

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

NOWNESS

Taryn Simon: Birds of the West Indies
The American Artist's New Juxtaposes Two Very Different James Bonds



Switzerland (detail), Birds of the West Indies, 2014 © Taryn Simon. Courtesy Gagosian Gallery.

“The name’s Bond, James Bond—and I’m an ornithologist,” is not the likely opening gambit that you would expect from Ian Fleming’s spy hero, but 007’s moniker was in fact pinched from a wildlife expert who published the definitive taxonomy *Birds of the West Indies* in 1936. Brooklyn-based artist Taryn Simon took this fact as the source of her latest exhibition at the Gagosian Gallery in Beverly Hills, opening later this month. Hailed as one of the most important photographers of her generation, Simon’s previous exhibitions have taken the form of exhaustive catalogues—most recently *A Living Man Declared Dead and Other Chapters*, which showed at MoMA and Tate Modern. *Birds of the West Indies* divides into two parts: in the first, Simon scientifically indexes the women, cars and guns of the silver-screen franchise. Her portraits of the Bond girls are blunt and perfunctorily labelled, the light and total lack of exoticism in keeping with Simon’s cerebral style. For the second, the artist turns birdwatcher and methodically identifies the 340 birds that feature in the Bond films. “The birds render on paper like dust on a negative,” she explains. “They are moments beyond control that invade carefully calculated scenes; fleeting background characters tethered to an iconic fictional space and narrative by chance.”