“What’s just as important as the photographic components are the more tactile, immediate elements, such as the inks I use...Working with ink is very much about being in the moment, and as a result there’s a degree of subconsciousness that comes through,” Simpson told The Paris Review in 2015.

In 2017, Simpson returned to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, the site of her first solo museum show in 1992, for a mural commission in the second-floor atrium, which builds on her photo-collage paintings.

Simpson spoke with Thelma Golden, Director and Chief Curator of The Studio Museum in Harlem, in 2018 about her exhibition, Lorna Simpson: Unanswerable at Hauser & Wirth, London in a conversation that touched on her interest in collage, archives, transition into painting, and dealing with the topics of identity and representation.

Darkening, Simpson’s first solo show at Hauser & Wirth’s New York gallery in 2019, presented large-scale paintings inspired by photographs of historical expeditions in arctic landscapes and the political climate in the United States. “I still have an interest and a desire for photography, but that does not necessarily mean making photographs...The work that I am doing now, these constructed images, these landscapes, and these faces that are surreal and superimposed upon one another, are not static at all, but surreal portraits,” Simpson told the gallery’s New York Director in a studio visit.
Lorna Simpson (American, b. 1960)

Howling, 2020
Ink and screen print on gessoed fiberglass

Peterson Family Collection; L2020:82.1

Lorna Simpson emerged from the School of Visual Arts in New York and the University of California, San Diego, as a powerhouse of conceptual photography in the 1980s, quickly establishing herself one of the most important and innovative artistic voices of her generation. Over thirty-five years, Simpson has expanded her multi-faceted practice to explore complex themes of race, identity, gender, cultural representation, and human relationships. Her practice has encompassed bold pairings of photography and text, found images transformed by collage and screen printing, multi-screen video installations, printmaking, and in recent years, painting and sculpture.

Howling is a stellar example of an evolving series of large-scale paintings begun in 2018. It combines Simpson’s distinctive use of text and found images – cut from her favored sources of Jet and Ebony magazines – with timeworn photographs from arctic expeditions. Strips of text linger in the dripping azure haze, forming a curtain in the frozen landscape from which a woman’s face can be glimpsed peeking through, a mix of caution and daring in her eye. The shifting blues and layers of ink, paint, and digitally enhanced photography that define the series embody Simpson’s grief for the socio-political division, isolation, and unrest she feels increasingly permeating the United States. “It does feel like a preoccupation with an environment that is historically inhospitable, with very dire rules for survival,” she reflected in 2019, speaking of the works as psychological mirrors to the “heightened inhospitable condition” of daily life.

Extra Resources
Simpson speaks about her most recent painted collage Ice series

Simpson’s 2017-18 and 2019 Ice series iterations

On view August 19 – November 22, 2020