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OPINION

STARING AT AMERICA

Photographs and Text
by Taryn Simon

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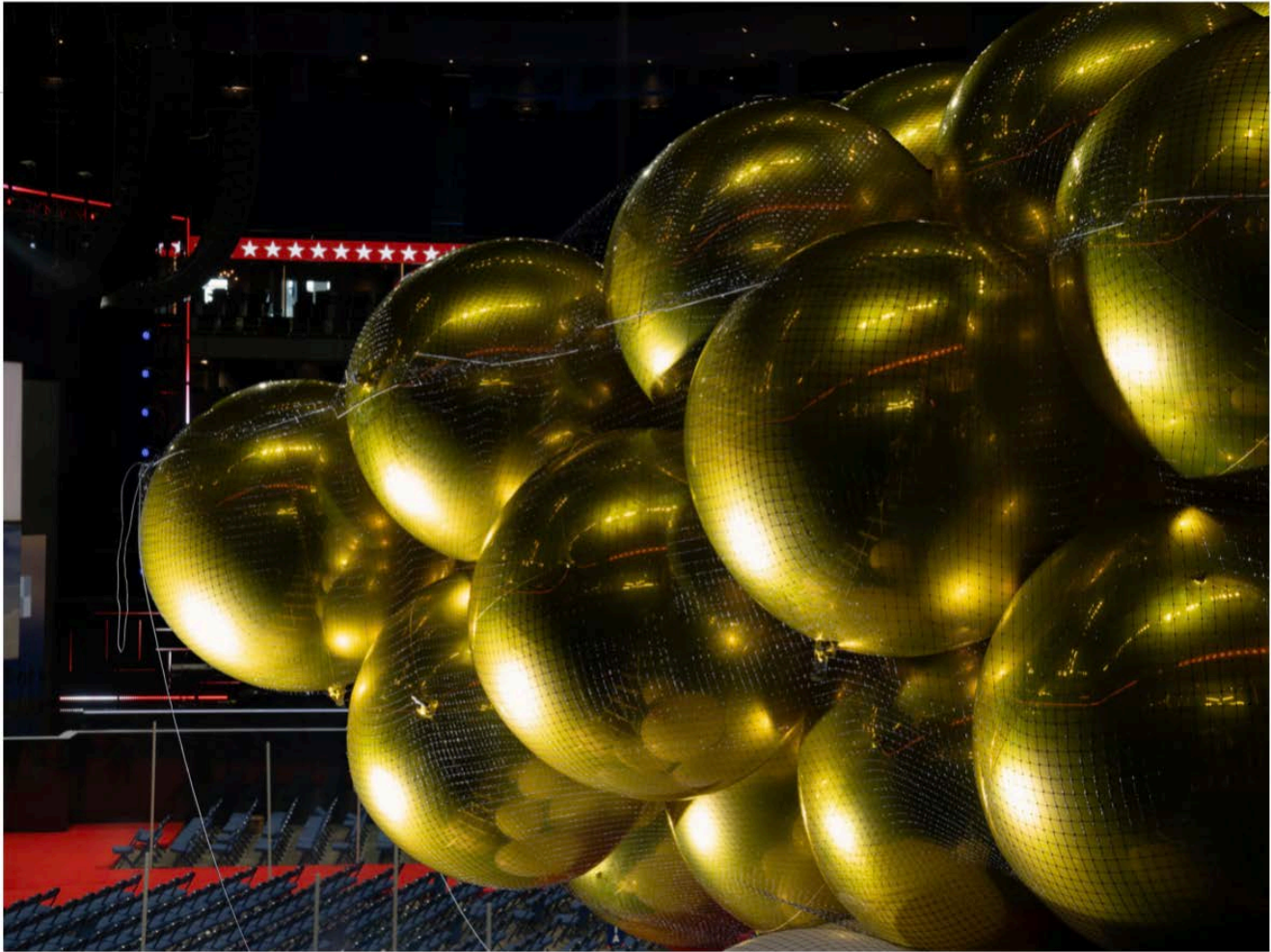
For six months this year, Taryn Simon followed the political vapor trail to document the people, spaces and objects central to the 2024 presidential campaigns. Ms. Simon, who works at a distance from the daily news cycle, examines our distracted national gaze and desires, letting us pause and look at what we all experienced. “You can’t see anything reflected in boiling water. But when it’s still, water is a mirror,” she said. “It’s still in the anticipation, and it’s still in the aftermath. But we’re told to watch when it’s boiling.”

Ms. Simon traveled to many locations, including Springfield, Ohio, to find the cat at the center of the false claims about the town’s Haitian immigrants; to Feasterville-Trevose, Pa., to photograph French fries from the McDonald’s where Donald Trump held a campaign event; and to Merritt Island, Fla., for the launch of one of Elon Musk’s SpaceX rockets.

Ms. Simon said she sees her work as “a shaky hand holding a spotlight. These photographs mark where the light landed — what we chose as a nation to give our attention to. And I guess this attention and where it was given defines who we are and what we will end up being.”







01

**Republican National Convention
Milwaukee**

Mr. Trump made his first public appearance at the Republican National Convention just two days after a gunman tried to kill him at a rally in Butler, Pa. In a speech accepting the party's nomination for president three days later, he said, "The amazing thing is that prior to the shot, if I had not moved my head at that very last instant, the assassin's bullet would have perfectly hit its mark, and I would not be here tonight. We would not be together." He added, "I stand before you in this arena only by the grace of Almighty God."

02



02

**McDonald's
Feasterville-Treose, Pa.**

Mr. Trump dunked a basket of fries in oil, salted them, scooped them into containers and handed orders to drive-through customers at a McDonald's in Pennsylvania 16 days before the election. He often deploys fast food at public events and on social media. He served Big Macs at the White House and to Mr. Musk, Donald Trump Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy Jr. on his private plane.

03



03

Wanda Kagan
Montreal

Wanda Kagan and Kamala Harris first met at a Black community center in Montreal. During her campaign for the presidency, Ms. Harris frequently spoke of rescuing Ms. Kagan from a sexually abusive home when they were in high school and providing a safe place for her to live.



04



04

**Fox News Headquarters
New York City**

Fox News media reaches a monthly audience of nearly 200 million. Fox News was the No. 1 cable news channel on television this year and the most watched network in every swing state. On election night, it had more prime-time viewers than ABC, CBS, NBC, MSNBC and CNN. It is the only cable outlet whose audience has grown since the election.

05



05

**Capitol Police Headquarters
Washington, D.C.**

The United States Capitol Police is responsible for protecting the legislative branch of government. After the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol, the agency increased the number of officers trained in civil disturbance tactics, expanded intelligence capabilities and updated its standard-issue riot gear to address vulnerabilities amid growing threats to Congress.

06



06

Thomas Cavanaugh
Milwaukee

Mr. Cavanaugh is a student protester who converted to Islam in March. He confronted Ms. Harris about her stance on Gaza, calling Israel's actions genocide, at a closed-door campaign event at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. After the interruption she said, "Listen, what he's talking about, it's real." Many saw her response as agreement. Her campaign team later said, "She didn't agree with defining the war as a genocide, and she has not expressed such a stance in the past, as this is not her position."



07



07

**Election Warehouse
Philadelphia**

The 727,595 ballots cast in Philadelphia County were received — some in sealed containers with red tags — sorted, tabulated and stored at a 230,000-square-foot facility that was once home to a Bible printing plant. Ms. Harris and Mr. Trump visited Pennsylvania 33 times in the three months leading up to the election.



Cowboy Kamala Sash and Cowboy Carter Incense

During the four days of the Democratic National Convention, delegates from Washington State wore “Cowboy Kamala” sashes and hats with flashing lights modeled after Beyoncé’s “Cowboy Carter” album cover. Beyoncé later appeared with Ms. Harris at a rally in Texas. Mr. Trump, who was holding a rally at the same time in Michigan, said to the audience, “Kamala is at a dance party with Beyoncé.”

09



09

Miss Sassy
Springfield, Ohio

A Springfield resident reportedly told police that she thought her Haitian neighbors had stolen her cat, Miss Sassy, and chopped her up. JD Vance used a police report to justify his claim that Haitian immigrants were abducting and eating people's pets. Local officials noted there was no evidence to support this claim.

10



10

**Representative Jasmine
Crockett's Eyelashes**

At a congressional hearing held after hours, Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene demeaned Representative Jasmine Crockett's appearance, saying, "I think your fake eyelashes are messing up what you're reading." Seeking clarification on House rules about remarks on "personality," Ms. Crockett asked if it would be acceptable to comment on "somebody's bleach blond, bad-built butch body." Ms. Greene went on to campaign for Mr. Trump, and Ms. Crockett campaigned for Ms. Harris.

Ms. Crockett's lashes are individually sewn on by a lash technician. She keeps a pair of false lashes (shown here) on hand in case of emergency.

11



11

SpaceX Dragon Launch
NASA Kennedy Space Center, Merritt Island, Fla.

Mr. Musk's SpaceX Dragon launched into space the night before the election. Its mission was to deliver food, supplies and equipment to the International Space Station crew. The payload also included Antarctic moss for an experiment to observe the effects of cosmic radiation and microgravity on plants and their survival in space. In his victory speech, Mr. Trump, commenting on Mr. Musk, said, "Oh, let me tell you, we have a new star. A star is born, Elon."



12



12

The Yard
Howard University, Washington, D.C.

Damaris Moore, Miss Howard University, sang the national anthem to the crowd of Harris supporters on election night who were anticipating the vice president's arrival. They watched live performances and speeches while results rolled in on outdoor screens displaying CNN. Ms. Harris did not appear until the next day, when she gave her concession speech.

[Taryn Simon](#) is a visual artist who uses photography, sculpture, text, sound and performance for her projects, which center on storytelling, secrecy and the hidden contours of power. Her work has been exhibited and is in the collections of the Guggenheim in New York, the Tate Modern in London, the Centre Pompidou in Paris and the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin, among others.

Produced by Sara Barrett.