

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

Hide and Seek

Los Angeles

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Left: Steven Spielberg and Casey Affleck. Right: Salman Rushdie and artist Taryn Simon. (Photos: Andreas Branch/Patrick McMullan)

Printed on the lower corner of a back page of Taryn Simon's new book of photographs is a fax the artist received from Disney Publishing Worldwide that reads, "Especially during these violent times, I personally believe that the magic spell cast on [our] guests . . . helps to provide them with an important fantasy they can escape to." Although this fax goes on to outline the reasons Simon was denied access to photograph the Magic Kingdom's backstage area, it might have explained the bands of revelers flocking to the fantasyland of Rodeo Drive last Saturday for the artist's Gagosian opening of "An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar," a project that painstakingly catalogues

the hidden logistics of American culture during these “violent times” (from avian-quarantine facilities and a US Customs contraband room to Braille editions of *Playboy* and the art collection at CIA headquarters). Surprisingly, the crowd of hip, affluent escapists didn’t so much stand out against Simon’s tell-all photographs as bring into stark focus a hunger for politicized images on (and about) the home front. Gathering near the gallery walls to decipher cold, factual texts, the guests seemed taken with the various curiosities. Near an emerald print of a research marijuana grow room, one viewer remarked, “That looks like my bedroom.” “I’m going home with you,” replied an opportunistic passerby.

The opening followed a Friday-night book signing at Dagny Corcoran’s Art Catalogues, and the show roughly coincides with the inclusion of the series in the Gwangju Biennial. I asked Simon about the reception it has received at home and abroad. “We’re approaching the elections now, which certainly makes a difference,” she explained. “The most substantial conversation around this work occurred in Germany, perhaps because they’ve already dealt with a history of shame and looking inward.” Among the introspective out to support Simon were local writers, art students, and curators; artists like Monica Majoli and Luciano Perna; collectors including Merry Norris and Beth Swofford; Sir Salman Rushdie, who wrote the foreword to Simon’s book; and a handful of actors, most notably Blythe Danner, Jason Schwartzman, and Casey Affleck.

Buzz over Simon’s other high-profile supporters had me hurrying to the Chateau Marmont afterparty. After clearance from an off-duty cop directing cars, two valets, a group of hotel bouncers with a PR rep, a table of four Gagolian staffers, two hostesses, and a busboy with a tray of wine, I slipped behind a long velvet curtain into the Chateau’s dimly lit lobby, where the party was already underway. Needless to say, the various layers of the event (a private party celebrating an artist who makes images of privatized oddities, attended by public personae whose business is mediated images) were not lost on some of the guests. But once inside, it seemed a happily ordinary, relaxed LA art crowd. Around the time the group turned toward dessert, which was spread over a baby-grand piano that Simon had been gently petitioning people to play

(luckily, the hotel found some Pavarotti to break the silence), artist Gustavo Godoy stopped by my table and teasingly asked, “Has anyone seen Steven Spielberg? I asked him to meet me by the piano.”

— Catherine Taft