

Michael Simpson

New Paintings

2 October 2019 – 25 January 2020
Blain|Southern London



Michael Simpson, *Squint 65*, 2019, Courtesy the artist and Blain|Southern, Photo: Peter Mallet

Blain|Southern is delighted to announce *New Paintings*, Michael Simpson's first solo exhibition at the London gallery. Simpson presents a significant body of new work, including a group of large-scale *Squint* paintings.

Michael Simpson (b.1940 Dorset, UK) is an artist whose work is characterised by a reduced palette and a distinctive vocabulary of 'Benches', 'Confessionals' and 'Squints', three motifs that appear in three separate series of paintings. Whilst Simpson's apparent subject is the infamy of religious history and the politics of belief, these subjective references provide only a subtext for his principal subject: the mechanics of painting. Whilst Simpson's apparent subject is the infamy of religious history and the politics of belief, these subjective references provide only a subtext for his principal subject: the mechanics of painting.

A 'leper squint' is a feature built into the walls of medieval churches which allowed sufferers of leprosy and other 'undesirables' to view sermons while remaining outside. In Simpson's paintings the squint appears as a rectangular aperture placed high up on outer walls with various architectural means to reach it. The structure and composition of the paintings invite viewers to approach the tantalising apertures, yet they are always just out of reach, frustrating our desire to see what might lie beyond.

Squint 62 (2018-2019) is a subdued composition of greys and blacks. Fine black lines form a mesh platform from which to access four squints set into a solid grey wall. Whilst there are never any figures in Simpson's paintings, the size of work, which spans five metres, is an example of how he uses scale to bring the idea of human presence into play – placing the viewer at the scene, reminding them of the possibility that someone could have occupied the space or may be about to do so. How a flat surface conjures the illusion of space and 'making a painting work – making it plausible' are Simpson's primary concerns. *Squint 64* (2019) achieves a powerful mood of balance and harmony through the precise rendering of light and space.

Despite a restricted colour palette, Simpson evokes a variety of materials. In *Confessional 6* (2018-2019) the confessional box, folding metal door and rectangular shadows combine to form a composition that brings to mind the same 'seeing/not seeing' paradox evoked by the squints. As Jennifer Sliwka writes in the book that accompanies the exhibition: 'These are works whose subjects and treatment are entirely about the act of seeing or, perhaps more accurately, the inability to see.'²

A new publication *Michael Simpson: Paintings and Drawings 1989-2019* will be published during the exhibition and includes essays by Barry Schwabsky, Jennifer Sliwka and Mark Wallinger. A book launch will be held at the gallery on 14 November.

'Between, Risking Enchantment by Mark Wallinger and 'Illusive and elusive: the (im)possibility of seeing in Michael Simpson's flat surface paintings by Jennifer Sliwka, from *Michael Simpson: Paintings and Drawings 1989-2019*, Blain|Southern

Notes to Editors

Simpson's work is part of [Slow Painting](#), a Hayward Gallery Touring exhibition of contemporary British painting which opens in Leeds in October and tours to venues across the UK.

About the Artist

Michael Simpson (b.1940) lives and works in Wiltshire, UK. He studied at Bournemouth College of Art (1958-60) and Royal College of Art, London (1960-63).

Simpson's work is in numerous public collections including: Tate, UK; Arts Council England, UK; Arts Council of Northern Ireland, IE; Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, UK; British Council Collection, London, UK; David Roberts Arts Foundation, London, UK; The Ekard Collection, NL; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, DK; Stuyvesant Foundation, NL; Ulster Museum and Art Gallery, Belfast, IE.

Selected recent solo exhibitions include: *Selected Works of Michael Simpson*, Shanghai Minsheng Art Museum, CN (2018); *Squint*, Blain|Southern, Berlin, DE (2017); *Flat Surface Painting*, David Risley Gallery, Copenhagen, DK (2016); *Flat Surface Painting*, Spike Island, Bristol, UK (2016); *Study #6*, David Roberts Arts Foundation, London, UK (2014); *The Leper Squint Paintings 2012 - 13*, David Risley Gallery, Copenhagen, DK (2013).

Simpson is the recipient of several awards including the *Arts Foundation Fellowship* in Painting (2000) and most recently the *John Moores Painting Prize* (2016) for his painting *Squint 19*.

About Blain|Southern

Blain|Southern is a contemporary art gallery based in London, Berlin and New York. The gallery represents an expanding roster of international artists and is the exclusive representative of the estates of Lynn Chadwick and Avigdor Arikha. Recent exhibitions include: Francesco Clemente, Rachel Howard, Ed Moses & Qin Feng, Herbert Zangs, Enrique Martínez Celaya, Bernar Venet, Abdoulaye Konaté, Joan Snyder and Bill Viola.

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Saturday: 10am - 5pm

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