

and-shoot sensibility. Scenes of daily life—of going out at night, using the ATM, gazing at “cute” animals—are cast under a cold eye. It can be flat-footed in the best way. Subjects are often offered in parts only to be sutured together somewhere between the frame and the screen (which more and more seem to be one and the same). Pryde’s works have famously focused on birth and motherhood, and the influence of these pieces is evident in Shin’s show, but not in the form of anxiety. Rather, Shin takes Pryde’s work and makes it literal, overtly and painfully biological, if only to test out what it might look like to make an existential claim. She takes the question and makes it too much.

I wanted to say that she makes it real. *Is this real?* I wondered when I saw these works. *Yes, this is real!* (And a real riposte to the infatuation with a certain kind of Brooklyn baby.) This happened. These babies were born, and yet the photographs have no trace of documentary about them. Context has been meticulously cut out. We don’t feel like we are anywhere really in front of these scenes. Soft focus dissolves rooms and onlookers, such as the doulas, doctors, and nurses. The photographs’ white mats and stained-maple frames do some kind of distancing work, too (as do the three crude “political” sculpture-totchkes on pedestals that you see when you first walk into the gallery). Minus the specifics, we are asked to confront the horrible head of being, a kind of tortured universality, not the family but the fuck you of man. Can I say that it might be one of the best shows I’ve seen in a long time?

—Alex Kitnick

## Marianna Simnett

SEVENTEEN

Among the various forms of affectual experience typically available to gallerygoers—from dead boredom to rapt fascination and many more between—genuine *fear* remains a rarity. Part of the reason for this is that it’s actually pretty difficult to induce the emotion amid the anodyne precincts of the white cube, an environment that tends to disrupt the usual mechanisms and thwart the requisite level of empathy necessary to generate true dread. If the work of the British artist Marianna Simnett doesn’t entirely sidestep certain familiar sorts of scare tactics, it does vividly recast them, and does so in a context that provokes an almost hazardous degree of identification between spectator and artist. The two works on view here, the room-size installation *Faint with Light* and the single-channel video *The Needle and the Larynx* (both 2016), were as dark and fierce and bodily—as fearsome—as any to be found in a New York gallery in recent memory.

Borrowing from both the grind house and the haunted house, the two pieces exploited familiar tropes of bodies in peril, but did so in ways that alter familiar conceptions of power and powerlessness. *Faint with Light* occupied a darkened space split in half by a looming wall of horizontal aluminum strips. The sound track to the roughly eleven-minute piece was a recording of the artist attempting, with disturbingly audible success, to hyperventilate herself into four successive episodes of fainting. This was synced to the long bands of screamingly bright LED lights lining the louver-like slats of the dividing structure, whose level of illumination rose and fell with the artist’s hectic breaths. Each section of this looping syncopal quartet culminated in a full-screen whiteout accompanying the sound of Simnett collapsing after a slurping full-body exhalation, simultaneously enacting a medical crisis and a kind of sickening deformation of an orgasmic *petite mort* before slowly ratcheting up again. The shadowy room, the blinding lights, and the high-volume sounds of the real physical distress being experienced by Simnett worked on the most primal of levels, making the viewer feel

vulnerable to the same kinds of physical and psychological extremity being enacted in the piece. (Fainting—a mechanism that emphasizes the uncanny overlaps between mind and body—looms large in Simnett’s practice. A 2012 student work in which she also made herself pass out was framed in the context of the remarkable story of her grandfather, who fainted before a firing squad in World War II and dodged the bullet intended for him, saving his own life. Meanwhile, a screening of her video works at the Serpentine Pavilion in London in August 2015 caused two members of the audience to themselves faint, a story that has come to serve as a symbol of the physically and emotionally destabilizing intensity of Simnett’s work.)



Less abstractly visceral but no less vivid in its agitations, *The Needle and the Larynx* is a sort of warped fairy tale. It features the artist in the office of a doctor, her head tilted up and her neck bared as she awaits an injection of Botox into her cricothyroid muscle. Accompanying the cringingly slo-mo documentation of the procedure, a multipart sound track whose various roles are voiced by Simnett recounts the story of a girl who wants her voice lowered “so that it . . . is closer to those groans outside that keep me turning in the night” and threatens the reluctant doctor with a plague of mosquitoes should he refuse. This Grimm-like fable is interwoven with a deadpan description of the discovery of botulinum and its modern applications for the sort of vocal recasting seen here (more usually undergone by young men wishing for lower voices, or as part of a gender-reassignment process), as well as several musical interludes. We watch the needle ever so slowly enter, probe, and then withdraw from Simnett’s throat, then hear her speak forty-eight hours later in her newly deepened voice of the unexpected trauma of the procedure and the weakness she is experiencing. Like the faint-worthy intensities of the installation howling over and over again in the gallery next door, her pained wooziness here is weirdly contagious—the work produces a kind of osmotic unease, a dark little shard of panic that stows away with empathy and then worms its anxious way into even the most (supposedly) distanced of viewers.

—Jeffrey Kastner

Marianna Simnett, *The Needle and the Larynx*, 2016, HD video, color, sound, 15 minutes 17 seconds.

## Brian O’Doherty

SIMONE SUBAL GALLERY

Nearly twenty years after Barnett Newman’s second exhibition at the Betty Parsons Gallery—the now-canonical show at which he presented *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*, 1950–51; *The Wild*, 1950; and *Here I*, 1950,