

HEAVY PETALS

In the sixties, hippies placed daisies in the barrels of guns. In new photographs, the American artist Taryn Simon captures a different kind of flower power: bouquets that sat on the tables where world leaders were brokering deals. In 2005, Alexander Rumyantsev (pictured below), then Russia’s atomic-energy minister, travelled to Iran and signed an agreement to provide the country with nuclear fuel. The accord was attended by a froth of Colombian carnations, Portuguese gladioli, Dutch daffodils, and American ferns—or so Simon deduced after researching archival images with a botanist. Simon imported four thousand botanical specimens from the world’s largest flower market, in the Netherlands, and created three dozen still-lives, evoking diplomatic accords made between 1968 and 2014. The images shed light on the artifice underlying politics. Simon’s weighty concept has a title to match: “Paperwork, and the Will of Capital.” Flowers wilt; often, so does diplomacy. But fresh bouquets are always arriving at new tables. Last summer, Simon showed her photographs at the Venice Biennale, each image accompanied by a text that conjured the history behind it. Shortly after the exhibit opened, Secretary of State John Kerry sat down with Iran, and five other countries, to negotiate limits to Iran’s nuclear program. Blue hydrangeas joined the talks.

