



COREEN SIMPSON

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Press Release

For Immediate Release

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Aperture and Vision & Justice Announce *Coreen Simpson: A Monograph*

The first and long overdue celebration and introduction to a singular creative force who interweaves photography, design, and explorations of identity

New York, September 30, 2025—This October, Aperture will release *Coreen Simpson: A Monograph*, the first publication on the celebrated photographer and jewelry designer whose career spans more than five decades. The book is the second volume in the Vision & Justice Book Series, a groundbreaking endeavor designed to contribute to the ongoing work of building a richer story of lens-based practices, created by Dr. Sarah Lewis, and coedited by Lewis and Drs. Leigh Raiford and Deborah Willis.

Simpson has been capturing Black life and style for nearly fifty years. Before turning to photography, she pursued a career as a freelance writer, working for magazines such as *Essence*, *Unique NY*, and *The Village Voice*. Dissatisfied with the images that illustrated her stories, she decided to learn how to make her own, taking lessons in darkroom processing at the Studio Museum in Harlem and studying with jazz photographer Frank Stewart.

Working as an editorial photographer, Simpson made portraits of athletes, artists, and celebrities, including Grace Jones, Muhammad Ali, Eartha Kitt, Toni Morrison, Diana Ross, and David Hammons. Among the images featured in *Coreen Simpson: A Monograph* is the artist's celebrated *B-Boys* series, begun in the 1980s. These portraits of young people at the Roxy club, coming of age within the early years of hip-hop, characteristically explore the subjects' poise and self-possession and how they expressed themselves through dress. As Deborah Willis writes, "All of Simpson's portraits stress pride and dignity."

The book also showcases Simpson's later experimentations with collage, overpainting, and other formal interventions, and tells the story of how, while working as a photographer, she simultaneously built a successful jewelry business. Simpson's iconic jewelry, such as her celebrated Black Cameo, has been worn by figures from Rosa Parks to Rihanna.

With original scholarship and essays by Bridget R. Cooks, Awol Erizku, Rujeko Hockley, Sarah Lewis, Valerie Cassel Oliver, Jonathan Michael Square, Doreen St. Félix, and Salamishah Tillet, as well as a wide-ranging interview by Deborah Willis, the book explores the many dimensions of Simpson's life in art and fashion.

As the second of three initial titles in the Vision & Justice Book Series, *Coreen Simpson: A Monograph* follows *Race Stories: Essays on the Power of Images* (2024), a compilation of writings by cultural historian, curator, and writer Maurice Berger (1956–2020), and precedes a forthcoming

monograph that salutes the foundational work of Doug Harris (b. 1943). The series presents vital new books that extend a critical canon-building movement, redefining the historical record—both central concepts and artistic practices—and disseminating the often unheralded work of Black artists.

In conjunction with the release of the monograph, the Aperture PhotoBook Club hosts a conversation with Coreen Simpson; Sarah Meister, Aperture's executive director; Michael Famighetti, Aperture editor in chief and editor of this title, and the book's designers, Adam Turnbull and Elizabeth Karp-Evans of Pacific. Held on Tuesday, October 21, at 6:00 p.m. EDT, at The New School, Wollman Hall, with entrance at 66 West 12th Street, New York, NY, the event is free to the public, with registration by emailing bookclub@aperture.org

Coreen Simpson: A Monograph is made possible, in part, with generous support from the Ford Foundation through its grant to Sarah Lewis's Vision & Justice initiative at Harvard University. Additional support has been provided by Agnes Gund and Dawoud Bey.

The monograph is published by Aperture and available at aperture.org/books

Coreen Simpson (born in New York, 1942) is a celebrated photographer and jewelry designer from Brooklyn whose career has spanned more than five decades. Her work has been featured in *Essence*, *The New York Times*, *The Village Voice*, and *Vogue*, among other publications. Her photographs are held in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Bronx Museum; Le Musée de la Photographie, Belgium; and Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture at the New York Public Library, among others.

Sarah Lewis is the John L. Loeb Associate Professor of the Humanities and associate professor of African and African American studies at Harvard University and the founder of Vision & Justice. She is an award-winning art and cultural historian and Walter Channing Cabot Fellow whose books and edited volumes include *The Rise* (2014), the "Vision & Justice" issue of *Aperture* magazine (2016), *Carrie Mae Weems* (2021), *The Unseen Truth* (2024), and the forthcoming *Vision & Justice* (2026).

Deborah Willis is an author and curator whose pioneering research focuses on cultural histories, the Black body, women, and gender. She is a celebrated photographer, acclaimed historian of photography, MacArthur and Guggenheim Fellow, and university professor and chair of the Department of Photography and Imaging at the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University. Willis is also a coeditor of the Vision & Justice Book Series.

Bridget R. Cooks is professor of art history and African American studies at the University of California, Irvine. Her research focuses on African American artists, Black visual culture, and museum criticism. She is author of *Exhibiting Blackness: African Americans and the American Art Museum* (2011), and her writing can be found in dozens of art exhibition catalogs and academic publications such as *Afterall*, *Afterimage*, *American Studies*, *Aperture*, and *American Quarterly*.

Awol Erizku's multimedia work has been exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art, Gagosian, New York; Crystal

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Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art, Gagosian, New York; Crystal Bridges Museum, Bentonville, Arkansas; Museum of Contemporary Art Toronto; Ben Brown Gallery, Hong Kong; Sean Kelly Gallery, Los Angeles; and FLAG Art Foundation, New York. Aperture published his first major monograph, *Mystic Parallax*, in 2023. He lives and works in Los Angeles.

Doreen St. Félix is a staff writer at *The New Yorker*. She is a winner of a National Magazine Award for Columns and Commentary.

Rujeko Hockley is the Arnhold Associate Curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art, where she cocurated the 2019 Whitney Biennial. Additional projects at the Whitney include *Amy Sherald: American Sublime* (2025), *Inheritance* (2023), and *Julie Mehretu* (2021). In 2017, she cocurated *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965–85*, which originated at the Brooklyn Museum and traveled to three additional US venues in 2017 and 2018.

Valerie Cassel Oliver is the Sydney and Frances Lewis Family Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. From 2000 to 2017, she was at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (CAMH), where she was senior curator. Prior to her tenure at CAMH, she was the director of the Visiting Artists Program at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a program specialist at the National Endowment for the Arts.

Jonathan Michael Square is an assistant professor of Black Visual Culture at Parsons School of Design. He is the founder of the digital humanities project Fashioning the Self in Slavery and Freedom. He most recently curated the exhibition *Almost Unknown: The Afric-American Picture Gallery* at the Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library, Delaware.

Salamishah Tillet is a scholar, writer, and feminist activist. She is the Henry Rutgers Professor of African American Studies and Creative Writing at Rutgers University–Newark, where she also directs the New Arts Justice Initiative.

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About Vision & Justice

Vision & Justice is a catalytic civic and cultural initiative that generates original research, curricula, and programs that reveal the foundational role of visual culture in America's representational democracy. Founded and spearheaded by art and cultural historian Sarah Lewis, the initiative builds awareness of the impact of images in the public realm and their capacity to shape the interwoven fabric of individual identity, community collaboration, and democratic participation. Through institutional collaborations, leadership convenings, and public programs, Vision & Justice serves as a partner and resource for civic and cultural leaders in fostering representational literacy and justice. For more information on the initiative, visit visionandjustice.org

About Aperture

Aperture is a nonprofit publisher that leads conversations around photography worldwide. From our base in New York, Aperture connects global audiences and supports artists through our acclaimed quarterly magazine, books, exhibitions, digital platforms, public programs, limited-edition prints, and awards. Established in 1952 to advance "creative thinking, significantly expressed in words and photographs," Aperture champions photography's vital role in nurturing curiosity and encouraging a more just, tolerant society. For more information on Aperture, visit aperture.org

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