.

The disorientation caused by the drawings urges the viewer to take them in in conjunction with the two video projections presented in the same gallery. The video projections are footage from Thomas Edison’s *Railroad Smash-up* (1904) and *Fourth of July fireworks* along with the aural element of slowed down sounds of train crashes and fireworks. Simpson’s criticism of the “spectacle of war” is more direct in the video works, whereas the drawings give the viewer more room for private deliberation and free-association.

The subversive beauty that has been present in Lorna Simpson’s work since *Waterbearer* (1986) has reached a new level of refinement in the private world of her new drawings and “collected” imagery. These new drawings address critical issues that are important to the artist while giving the viewer just enough mental space to experience precious moments of deliberation. It is the melding of formal sophistication with the artist’s honest yet poignant perspective on critical issues that makes Simpson’s work transcend boundaries and definitions and any and all expectations.