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Raphaëla Simon, *Schwarze Brille*, 2020

23 May – 6 June 2020

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Raphaela Simon  
*Schwarze Brille*, 2020  
oil on canvas  
140 x 245 cm.;  
55 1/8 x 96 1/2 in.



## RAPHAELA SIMON

born 1986 in Villingen, Germany  
lives and works in Berlin, Germany

German artist Raphaela Simon is known for her oil paintings of simple structures and non-descript, yet evocative, forms. To make these the artist works in several stages, overpainting and modifying compositions in a slow and continuous process, generating sorts of palimpsest, with colours shining through the different layers of paint. In her recent work, suggestion has given way to figuration; the everyday has asserted itself on the canvas in the form of pasta, strawberries, suits or watches, which find themselves blown up in scale and set against monochrome backgrounds. In addition to painting, Simon also creates elaborate, life-size objects and figures in fabric which, carefully staged, develop their own narrative and dialogue with the works on canvas. The titles of both paintings and sculptures mix the autobiographical and the archetypal with crisp, descriptive terms generally provided in the artist's mother tongue.

In the monumental painting *Schwarze Brille*, 2020, an oversized pair of black sunglasses, flecked white, with yellow accents on either side and chocolate brown lenses, floats against a luminous black expanse. Customarily curved at the ends, the temples extend backwards into the pictorial space, enhancing the sensation of depth conveyed by the rest of the frame. Presented without any context, and without facial features to enhance them, the pair of sunglasses gains an uncanny sense of individuality and presence, turning the gaze back on the viewer.

While Simon's recent work seems to indicate a shift towards representation, it should not be mistaken for a desire for realism. Paintings like *Schwarze Brille* foreground familiar objects in order to explore recollections and associations; they ask the viewer to delve into the subject's essence and symbolic charge, and therefore enable them to transcend their worldly character. Evoking the late work of Marcel Broodthaers, who made extensive use of found objects, Simon's paintings highlight with playfulness and wit, contrasts such as functionality and aesthetics, form and content, the world of concrete things and the infinite world of meaning.

*Schwarze Brille* (detail), 2020





Figure 1  
Raphaela Simon  
*Hellblaue Frau* (detail), 2018  
fabric, cotton wool, wooden construction, metal wire  
176 x 60 x 60 cm.; 69 1/4 x 23 5/8 x 23 5/8 in.



Figure 2  
Raphaela Simon  
*Rosa Frau*, 2018  
fabric, cotton wool, wooden construction, metal wire  
overall: dimensions variable  
woman figure: 190 x 60 x 54 cm.; 74 3/4 x 23 5/8 x 21 1/4 in.  
dog: 28 x 41 x 13 cm.; 11 x 16 1/8 x 5 1/8 in.



## Interview with Raphaela Simon

**In your most recent paintings, there is a formal shift from abstracted and polysemous forms to more obvious figurative motives. Was this a conscious development?**

The approach has changed. In the earlier works motifs emerged from shapes on the canvas. Now I am working with pre-existing references that lead me to the idea of the image. According to the character and materiality of the “model” I come up with different painterly solutions. This explicitness can be polarising. I am interested in the idea of being questionable and saying something very stupid.

**Where does the motif of sunglasses in “Schwarze Brille” come from?**

Sunglasses are a very vain thing, pictures are too. They address seeing, supposedly seeing, being seen. Sometimes it is hard to see through glasses or sunglasses although they serve to improve the quality of vision. If there is a greasy stain on them, the lenses are the wrong color, or the whole design is clumsy, vision is impaired. Sometimes, the viewer puts great effort into looking at a picture, as if waiting for a magical revelation. Here, good glasses can enable sharp sight.

**In some of your recent paintings there is an empty black backdrop—the objects seem to float in a void, as seen in “Schwarze Brille”. What is the appeal of monochrome backgrounds to you?**

At the moment the object is in the foreground, which in my opinion comes out best on a monochrome, contextless background. It lends the image a general character. I need to have an overview and every part must be in line with the whole. A landscape or a genre painting, according to Alberti, is a window to the world. My pictures tend to meet the viewer and become part of the space. In the case of the glasses two windows open up.

**Your recent paintings set (everyday) objects in focus, and represent them in exceptionally large formats. What role do the specific connotations of an object play in your selection?**

They are all objects for which I have a preference, such as the sunglasses. I don't like to wear them much myself, they make one look unsympathetic. Of course, sunglasses on a nose are different than in a painting.

**Can one draw parallels between an artistic movement like Pop Art—which brings quotidian and consumer objects to the fore—and your work?**

Of course, gladly, some of the greatest artists were involved in Pop Art. I just hope it doesn't stop there.

**What links your painted and sewn works?**

I am the link. What I like about the fabric sculptures is that you can play with their positioning. The fabric sculpture can stand between the real object / subject and the painted one. You can touch it, move it, but you can't really use it. Paintings and things made of fabric have always attracted me the most. I am connected to them in a similar way. I find them flattering and comforting.



*Schwarze Brille* in the artist studio

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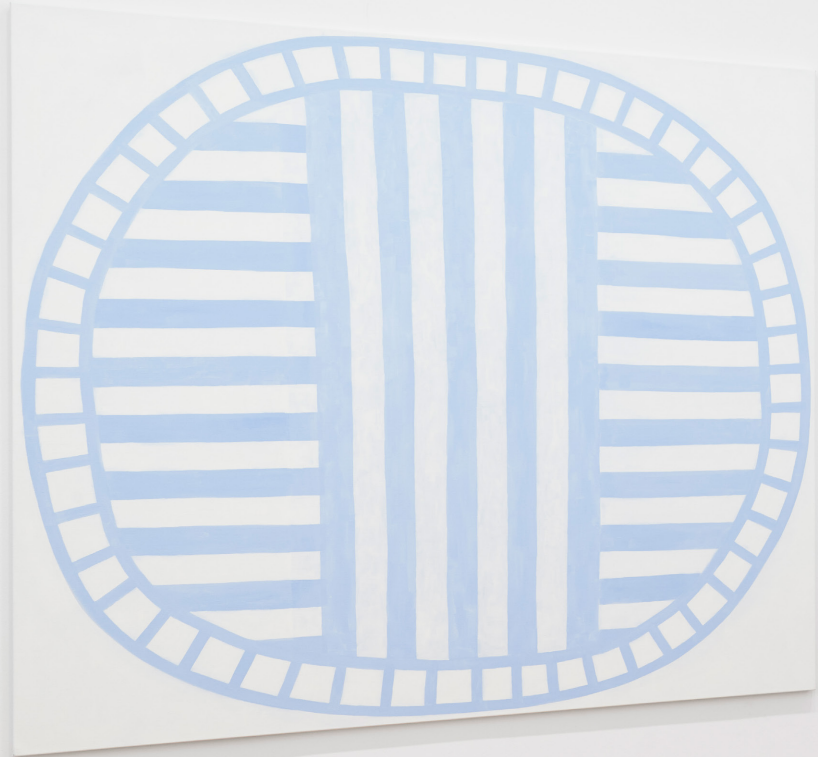
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Sterne, Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin, 2019

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Raphaela Simon was born in Villingen. The artist lives and works in Berlin. Simon studied with Peter Doig at the Academy of Arts Düsseldorf and in the class of Günther Förg at the Academy of Fine Arts Munich. Her works were part of solo and group exhibitions at Michael Werner Gallery, London (2019); Galerie Max Hetzler (2019, 2017 and 2016); Victoria Miro Gallery (2018); TRAMPS/Michael Werner, New York (2017); Hannah Hoffman Gallery, Los Angeles (2016 and 2015); and TRAMPS, London (2014), among others.

Portrait of the artist

**To inquire about the work, please click here  
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Raphaela Simon, *Schwarze Brille*, *Hellblaue Frau*, *Rosa Frau*,

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Work available subject to being sold.