

One Wall One Work

**Lorna Simpson**

November 11, 2017 - December 23, 2017

Born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1960, Lorna Simpson started out as a documentary photographer. Coming to fame in the 1980's for her powerful photographs of black women that directly engaged racial and gender stereotypes, Simpson then explored the many readings and functions of photography, making conceptual compositions that combined black-and-white images with text and used the discrepancy between the two to block traditional or stereotyped interpretations. She is perhaps best known for works that link words with potent images and require the viewer to participate in the creation of the meaning.

"15 Mouths" consists of 15 photographs, each with a short text below it, all installed on a wall, along with an audio recording of an ensemble humming (not singing the lyrics) the Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart tune "It's Easy to Remember (And So Hard to Forget)". Simpson chose the song specifically as she has vivid memories of John Coltrane's version of the song being present throughout her childhood. The text below each pair of lips could potentially refer to the internal monologues inside the heads (not shown) to whom the lips belong. As Holland Cotter wrote in the New York Times, "Much of Lorna Simpson's photo-based work has been about African-American identity approached from an oblique and elusive perspective. Most of the figures in her pictures, usually black women, were filmed with their backs to the camera, as if to make them generic presences, adaptable to any narrative. The implication is that there are many narratives about race available, all of them conditional and subjective, created by the pressures of personal experience, interpretation and memory."