

by
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The stories

Marianna SIMNETT

MARIANNA SIMNETT was not really interested in football until the HAMBURGER BAHNHOF, a museum of contemporary art in Berlin, asked her to create a video installation on the occasion of the 2024 European Football Championship, hosted by Germany. As a result, the artist from the UK created *WINNER*, a three-act ballet told through the lens of football, restaging and transforming the play's most impassioned moments: elation and triumph, brutality and ferocity, suffering and defeat.

Topics that MARIANNA SIMNETT repeatedly addresses in her immersive installations, provocative performances, and boundary-pushing films. Weaving together elements of mythology, folklore and contemporary culture, she creates modern-day fables that are a poignant, fearless exploration of human existence and societal constructs. Marianna talked to *Fräulein* about what our lives and football games actually have in common, which personal story means everything to her, and how art can be a way to create a safe space.



Marianna Simnett, *WINNER*,
(film still), 2024.
Courtesy of the artist and
Société, Berlin

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FRÄULEIN: Your works seem to me enchantingly playful yet dark, fantastical yet profoundly human. How would you describe your artistic cosmos in your own words?

MARIANNA SIMNETT: Art has always been with me, like a loyal friend, before I had words to describe it. I have always had a strong drive, an innate resistance to the way stories are told and a craving to tell my own.

What did the kind of narrative that you missed look like?
Often, the way people perceive you does not necessarily chime with the way you feel inside, so I found myself knocking down doors or climbing over fences to escape a feeling of being locked into an ideal.

Is it your intention to break the narratives of our society?
Stories are not there to obey, but to be broken open.

You dare to go to places normal people would rather shy away from.

My life is full and vibrant, but deliberately uncomfortable. I'm not shy to speak about difficult feelings that are usually swept under the rug.

How did your vision shape over time?

It started from a personal place – the need to build my own world and create a safe space away from my surroundings. I drew everything around me and was always the “art kid” in school. As I grew older and gained more confidence, art became less about my life, and more about building a universe bigger than the sum of its parts. I can be very impatient, but art is something I can be sure I will never tire from.

One of your most famous and personal works revolves around fainting. And the story behind it is heartbreaking.

This work is about my Jewish-Croatian grandfather who survived a bullet during the Holocaust when he fainted at the same time that he was shot. The Nazis mistook him for dead. It's a striking story and when my mother told it to me for the first time, it felt like my calling. I first started to deal with it in



Marianna Simnett, *WINNER*, (film still), 2024. Courtesy of the artist and Soci t , Berlin

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2012, but I wasn't satisfied with the resulting film and it took me another four years before I made "faint with Light." The final work is a light and audio installation for which I recorded myself inducing my body to repeatedly faint through a self-taught method of hyperventilation. My breath is monitored by a blinding wall of LED lights which rise and fall with each breath, building to the sudden silence and darkness of my collapse, followed by the blinding light and disconcerting moan of my revival.

You went from a complex story to the basic core of it.

"Faint with Light" is the core of everything that I make. It needs no words, it just involves my body, my breath, and a blinding void.

Talking about the big narratives of human existence – your work is often based on mythology and fairy tales. What eternal motifs do you recognize in them, or what appeals to you about their dramaturgy?

I've always been a big reader of myths and fairy tales, and feel at ease when describing the world through their lens. The painter Maria Lassnig once had an exhibition titled "The future is invented with fragments from the past". It's a beautiful line and I always return to it. I'm fascinated with ancient history because I feel very much part of a continuum. We are all obsessed with the future and big tech, but I've always seen the future as part of a deeper constellation that we invent together with our

ancestors and future species.

"WINNER" is the title of your latest work, revolving around football. What role does this game play as a modern equivalent to the gladiatorial combat of



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antiquity in channeling the emotions of the masses? Does it have a cathartic effect and is therefore so important?

In the 19th century, there was no division between player and spectator. Football used to involve the whole town. The invention of clubs and associations happened later. Games are often microcosms with the same political challenges that we face on our planet. They are just easier to look at on a smaller scale, from a safe distance.

It's certainly a perfect fit with your art since a lot of human drama is happening on the football field.

I love the adrenaline of the crowd, the irrationality of love for your team, the hate beyond bounds. The figure of the referee has become an interesting protagonist, the neutral figure in the center of the game, not allowed to pick sides but running the whole show. Today, in this moment of excessive polarization, it's fascinating to look at the figure in the middle.

How do you think we could reach this point and start playing together instead of against each other?

It will take a lot more work and not everybody wants to do it. I would say play outside, get messy, be with people you disagree with and start from a place of compassion.

We often see only one aspect of a person, but we forget about how complex we all are.

It's a mad time. One moment, everyone's your best friend and the next, you are trolled to the point of having your career destroyed. It's a mean world feeding off content without context.

That's also why we need football – for releasing and expressing emotions. It's a very beautiful game.



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