

# ADAM SIMON

For nearly twenty years, Adam Simon has been making paintings using outlines of motifs culled from our shared visual culture. Simon began his painting practice when working at Esquire magazine in the 1990s. Fascinated with the catalogues of stock photography (before Getty changed the industry), which attempted to index gestures, objects, and places into a metonymic archive of normative moments, Simon further concentrated these images into silhouettes. The outlines, transformed into acetate stencils, were then transferred onto paintings, first as single forms and subsequently in a variety of increasingly complex fragmentations, duplications, and repetitions. In the process, easily recognizable shapes overlapped, eroded, or mirrored into near ornamental abstraction. When a search for the perfect image of a vase lead Simon from stock imagery to a 17th century Dutch still life, he moved from paintings using stock photography (2006-2012) to paintings featuring silhouetted and stenciled elements from art history (2012-2013). As Koons bunnies and Picasso bulls, Brancusi birds and Magritte's man with a bowler hat began to populate Simon's paintings, their function shifted as they depicted less and less specific moments or scenes, and began to represent themselves, becoming gestures of iconicity and branding. This recognition in turn lead Simon to explore imagery designed explicitly for that purpose—corporate logos and brands—in a series of subsequent paintings (2013-2015).

As Simon moved studios, some of his stencils were lost or discarded, which he now regrets as a loss of his paintings' history. By 2020, after unpacking his remaining collection of stencils in his upstate New York studio, Simon began combining stencils from all three categories: logos, stock photography, and art history. When these works were exhibited in 2021 in dialogue with works by German constructivist artist and designer Anton Stankowski (1906-1998) at OSMOS Address in New York, Simon reconsidered his use of art historical references. While previously functioning as both representations of normative gestures and as concentrations of these scenes into icons—Stankowski's purely abstract, constructivist treatment of composition, which was often employed in service of other functions, encouraged Simon to introduce color and construction as art historical devices without having to rely on the iconicity of the quoted elements.

The result of this process is a series of paintings, all identically sized and executed in acrylic on canvas over wood panel, that follow the same compositional logic: each painting, oriented vertically, is divided into a grid of four equal rectangles of different monochrome secondary and tertiary colors. On top of this repeating abstract composition, with each painting presenting a different combination of colors, Simon places a single outline of a stock image—a skier, a couple holding hands, a woman holding a baby, a person with a laptop, a waiter, and so on—which is then overlaid with an iconic company logo. While Simon's previous works often featured classic American brands—Kellogg's, McDonalds, CBS, Nike—the logos in his most recent series are almost all from new economies: Twitter, Facebook, Netflix, Tesla, Amazon, Apple, and Bitcoin. Only McDonalds and John Deere belong to traditional industries, while Monsanto and Pfizer straddle both old and new. Where the outlines and shapes of each form overlap, new fields are created and shaded in a beautifully varied sequence of colors that suggest composites of the colors of overlaid forms, not dissimilar to the prismatic chromas of additive and subtractive color theory. Each field, treated as its own shape, is in turn suspended between formal independence as a solidly colored outline and as an element in a larger shape recognizable only by reading across the spectrum of corresponding colors. In all paintings, the grounding grid never completely disappears, and the iconic outlines of figures and logos oscillate between clarity and momentary dissolution, allowing the viewer a visual pleasure across the series that provides both coherence and the capacity to get lost in single details.

BY CHRISTIAN RATTEMAYER

*Adam Simon received his MFA from Bard College in 1992 and has exhibited extensively throughout the United States and Europe. Together with Michele Araujo and Mike Ballou, he established and co-directed Four Walls, an artists' forum and exhibition space, which ran from 1984 to 1999 and has been credited with being a pivotal force in the creation of the Williamsburg art scene. Simon lives and works in Brooklyn and Stamford, NY.*



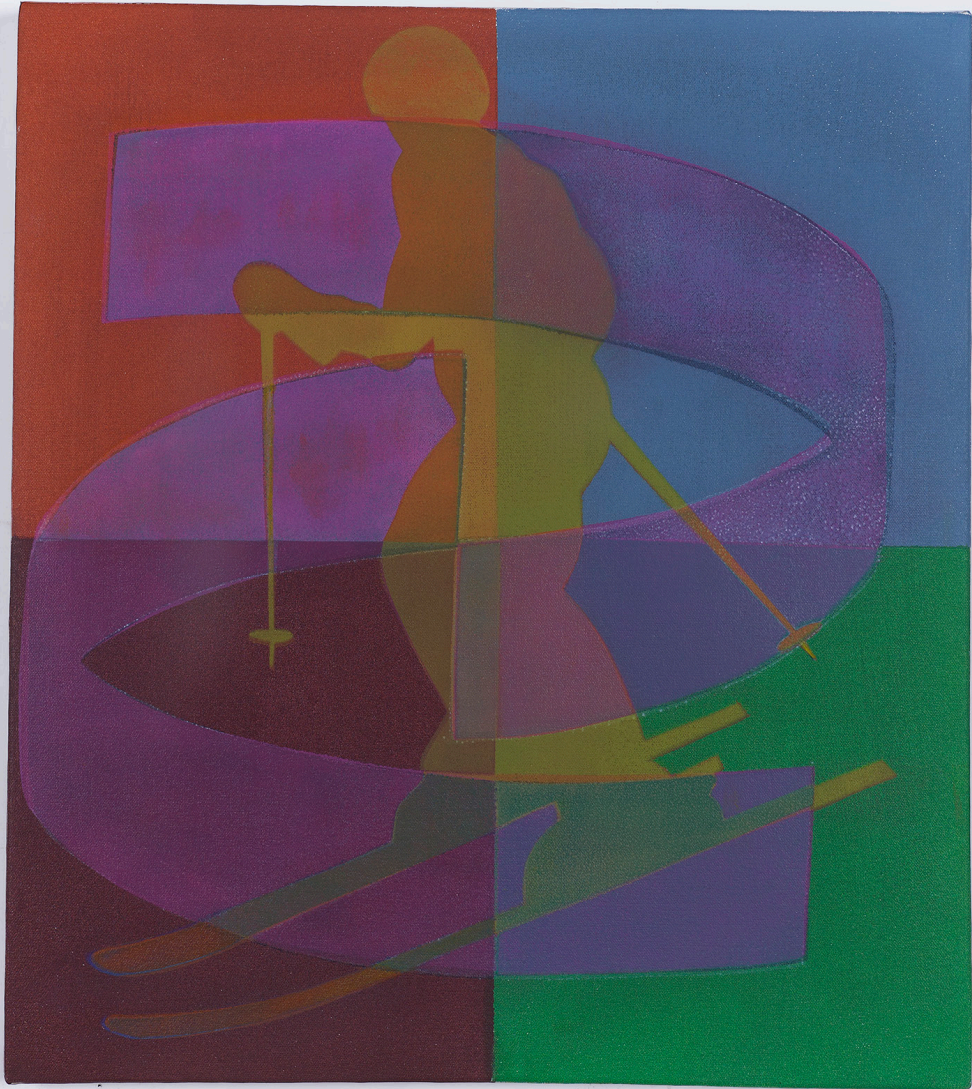
*John Deere/Hikers, 2021*





*Apple/Men, 2021*





*Pfizer/Skier, 2022*





Tesla/Boys, 2022





*Bitcoin/Handshake, 2022*





*Amazon/Dancer, 2021*





*Facebook/Man and infant, 2022*