

# GAGOSIAN

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May 9, 2017



## TARYN SIMON PORTRAITS AND SURROGATES

Opening reception:  
Thursday, May 25, 6–8PM  
May 25–August 5, 2017

7/F Pedder Building,  
12 Pedder Street  
Central, Hong Kong

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*My works continually mutate under different politics, economies, cultures and times ... These disruptions and time's passage are part of the work.*

—Taryn Simon

Gagosian is pleased to present “Portraits and Surrogates,” Taryn Simon’s first exhibition in Hong Kong. Simon draws from three key bodies of recent work, as well as a video self-portrait made in collaboration with a Russian news program, to examine the reciprocity between portraits and their surrogates. The technical, physical, and aesthetic realization of Simon’s projects often reflects the control and authority that form the grist of her work.

Simon is a multidisciplinary conceptual artist whose work has been the subject of many museum exhibitions across the world since her prescient debut with *The Innocents* in 2002 at MoMA PS1, New York. In 2013, her ambitious taxonomic series *A Living Man Declared Dead and Other Chapters I–XVIII* (2008–11) was presented at the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art in Beijing. Simon's research-driven approach has produced other such impactful series as *An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar* (2007); *Contraband* (2010); and the web-based *Image Atlas*

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(2012); as well as *The Picture Collection* (2013); *Birds of the West Indies* (2013–14); *Paperwork and the Will of Capital* (2015); and *Black Square* (2006–), an ongoing project about the consequences of human inventions. For Simon, photography has always been a vehicle for larger conceptual ideas. Paired with text, her photographs reveal the structures behind controlling systems, from ancestry and borders to botany and diplomacy. Between text and image, a blur occurs and each is altered by the other, again and again, back and forth.

“Portraits and Surrogates” suggests the transformative power of the subject and its photograph; how even the most banal object becomes freighted with new significance when exposed to different cultural and political circumstances. *Contraband* (2010) is an archive of desire and control, comprising 1075 photographs taken at the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Federal Inspection Site and the U.S. Postal Service International Mail Facility at John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York. With performative intent, Simon lived a full working week at the airport without pause, photographing the flow of generic goods seized from passengers and express mail entering the United States from abroad—from fashion items and foodstuffs to exotic creatures and pirate videos.

*A Living Man Declared Dead and Other Chapters I–XVIII* documents bloodlines and their related stories, from albinos under threat of physical attack in Tanzania for their purported magical powers; to the abduction of South Koreans by North Korea; and the nineteenth-century European rabbit that became a modern Australian pest. Each “chapter” is the product of rigorous research, travel, and data collection, resulting in an index of identity, memory, and heredity.

In *Paperwork and the Will of Capital*, Simon considers the stagecraft of power via the accords, treaties, and decrees drafted to influence systems of governance and economics, from nuclear armament to banking conventions and diamond trading. In original archival images of the signings of these documents, powerful men flank flower arrangements; Simon recreated and photographed these arrangements, pairing them with expository texts that underscore not only the instability of fact but the fragility of history itself. Each arrangement, placed in front of striking bicolored backgrounds, occupies several layers of symbolism at once: they reference the Flemish Enlightenment idea of the “impossible bouquet;” they bear witness to the formalities of governance; and, displayed in sculptural concrete presses alongside the preserved botanical specimens, they attest to the inevitable effects of time.

*Cutaways* (2012) is both a portrait and a surrogate of the artist herself. At the close of a video interview on Russia Prime Time, Simon was asked to sit silently and stare at the newscasters for several minutes, informed that this was standard practice, and that the footage would be used in the editing process. Simon thus finds herself at the center and as the subject of the very systems of orchestrated authority that her own work examines.

**Taryn Simon** was born in 1975 in New York, where she currently lives and works. Collections include Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Tate Modern, London; Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; and

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Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Institutional exhibitions include “Taryn Simon: An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar,” Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2007, traveled to Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt; Foam Fotografiemuseum, Amsterdam; Institute of Modern Art, Australia; and Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne, through 2010); “A Living Man Declared Dead and Other Chapters,” Tate Modern, London; Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin (2011, traveled to Museum of Modern Art, New York; Geffen Contemporary at Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; and Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, through 2013); “Contraband,” Centre d’Art Contemporain, Geneva (2011); “A Polite Fiction,” Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris (2014); “Rear Views, A Star-forming Nebula, and the Office of Foreign Propaganda,” Jeu de Paume, Paris (2015); 56th Biennale di Venezia (2015); “Taryn Simon: Action Research / The Stagecraft of Power,” Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow (2016); Galerie Rudolfinum, Prague (2016); “A Soldier is Taught to Bayonet the Enemy and Not Some Undefined Abstraction,” Albertinum, Dresden (2016); and “Taryn Simon: An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar,” Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Copenhagen (2016–17).

Simon’s first large-scale performance installation, *An Occupation of Loss* (2016), co-commissioned by the Park Avenue Armory and Artangel, premiered in New York in 2016.

**Image:** Taryn Simon, *Agreement for cooperation on China's Beidou Navigation Satellite System in Pakistan. Aiwan-e-Sadr, Islamabad, Pakistan, May 22, 2013, Paperwork and the Will of Capital*, 2015, archival inkjet print and text on archival herbarium paper in mahogany frame, 85 × 73 1/4 inches (215.9 × 186.1 cm) © Taryn Simon

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