

**The Huffington Post** : 'On Taryn Simon, Our Monday Muse', by Prabal Gurung, August 20, 2013.

## THE HUFFINGTON POST

### On Taryn Simon, Our Monday Muse

Prabal Gurung

As we have established, our Monday Muse is a tribute to women of depth and accomplishment, and most particularly what lies behind them -- the character, sensuality and soul that drives them, and that is so admirable.

Taryn Simon has exhibited at New York's Museum of Modern Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art and Whitney Museum, as well as the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin, Centre Pompidou in Paris and London's Tate Modern -- among many others. She works an artistic medium that consists of three elements, photography, text and graphic design, exploring the impossibility of absolute understanding. A globally recognized talent, she is also wildly beautiful.

What really draws us to her, however, is the acute and unwavering curiosity that fuels her work. Her first book *The Innocents* documents the stories of several individuals who served time in prison for violent crimes they did not commit. Fascinated by the way in which photography (the mug shots, composite sketches, Polaroids etc.) offered the government a path to mistaken identity, Simon photographed these men in places that in some way referenced their improper conviction. She fully reveals the potential ambiguity of the photograph -- as a representation of anything in life -- and the consequences this ambiguity can lead to.

In 2009 Taryn investigated contraband items seized at the customs and border control of JFK Airport. What she found was a completely compelling insight into the eccentricities of human nature. She remained on site for four days and nights, doggedly pursuing what she wanted and ended up with 1,075 photographs of items that ranged from cigarettes, drugs and unidentified liquids to Ukrainian pork fat, Viagra, Indian cow dung toothpaste, an Asian deer penis, a bird corpse and a plastic pitcher of salami.

It's certainly tempting to categorize Taryn Simon as a political artist, but she in fact rejects the notion. While she accepts that there might be some political undertone to her work, she maintains that it plays no part in her agenda. What motivates her is a thirst for the unknown, a curiosity, an interest in the diverse and complex role photographic imagery can play in the world. What she doesn't understand is what exhilarates her, not the opposite. More of an artistic sociologist than political activist. Udo Kittelmann of the Nationalgalerie Berlin says of Simon 'Taryn documents the soul of the world.'

Taryn Simon is a woman who is undaunted by complicated tasks and the impediments her line of work brings forward -- she says of herself to The Guardian's Sean O'Hagan, 'In some perverse way, obstacles interest me and I'm drawn to projects that end up being incredibly laborious.' She likes to push herself and her boundaries, finding ease and simplicity unfulfilling.

We particularly love Joan Juliet Buck's report of Taryn for W Magazine:

*"First there's the flashing beacon of the intellect from across a room; then you find this stunning woman, her beauty magnified by her intensity and intelligence."*

She has that coveted quality, that quiet, unassuming allure, a sensuality sustained by an intense intelligence and sense of innocent, but fiery curiosity. She is a PG woman, and this Monday's muse.